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## Comparative Report

Based on research for the project

*“Nordic Network for empowerment of immigrant women with low educational background / working experience”*

*Nordplus programme 2010 -2011*

**Coordinator of the project:**



**Partners of the project:**

**FORRETNINGSUTVIKLING OSLO as**



SOROS INTERNATIONAL HOUSE





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## Introduction

The academic research over the last 30 years has revealed the unique needs, challenges, and opportunities of female immigrants in the Nordic and Baltic countries. Current integration policies in Sweden, Norway, Finland and Lithuania mention the necessity of integration of immigrant women as mothers of future generation into labour market as a prerequisite for future economic and political stabilities of these countries.

In practice, unemployment among immigrant women is much higher compared to native women and compared to male immigrants. Moreover, the group of “immigrant women” is not homogenous and the unemployment rates among them differ a lot depending on a range of factors: country of origin, number of years in the host country, age, health, family situation, etc. Non-Western immigrant women with low educational background and without formal working experience are most at risk of unemployment, social exclusion and isolation. In spite of numerous political debates the existing policies have paid little attention to the necessity of flexible education and labour market opportunities for non-Western immigrant women with low educational background. Somehow this group of women is automatically considered to be outside of the realm given attention to by decision-makers and society. The blame for this is usually placed on the cultural differences which prevent these women from integrating into the new society.

The question is: What are the reasons for social exclusion and the high unemployment rate among immigrant women with low educational backgrounds? Is it fair to place the blame on culture, traditions and family obligations? Why do we not put the individual needs, strengths and capabilities of the women at the centre instead?

The focus of this report will be on women originating in non-Western countries from the Middle East, Asia, Africa and South America. Relevant education based on individual and labour market needs is considered to be the way for the successful integration into labour markets according to the Action Plan of the Commission of the European Communities. Labour market integration opens the way to full integration into the society. The Action Plan focuses on those who are in disadvantaged groups because of their low literacy levels and/or inadequate work skills. Usually these disadvantaged groups include migrants, older people, women or persons with disability (Commission of the European Communities Action plan on Adult Learning. “It is always good time to learn”, Brussels, 27.09.2007). Our report shifts the focus from the cultural barriers for successful integration to possibilities through relevant education and working opportunities.

Nordic Network for Empowerment of Immigrant Women with Low Educational Background



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## 1. Objectives of the research

There are 3 main objectives of the research carried out by Nordic Network for Empowerment of Immigrant Women with Low Educational Background:

**Objective 1:** *To compare the situation of immigrant women from the point of view of their educational background and working experience across the Nordic and Baltic countries.*

**Objective 2:** *To identify possible barriers to immigrant women to educational and labour market systems in the Nordic and Baltic countries.*

**Objective 3:** *To outline a set of good practices and recommendations for empowerment and assistance of immigrant women into educational and labour market systems in the Nordic and Baltic countries. Recommendations target both decision-makers and practitioners working with immigrant women in partner countries.*

## 2. Methodological tools of the research

The research is based on 2 methodological tools, namely ***desk research*** and ***qualitative interviews***.

**Method 1:** *Desk research carried out in Sweden, Norway, Finland and Lithuania includes analysis of statistical data and study of major publications on ethnic minority groups in the above countries. Availability of information on immigrant women with low educational background differs from country to country – in some countries thorough research on immigrant women was carried out earlier, in other countries the available data is only on immigrants in general. Interviews with experts and practitioners in partner countries have provided us with specific information on education attainments and labour market participation of immigrant women. The internet sources were used to find latest publications on the issue in the Nordic and Baltic countries as well as on the EU level.*



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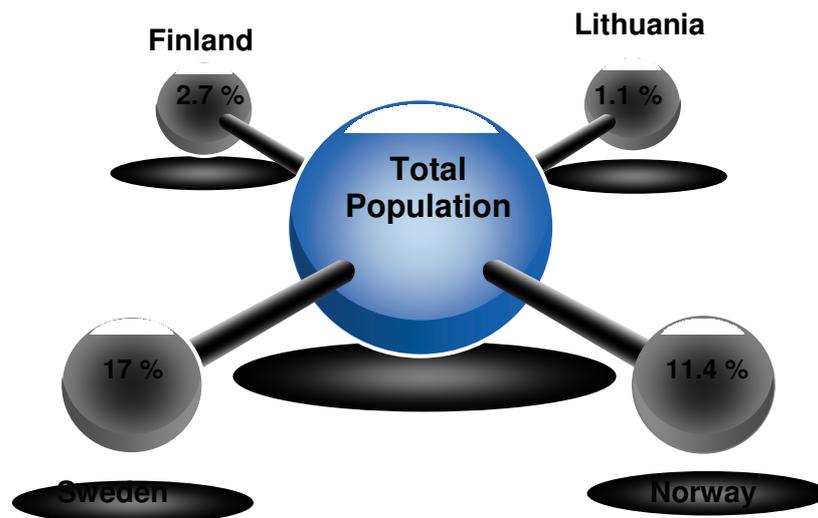
**Method 2:** *There were 3 target groups for qualitative interviews carried out in this research, namely local and regional decision-makers, practitioners working with immigrant women and the immigrant women themselves. The first objective of the qualitative interviews was to identify existing and potential barriers for immigrant women in entering the educational system and labour market from both the point of view of those working within the system and that of the individuals themselves. The second objective of the qualitative interviews was to find solutions to overcome the existing barriers from both the system and individual points of view. This approach helps to highlight the gaps in integration of immigrant women from the point of view of the system compared to the needs and capabilities of immigrant women. Each partner of the project interviewed about 20 – 30 immigrant women and about 10 – 15 relevant stakeholders (decision-makers and practitioners). The criteria for selection of immigrant women for participation in interviews were the following:*

- √ *Non-Western immigrant background (except Lithuania);*
- √ *Legal permission to stay in the host country (permanent living/working permission);*
- √ *Basic knowledge of language of the host country;*
- √ *With at least secondary school education level;*
- √ *Evidence of participation in social ice-breaking activities in the host country;*
- √ *Age: from 18 to 60 (or the working age in each country before the pension).*

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### 3. Facts about immigrant women in the Nordic and Baltic countries

Nowadays people with immigrant background represent the following percentage of the populations of the Nordic and Baltic countries:



First generation of immigrant women is not a homogenous group across these countries. There are many differences in terms of backgrounds, namely countries of origin, cultural situations, educational backgrounds and working experiences of women. This report analyses the situation of immigrant women who immigrated to Sweden, Norway, Finland and Lithuania within the last 20-30 years. With non-Western countries of origin we mean countries outside Europe, USA, Canada and Australia. A large percentage of women immigrated from the Middle East, Asia and Africa due to family reunification or as refugees. In Lithuania, immigrant women usually come from Eastern Europe countries due to family reunification.

#### 3.1 Facts on countries of origin of immigrant women in the Nordic countries and Lithuania

In Sweden, a large percentage of immigrant women come from the Middle East, Africa and Asia. At present the two most common countries of origin for non-Western immigrant women



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in Sweden are Iraq and Somalia. In 2009 the number of women from Iraq in the age group 18 to 54 was 153 120 women and there were 58 588 Somali women.

In Norway, non-Western immigrants constitute 53.6 % of all immigrants: 199 000 people come from Asia, 67 000 people are from Africa and about 18 000 people are immigrants from South and Central America. There are slightly more female immigrants than male – almost 196,000 women compared with around 191,000 men. Female immigrants from Pakistan make up the largest non-Western group of female immigrants, and 7 % of the Norwegian female immigrant population has Pakistani background. After Pakistan, the largest groups of female immigrants come from Vietnam (9,300), Iraq (8,600), Somalia (8,300) and Bosnia-Herzegovina (7,500). During the period 1991 to 2005, between 60 and 70 % of all people who arrived as family immigrants with a non-Western backgrounds were women.

Numerically speaking, the proportion of foreign born population in Finland is around 3.8% in a country of some 5 million inhabitants. Most of this immigration, approximately 2/3, has come from Western or European countries (largely Estonia and Russia) and only some 25.000 are non-Western immigrants. In regards to non-Western immigrants, the largest groups according to the language of origin are: Somali (11 681 people) and Arabic (9 682 people). Moreover, there are 7 135 Kurdish speaking immigrants, 7 078 Chinese speaking immigrants and 6 736 immigrants speaking Albanian. The statistics show the general immigration numbers for both men and women and the numbers for just female immigrants are missing. However, the available statistics imply that the majority of non-Western immigrant women in Finland come from Somali- and Arabic speaking countries.

In Lithuania, the immigration situation differs quite a lot compared to that of Sweden, Norway and Finland. The most common countries of origin there for immigrants in general, and immigrant women in particular, are Eastern European countries: Russia (32 % of the total number of immigrants), Belarus (26 % of the total number of immigrants) and Moldova (11 % of the total number of immigrants). 50 % of women from Eastern Europe come to Lithuania as the result of marriage with Lithuanian citizens.



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## ***Conclusion***

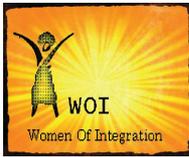
The biggest challenge in the current research was a lack of statistics on non-Western immigrant women; the data available is fragmented and different methods are used in different countries to show the situation of immigrant women. More research is needed to explore the situation of the above target group, namely to map out their formal education, soft skills and formal/non-formal working experiences. Even more important, is to find out the needs of the immigrant women themselves and learn more about their own solutions to fight societal isolation and unemployment. To truly be effective, the proposed research should be carried out at regional, national and European levels.

### **3.2 Facts on education of immigrant women in the Nordic countries and Lithuania**

Language skills and education relevant to labour market demand are important prerequisites for integration of immigrant women into the labour market and society. The question of integration of immigrant women in Sweden, Norway and Finland is gaining attention nowadays. Our premise is that immigrant women can be an asset for the present economy of the above countries instead of being a burden and that immigrant women as mothers of the next generation are an asset for the future economic and political stability of these countries.

The educational backgrounds of immigrant women differ quite a lot depending on what the possibilities for education in their country of origin were and what is available in the host country. Their life paths vary but despite these differences, there is a lot in common as, for example, the fact that many women stay at home after marriage and care for children. In all the countries researched, it is the women rather than the men who never completed their education.

In Sweden, where the majority of immigrant women within the last 20 years are from Somalia, Iraq, Iran and former Yugoslavia, the educational backgrounds of women are not comparable. There is a lack of official statistics on female educational backgrounds but the general statistics on education of immigrants gives an approximate picture. 29 % of people born in Iran are highly educated (tertiary education – 3 years or more) compared to 22 % of people born in Sweden. Iraq has a relatively large share (30 %) of persons with compulsory



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education as their highest level of education. This tendency is more typical for men than for women. Among people from former Yugoslavia, this number is lower, about 20 %. The lowest proportion of highly educated people is among immigrants born in Somalia, about 10 %. Somali women have the lowest level of education in comparison to women born in Iran and Iraq.

In Norway, the majority of non-western immigrant women come from Pakistan, Iraq, Somalia and Vietnam. While women from Western countries have a higher education than men on average, the trend is reversed among a number of non-Western immigrant groups. The percentage of women with immigrant backgrounds with no completed (or unknown) education varies from 11 to 56 % depending on country background. The differences in the level of education between men and women are greater among immigrants from Africa, where almost 11 % of the women and 19 % of the men are registered with higher education. There are also major differences between non-Western women. For instance, figures from 2008 show, that while 34 and 32 % of female immigrants from India and the Philippines respectively have higher education, this only applied to 9, 7 and 4 % of the women from Pakistan, Turkey and Somalia respectively.

In Finland, the statistics show the following educational attainments for all immigrant women: primary education – 24 %, secondary education – 38 %, short professional training – 58 %, vocational education and training – 43 %, university education – 57 % and doctoral education – 62 %.

In Lithuania, the majority of immigrant women come from Eastern Europe. Less educated women with no professional training or language skills find it difficult to integrate into the labour market. The Lithuanian language is requirement number one if one wants to apply for a job in a state institution. Therefore, women tend to take low-paid jobs even when they have higher education. In Lithuania, the general statistics on the educational level of immigrant women shows quite high educational level: basic education – 8 %, secondary education – 13%, vocational education – 20 %, bachelor degree at university – 26 % and studying at the moment – 33 %.



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## *Conclusion*

Despite the differences in educational backgrounds, there is an assumption in the project team that successful integration of immigrant women demands the following conditions: 1) the necessity to learn the language of the host country and 2) relevant formal education recognised by the employers and based on individual needs of immigrant women. Today, Europe in general, and the Nordic and Baltic countries in particular, tend to be “paper societies”. This means that in most cases the formal papers on education (validation of education from the country of origin and education in the host country) as well as proof of previous working experience are necessary for entering the labour market. In Sweden, for example, in order to get a work in the cleaning sector, a person needs a driver’s license and a formal certificate as cleaning personnel.

The modern image of the woman in the Nordic and Baltic countries is by definition equal, employed and financially independent members of society. Immigrant women with low educational backgrounds lack the relevant education in order to enter labour market of their host countries. In addition, because of the lack of language skills they can’t help their children with school or many other things. In bringing up their children, immigrant women with low educational background are reduced to dependency on their children, who often function as messengers between school and the home. Immigrant women, especially stay-at-home mothers, need help in bringing up their children and they need activities that help them to integrate to the society. Thus it is important to offer language training and flexible pre-vocational and vocational training (alternative: entrepreneurship training) to low-skilled immigrant women.

To achieve this, new methods are needed to improve access to adult / pre-vocational / vocational / entrepreneurial education for immigrant women with low educational backgrounds. The formal educational system itself should be more flexible and “friendly” for immigrant women with low educational background. One more factor of success is improved informational channels on how to enter formal education and what is important to



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successfully finish it. Child care solutions and flexible education hours should be provided to mothers in order to be able to attend classes.

### **3.3 Facts on employment and unemployment of immigrant women in the Nordic countries and in Lithuania**

In the Nordic countries, and to a lesser extent in Lithuania, the definition of gender equality and female citizenship is defined through employment, where equality is based on the woman's capacity to be a citizen and worker in the same way as a man. The Nordic welfare state in particular has been modelled based on the assumption of women as workers. Thus in general, employment is an important element of integration and unemployment is often attributed to lacking skills and lower levels of education.

Finland, and to a lesser extent Denmark, Norway and Sweden, has particular problems of integrating immigrant women, particularly if they come from developing countries (often refugees). Unemployment rates of immigrant women in Finland are more than double those of natives. Immigrant women with low educational background are particularly at the risk of exclusion. According to the statement from the Finnish government in 2002: *“There are such women among the immigrants for whom integration has gone well and who are part of the working life, but there are also such women who need special support and encouragement in integration and in finding employment. These women may have been left without education in their home countries, their families have multiple children and it has not been part of their value systems that women educate themselves or have jobs. Despite [sic] whether these women work or not, it is important that they participate in the Finnish society”*.

The available statistics on unemployment of immigrant women in the Nordic countries and Lithuania is not enough to show the objective picture due to several reasons:

- There is a lot of statistical data on unemployment of immigrants in general but the statistics on low-skilled immigrant women is fragmentary.
- A lot of immigrant women are reluctant to register at Public Employment Services and thus are not officially unemployed.



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- A lot of immigrant women who are registered at Public Employment Services as unemployed in reality work in the grey market (illegally/informally).

The available data shows the following: In Sweden the employment rate is the lowest among immigrants from Iraq and Somalia. Approximately 50 % of immigrants from Iraq are employed 10 years after immigration. Approximately 35 % of immigrants from Somalia are employed 10 years after immigration. In general, immigrant women have much lower employment level compared to women born in Sweden. 58.7 % of immigrant women compared to 74.7 % of women born in Sweden were employed in 2009. 32 % of immigrant women are not in the labour force (not looking for a job at the moment of research in 2009) compared with 20 % of women born in Sweden. 42 % of immigrant women have never worked in their life.

In Finland, the Ministry of Labour statistics states the general unemployment rate of immigrants was about 29% at the beginning of 2010. In comparison, the unemployment rate for the Finnish population was 9%. The highest unemployment rates are among immigrants from former Yugoslavia (about 30 %), Iraq (about 32 %) and Somalia (about 25 %).

In Norway, the situation on unemployment of immigrant women with low educational background is not too different from Sweden and Finland. The unemployment rate among immigrants is three times higher than that of the total population, with the highest unemployment figures among non-Western immigrants. The lowest employment rates are found among the refugee groups with a short period of residence, such as among those from Afghanistan, Somalia and Iraq. For these countries, 19 %, 20 % and 22 % of the women participated in the labour force respectively (all aged 16-74). Pakistani women have a low labour force participation (28 %), which is much lower than among Pakistani men (60 %). The highest rate of participation among non-Western immigrant groups is among women from the Philippines (63 %) and Chile (61 %).

In Lithuania, the unemployment of immigrant women is still high despite the quite high level of education among them compared to Finland, Sweden and Norway. According to the results of a study carried out by the British Council and the Migration Policy Group, Lithuania got



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only 31 points out of 100 for its integration policies, while Sweden for example got 83 points. The ranking in this report was based on a set of criteria as: 1) employment opportunities, 2) access to education, 3) anti-discrimination legislation. There is not much data about the number of unemployed immigrant women in Lithuania and their level of education. According to the Labour Exchange Center data for the year 2010, female unemployment is 48% of the total number of unemployed in Lithuania. A lot of unemployed women have at least vocational education.

### **3.4 Sectors “reserved” for immigrant women in the Nordic countries and Lithuania**

The range of jobs for immigrant women, especially those with low educational background, is limited to some sectors of labour market and this trend is typical for all Nordic countries and Lithuania.

In Finland, in 2009 the most common occupation among employed immigrant women was cleaning (12 %), sales work (10 %), teaching and education (9 %) and restaurant service (8 %).

In Sweden, service, healthcare and sales are the most common areas of employment for immigrant women. 37 % of immigrants from Africa, 27 % of immigrants from Asia, 31 % from South America and 18 % from North America work in these sectors, the majority of them women. In comparison, 20 % of women born in Sweden work in these sectors.

In Norway, sales and service jobs are the most common occupations among non-Western female immigrants. More than one third of women in employment are in such occupations. Although sales and service jobs are also common among the men, these account for 16 % less compared to the women. Fewer non-Western female immigrants than women in the population as a whole have university, college or academic occupations, managerial positions or office jobs. The greatest difference in relation to women in the population as a whole is found in the category “other occupations”, which mostly consists of unskilled occupations.



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In Lithuania the most common sectors of work for immigrant women are cooking, healthcare (massage), sales and cleaning.

### ***Conclusion***

Adequate income support, inclusive labour-markets and access to quality services are necessary conditions for assistance of immigrant women with low educational background to labour market.

The persistence of high levels of unemployment and grey economy participation among immigrant women demonstrates that current social, economic and employment policies in the Nordic countries and Lithuania are not designed to meet their needs. In order to have a positive impact, it is essential to tackle the structural causes of unemployment of immigrant women in general and unemployment among low-skilled immigrant women in particular. Moreover, some groups of women have very limited access to financial services. Cultural stereotyping and discrimination by employers result in many immigrant women having to take temporary and/or low-skilled jobs. Consequently, migrant women are frequently excluded from social protection measures, including maternity benefits, pensions and medical leave.

Particular attention should be paid to flexible adult education/ pre-vocational / vocational education as a first step to the labour market based on individual needs and capabilities of immigrant women with low educational background. Their strength and their knowhow are usually left hidden inside the walls of the home. Flexible and adjusted preparatory education and guidance is needed to motivate these women to become self-sufficient and independent.



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#### **4. Perceived barriers from the point of view of immigrant women and the relevant stakeholders**

One of the objectives of this survey is to find out more about the perceived barriers which prevent immigrant women with low educational backgrounds from successfully entering the labour market and integrating into society. The project team has also surveyed service providers and government agencies to see what challenges they faced as well. We found some issues which are of course country specific, but there were many trends that are relevant across the Nordic countries and Lithuania. They are:

***The main issues the women themselves found challenging are:***

1) **Language.** It is difficult to learn a new language given the existing teaching methods used since there are generally speaking few options, long wait times for classes and not always flexible hours. Moreover, most jobs and higher studies require fluency in the national language even if classes are held in English or the native language of immigrants. According to immigrant women with low educational background there is a great need in courses adjusted to their needs in regards to tempo, pedagogical approaches and flexibility.

These language issues effectively provide employers who do not want to hire immigrant women with an excuse that immigrants do not speak the language of the host country “well enough”. Since there are no/few options for learning the language according to the needs of low-skilled immigrant women, there is no option for them to address or refute this issue.

2) **Discrimination** - Many recruiting agencies simply hear the accent, see the name or skin colour and decide not to interview the person despite their qualifications or language ability.

3) **Lack of recognition for non-national qualifications** - Non-national degrees/education are often not recognized in-country as being valid (despite in some cases international recognition). It is an even more complex process to recognise non-national work experience in the host countries as being valid (again despite in some cases international recognition). Many countries require their own national certificate despite existing certificates/long work experience from other countries. This forces many immigrants to retake their education in the



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host country. This leads a narrow minded focus on diplomas over skills and to lower quality service and treatment of customers which in some cases has even led to deaths (several newspaper articles in Norway). It also reinforces the habit of “sticking with what you know” on the customer’s side. Immigrant women who have working experience as housewives or in a cleaning / sales / cooking sectors are usually considered not to have any experience simply because the system for validation of their experience is missing.

4) ***Access to Information is difficult.*** Many of the main employment sites are only in the native languages of the host countries. Moreover, it is often difficult to understand unspoken codes and rules of the host country. No explanation of how the national systems work is provided and often natives assume non-natives know the process, that it is intuitive. There are often no clear resources for further information provided at access points like visa centres, language schools and unemployment agencies. This quite commonly leads to frustrated and unhappy immigrants who then turn to their own communities for work and support. *A Norwegian example: There is a growing “grey” economy in Norway. In 2004 no one would even consider working under the table. Now there are many who have done it and know others who do as well. And not only foreigners – native Norwegians as well, often because they have lost faith in the system. Spring 2011 a survey was reported in one of the major newspapers that 45 of 50 NAV employees were not qualified for their jobs and did not follow the laws they were given. (NAV is the state unemployment and social services agency in Norway).*

5) ***Integration issues*** are often caused by attitudes. Hostile/racist attitudes against immigrants, lack of understanding or interest to learn more about them, assumptions being preferred over facts, and valuing homogeneity over multiculturalism are typical barriers. Moreover, the fact that many natives move out of neighbourhoods that have high percentages of foreigners limits the ability to integrate as does the common pressure to do as the natives do 100%, which represents a low understanding for bi-cultural/bi-religious citizens. Cultural and value differences often create challenges since many feel that it is not accepted that they may like to stay home and take care of their family instead of working. Gender differences are also a factor in that the husband/family might not approve of the woman doing anything else than



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staying at home, and she might not have the possibility to learn the language, make social contacts, find work or develop hobbies.

6) **Limited study options.** In many cases it can be cost-prohibitive for non-natives without employment to study. There is a lack of proper education / demanded skills and knowledge of how to gain those. For many, it is time-prohibitive to take classes if they have a part-time or full-time job. And there are few tailored options. This keeps those at the lowest level of society there. If one receives welfare benefits and wants to take a class that is not approved of by the welfare agency (that is to say their particular advisor, even though another advisor might approve it) they are not paid their welfare benefits while they take the class. Moreover, they need to cover all additional costs themselves on the lower benefits.

7) **Limited choices.** Some immigrant women are not always able to / allowed to make their own decisions due to the state, family or other issues. Moreover, there are often too advanced demands to entering the labour market as well as a lack of opportunities to start ones own business. Another issue is that with the social welfare systems in place it can be better paid to stay at home. Limited or ineffective interaction between authorities, labour market, and immigrant associations often leads to limited knowledge on multicultural guidance and educational opportunities to adapt to a new social environment as well.

***The main barriers according to the stakeholders are:***

For the stakeholders, that is to say service providers, government and agencies, the barriers are a bit more limited but none the less quite serious.

**1) limited or ineffective interaction** between authorities, labour market, and immigrant associations and NGOs. This hampers the flow of information, causes many to have to recreate programs from scratch, reduces the ability to learn about best practices and improved methods, as well as limits the number of immigrant women who can be helped by each offer.

**2) limited knowledge on multicultural guidance** and education on how to help the women adapt to a new social environment (lack of skilled staff). Many stakeholders state that they are



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unable to reach and understand the true needs of the target groups. The other problem is a lack of information, statistics, common resources and political uniformity regarding immigrant women with low education. This leads to a lack of adjusted methods / time for integration to education / labour market as well as restricted funding sources. This often results sadly in the lack of attention to the true needs of the women being served.



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## 5. Consequences of the situation described above

What kind of consequences will immigrant women face as a result of the barriers they perceive when entering a new country and culture?

We have to consider at least two dimensions, i.e. barriers these women bring within their perceptions stemming from their own culture, and barriers raised in the new host country. Many factors affect integration, as seen in the interviews with immigrant women from the four countries of Finland, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden, including age, gender, health, access to support networks, education and skills, experience of migration, fluency in the new language, discriminatory practices in the new country and the type of immigrant status held. One common feature of integration processes, however, is that they involve learning and thereby change, including cultural adjustment involving conflict and possible psychological disturbance. Integration is not, then, an easy path.

To be more specific about the factors, or barriers, that affect integration as perceived by the immigrant women we have divided this work into two groups, i.e. the immigrant women themselves, and the stakeholders involved in the integration process.

Common factors, that is to say barriers perceived by the immigrant women in the four countries are: language, lack of recognition of non-national qualifications, access to information, integration, limited study options and the lack of ability to make sufficient choices.

There are factors that aid integration. For example, the greater the knowledge of the new language, the easier it is to learn how to operate in the new country. The granting of permanent or long-term rights to remain often confers rights to education and work that form a basis for integration. Further security of mind is that gained by being granted citizenship. But this can be a difficult process and access to citizenship varies across Europe. Good health, both mental and physical is an asset. Certain qualifications acquired abroad are readily accepted by employers, especially those who have skills shortage vacancies. The acquisition of local qualifications and increasing the length of residence are important factors as well,



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although they do not guarantee access to valued employment. Work and an adequate level of education, which potentially confer income security, are also “instruments for further participation in the society” (Launikari & Puukari 2005, p. 23).

However when things are not going as planned, it becomes even harder to access the labour market or the educational system. There is a lack of full understanding of what other options are available which gives way to frustration and real stress. Small barriers once perhaps considered minor are gradually perceived as significant and quickly become sources of great stress.

A new environment requires a great deal of conscious energy not required in old, familiar environments. This leads to cognitive overload and fatigue, which could lead to a strong desire to return to one’s own old culture and to see the new culture in opposition to that. It is sometimes noted that the problems associated with the host culture are due to real differences in values, beliefs and behaviours. This stage can also be called as “growing realism”: good and bad are seen in every culture.

Regarding stakeholders, that is to say the authorities dealing with this group, their main barriers are limited or ineffective interaction between the different organizations, limited knowledge of multicultural guidance and education, lack of resources, political uniformity and restricted funding.

It is unfortunately, frequently difficult for any adults to obtain suitable vocational guidance. There are particular problems in countries where immigration and the reception of refugees is relatively recent phenomena, where they are dispersed or few in number, where national governments do not institute integration programmes or other support measures and where the voluntary sector is weak or under-funded. Where services do exist and are accessed by immigrants, guidance workers may face three types of problems. Firstly, many lack relevant knowledge, such as the equivalence of overseas qualifications. Secondly, they are not trained in multicultural counselling and issues specific to refugees and other immigrants. Thirdly, the practice of their organisation is not adapted to the specific needs of immigrants. Furthermore,

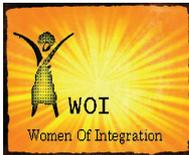


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very little good-quality training is available in this field in Europe. Free telephone help lines with a range of language options and web-based guidance exist in some countries and guidance may be available to adults already in further and higher education. The holistic, person-centred guidance that many immigrants need, however, is hard to find outside large cities with significant immigrant populations or integration programmes.

Besides the basic one-to-one encounter aimed at remediation of the individual, these roles often involve larger social units, systems intervention and prevention, which include not only coordination and development of multi-professional working cultures and approaches, but also a real development of decision making and allocation of resources.

The need to develop multicultural counselling competences and recognition of the significance of immigrant work within one's own organisation are truly important factors for success in this continuous process.



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## 6. Relevant best practices

The term "best practice" refers to those practices that have produced clearly visible and feasible results in one situation and that could be adapted for other situation. It's sharing of experiences and practices that have proven their worth, and enhancing efforts at improvement. The best practices in how to integrate immigrant women into a new society involve integration training and integration advice center activities such as those developed in the partner countries as follows:

### Lithuania

1. In today's global knowledge society and with ever increasing mobility, migrants face many challenges before they can settle and feel part of a new community. Two major challenges, which affect many new arrivals, are lack of language skills and lack of basic knowledge on financial matters. The LLP Grundtvig Multilateral project "Migrant's Integrating Kit – Basic Language for Dealing with Financial Matters– INTEGRA" launched by Soros International House seeks to improve the integration of migrants into local society by providing them with opportunities to gain language skills on basic financial matters. A useful kit of financial terminology, a financial glossary and a guide with main information on financial institutes or financial information sources is being developed by project partners from 10 European countries. A European network of fitted trainers from migrant communities who will be able to continue delivering the skills to migrants will be created and long after the project is over there will be an active web portal integrating all the useful financial information, providing on-line trainings, contact information and network data. More information can be found here: [www.integra-project.eu](http://www.integra-project.eu)

2. The project – "The integration of a refugee advice centre" (launched in 2009) is a continuation of the earlier implemented projects on integration. The centre has been working for 6 years and employs four staff members: the centre administrator, a social worker, a social educator and a consultant refugee - a refugee from Afghanistan, who more than anyone else knows the problems faced by immigrants and is successfully looking for ways to solve them. The centre provides the foreigners who were granted asylum with social, legal advice, organizes professional Lithuanian language lessons and runs pre-employment workshops. The



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social educator helps mothers to take care of their children and provides assistance with homework and school trips. The centre has a library with access to internet. During the implementation of the project, visits to Lithuanian traditional model areas are organized for refugee families and later refugee community members are introduced to Lithuanian customs and culture. Within the framework of the project children's summer camps are organized for refugee children together with the locals. More information can be found here: <http://www.redcross.lt>

## **Finland**

### **1. Integration training**

Integration training for immigrants is arranged for adult immigrants who are subject to the Integration Act. Training usually lasts one year and consists of many courses. Most integration training is labour policy education. Immigrants may also receive an education subsidy when they are participating in the form of integration training other than labour policy education if there are valid reasons for doing so. The reason may be for example a large number of education providers in the region. Decisions on this type of training (so-called comparable training) are made by the local employment office. Integration training for immigrants includes instruction in Finnish or Swedish, social studies, everyday skills, cultural knowledge and guidance related to vocation and working life. A period of practical training at a workplace is often included in the training. The students' capabilities to study are developed and an individual study plan and employment plan are designed during the training. It is also possible to receive remedial instruction in language studies and to use the services of an interpreter.

### **2. The Finnish Refugee Advice Centre**

Lawyers of the Refugee Advice Centre give legal aid to asylum seekers in different stages of the asylum procedure. The Refugee Advice Centre also works to promote the legal rights of asylum seekers, refugees and other foreigners. The organisation is recognised as an expert in refugee and alien affairs in Finland. It is thereby listened to by officials and the Parliament when new laws concerning foreigners are drafted. The Refugee Advice Centre and the Finnish Immigration Service have been developing the asylum interview together since the beginning



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of 2008. This is the first time that an asylum process has been developed jointly by NGOs and officials. The project has received funding from the European Refugee Fund (ERF).

### **3. Infopankki (Info Bank)**

Info Bank is a website in 15 languages with all the necessary information needed to know when moving to Finland. It contains links, information, forms, cultural issues, studying, working and a lot more. The development and reform of Info Bank was made possible by a five-year cooperation agreement (2009-2013) between the government and the municipalities. Government funding partners are the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, the Ministry of Education and the Social Insurance Institution of Finland. The project is also applying for state funding from the Ministry of Finance to finance development of the service. The municipal sections are the responsibility of the respective member municipalities. Info Bank operations are guided by a steering group comprised of representatives of the funding parties. Administratively it operates under the Helsinki Cultural Centre. Infopankki was awarded by The European Commission Good Practice label for high quality online services in 2007. More information can be found here:

<http://www.infopankki.fi/en-GB/home/>

### **Norway**

**1. Top 10 project** - <http://www.thetop10.no/> from their own website: Top 10 is a research project, annual award and media profiling project aimed at promoting successful immigrants in Norway. Top 10 was initiated in 2004 with the purpose of finding, selecting, profiling and researching ten international women who had succeeded in the Norwegian work world. The focus on successful international women was unique and created a greater reflection and insights into the barriers and strategies to integration. In 2005, Top 10 included successful international men in the profile. Top 10 was started by AIPBW (the Association of International and Professional Business Women) and is currently owned by the Leadership Foundation - see [www.leadershipfoundation.no](http://www.leadershipfoundation.no).

*Results:* The project has been successful in highlighting and profiling the competencies of immigrant men and women in Norwegian society through positive media attention and



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various presentations at relevant conferences and seminars. The profiling of the candidates selected in the national newspapers has contributed to the celebration of differences and the achievements of the group. This has, in our opinion, impacted positively on the inclusion of immigrants in Norwegian society. Several of the winners have been further profiled and honored in their workplace as a result of Top 10 and as such positively influenced the inclusion of immigrants at the workplace.

**2. Ambisjoner.no is the leading Internet portal** in education and career aimed at people with minority backgrounds. [www.Ambisjoner.no](http://www.Ambisjoner.no) was established in May 2007, having noticed the need for good mentors. Many ethnic minorities complained that the schools are advised to educate them in subjects that did not interest them. Parents on the other hand, wanted their children to take prestigious educations. The young people did not feel understood at home or at school. Media and politicians formed an image of ethnic minorities as social losers. Media has always had a need to create controversial headlines and largely discusses minorities when referring to such negative topics as gangs, crime, fraud, etc. Ambisjoner.no has the goal to act as a counterpart, to help, listen, inspire and motivate; and also to understand students on their own terms in order to create trust. Through the project's web portal, there is opportunity to open a whole new world for minority youth. The goal is to inspire them to think: "Yes we can". The website also highlights people who had excelled in their careers and in their education as both a model and inspiration for others. Today, Ambisjoner.no addresses current issues related to employment and education through the website. They are a part of the driving force that encourages ethnic minorities to choose careers that interest them. Through the interviews with ethnic minorities, they want to motivate more people to pursue higher education and to foster long term careers.

## **Sweden**

### **1. Spånga Blå Band – social enterprising concept**

This is project aiming to prepare immigrant women for the Swedish society and labour market; to get a headstart before they enter the mandatory language education called SFI (Swedish for Immigrants). The immigrant women are given the possibility to connect to a social network, thus reducing isolation. They are given the possibility to learn Swedish in the



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form of study circles, a more informal and relaxed way of learning in small groups. They can attend “Feel Good” courses, to improve self confidence and self esteem, and make them feel better in their new environment. There are also courses where the women learn how to take care of themselves (Beauty Care). They also have the possibility to get in touch with the labour market through activities like study visits at different work places, orientation courses of how society works, rights and obligations, and via different training courses to enhance skills and competences. Every participant gets individual help from trained staff, coaches, tutors and counsellors. Either in personal matters or matters regarding employment or education, or other issues needing attention. When the immigrant women are ready they continue to the more formalized language education, SFI. More information can be found here: <http://www.spangablaband.nu/>

**2. „Immigrant women in isolation“** is the project coordinated by the Public Employment Services (PES) in 5 regions in Sweden, namely Stockholm, Malmo, Gothenburg, Landskrona and Sundsvall. The aim of the project is to find new methods for support of immigrant women with low educational background into labour market.

*The project was carried out according to the following activities:*

- Outreach activities – where the coaches working with immigrants found immigrant women who are not registered at PES and invited them to participate in the project. The first step was to register at PES and to achieve a commitment to participate in the project activities.
- Interaction – where the networking activities were carried out in order to engage relevant stakeholders necessary for successful integration of immigrant women in the regions.
- Focus groups – where learning and motivation activities were carried out by PES coaches in order to: a) find out the what motivates the individual immigrant women to study / to work, b) help and assist immigrant women on their way to labour market based on their individual needs and strengths.



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- Finalisation of methods – where the coaches, who worked with immigrant women according to focus groups and individual action plan approaches, compare methods used.

***Results of the project*** – a range of new methods based on 2 main criteria:

- a) methods adjusted to individual needs and capabilities of immigrant women with low educational background;
- b) methods adjusted to local / regional labour market needs.

More can be found here:

<http://www.arbetsformedlingen.se/download/18.6be1c39612ee961cb0e80003437/utrikesfodda-kvinnor.pdf>



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## **7. Recommendations for integration of immigrant women with low educational background**

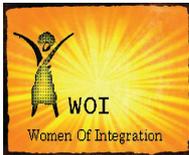
### **Recommendation 1. Progressive approach in guidance and coaching**

In paperbased societies, as it is in case of the Nordic and Baltic countries, each individual needs to take a certain number of steps in order to enter the labour market. To do so, some criteria have to be met such as language skills, professional skills and other demands, specific for each profession (as, for example, a driving licence for a job as a personal assistant in Sweden). For some it is easy to see a clear starting point, goals as well as what criteria needs to be met in order to achieve those goals. For others this path is not as clear and they need relevant guidance along the way.

Traditionally, heavy input is placed on delivering labour market information to help people to find a job or a training programme. The existing practice shows that it is no use delivering labour market information if the person is not able to use it in a proper way. Instead, the guidance should be based on the individual needs and possibilities and the “right” information is given in “right” time.

In order to deliver relevant advice for immigrant women with low educational background based on their needs and capabilities, it is recommended to use a progressive approach. The progressive approach is based on the following criteria:

- √ The “right” information is delivered to the individual at the “right” time. The individual goes through the process of integration into the labour market step-by-step. Instead of overwhelming the individual with lots of information at once, the counsellor/mentor provides information in small portions with relevant goals for each step on his/her way to the labour market. This approach allows avoiding “big” goals which can de-motivate the individual as they feel that whole process is too complicated and even impossible to go through.
- √ From the point of view of the progressive approach advice has to be directed at enabling individuals to be or become self-managing. This implies that career guidance has to be viewed as a process in which people learn how to manage their own careers based on their needs and capabilities. Thus the role of the mentor/counsellor is to



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prepare, guide and support in such a way that the individual can find his/her own way independently. As a result of this, the individual learns to plan on running into obstructions and finding solutions for them on their own. The mentor teaches the individual to manage his/her talents and to get a grip on his/her future. During the process the picture gradually becomes clearer with regards to the individual's position, goals in the labour market as well as the requirements. In other words the process approach takes care of this fine-tuning by putting the individual in the centre.

- √ At the beginning of the guidance process it is important to create trust among immigrant women so as to ensure commitment. By commitment we mean that one agrees with the choices that are made and the changes that are introduced. Good practices in some countries have shown success in involving bilingual mentors/advisors for the first stages of integration process. Immigrant women who have successfully integrated themselves can coach others as they know how to motivate and support women from the same culture.

### **Recommendation 2. An online platform with “start-up” information in different languages**

Moving to a new country and trying to integrate into society there requires a lot of knowledge about the structure and rules of said country. One has to know how to proceed, what is needed and whom to turn to in different situations. The research shows that immigrant women with low educational background lack this information in many cases. Some of them live in the country for 10 – 15 years without any contacts except for their neighbourhood communities. The information which exists on the Internet is usually insufficient or is provided in the language of the host country, which is not a big help for those who do not speak this language. In order to provide women with the fundamental information the need at the beginning of the integration process in the new country an online platform is recommended.

- 1) Set up an online platform that caters to EU countries containing all the basic information in English for all the countries involved including how to immigrate to each country, what you need to know before moving, where to find the necessary information needed, forms,



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traditions and rules to follow in the country in question, how and where to find housing/look for a job/and how to deal with the system in each country.

This site should also include contact information where immigrants can find legal advice, meet other foreigners as well as associations where the immigrants can integrate easily with the inhabitants of the country by joining an association or hobby. Information on places of interest (religious, work-related and social) would be important as well.

This platform should be integrated with an online language course in each language complete with interactive exercises and the basic information about the grammar with both print and online references. The course should have English as the lingua franca so that the partner countries could translate and/or make similar exercises such as how to manage in the daily life, numbers, shopping to basic dealings with the government. The course should be from level A1-B1. Pictures should be included for basic vocabulary and this can be used in each language. Audio files should be on the site for pronunciation training.

### **Recommendation 3. Liberal Adult Education as a pedagogical approach**

The interviews with immigrant women with low educational background show that many of them are rather reluctant to return to the school bench due to many reasons. Some of them are:

- The existing educational systems are not flexible enough to meet the needs of the women in terms of time (when the classes are held) and content of the classes (tempo is not adjusted to the needs of the women).
- The women do not have a study habit / experience; they need a more individually based pedagogical approach based on their needs and capabilities.
- The women do not trust that anything will change if they attend classes. Many of them go to school because they have to (to get the social benefits) rather than because they want to. This is caused by the lack of individual motivation and trust in the system.

In order to ensure a “soft” start at the beginning of the educational process which will motivate and empower women, the project team recommends the Liberal Adult Education pedagogical approach. The central method of this approach is study circle as an alternative



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form of education. Child care solutions and flexible education hours should be provided to the mothers in order to be able to attend the classes.

***Description of the structure and methods of study circles in Sweden:***

NGOs or groups of activists in Sweden have the possibility to organise so-called study circles through governmental grants together with Study Associations, Folk High Schools and other adult educational providers. The topics of study circles vary but the goal is common: “to help strengthen democracy and intensify commitment to, and participation in, the development of society, among other aims – and set out applicable reporting requirements.”

Study circles can be arranged by NGOs or adult education providers, where adult educational providers have the role of facilitator / administrator of the process. Facilities and materials for study circles are paid through governmental grants. In order to get support to start a study circle, there is a set of the following requirements:

***1. The number of participants:***

Minimum 3 participants, including circle leader at each meeting, maximum 12 participants including a circle leader.

***2. The number of meetings per person:***

A person may be in different study circles up to 20 study hours per week (one study hour is equivalent to 45-minutes). A person may be involved in one study circle up to 12 study hours per week.

***3. The number of hours per one study circle:***

One study circle may last up to 4 study hours per day. The minimum requirement for a study circle is 9 hours within at least 2 weeks with a minimum of three sessions. The maximum requirement for a study circle is up to 40 weeks.

***4. Other requirements:***

Children under 13 may not participate in the study circle. There should be a circle leader at each (physical/virtual occasion).

***A study circle is:***

- Free and voluntary,



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- Contributes to education and personal development,
  - Gives participants the opportunity to influence the content,
  - Creates engagement of participants to participate in community development,
  - Helps equalize educational disparities and improve education in society.

The study circle method is based on two components: 1) one common topic of interest for participants, 2) participants learn through talking, sharing and listening instead of from a traditional class or lecturer. This method is difficult to describe in general terms as each study circle is unique because it is composed of unique people and topics vary a lot. A study group has a leader who leads the group and who takes responsibility for the group. The leader does not need to have specific expertise and is more facilitator than the teacher. Study associations arrange circle leader training for those who want to become leaders. The modern study circle (based on the same fundamentals as that of those a century ago) can take place both virtually and at physical meetings led by the instructor.

***Impact:***

More than 300 000 study circles are organised each year in Sweden. About 2.7 million people participate in these study circles. This form of education is widely used in Sweden for integration and engagement into society of most disadvantaged groups. For immigrant women with low educational background, a variety of “ICE-BREAKING” courses are organised through study circles: cooking, swimming, cultural exchange, health, language, dance, etc. This pedagogical approach is an efficient start for those who are not ready to enter the formal education system for various reasons.

**Recommendation 4. Centralised approach and coordinated integration measures on the stakeholder level**

The research shows that the main barrier for low-skilled immigrants in general and women in particular is ineffective guidance due to lack of centralised approach and coordinated integration measures on the stakeholder level. The relevant stakeholders include Adult Education Providers, Public Employment Services, Social Welfare Offices, NGOs and employers. Each one of the stakeholders has developed their own methods for facilitating



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participation of the low-skilled in the education/labour market. The problem is that immigrant women with low education do not have a clear understanding about which steps they should take in order to enter education/labour market in the host country. There is an enormous variety of educational courses, but “correct” guidance is needed for choice of the “right” training for each individual in accordance with his/her capabilities/needs. Since there is no coordination between stakeholders, the same guidance services are provided to one person several times, and/or good services are offered at wrong moments. The consequence is that the provided services lead to de-motivation and lost of self-esteem. In order to create coherent support / guidance systems for immigrant women with low educational backgrounds the cooperation between the above-mentioned stakeholders is needed. Each stakeholder shall be responsible for a certain step in the integration progress of the individuals. This will offer the possibility of introducing a coherent individual centred approach at all levels and improve the focus on the needs of the individual at the same time. For the stakeholders it will provide a clearer understanding of what is expected of their services and the way these can be delivered.

### **Recommendation 5. Awareness rising campaigns among stakeholders and society about immigrant women**

The research shows that there is a lack of statistical data on immigrant women in education and labour market systems in the project countries. It was quite challenging to find data on the target group of the project. There is a redundancy of information on immigrants in general but regarding women there is only limited and insufficient data available. It depends partly on the fact that many of these women are not registered in the system. Another reason is that too little attention is given to the integration of this specific target group as this is not recognised as the priority group for integration. The lack of statistics shows that there is little attention given to integration of immigrant women with low educational background as a target group despite the variety of applied methods and good practices. This indicates as well that there is a lack of tailor-made methods and tools for the integration of low-skilled immigrant women into the education/labour market based on their needs. They usually “fall under average measures for all unemployed” which is both de-motivating for the women and ineffective for the society. Usually employers the research countries are very cautious regarding employment of immigrant women. This is for different reasons, such as the fear that these women would



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not “fit-in” in working teams, to the desire to avoid extra work/problems caused by “extra training”.



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