



**Enabling inclusive and empowering workplaces
for migrant women through entrepreneurial support**

A guide for Business Support Organisations



*Worldplaces - Workplaces working with migrant women
Co-funded by the EU Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF)*



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Background



About this toolkit

This toolkit extracts content from Thinklusion specifically related to how BSOs can facilitate the inclusion of migrant women into the labour market by adapting the entrepreneurial support they provide through their programmes and services. Thus, this toolkit is about equipping BSOs with principles, tools, activities and methods that they can use with the entrepreneurs and ventures they support, so that enterprises can make their workplaces more inclusive and empowering for migrant women.

In addition to providing some overall framing, this toolkit offers tips and actions clustered around five themes promoted on the Thinklusion website:

- Engagement and Participation
- Inclusive Leadership and Employment
- Linguistic and Cultural Mediation
- Worklife, Family and Community Skills
- Achieving Empowerment: Body and Identity

Browse through this toolkit for inspiration. Identify the tips and actions that you believe to be most relevant for your context and entrepreneurial community. Dive deeper into the resources references throughout. Most importantly: create a plan that translates your learning into tangible commitments and actions that make real change for organisations and migrant women.

About Thinklusion

This toolkit collates content developed by Impact Hub for Thinklusion, a resource portal offering tools that help migrant women integrate into their new social and labour context. Thinklusion is a workstream of WorldPlaces, an EU funded programme that brings together private, nonprofit and public sector organisations committed to facilitating the inclusion of migrant women into the labour market, with a focus on training and leadership, interpersonal skills, language, culture, identity and self-confidence. More information on the programme and its partners can be found by visiting Thinklusion's website.



Why inclusive and empowering workplaces for migrant women?

Across the European Union, migrant women encounter substantial barriers in accessing and retaining employment, enjoying as a result fewer opportunities for integration. Workplaces are formidable integration hubs but not every workplace is equally accessible to migrant women lacking formal education and skills. This results in exclusion from integration processes and work life. By providing the right support and enablement in workplaces - paying specific attention to migrant women - we can build a more inclusive job market and society.

The experiences of migrant women



Take an intersectional approach to understanding and responding to how a person's identities and experiences combine to receive different modes of discrimination and privilege. The term “migrant women” brings two identities to the forefront of our comprehension, but it is important to remain sensitive to the complexities that exist within this grouping. The more we can see people for all of who they are, the more we can create spaces where they can fully be themselves and connect to others across different identifiers. This toolkit does not seek to define any given group but this section does provide just a few insights into the experiences of migrant women. It is important that you validate this with your own research, outreach and dialogues within your ecosystem and labour market.

LIAISE's Better Incubation Toolkit provides the following overview of migrants' experiences of and barriers:



In 2020, the number of refugees and asylum seekers in Europe increased to an unprecedented 23 million (Eurostat, 2021). However, their participation rate in the labour market is on average lower than that of the native population (73.3% vs. 57.6%). Entrepreneurship therefore represents a great opportunity for refugees and other migrants to rebuild their lives and contribute to the economy and society in their new home country. Their entrepreneurial potential is often thwarted by multiple cultural, social and economic barriers resulting in isolation, limited access to financial capital or challenges in establishing a customer's network (OECD, 2019). Relevant business support services can help address these challenges, but it needs to be accompanied by a change of mindset in the sector to better reflect on the real needs of migrant entrepreneurs. (p.7)

...and of women:



The European business and entrepreneurship ecosystem is far from being diverse and inclusive. According to the OECD report (2017), women were half as likely as men to be self-employed (9.9% vs. 17.8%), while the share of women who started their own business only increased by 2%. This gap can be explained by deep structural imbalances against female business founders, such as lack of access to finance, low opportunity perception regarding entrepreneurship among women, lack of role models or competing demands on time, with a double burden on home and work responsibilities for women. (p.7)





More emerges at the intersection of migrant and women groups, such as what is outlined in the European Union's briefing paper on Migrant women and the EU labour market:



Migrant women play an increasingly important socio-economic role in the European Union. Once mostly seen as partners joining migrant men, foreign-born women increasingly migrate alone in search of work. Globally, although around half of migrants are nowadays women, their integration in host societies is often problematic. This is partly due to obstacles resulting from the institutional framework of host countries. A migrant woman's status – i.e. whether she is legally or irregularly resident – is likely to shape her migration experience. Those who migrate for work are expected to 'fill the gaps' in the labour market. Often this means working in low-paid and unregulated sectors of the economy, where they are likely to be over-qualified. Employment and legal status are interrelated: both have an impact on the migrant woman's access to public services. Yet many migrant women, especially those with young children, face barriers to accessing the labour market. (p.1)



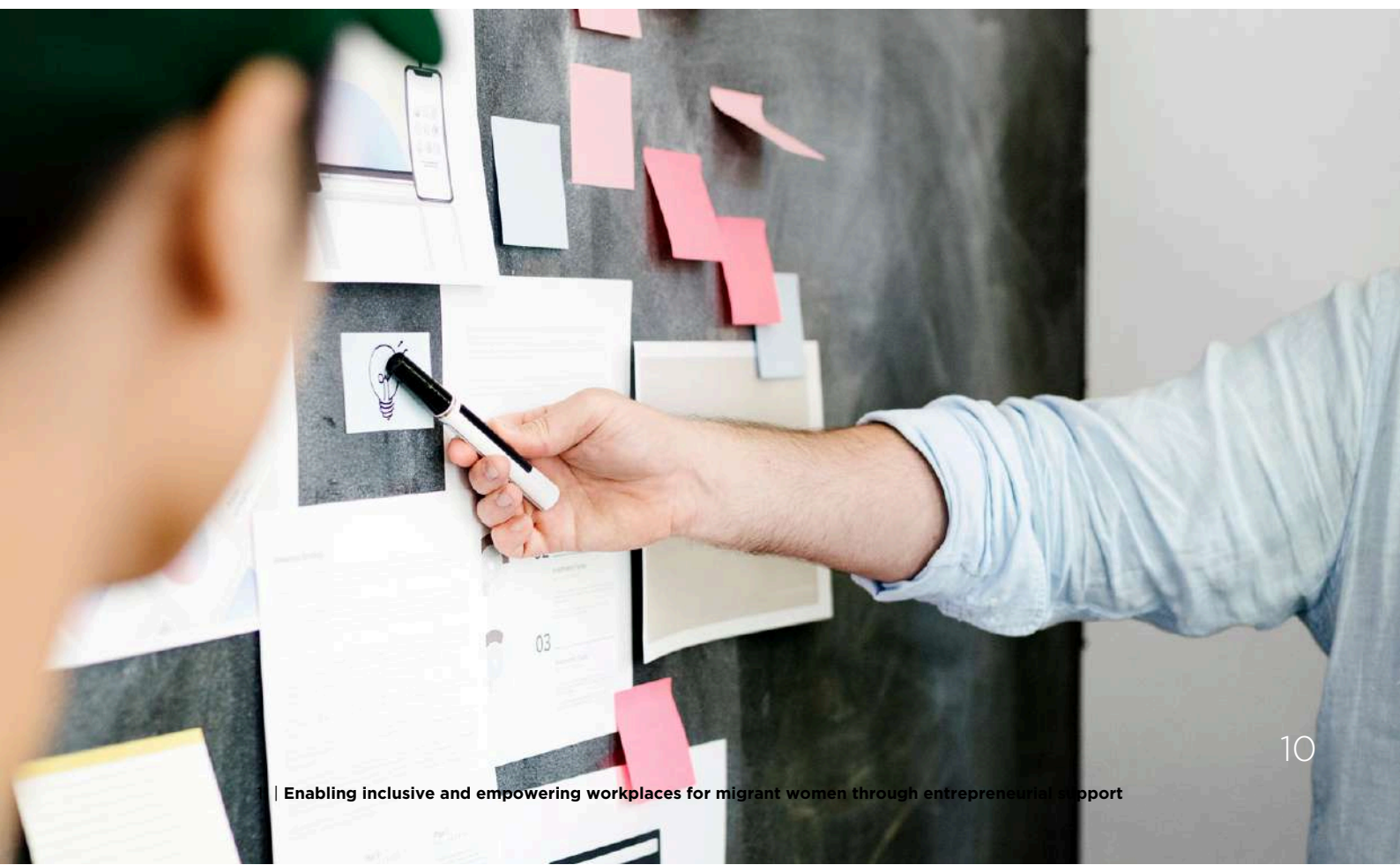
The role of Business Support Organisations and entrepreneur support





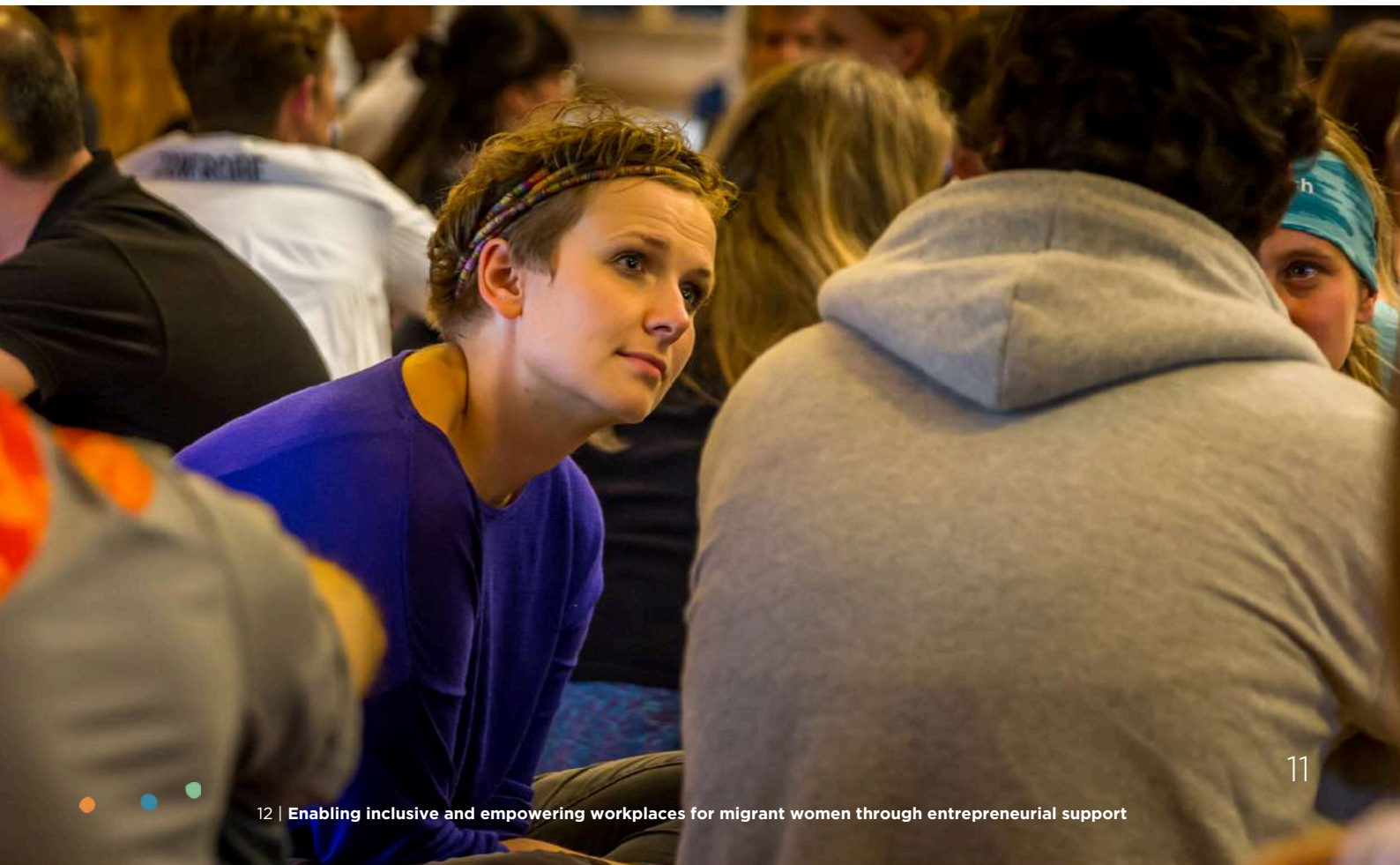
BSOs enable entrepreneurs to grow their businesses and increase chances of success, delivering the right support at the right time, based on the needs of the entrepreneur and their venture. To help achieve this, many BSOs will design and implement support programmes bringing together various activities, services and experiences suited to the community of entrepreneurs they intend to serve and the ecosystem of which they are part. Programmes work with a determined cohort of participants, often selected through an application process, brought together regularly over a defined period of time.

As a BSO, you have the opportunity to facilitate the adoption of policies, practices and cultures that foster more inclusive and empowering work environments. Startups and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) have an important and disruptive role to play in accelerating the transition to an inclusive economy by developing, testing and scaling sustainable solutions in the marketplace. BSOs can also support this transition by tweaking existing programmatic offerings, thereby empowering entrepreneurs and businesses to make their workplaces more inclusive and empowering for migrant women, making this an integral part of the way businesses grow.



In order to build and maintain credibility in this field, it is essential that you and your BSO walk the talk when it comes to progressing diversity, equity and inclusion. You should not offer services focused on building more inclusive and empowering workplaces for migrant women without demonstrating that you are doing this work yourself. The work in this field is ongoing and ever evolving, and this toolkit cannot cover this all. To start, ask yourself: How are you living your values? How inclusive are your suppliers and partners? What about your team, facilitators and mentors? How do you empower and platform migrant women? Who is not here, but should be? Do members of your community feel like they belong?

What follows are principles, tools, activities and methods that can be integrated into your existing support programmes. Recommendations vary in their complexity and investment levels to provide options for a range of circumstances, but are not exhaustive or definitive. Feel free to adapt what follows to your local needs and contexts, and use them as inspiration for additional integrations and modifications that may not be in this toolkit. For more general guidance, review [WorldPlaces, meaningful engagement and integration of migrant women](#).





Support Programme integrations



Engagement and Participation

Set the tone early through scouting and selection: Your programme recruitment processes can be leveraged to establish expectations regarding inclusion and empowerment for migrant women. An efficient and meaningful selection process is crucial to identifying and confirming the entrepreneurs and ventures that are best placed to make the most of and benefit from your support programme. Consider adding to your eligibility criteria a condition regarding the provision of employment opportunities accessible to underrepresented groups. Depending on the specificities of your programme, this could relate to a commitment, or require demonstrable evidence. By doing this, you are raising awareness of the topic and promoting standards before you even come into direct contact with programme applicants.

Emphasise expectations through venture diagnostics: A thorough diagnostic should be part of the onboarding phase of any entrepreneur support programme. Questions needn't be limited to understanding the entrepreneur, their proposition, team, performance and plan. Integrate questions relating to the inclusion and empowerment of underrepresented groups, for example: To what extent is my venture inclusive of migrant women?; What is the composition of my team?; How do I engage with and involve underrepresented groups in society?; What is the culture of my workplace like? Such reflections should inform the participant's development plan thus intertwining, from an early stage, the cultivation of inclusive and empowering workplaces with business growth.

Initiate user-centred product development: Business fundamentals can complement your goal of creating more inclusive and empowering workplaces for migrant women. For example, when your programme participants conduct user research and product testing, ensure that they interview not only their usual suspects but make efforts to involve migrant women in this process. In this process, ensure that programme participants build meaningful reciprocal relationships with people. This activity provides another channel through which to centre experiences of migrant women and start to develop a deeper understanding of the barriers and challenges they face. As IDEO explains in their article [Extremes and Mainstreams](#), designing a solution that will work for everyone means talking to people within and outside of a venture's network.





Inclusive Leadership and Employment

Design inclusive employee experiences: For inclusion to happen fully, it is essential to establish a people-centred culture. Employee journey mapping fosters an understanding that each person goes through a journey with their organisation, from encountering a job advertisement right through to leaving and remembering the organisation. The employee experience is how a team member feels and thinks about what they encounter over the course of their time at the organisation. Read this [article by Sergio Careda](#) for more information. You can create your own canvas, so that your programme participants are able to map out their current and ideal employee experiences for a variety of people, including migrant women. The Employee Experience Advantage by Jacob Morgan provides resources for such activities.

Provide inclusive leadership training: As a venture grows, so does the responsibility of the more senior members of the team to provide effective leadership. When facilitating activities that develop management capabilities, bring focus onto what it means to be an inclusive leader and the competencies encompassed by this. Inclusive leadership can enhance people's sense of belonging in a workplace, while also nurturing leadership qualities of other people, creating a multiplying effect. Check out this [article on Harvard Business Review](#), which outlines six characteristics of inclusive leadership: Visible commitment; Humility; Awareness of bias; Curiosity about others; Cultural intelligence; Effective collaboration. How can you enable your cohort to build such characteristics through the experiences curated over the course of your programme?

Promote HR practices that raise the bar: When BSOs support ventures that are growing, there is often programme content enabling transitions to more effective management systems, processes, and policies. This provides you with an opportunity to promote HR practices that include and empower migrant women. Bearing in mind the barriers facing migrant women, what policies, cultures and support can businesses implement to help overcome these? For example, risk assessments and safeguarding processes are important when working with vulnerable groups, while well-considered health, parental, anti-racist and gender-sensitive policies can enhance the experiences of employees. Run a workshop on the topic, and connect your ventures to advisors and mentors to help implement learnings and hardwire inclusion and empowerment into the fabric of their workplace.



Linguistic and Cultural Mediation

Build a learning culture within your team and organisation: It is important to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to notice invisible barriers linked to lack of privilege and psychological barriers such as self-doubt, as well as the micro-aggressions often suffered by underrepresented groups when they are the minority. To gain awareness of such biases, access training to understand important concepts such as privilege, and share this with programme participants. Consider creating a Diversity and Inclusion Training Programme. This enabled Impact Hub Budapest, for example, to embrace the specificities of their target group from the beginning (LIAISE, Better Incubation Toolkit, p.25). This will also equip your BSO to better support ventures grappling with such issues.

Strengthen people's empathy muscles: Empathising is important to human-centred design, so by including activities such as empathy interviews, persona mapping and value proposition canvassing you are also building transferable skills for cultural mediation processes! Understanding the perspectives, backgrounds and realities of another person is crucial to overcoming challenges that might arise regarding cultural or linguistic differences. While supporting your ventures to build out their products and services through empathy-informed methodologies, articulate this transferability so that participants become aware they can apply these tools to real life situations. LIAISE's Better Incubation Toolkit provides further resources related to this, as well as examples of how other BSOs have applied such tools (p.11, p.15).

Recognise different communication styles: Support the entrepreneurs participating in your programme to learn how to feedback effectively in different cultures. Cultural environments, prior experiences and education shape the way we give and receive feedback. As such, feedback can be received differently in multicultural teams, since there are multiple criteria and perceptions. MIG.EN.CUBE's Incubating Migrant Entrepreneurs MOOC dedicates an entire module to feedback in different cultures with the intention to support learners recognise different communication styles in order to increase productivity in the workplace. Review this material and consider how you can share such learning through your programme, either by bringing in facilitators and mentors to facilitate sessions, or sharing the resources provided in this course with your programme participants.





Worklife, Family and Community Skills

Host events for your programme participants and wider community: Build a community within and around your BSO that brings together a diverse group of people and organisations, and ensure that entrepreneurs participating in your programmes are immersed in this. By organising a series of educational, skill-building and networking events that engage in topics of inclusion and that platform the voices of migrant women, you can build awareness amongst your cohort of the work, family and community assets that can enable migrant women to thrive. This will equip them, back in their workplaces, to support migrant women with social and labour inclusion. Check out [Community Canvas](#) to understand how your BSO can build meaningful communities that bring people together. Who are those organisations and individuals that empower migrant women in your ecosystem? Bring them in.

Enrich your mentor pool and make matches intentionally: Recruit mentors that are migrant women, and connect them to your programme participants. These mentors can support ventures on many issues and specialisms, and they might also be available to support other team members of the venture to build their skills. The [Better Incubation Toolkit](#) by LIAISE outlines the value of this and also provides further resources on the topic: “Mentors matter for all entrepreneurs. But for people from underrepresented groups, it doesn’t just matter if these mentors are knowledgeable in the field or if they can open doors to their network. It also matters who these mentors are and if they can understand the barriers the entrepreneurs may be facing. That’s where intentional mentor matching comes in” (p.43-45).

Embrace competency frameworks and coaching skills: Explore with your programme participants the importance of self-awareness in the workplace, and how coaching skills can support development. [EntreComp](#) is an example of a competency framework, but is not the only framework out there. Support your ventures to find a framework suitable to their workplace and inclusive of underrepresented groups - suitable vocabulary is an important factor to consider, for example. Offer opportunities for your programme participants to develop [coaching skills](#), which they can use to enable migrant women in their workplace to set their own development goals, in their own words and on their own terms, focusing on areas important to them, which may include skills relating to work, family and community.



Achieving Empowerment: Body and Identity

Facilitate a wellbeing workshop: Equip your cohort of entrepreneurs with a holistic understanding of health and wellbeing, so that they are enabled to cultivate a culture of wellbeing in their workplaces. First it is important to develop an understanding of wellbeing, so that founders can practice this themselves, and then cultivate a work environment that enhances rather than limits or negates other people's wellbeing. There is no single definition of wellbeing as its meaning differs across cultures, languages, demographics and individuals, so research its meaning in your context. [Recipes for Wellbeing](#) suggest some great activities, including this one on [women's health and wellbeing in the workplace](#). For more guidance, check out [Doing Good Staying Well: a wellbeing toolkit for social entrepreneurs](#), co-authored by Impact Hub Phnom Penh.

Establish an advisory panel: Build more equitable decision making and accountability structures such as an advisory panel that includes people with a variety of lived experiences, including migrant women. At this decision making level, members contribute to programme design, define important issues of logistics and operation, participate at some level in the allocation of resources and directly influence the choices made by the BSO and partners. This in itself is empowering by definition as it involves sharing the authority or power to do something. For example, Impact Hub Berlin has established a [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Advisory Board](#), the members of which advocate for greater access and equity, and push for changes that need to be made in order to build safer and more supportive spaces for underserved communities.

Intentionally recruit and enable ventures led by migrant women: By putting gender and migrant equity at the heart of programme design and delivery, you can centre the needs of migrant women and increase representation of this group in the enterprise sector. This might mean running a programme with a cohort that is wholly composed of migrant women, or setting a target so that a certain proportion of programme participants are migrant women. By co-designing such a programme with migrant women, the content and related services should start to incorporate a range of body and identity related features that help build an empowering ecosystem of workplaces led and shaped by migrant women. Impact Hub's [Accelerators as Drivers of Gender Equality](#) and [Better Incubation Toolkit](#) offer useful guidance for such work.





Moving Forward



Practical Tips for Creating Inclusive Workplaces

To foster inclusive workplaces that support the diverse needs of employees, especially migrant women, you can encourage businesses to implement the following practical activities to make their workplace look, feel and be more inclusive. Three ideas have been suggested below, but these need to be thought through carefully based on the culture, context and organisational processes of any business.

Implement a buddy system: Establish a buddy system that pairs third-country employees who are newer to the country with people who are more familiar with it to create a tailored support network. This approach helps new employees acclimate to the workplace, providing them with a reliable point of contact for guidance, support, and social integration. The buddy system can enhance cultural exchange, mutual understanding, and create a sense of belonging among employees. Be mindful of how this is approached - make sure it doesn't position people as 'other' or make people more visible in ways that are a risk to their safety.

Facilitate informal socialising sessions: Organise informal facilitated socialising sessions to enhance multicultural awareness and foster a more inclusive culture within the workplace. These sessions can include activities such as cultural sharing events, team-building exercises, and open discussions about cultural diversity. Such interactions can help break down barriers, build empathy, and promote a more cohesive and understanding workplace environment.

Provide translation tools: Equip employees with versatile translation tools that can be used discreetly in various contexts to aid communication. This could include access to language translation apps on personal devices, handheld translators, or software integrated into workplace communication platforms. By offering these tools, businesses can help bridge language gaps without making individuals feel singled out, ensuring smoother and more inclusive interactions among all staff members.

These are just three examples. Collaborate with your team to identify other practical activities, and be sure to involve migrant women in this co-creative process. You should also be prepared to apply these activities within your own organisation too!



Working with low-skilled migrant women

The term 'low-skilled migrant women' refers to female migrants who have relocated to a country and possess low levels of formal education or vocational training. These women typically engage in labour markets requiring minimal qualifications or professional skills, such as domestic work, agriculture, hospitality, and care services. However there is an increasing number of initiatives supporting these women to envision and access different professional paths through tailored capacity building (reference AMIF funded project [Momentum](#)). Here are some considerations to take when working with low-skilled migrant women.

Treat people as individuals not as labels: Think carefully about your perceptions and the language you use in your communications - How do the women you're working or seeking to engage with identify themselves? What language do they use? What aspirations do they have? Base your vocabulary and approaches on answers to such questions.

Provide targeted language and literacy support: Offer tailored language classes that focus on workplace vocabulary and everyday communication. Provide literacy programmes for those with limited formal education to improve reading and writing skills.

Facilitate access to basic education and skills Training: Organise foundational education programmes, including basic math, literacy, and digital literacy. Offer skills training in areas with high demand for low-skilled labour, such as hospitality, caregiving, agriculture, and manufacturing.

Promote job readiness and placement: Develop job readiness workshops covering resume writing, interview skills, and job search techniques. Establish partnerships with local employers to create pathways to employment for low-skilled migrant women, including apprenticeships and entry-level positions.

Offer comprehensive support services: Provide assistance with navigating bureaucratic processes, such as obtaining work permits, integrating childcare and accessing social services. Ensure access to basic needs support, including affordable childcare, housing, and healthcare, which can be critical for low-skilled workers.



Create safe and supportive learning environments: Establish community centres or safe spaces where migrant women can access resources, attend classes, and receive support. These spaces should also be inclusive of children and other family members for whom women may be caregivers. Organise peer support groups and mentoring programmes to build confidence and provide role models.

Prioritise cultural sensitivity and relevance: Adapt educational and training materials to be culturally relevant and sensitive to the backgrounds of migrant women: Provide training for staff on cultural competence to ensure respectful and effective support.

Be practical and flexible in programme and service design: Design programmes with flexible schedules to accommodate the needs of women who may have irregular working hours or family responsibilities. Offer practical, hands-on training that directly translates to job opportunities in the local labour market.

Address barriers to employment and learning: Identify and address common barriers that low-skilled migrant women face, such as lack of transportation, limited networks, and employer biases. Advocate for fair labour practices and policies that protect the rights of low-skilled workers.

Build long-term skills and career pathways: Encourage continuous learning and skill development to help women progress from low-skilled to higher-skilled positions. Provide information on career pathways and opportunities for advancement within various industries.

By focusing on the specific needs of low-skilled migrant women, support organisations and businesses can create more effective and meaningful programmes that help these women build essential skills, gain employment, and achieve greater economic and social integration.



Recommended resources:

- European Commission - Migration and Home Affairs: Publications and reports on migrant integration and labour market policies, such as the "Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027".
- OECD Migration: Reports on the integration of immigrants, such as "Working Together: Skills and Labour Market Integration of Immigrants and their Children in Sweden".
- International Labour Organisation: Documents addressing the working conditions and rights of migrant workers, including the publication "Promoting fair migration: General Survey concerning the migrant workers instruments".
- Eurostat: Statistical data on employment, education levels, and social conditions of migrants in the EU.
- European Migration Network: Reports and studies on various aspects of migration, including the integration of low-skilled migrants.
- UN Women: Resources and reports on gender-specific issues faced by migrant women.



Now it's over to you. What commitments are you prepared to make to your entrepreneurial community and to migrant women? How will these inform your next steps? What do these next steps mean for the support programmes you offer? Who holds who accountable? Answer these questions with your team and community:

1. What would my ecosystem look like if the workplaces of all its startups and SMEs were inclusive and empowering of migrant women?
2. How can my BSO's support programmes contribute to the realisation of this vision?
3. What can I modify within my existing support programmes, and by when?
4. What else needs to happen within myself, my team and BSO?
5. Who else do I need to work with to achieve the above?

The reference list below doubles up as a useful reading list. Make some time to read these resources in more detail, deepen your knowledge and investigate the realities in your own organisation and community.

It can help to map out your support programmes visually before identifying the activities you intend to modify, or the points at which you would add new activities. First map out your programme as it is, and then modify it with a migrant women inclusive lens. For example, [try using this template](#) to get started.

Whatever you do, be inclusive, action-focused and collaborative. That's how change happens!



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