

*Eurodiaconia's Guidelines for
the Integration of Migrant
Women*

Eurodiaconia is a **dynamic**, Europe wide **community** of organisations founded in the **Christian faith** and working in the tradition of Diaconia, who are committed to a Europe of **solidarity, equality** and **justice**. As the **leading network of Diaconia in Europe**, we connect organisations, institutions and churches providing **social and health services and education** on a Christian value base in over 30 European countries.

We bring members together to **share practices, impact social policy** and **reflect on Diaconia in Europe today**.

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Eurodiaconia  Connecting faith
and social justice
through action

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Introduction

Eurodiaconia is a network of 48 organisations in 32 countries, founded in the Christian faith and working in the tradition of diaconia. Representing over 30.000 local organisations, Eurodiaconia members provide social and healthcare services and promote social justice. They are engaged in all facets of migrants' integration, ranging from emergency aid to supporting access to the labour market and social participation.

The need to more effectively integrate migrant women in European societies has come to the forefront of policy debates in recent years. With the higher numbers of asylum seekers and refugees coming to Europe in 2015 and 2016, the specific challenges that women migrants face in the integration process has become more evident. Research has shown that migrant women often face a 'double disadvantage' due to their status as women as well as immigrants.¹ They are usually confronted with more obstacles to access employment, training, language courses, and integration services than their male counterparts.

According to an OECD report, in over two thirds of OECD and EU countries, immigrant women have larger gaps with respect to employment relative to native-born women as compared to immigrant men and their native-born counterparts.² Moreover, within the group of non-EU migrants, refugee women are confronted with additional challenges to integration often related to their forced migration, including poor health, trauma, and lack of documentation of their

education and work experience.³ In addition, migrant women often experience multiple forms of discrimination based on factors including gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and immigration status, putting them at a higher risk of experiencing violence, poverty, and social exclusion.⁴

Against this backdrop, in 2018 Eurodiaconia organised a network meeting in Rome to discuss and exchange ideas on how to more effectively reach out to migrant women and include them in integration services. The fruitful exchange between Eurodiaconia members led to the idea to develop a guide for service providers on how to mainstream gender into integration programs and activities. The guide was subsequently developed with input from members through study visits, network meetings and best practice sharing. It is meant to complement Eurodiaconia's Policy Paper on the Integration of Third Country Nationals and Eurodiaconia's Guide to Integration.

The purpose of the guide is to improve knowledge and understanding among service providers, volunteers and organizations working with migrants of the specific challenges and barriers migrant women face in accessing services and integration programs and provide practical guidance on different ways of working and types of programming that could assist to more effectively include and integrate migrant women into our societies and communities. We hope that organisations can draw inspiration from these guidelines for new initiatives or for the further development of their work.

The guide is organized into four sections. The

¹ Liebig, T. and K. Tronstad, Triple Disadvantage?: A first overview of the integration of refugee women, OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No.216, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2018, p. 8. https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/triple-disadvantage_3f3a9612-en#page1

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴ European Parliament, Report on the situation of women refugees and asylum seekers in the EU (2015/2325(INI)), 2016, p.18. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+REPORT+A8-2016-0024+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

first two sections focus on the characteristics of migrant women, providing some key data, and on the specific integration challenges that migrant women face in the integration process. The third and fourth sections are more practice-focused and give some key recommendations on how to more effectively work towards the social inclusion and integration of migrant women with concrete examples of projects from the Eurodiaconia membership that specifically target the needs of migrant women.

The characteristics of migrant women

The composition of migrant women in Europe

Migration has become more female both in the composition of migrants and in absolute numbers.⁵ In Europe, female migrants slightly outnumber male migrants. According to the UN's 2017 International Migration Report, the share of female migrants in Europe increased slightly from 51.6 per cent in 2000 to 52.0 per cent in 2017.⁶

Women migrate for different reasons. They might migrate as highly specialized employees or as unskilled labour migrants trying to make a living in the low wage sector. Some women migrate to join their families while others leave family behind to work and become their household's main breadwinner.⁷ Women may also be forced to migrate as a result of conflict, war, natural disasters or due to different forms of persecution, including gender-based violence.

⁵ European Economic and Social Committee, Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on Inclusion of migrant women in the labour market, 2015, p.4. <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/inclusion-migrant-women-labour-market>

⁶United Nations, International Migration Report, Highlights, 2017, p. 15. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/publications/international-migration-report-2017.html>

Among refugees in Europe, women constitute a sizeable and growing group. According to statistics, approximately half a million women were granted international protection in Europe since 2015, with 300,000 being granted in Germany alone.⁸ Compared to men, women are less likely to arrive through the asylum channel. The data indicates that since 2014, only 30 per cent of asylum claims filed in Europe were by women. But if we look at resettled refugees, the picture becomes more gender balanced, while the data for family migrants of refugees indicates that the majority are women.⁹

Education and Qualifications

Generally, women have higher education attainments than men and the share of tertiary education is higher among women born outside the EU than among men.¹⁰ The picture is different for refugees and asylum seekers. Female refugees have lower education levels compared to any other migrant group and compared to the native population.¹¹ In Germany in the first half of 2016, 16 per cent of female asylum seekers had no formal schooling compared to six per cent of male asylum seekers.¹²

Unemployment and Underemployment of migrant women

Being able to work is key to integration. But as Eurodiaconia members supporting third-country nationals have found, migrants often

⁷European Economic and Social Committee (2015), p.4. op. cit. note 5.

⁸ Liebig, T. and K. Tronstad (2018), p. 8. op. cit. note 1.

⁹Ibid, p. 13-14.

¹⁰European Web Site on Integration, Integration of migrant women, 2018. <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/feature/integration-of-migrant-women>

¹¹Liebig, T. and K. Tronstad (2018), p. 16. op. cit. note 1.

¹²Ibid.

have difficulties accessing the labour market or have no choice but to accept jobs for which they are overqualified.¹³ This is particularly the case for migrant women, who have the highest difficulty entering the labour market and often end up employed in informal, low-wage and precarious employment or with contracts that usually provide them with limited rights and protections.

These observations are supported by recent data. Research has shown that the education attainments of women are not paralleled in their employment situation. Women born outside the EU tend to face a double disadvantage of having lower employment outcomes compared to both native-born women and men born outside the EU.¹⁴ In the EU they are less likely to be employed and more likely to be overqualified for their job compared to native-born women and men. According to the European Web Site on Integration, 54 per cent of women born outside the EU are employed, which is 14 percentage points less than native women and 19 percentage points less than men born outside the EU.¹⁵ According to the same statistics, 40 per cent of tertiary-educated women from non-EU countries are over qualified for their position, compared to 33 per cent of men born outside the EU and 23 per cent of native-born women and 20.5 per cent of native-born men.¹⁶ Concerning refugees, the employment rate of 45 per cent for refugee women in the EU suggests that the “triple disadvantage” also exists in the EU’s labour markets.¹⁷

Gender-based violence, trauma, and health

Migrants, and in particular refugees suffer from specific health issues that are often linked to their situation in their country of origin or to violence during their journey.¹⁸ Some migrants may have experienced traumatic events and therefore might have special needs in terms of access to specialized services, such as psychosocial care.¹⁹ Gender-based violence is also a major concern throughout a refugee women’s flight and also in reception centers in the EU.²⁰

Empirical findings further underscore the gender specific dimension of health issues. A survey from Austria evaluated that 22 per cent of refugee women classified their overall health as bad or very bad and there are similar findings on suffering from post-traumatic stress from other countries.²¹ In addition, the UNHCR estimates that every year, 20.000 women and girls from countries practicing female genital mutilation (FGM) seek asylum in the EU and that 71 per cent of asylum applicants in the EU from FGM-practicing countries are survivors of this ritual.²²

Key challenges in the integration of migrant women

Lack of integration support and barriers linked to immigration status

In the majority of European states there are no policies in place to specifically address the challenges related to the integration of migrant

¹³Eurodiaconia, Towards an effective integration of third-country nationals, 2017, p. 4. https://www.eurodiaconia.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Policy-Paper_TCN-Integration_2017_12_13.pdf

¹⁴European Web Site on Integration (2018). op. cit. note 10.

¹⁵ibid.

¹⁶ibid.

¹⁷Liebig, T. and K. Tronstad (2018), p.19. op. cit. note 1.

¹⁸OECD, Making Integration Work: Refugees and others in need of protection, OECD Publishing, Paris. 2016,

p.41. https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/making-integration-work-humanitarian-migrants_9789264251236-en#page1

¹⁹A Eurodiaconia member in Sweden has set up a specialized clinic for migrants with psychosocial needs. For more information on the clinic read the [Eurodiaconia’s Guide to Integration](#) (2018), p.7

²⁰European Parliament (2016), p. 6. op. cit. note 4.

²¹Liebig, T. and K. Tronstad (2018), p.30. op. cit. note 1.

²²European Parliament (2016), p. 5. op. cit. note 4.

women.²³ The barriers and difficulties women face are often related to their immigration status. While migrant men usually arrive alone, women more often join as a family member at a later stage. In this case they might not be targeted by integration policies on an individual basis but on their family status. This leads to their exclusion or limited access to integration support measures, skill assessments and trainings.²⁴ For example, women joining a refugee spouse might not access introductory integration programs and are less likely to be targeted by mainstream public services.²⁵

In addition, family reunification visas make women economically and legally dependant on their spouse, limiting their right to work and often forcing women in abusive relationships to stay with their spouse for fear of losing their residency status.²⁶ If a woman becomes undocumented due to a breakdown in the marriage, exploitation or for other reasons, she also faces a particular set of challenges linked to her irregular status.²⁷ While access to health, education, fair work, and justice have been recognised as essential rights to ensure the equality of women worldwide, once a woman becomes undocumented, she is consistently deprived of these basic rights.²⁸

Lack of language skills

The acquisition of language skills is often highlighted as a key component for

integration.²⁹ Insufficient knowledge of the host country language is thus a major obstacle to integration and might push migrant women into social isolation. Without language skills it is harder for migrant women to obtain information about their rights and about services available. Furthermore, poor language knowledge by migrant women tends to negatively impact the education prospects of their children.³⁰

Refugee women are particularly affected, as they have less knowledge of the language compared to other migrant women and to male refugees and are less likely to participate in introductory language courses. Thus, they also make less progress in learning the language than male refugees. Evidence from some European countries, however, shows that those women who participated in language classes scored on average better results than their male peers.³¹

Family Obligations, Childbearing and Access to Services

The family situation, childbearing and childcare responsibilities often affects the integration of migrant women and their ability to access services. Research shows that refugee women are particularly affected by childbearing. They have higher fertility rates than other migrant women or native-born women and, on average, are particularly likely to be pregnant in their first year after arrival.³² These factors impact their chances

²³European Web Site on Integration (2018). op. cit. note 10.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Liebig, T. and K. Tronstad (2018), p. 30. op. cit. note 1.

²⁶PICUM, Women: Undocumented Women. <https://picum.org/focus-area/women/>

²⁷There are many different reasons why migrants become undocumented, including the rejection of an asylum claim, loss of residency permit as result of a breakdown in marriage or employment contract, expiration of a student

or tourist visa, being the child of undocumented parents, crossing the border irregularly, or administrative delays in the issuing of residency permits, among others.

²⁸PICUM. op. cit. note 26.

²⁹Eurodiaconia (2017). p 5. op. cit. note 13.

³⁰European Economic and Social Committee (2015), p. 7. op. cit. note 5.

³¹Liebig, T. and K. Tronstad (2018), p. 27. op. cit. note 1.

³²Ibid., p. 28.

of employment and integration. Comparing refugee women with migrant and native-born women, the gender gap in employment is highest in the childbearing years between 25 and 35 years. Interestingly, the employment rate of refugee women is highest around 40 to 50 years, which is much later compared to native-born women.³³

Family obligations are also challenging for migrant women, especially considering the insufficient access to child care services and financial assistance.³⁴ In addition, migrant women might lack knowledge of the available measures in place. The accessibility of health care services is equally important. Gendering health supports can help alleviate some of the violence and trauma that female migrants and refugees might experience — such as human trafficking, domestic violence, and female genital mutilation — and empower vulnerable groups among migrant women.³⁵

Barriers to Employment

The lower employment rate of female refugees can in part be explained by legal barriers; spouses admitted under family reunification schemes are legally restricted to access the new country's labour market for sometimes as long as a year. Asylum seekers might face even longer periods of waiting and uncertainty.³⁶ This long period poses a challenge to their overall integration prospects as it leads to a loss of skills and makes women dependent on the income of their spouse or family members. Another obstacle to the labour market

integration of women is the validation of their skills. Women from developing countries often have skills that are not formally certified by diplomas but still of value for European labour markets.³⁷

At the same time, there are cultural barriers that can affect the labour market integration of migrant women in host countries. In many countries of origin gender inequality is higher than in countries of destination and negative perceptions of female employment may continue to exist in migrant communities.³⁸ Additionally, migrant women may suffer discrimination in trying to access the host country's labour market.³⁹

Unfavourable labour market conditions

Inside the labour market the situation of migrant women is no less concerning. Female migrants tend to work in lower skilled sectors and are more likely to be employed in part-time work and in short-term contracts.⁴⁰ While these sectors offer an opportunity for employment, they are often informal, insecure, not professionalized and offer low salaries and poor working conditions with limited rights and protections. Migrant women in these sectors are frequently excluded from career paths, which is particularly the case for refugee women who have lower levels of education upon arrival. It is, however, known that secondary schooling increases their employment chances significantly.⁴¹

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ European Web Site on Integration (2018). op. cit. note 10; European Parliament (2016), p. 18. op. cit. note 4.

³⁵ European Web Site on Integration (2018). op. cit. note 10.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Liebig, T. and K. Tronstad (2018), p. 24. op. cit. note 1.

³⁹ European Economic and Social Committee (2015), p. 6. op. cit. note 5.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Liebig, T. and K. Tronstad (2018), p. 25. op. cit. note 1.

Practical recommendations for a more effective integration of migrant women

Conduct comprehensive gender sensitive assessments

When conducting intake assessments, it is important for service providers to consider the factors that might particularly affect migrant women. Assessing their current situation in a comprehensive way — looking at their current immigration status; their childcare and family responsibilities; their access to basic needs such as secure and affordable housing, health, food, and social security; their family dynamics and cultural pressures; their level of education and proficiency in the host country's language; their employment experience, qualifications, and formal and informal skills — are all important when assessing their integration needs and the different factors that could affect their ability to access services.

Similarly, it is also important for service providers working more closely with the migrant woman and her family – i.e. social workers, counselors, mental health professionals – to understand her pre-arrival situation to get a better sense of other stressors that could affect her integration in the host country. Assessing her situation in the country of origin before departure and her reasons for leaving can provide a more comprehensive picture of her situation. For example, did she migrate to join a family member or flee as a result of gender-based violence or other forms of persecution? Did she leave because of war, a natural disaster, family conflict? Or did she choose to migrate for economic or health reasons, or a combination of different factors?

It is also useful to understand her migration trajectory and how this might impact her and her family's current wellbeing. This is particularly useful for asylum seekers and refugees who often undergo arduous journeys, transiting through many countries to get to Europe. For example, understanding her migration route to Europe and whether she or her family were separated or spent time in a refugee camp, detention or reception center or whether she was a victim of trafficking or exposed to violence during her journey could help a health practitioner better understand her current health needs.

The above list of assessment questions is meant to provide a glimpse into some of the factors that could impact a migrant women's integration in the host country. As Eurodiaconia members working directly with migrants have indicated, as service providers it is important to be mindful that every woman experiences these stressors and situations differently and to not make assumptions as to what she might need, but rather work together to decide the best course of action based on her current situation.

Provide specific attention to the needs of migrant women in introductory activities

Research has shown that female migrants often receive less integration support than men, particularly when it comes to number of hours of language training and active labour market measures.⁴² This could be because integration services usually don't focus on family migrants, or because more resources tend to be put towards assisting refugees who are on social assistance, which is not usually

⁴² Ibid.

the case for women who arrive through the family reunification process.⁴³ Another reason could be that migrant women, particularly refugee women, are more likely to get pregnant after arrival — which according to research might be related to the fact that prior to fleeing or while in transit, refugee women are reluctant to have children due to insecurity — which limits their ability to participate in integration activities soon after their arrival.⁴⁴

But there is evidence to suggest that attention paid to refugee and migrant women in introductory activities yields more positive results in terms of employment.⁴⁵ As Eurodiaconia members working with migrants across Europe have found, language, orientation and culture classes need to be accessible to all women regardless of their status as early as possible, in order to allow for the quickest possible integration. As motivation and willingness to learn and integrate is highest at the very beginning of a migrant's stay, it should not be lost by long waiting periods.⁴⁶

Additionally, introductory or orientation programs for new arrivals, such as those offered in Sweden and Norway could have an added value for refugee women, since they may otherwise not have any contact with integration services. Research has shown that this can be particularly the case for female migrants joining a spouse through family reunification programmes. Since the spouse is usually not dependant on social assistance, contact with mainstream integration services does not happen regularly, if at all. Following the practice of Scandinavian countries

where family migrants joining refugees are covered by introductory programmes, makes it more likely that women coming through these migration channels will receive early integration support.⁴⁷

Research in Sweden on the outcomes of a reform of their introductory program — which was modified in 2010 to strengthen the labour market outcomes for refugee women and men — has showed some promising results. An evaluation of the reform indicated that earlier contact with public employment services, the labour market, and a closer follow up of participants seemed to have a positive outcome on the likelihood of securing employment two to three years after the programme for both refugee women and men.⁴⁸ In the same spirit, the Swedish Public Employment Service recently (2017-18) launched an Action Plan with the objective of increasing the employment of migrant women through more information and better follow-up measures of participants. Recent evaluations of the Action Plan pointed to a positive trend with a continuous increase in the early labour market outcomes of participants in each year of recent cohorts who completed the introductory programme, demonstrating a particularly significant increase among low educated women.⁴⁹ The evidence from Sweden therefore seems to suggest that paying specific attention to migrant women in introductory programmes, and providing follow up and a labour market focus seems to yield positive results in terms of integration and labour market outcomes in the long-term.

⁴³ Ibid., p 30

⁴⁴ Ibid., p 28

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Eurodiaconia (2017). p 7. op. cit. note 13.

⁴⁷ Liebig, T. and K. Tronstad (2018), p. 31. op. cit. note 1.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.



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Ensure flexibility in service access and eligibility

‘Service delivery needs to recognize that migrant and refugee women’s needs vary at different points in their settlement and integration journey and that “one size does not fit all.”⁵⁰

Ensuring flexibility in the eligibility and uptake of services is key for migrant women. Basic services should be eligible to all migrant women, irrespective of their immigration status; and length of time in the host country should not determine eligibility for integration programs. For example, many migrant women upon arrival are faced with competing tensions between their needs to learn the host country language and engage in integration activities and their family and childcare responsibilities.⁵¹ This often translates in some migrant women not being able to begin language training or employment-related integration activities until they are more settled in the country and have found alternative care options for family members. Integration programs therefore need to be flexible and recognize that participants needs change over time and should be adapted to support the person’s evolving situation and presenting needs.

It also means that integration programs need to be flexible in terms of status requirements, as a women’s immigration status may change over time but her needs to access support services may not. For example, a family migrant whose status is dependent on her spouse and who becomes undocumented because she decides to leave an abusive relationship will likely need access to legal, health and/or psychosocial

support, which should not be denied to her due to her irregular status. This means that restrictions on access and eligibility should be more relaxed and adapted to migrant women’s changing situations. As suggested by the Australian institute of family studies, a good practice would be to not only identify women’s needs at intake appointments, but also to provide regular and ongoing needs assessments and follow up.⁵²

Ensure cultural competency in service delivery

There are often great differences in the ability of service providers to deliver services in culturally competent ways, particularly in mainstreams services.⁵³ They are not always trained to recognize how cultural practices or religious differences might impact a migrant women’s ability to access or benefit from services. A lack of knowledge and understanding regarding migrant and refugee communities may result in cultural stereotypes that are unsupportive and not useful.⁵⁴

For example, it wouldn’t be useful for a woman experiencing domestic violence to be judged by a service provider for her reluctance to leave a marriage due to specific ethno-cultural reasons or fear of losing her visa; rather the provider could work with her to understand her fears, inform her about her rights and options available and work together to find the best solution for her.

Other culturally specific behaviours might lead to misunderstandings between providers and participants, as in the case of a woman not making eye contact being misinterpreted as a

⁵⁰ Australian Institute of Family Studies, Empowering migrant and refugee women. Research Report No. 38, September 2017, p 5. <https://aifs.gov.au/publications/empowering-migrant-and-refugee-women/export>

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

sign of indifference whereas in the participant's culture it might mean something different.

As Eurodiaconia members have suggested, the key is to try to understand the culture of the target group you're working with while approaching each encounter with an open mind, not making assumptions or interpretations about the needs or behavior of the participant and adapting services to the needs of the participant. This is where training and support for service providers to improve their understanding of the challenges that migrant women face and how their migration backgrounds and cultural contexts can impact their needs could be helpful.

Conduct outreach and ensure service accessibility

Barriers to service access are often as much of a challenge as the availability of services. As inability to communicate in the host country's language is one of the key challenges for migrant women in accessing services, it is important for services to be promoted in the languages of the target groups organizations are trying to reach. In addition, the delivery of services should be provided in different languages to ensure that migrant women's needs are understood and that they're connected to the right services.

Using volunteers and former participants who have a migrant background to do outreach in the community and promote the services of the organization is also a good way to outreach to isolated migrant women.⁵⁵ Outreach is

particularly important as research has shown that migrant women often lack contact with the host society and that such contact can have a significant positive impact on their labour market outcomes.⁵⁶ Involving migrants as volunteers in outreach efforts and other activities can also provide an opportunity for the migrant to increase their network, practice the language and gain useful skills and knowledge that can later be useful for finding employment.⁵⁷

Another key barrier for migrant women in accessing services are childcare responsibilities. Integration programs, particularly counselling, language and employment training programs should provide childcare whenever possible so as to encourage the participation of migrant mothers. Funders keen on investing in the integration of migrant women should also make sure to include support for childcare as part of the funding envelope.

Service accessibility also means that organizations need to be mindful of scheduling and other barriers when designing integration programs. If a provider offers language or employment trainings late in the evenings or at a time of day when women are more likely to be busy with childcare or other family responsibilities, they will likely not get a high turnout of female participants in their activities. The location of services and ensuring that the programs are in a location that is easily accessible by public transport is also important when thinking about program development and accessibility.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p6

⁵⁶ Liebig, T. and K. Tronstad (2018), p. 32. op. cit. note 1.

⁵⁷ Eurodiaconia, Eurodiaconia's Guide to Integration: A collection of best practice examples in the

integration of migrants from the Eurodiaconia membership, 2018. <https://www.eurodiaconia.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Pub-2017-Guide-to-integration.pdf>

Make language courses accessible to migrant women

Integration, access to employment and any further training or work is largely dependent on migrant women's ability to speak the host country's language.⁵⁸ Insufficient grasp of the language prevents women from accessing services and training, learning about their rights, and often leads to social isolation.⁵⁹ As was recommended in Eurodiaconia's policy paper on integration, to facilitate integration, language classes — and literacy training for those requiring it — should begin as early as possible and a broad offer of high quality classes adapted to the levels and needs of migrant women should be offered.⁶⁰ Furthermore, they should be accessible to migrant women with regards to cost, location and timing and the content should be useful in their search for employment and contact with public services.⁶¹

Assist in the assessment and recognition of qualifications and informal skills

For many migrant women, one of the biggest challenges is getting their qualifications and skills recognized in the host country. The process can be very lengthy and frustrating and often leads to deskilling and long-term unemployment, resulting in many migrant women taking up jobs for which they're overqualified.⁶² Services providers can provide migrant women with information about the procedures to get their qualifications recognized and assist them in accessing these services. However, policy makers also need to put in place more transparent and accessible procedures that assess

and recognize migrant's qualifications and credentials. As suggested by a European Economic and Social Committee report on the inclusion of migrant women in the labour market, social partners such as trade unions and employer organizations can also play a key role in this respect by facilitating the recognition of migrant's qualifications in collective agreements.⁶³

Assessment and recognition of informal skills is also essential, as many women, particularly refugee women whose education has been interrupted as a result of war or who come from countries where girls are not given equal access to education, might not have had the opportunity to acquire qualifications in formal institutions but nevertheless have informally acquired useful and transversal skills that could be adapted and upgraded to the current job market. Employment counselors can help migrant women assess their informal and formal skills and support them in repositioning themselves in the labour market and make the appropriate choices based on their personal and professional goals.

Assist in the creation of professional and social networks for migrant women

Research has shown that there is often a strong link between a migrant's ability to secure employment and their social network, and that female migrants, particularly refugees, often have fewer networks than men.⁶⁴ Service providers can assist female migrants to develop their networks by providing vocational and training programs, opportunities for them to volunteer and engage with the host

⁵⁸ Eurodiaconia (2017). p 5. op. cit. note 13.

⁵⁹ European Economic and Social Committee (2015), p. 7. op. cit. note 5.

⁶⁰ Eurodiaconia (2017). p 5. op. cit. note 13.

⁶¹ European Economic and Social Committee (2015),

p. 7. op. cit. note 5.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Liebig, T. and K. Tronstad (2018), p. 10. op. cit. note 1.

community, and encouraging them to enroll in language courses.

Mentorship programs can also be a particularly effective entry into employment for women who already possess the skills and qualifications but lack the networks and familiarity of the host country's labour market. As Eurodiaconia members' programs have shown, short internships can also give an opportunity for migrant women to familiarize themselves with the working environment in their host country which can assist with integration in the long-term as they better understand what to expect from future jobs.⁶⁵ Longer internships, on the other hand, can be used to provide training and ideally should be connected to the long-term employment goals of the migrant. Finally, organizations could also consider providing information, training and support for migrant women who are considering becoming entrepreneurs or being self-employed.⁶⁶

Engage migrant women through community building activities

Integration in a society is also about creating social bonds between migrants and the local community. Eurodiaconia members have a wide range of experience in this area with a variety of projects which encourage exchanges between migrants and locals and help bring people together — from cultural events and festivals to sports and artistic activities.⁶⁷ Churches, religious communities and other faith based organizations can play a vital role in helping migrant women engage in these low threshold activities, as many migrants

often perceive faith-based organizations as secure and familiar environments.⁶⁸ Their community structure and traditional attention to the plight of vulnerable individuals give them a natural role in facilitating the inclusion and participation of migrant women in their communities.

Promote a gender-sensitive approach in migrant integration action plans and strategies

Research has shown that there is generally a lack of policy regarding the integration of migrant women.⁶⁹ While the European Parliament in its 2016 report on the situation of women refugees and asylum seekers in the EU underscored the importance of including a gender dimension in the context of migration and asylum policies, a 2018 report by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) found limited evidence of gender specific references in national action plans or country strategies on migrant integration.⁷⁰ The FRA report goes on to recommend that member states include mainstream as well as gender specific actions in their plans and strategies on integration, in order to promote women's equal participation in society.⁷¹

While it is often left to faith based and non-governmental organizations on the ground to fill the policy gap and develop programs and services specifically targeting migrant women, organizations could also collectively advocate and campaign to pressure their governments to include women specific policies and targets in their migrant integration strategies and

⁶⁵ This is done in the Austrian 'Training Course for Asylum Seekers', described in [Eurodiaconia's Guide to Integration](#) (2018), p.16

⁶⁶ Eurodiaconia (2017). p 5. op. cit. note 13.

⁶⁷ Several Eurodiaconia projects organize these kind of activities. In the 2018 [Eurodiaconia Guide to Integration](#) you can find projects that favour cultural exchanges in the Czech Republic, the Netherlands and the UK.

⁶⁸ Eurodiaconia (2017). p 7. op. cit. note 13

⁶⁹ European Web Site on Integration (2018). op. cit. note 10.

⁷⁰ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Together in the EU: Promoting the participation of migrants and their descendants, 2017, p 26. <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2017/migrant-participation>

⁷¹ Ibid., p7

demand that adequate funding be allocated to ensure the effective implementation of such policies.

Best Practice examples from the Eurodiaconia membership

The role of churches and faith-based organisations in the integration of migrants

Churches and faith-based organisations are well-placed to develop and implement integration measures not only because of their experience and historical attention to the needs of vulnerable individuals, but also because they constitute a community in which migrants can be integrated into. Furthermore, they often benefit from a large contact network, ranging from the local to the international level. Churches and faith-based organisations should be recognized by governments as valuable partners for the integration of migrants.

The following are examples of projects from the Eurodiaconia membership which are successfully working to tackle the challenges that migrant women face and assist with their integration into the community.

Counselling Centre for Refugee Women, Diakonie Österreich, Vienna

<https://diakonie.at/einrichtung/frauenberatung-wien>

Diakonie Österreich's "Frauenberatung" exclusively targets the needs of female refugees in Vienna. The service is available to women who have applied for asylum or are entitled to subsidiary protection. During four days a week, anything of concern to the women can be discussed in a confidential and

safe space, from information about swimming lessons to questions about contraception or experiences of violence. The team of eight female staff also offer advice on topics related to social benefits and health issues, education and childcare as well as counselling on Austrian asylum law and other legal matters.

The overall aim is to empower women and encourage them to take independent and informed decisions about their specific life situations. The individual sessions and group activities are multilingual and while participants are encouraged to learn German, the value of further practicing their native language is acknowledged. To further contribute to the women's integration, they receive information about the support measures already available related to health and social services. If requested, personal accompaniment to appointments with authorities is provided. Since the project was launched in September 2017 as the first gender specific counselling center in Vienna, it has helped around 25 women per day. It is financially supported by the Fonds Soziales Wien of the City of Vienna.

Cooperation against exclusion, Skane City Mission, Malmö

<http://www.skanestadsmission.se/samverkan-mot-utanforskap/>

The Project "Samverkan mot utanförskap" of Skane City Mission in Malmö, Sweden, offers access to training and employment to people who face difficulties to enter the labour market due to a combination of structural and individual issues. To successfully offer the trainings, Skane City Mission cooperates closely with different actors such as the public employment agency and corporate contacts within the City Mission. Each participant benefits from tailor made services that include

a trained supervisor who helps to set up tasks, working hours and support measures. As the Skane City Mission's runs a broad range of social enterprises and cooperative companies — ranging from customer service to migrant counselling — participants can try different forms of work based on their own abilities.

Many of the project's participants have a migration background and are outside the formal labour market for various reasons. Migrant women seeking support have, in addition, a very different starting point compared to men. The challenges often concern single parenting, cultural issues within the families or communities, as well as experiences of violence in their family relationships. Furthermore, limited educational levels and insufficient knowledge of Swedish are often the main barrier for their labour

market integration. Skane City Mission tries to overcome this set of challenges by offering not only practical but also psychosocial support in their programmes. Furthermore, it works from a perspective of diversity that tries to engage many actors and stakeholders in dialogue and cooperation to overcome discrimination and segregation based on gender. This is necessary, as for example, employers often lack knowledge of the specific needs of this target group.

The project has been running since September 2016. The European Social Fund co-finances 47 per cent of the project. The remaining 53 per cent comes from publicly funded compensations to participants, public funds and private funds from the project's owner.



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**Residential Reception Centre,
Asociación Evangélica Nueva Vida, Spain**

<http://asociacionnuevavida.org/>

Since 1998, the housing programme of Asociación Evangélica Nueva Vida in Santander provides assistance to women who are victims of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Operating twenty-four hours a day, the centre not only provides accommodation, food and overall safety but also a long-term perspective of social integration.

Up to eight women and their children find shelter in the center for half a year or longer if needed. The project is based on an integral approach to support the women in a holistic manner. A special focus is put on individual psychological assistance to mitigate anxieties and to foster self-confidence and the development of social skills. In addition, the women receive information on available health services and medical staff also assist on-site. The women are provided legal

counselling that among other issues concerns the regularisation of their residency in Spain. Once the women have settled, they also participate in a labour market integration programme carried out in cooperation with private associations. In the period of January to August 2018, three women succeeded and found employment. To further help the individual development and social integration of the women, a broad set of leisure activities is offered in the region of Santander with the help of volunteers.

From January to August 2018, 14 women were helped, among them also two refugee women who were rescued off the Spanish coast in the Mediterranean and transferred to Santander within the Spanish government's Humanitarian Emergency-programme. The project is funded by the Spanish government, the autonomous community of Cantabria, and private funding. In early 2019, a similar programme to address the need of minors who are victims of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation is also planned.



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Eurodiaconia is a federation of 45 social and health care organisations founded in the Christian faith and promoting social justice.

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