



RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: STRIVING FOR A CONTEXTUALIZED BOTTOM-UP APPROACH

Written by: Andrea Fleckinger, drawing on insights gained during the ReIncluGen project

OUR PROJECT

The ReIncluGen project, involving **Austria, Belgium, Italy, Poland, and Spain**, examines how migrantised women's experiences intersect with gender, ethnicity, class, and other social dimensions. It aims to **conceptualise gender empowerment through the innovative framework of situated intersectionality**, recognising the cumulative effects of multiple forms of discrimination. The project focuses on structural gender-based violence (GBV), the empowerment and inclusion of migrantised women, and how these issues are represented in media discourses.

Through **participatory and co-creative action research**, ReIncluGen engages civil society organisations (CSOs) working with and for migrantised women. The study highlights the **diverse experiences of migrantised women** and emphasises their agency, challenging homogenous portrayals and advocating for inclusive, equitable societal change.

To make gender empowerment meaningful for migrant women, EU and national policies need to move beyond vague, top-down directives and **invest in bottom-up, focused strategies** that reflect the lived experiences of women and the practical knowledge of CSOs.

POLICY TAKEAWAYS

PROMOTE A BOTTOM-UP APPROACH

In line with the EPSR, policies must prioritise **bottom-up approaches rooted in the lived experiences of migrantised women**. Local **CSOs**, with their grounded expertise and trust within communities, **are key to shaping strategies** that are contextually relevant and sustainable. EU and national policies need to move beyond vague, top-down directives and actively **invest in participatory structures that give women a direct voice** in decisions. All relevant actors at national, regional, and local levels must be involved.

STRENGTHEN STRUCTURAL AND INTERSECTIONAL FOCUS

Recognising **diversity as a strength** requires acknowledging the intersectionality of gender, race, migration status, and class in the lives of migrantised women. Without an explicit intersectional lens, policies risk overlooking the most acute barriers and reproducing the inequalities they seek to solve. Strengthening structural responses, in alignment with the EPSR, means **addressing systemic barriers in employment, housing, healthcare, and migration systems**, while simultaneously fostering individual agency and collective responsibility.

SHIFT FROM INDIVIDUAL TO COLLECTIVE EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment strategies should move beyond individual capacity-building to **promote collective mobilisation and mutual support**, including peer-led initiatives and community-based leadership. Empowerment is fostered through active social participation, fair working conditions, and adequate social protection. protection, and also **requires introspection on barriers to integration in society by social institutions in society**. The EPSR Action Plan underscores the social economy and participatory models as vital for inclusive societies, empowering migrantised women and strengthening their societal position.



CHALLENGE

The concept of "**empowerment**" is frequently used in migration and migrant integration policies and debates. However, the ways in which empowerment – especially in these debates – is portrayed, **remain vague and reinforce stereotypes** about migrantised women as passive agents.



FINDINGS

Gender empowerment remains an ambiguous concept among CSOs working with migrantised women, with interpretations shaped by national contexts, feminist movements, and policy frameworks. Empowerment is frequently framed as overcoming obstacles such as language barriers, limited access to the labour market, and restricted citizenship rights. **There is little acknowledgment of informal and formal ways** in which migrantised women experience empowerment and societal participation. The findings show that **empowerment cannot be predefined or reduced to a set of activities**; it emerges when migrantised women are given the freedom, resources, and space to pursue their own goals, in ways that make sense to them, within their communities and daily lives.

A key finding is the dominance of a top-down approach, where EU and national policies guide implementation. However, CSOs emphasise the **need for bottom-up strategies that reflect the lived experiences of migrantised women** and address structural barriers.

Migrantised women's understandings of empowerment vary but converge around **three key themes**:

- **economic independence** and autonomy, which enable personal control and freedom from dependency;
- **personal choice and agency**, including decisions about sexuality, education, and community participation;
- **rights and equal opportunities**, with empowerment seen as a process of claiming recognition and equality within society.





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PROMOTE A BOTTOM-UP APPROACH

Empowerment strategies should be driven by local civil society organizations



STRENGTHEN STRUCTURAL AND INTERSECTIONAL FOCUS

Policies should address structural inequalities



SHIFT FROM INDIVIDUAL TO COLLECTIVE EMPOWERMENT

Encourage models of collective mobilization and support



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METHODOLOGY

The research employs an **ethnographic, comparative, and participatory design** inspired by **rapid ethnography**. The unit of analysis for WP2, on which this policy brief is based, comprises **15 CSOs**, three in each of the five participating countries (Austria, Belgium, Italy, Spain, and Poland), selected through purposive sampling based on their relevance to migrant populations and their work in different social spheres such as socio-cultural participation, education, GBV, and labour market inclusion.

Fieldwork combined **participant observation, focus groups with CSO staff, and participatory techniques with women**, including photo-voice and life story interviews. Approximately **30 women per country** (16-72 years old; first to third generation; varied socio-economic, educational, linguistic, and religious backgrounds) participated, generating rich comparative material.

Each woman was invited to three interview sessions—life story, elicitation with photos/objects, and reflective co-creation of narratives.

Cross-national synthesis enabled the identification of both shared patterns and context-specific dynamics. Ethical protocols, trauma sensitivity, and strategies to overcome language barriers and build trust were central to the research process.



TO LEARN MORE

www.reincludgen.eu



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe Research & Innovative Action under Grant Agreement No. 101093987



RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: SECURING CIVIL SOCIETY SUPPORT

Written by: Andrea Fleckinger, drawing on insights gained during the ReIncluGen project

OUR PROJECT

The ReIncluGen project, conducted in **Austria, Belgium, Italy, Poland, and Spain**, examines how migrantised women's experiences intersect with gender, ethnicity, class, and other social dimensions. It aims to **conceptualise gender empowerment through the innovative framework of 'situated intersectionality'**, recognising the cumulative effects of multiple forms of discrimination.

Through **participatory and co-creative action research**, ReIncluGen collaborates with civil society organisations (CSOs) working with and for migrantised women. It explores key themes such as gender equality, violence, representation, socio-cultural participation, and labour market integration. The study highlights the **diverse experiences of migrantised women** and emphasises their agency, challenging homogenous portrayals and advocating for inclusive, equitable societal change.

To make gender empowerment meaningful for migrant women, EU and national policies must move beyond vague, top-down directives and instead **invest in bottom-up, focused strategies** that reflect the lived experiences of women and the knowledge of CSOs.

POLICY TAKEAWAYS

STRENGTHENING CSOS AS GATEWAYS TO PARTICIPATION

CSOs play a pivotal role in ensuring that migrantised women can access fundamental rights, including legal status, housing, education, and employment. These are essential preconditions for participation, agency, and social inclusion. To fulfil this role, **CSOs require sustainable support, resources, and recognition** as key partners in implementing the EPSR (Principles 1, 3, 4, and 12-14).

STRENGTHEN THE CSO LANDSCAPE SUSTAINABLY

CSOs must receive **stable core funding rather than project-based grants**. Project-based financing and administrative burdens hinder strategic planning and long-term impact. The EPSR Action Plan addresses this need by urging Member States to **allocate resources for civil society capacity-building**. Funding mechanisms should move beyond time-limited project logic towards sustainable investment that enables continuity and innovation for inclusive practices.

PROTECT CSOS IN HOSTILE POLITICAL CLIMATES

CSOs must be protected from political interference to continue advocating for migrantised women's rights without fear of defunding or censorship. While CSOs are vital spaces for recognition, solidarity, and empowerment, they are not monolithic; their **effectiveness depends on transparency, accountability, and close engagement with the communities they serve**. This aligns with the EPSR Action Plan, which promotes inclusive governance and the social economy. The Action Plan supports bottom-up implementation and announces initiatives to strengthen social dialogue and safeguard civil society, especially in politically hostile environments where anti-migrant discourse threatens CSO independence.



CHALLENGE

CSOs working with migrantised women face growing challenges, including **unstable short-term funding, heavy bureaucratic burdens, and increasing political hostility**. These conditions limit their ability to **provide consistent, trusted support** and jeopardise their role as key spaces of empowerment. Rising political hostility, particularly in contexts marked by anti-migrant or misogynistic discourses, undermines their advocacy efforts and **risk silencing critical voices**.



FINDINGS

Empowerment for migrantised women depends on secure rights, protection, and resources, yet structural barriers persist.

CSOs have emerged as essential spaces of support, recognition, and empowerment. For many migrantised women, they represent more than service providers; they are:

- safe and trusted environments to speak openly
- sources of critical information
- spaces to begin building autonomy
- communities where women feel seen, respected, and supported—often referring to CSO staff as 'extended family'

Yet the capacity of CSOs is increasingly **threatened by**:

- unstable and short-term funding
- heavy bureaucratic burdens
- restrictive and politicised environments





RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: SECURING CIVIL SOCIETY SUPPORT

RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT



ACCESS TO RIGHTS AS A FOUNDATION

Guarantee unhindered access to legal status, housing, education, and work



STRENGTHEN CSO SUSTAINABILITY

Provide stable core funding for long-term support

PROTECT CSOS IN HOSTILE POLITICAL CLIMATES

Safeguard advocacy from political interference



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METHODOLOGY

We employed an ethnographic, comparative, and participatory design with **15 CSOs** across Austria, Belgium, Italy, Spain, and Poland. Fieldwork combined **participant observation, focus groups with CSO staff, and participatory work with 150 migrantised women** (photo-voice and three-session life-story interviews).

A participatory evaluation component followed Bacchi's (2012) **Folk Theory of Change in four iterative CSO-led steps**: (1) (Re)defining the social problem addressed; (2) situating practices in context and identifying adjustments; (3) articulating and sharing 'inspiring practices' (targets, actors, resources, preconditions); and (4) appraising impact beyond outputs, with attention to relevance, effectiveness, equity, and sustainability.

Reflexive attention to ethics, power relations, and positionalities was integral, addressing confidentiality, language mediation, internal hierarchies, and differential participation.

This design **centres CSO expertise**, surfaces context-specific mechanisms of change, and supports transferable learning on empowering practices.



TO LEARN MORE

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RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: EMPOWERMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Written by: Andrea Fleckinger, drawing on insights gained during the ReIncluGen project

OUR PROJECT

The ReIncluGen project, implemented in Austria, Belgium, Italy, Poland, and Spain, investigates how **migrantised women's experiences** are shaped by intersecting axes of inequality—such as gender, ethnicity, class, and migration status. Using the framework of **situated intersectionality**, the project rethinks gender empowerment not as a universal goal but as a contextual, evolving process rooted in lived realities and collective action. Focusing on structural gender-based violence, media representation, and social inclusion, ReIncluGen works through co-creative and participatory research in collaboration with civil society organisations (CSOs) that support migrantised women. The project explores how empowerment is produced not only through services but also through storytelling, artistic expression, and internal organisational practices—such as multilingualism, care ethics, and horizontal communication. These policy briefs **present key findings and recommendations** emerging from this bottom-up, cross-country analysis, highlighting the heterogeneity, agency, and narrative power of migrantised women, while calling for more inclusive and structurally grounded empowerment strategies.

POLICY TAKEAWAYS

SUPPORT PARTICIPATORY ORGANISATIONAL MODELS

Encourage and fund co-creation practices that centre migrantised women's voices in programme design, decision-making, and evaluation. **Women** should shape organisational priorities as **active decision-makers**, not token participants. The EPSR Action Plan promotes bottom-up implementation, and **CSOs are essential partners** in translating lived experiences into concrete, accountable policy and organisational practices.

ORGANISATIONAL CULTURES OF CARE AND REFLEXIVITY

Care and reflective practice should be embedded in organisational culture by recognising emotional labour, addressing burnout risks, and fostering conditions that prioritise staff and participant well-being. This includes horizontal structures, shared decision-making, and time for internal reflection. The need for context-sensitive training and structured supervision is emphasised. These priorities align with the EPSR Action Plan's focus on improving working conditions in social services to ensure sustainable, quality care provision.

TARGETED TRAINING AND ONGOING SUPERVISION

Practitioners often shoulder substantial emotional and relational responsibilities while navigating structural barriers. Policies should **guarantee access to targeted, context-sensitive training, covering intersectionality, trauma-informed care, anti-racism, and participatory methods, alongside ongoing supervision**. There is a systematic need to support staff to prevent burnout, isolation, or emotional strain. Promoting horizontal communication, collective care, and well-being aligns with the EPSR-AP's Principles 5 and 9, and underscores the value of social dialogue and participatory organisational structures in improving work environments.



CHALLENGE

We aim to address the challenge of **meaningfully conceptualising and implementing gender empowerment** beyond individualised, labour-focused, and stereotypical frameworks. **CSOs** play a crucial role as spaces of support and transformative practice, yet face **significant obstacles**: short-term funding, limited autonomy, staff burnout, and bureaucratic pressure. **The absence of structured training, supervision, and care-oriented cultures** further limits their capacity to foster inclusive and sustainable empowerment for migrantised women.



FINDINGS

CSOs are central actors in promoting gender empowerment and social inclusion for migrantised women. Their transformative potential is often constrained by **structural challenges**, including:

- short-term, project-based funding
- staff burnout and emotional strain
- precarious employment conditions
- bureaucratic overload and limited institutional autonomy

These factors undermine the continuity and quality of engagement with the communities they serve.

The findings underscore the **need for sustained investment in CSOs' internal capacity and organisational development**. This includes:

- continuous, context-sensitive training
- trauma-informed and participatory practices
- inclusive structures that reflect community diversity

Care-oriented cultures should be grounded in **cycles of mutual care**. Practices such as storytelling workshops, peer-led programmes, and collaborative tools show the value of flexible, co-creative approaches.

Such cultures require structures and relationships that **embody participation, reciprocity, and trust-making care** the foundation of sustainable organisational practice and community life.





RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: EMPOWERMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY

STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS



SUPPORT PARTICIPATORY ORGANISATIONAL MODELS

Fund co-creation practices that center migrant women's voices



ENSURE TARGETED TRAINING AND SUPERVISION

Provide staff training on trauma, anti-racism, and participatory methods



EMBED CARE AND REFLEXIVITY

Recognise emotional labour and foster collective care practices



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METHODOLOGY

The research employed a qualitative, ethnographic, and participatory methodology to examine how CSOs across **five European countries**—Austria, Belgium, Italy, Poland, and Spain—conceptualise and enact gender empowerment in their everyday work with migrantised women.

Fieldwork was conducted in **15 CSOs**—three per country—selected for their active engagement in domains such as gender-based violence, legal support, socio-cultural participation, education, and labour market access.

In each organisation, existing practices were evaluated and new good practices were formulated and tested. A central methodological element was the use of the 'folk theory of change'—an **approach that foregrounds practitioners' own understandings** of how change happens, rather than relying on external frameworks.

By combining embedded observation with attention to internal discourse and co-constructed meaning, the study revealed how empowerment is not only delivered through services but also enacted in the organisational cultures, routines, and ethics of CSOs themselves. This approach allowed the project to highlight CSO practitioners as not just implementers but co-theorisers of social transformation.



TO LEARN MORE

www.reincludugen.eu



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RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT CHANGING THE NARRATIVE: MIGRANTISED WOMEN IN PUBLIC DISCOURSES

Written by: Andrea Fleckinger, drawing on insights gained during the ReIncluGen project

OUR PROJECT

The ReIncluGen project, investigated in Austria, Belgium, Italy, Poland, and Spain, examines how **migrantised women's experiences** are shaped by intersecting axes of inequality—such as gender, ethnicity, class, and migration status. Using the framework of **situated intersectionality**, the project rethinks gender empowerment not as a universal goal, but as a contextual, evolving process rooted in lived realities and collective action.

Focusing on structural gender-based violence, media representation, and social inclusion, ReIncluGen works through co-creative and participatory research in collaboration with civil society organisations (CSOs) that support migrantised women.

By engaging in methods like photo-voicing, creative workshops, and collaborative digital tools, the project centres **migrantised women as producers of knowledge and agents of change**.

These policy briefs present key findings and recommendations emerging from this bottom-up, cross-country analysis, highlighting the heterogeneity, agency, and narrative power of migrantised women, while calling for more inclusive and structurally grounded empowerment strategies.

POLICY TAKEAWAYS

STORYTELLING AND CREATIVE PRACTICES

Support participatory storytelling formats that allow migrantised women to **express their lived experiences on their own terms**. These co-authored narratives serve as powerful tools for reclaiming visibility, fostering agency, and challenging dominant stereotypes. This approach aligns with the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan (EPSR-AP), which promotes participatory and inclusive social policies that recognise individuals—particularly those from marginalised groups—not as passive recipients, but as active agents of social change.

ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR INCLUSIVE REPRESENTATION

Journalists, educators, and institutions should use **ethically and trauma-sensitive language** when representing migrantised women, following **guidelines, co-developed with CSOs and communities**. Many women expressed reluctance to share their stories due to fears of being instrumentalised or reduced to one-dimensional victimhood. A collaborative communication strategy was therefore adopted. This aligns with Principles 2 and 3 of the EPSR-AP, which emphasise equal opportunities, gender equality, and inclusive representation in public discourse.

PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS THAT LINK PERSONAL NARRATIVES TO STRUCTURAL INEQUALITY

Design and fund awareness campaigns that move beyond deficit-based, individualised narratives of migrant integration. Instead, **public awareness campaigns should highlight the structural dimensions of exclusion** by situating personal stories within broader socio-political contexts. This aligns with the EPSR Action Plan's goal of fostering active citizenship and social inclusion by promoting fair, accurate understandings of social challenges and advancing its broader vision of a more just and participatory Social Europe rooted in shared responsibility.



CHALLENGE

The **persistence of stereotypical, exclusionary, or homogenising representations** of migrantised women in media and public discourses, along with the lack of structural support for alternative, participatory forms of visibility and voice, remains a significant challenge.

This issue is not merely one of misrepresentation but of **symbolic and political marginalisation**.



FINDINGS

Migrantised women are frequently subjected to simplified, **stereotypical, and deficit-based representations** in media and institutional narratives. They are often depicted as:

- voiceless victims
- culturally incompatible
- lacking complexity, agency, or structural critique

CSOs play a pivotal role in disrupting these narratives through creative, participatory practices, agenda-setting and the provision of support to collectively discuss hot topics in safe spaces. Tools such as storytelling workshops, exhibitions, and podcasts serve not only as means of expression but also as strategies of empowerment and collective authorship. These practices enable women to:

- represent themselves
- speak from lived experience
- discuss all kinds of diversity within this group

The findings underscore that such **visibility must be structurally supported**. Ethical representation requires time, trust, and facilitation by organisations that prioritise care, safety, and inclusion. Visibility alone does not constitute empowerment—but when rooted and institutionalised in collective processes and critical reflection, it becomes a powerful tool for social and political transformation.





RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT CHANGING THE NARRATIVE: MIGRANTISED WOMEN IN PUBLIC DISCOURSES

TRANSFORMING DISCOURSE ON MIGRANTISED WOMEN



Support Participatory
Storytelling Practices



Develop Ethical Guidelines
for Representation



Invest in Education
Campaigns



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METHODOLOGY

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In each organisation, **existing practices were evaluated and new good practices were formulated and tested**. A central methodological element was the use of the “folk theory of change”—an approach that foregrounds practitioners’ own understandings of how change happens. Rather than relying on external frameworks, the research team asked open-ended questions such as “What does change look like for you?” and “What enables empowerment in your work?”

By combining embedded **observation with attention to internal discourse and co-constructed meaning**, the study revealed how empowerment is not only delivered through services but also enacted in the organisational cultures, routines, and ethics of CSOs themselves. This approach allowed the project to highlight CSO practitioners as not just implementers, but also co-theorisers of social transformation.



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ETHICAL STANDARDS IN RESEARCH WITH VULNERABLE GROUPS THE NEED FOR STRESS AND TRAUMA SENSITIVE APPROACHES

Written by: Andrea Fleckinger, drawing on insights gained during the ReIncluGen project

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The ReIncluGen project, conducted in **Austria, Belgium, Italy, Poland, and Spain**, examines how **migrantised women's experiences** intersect with gender, ethnicity, class, and other social dimensions. It aims to conceptualise gender empowerment through the innovative framework of **situated intersectionality**, recognising the cumulative effects of multiple forms of discrimination.

Collaborating with **civil society organisations** (CSOs), the project applies **participatory and co-creative action research methods** to explore themes of representation, socio-cultural participation, and labour market integration.

When conducting research on this topic, the development of a **strong ethical framework** is needed. Ethical rigour goes beyond regulatory compliance to embed care, transparency, and co-creation of knowledge throughout the project. By amplifying the voices and agency of migrantised women, ReIncluGen contributes to **equitable knowledge production, which requires equal relationships and safe spaces**.

This demands targeted ethics training for researchers and continuous trauma- and stress-sensitive follow-up.

POLICY TAKEAWAYS

PRE-RESEARCH ETHICS AND TRAUMA SENSITIVITY TRAINING

Researchers working with groups taking up a vulnerable position in society must undergo **targeted, trauma- and stress-sensitive training prior to initiating research activities**. This includes training in co-constructed ethics, managing secondary trauma, addressing power dynamics, and applying culturally sensitive, anti-discriminatory practices. In alignment with European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) Principles 5 and 10, the development of collective trauma-informed research standards, including safe engagement protocols, is emphasized.

CONTINUOUS GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL SUPERVISION

Ethics cannot be frontloaded at the outset of a project but must be sustained throughout. **Institutions and research funders should provide support systems**, including ongoing group supervision, individual psychological and ethical coaching during fieldwork, and safe spaces to address emotional strain. This aligns with the EPSR Action Plan's commitment to strengthening the resilience and quality of the care workforce for professionals working with vulnerable groups.

TRAUMA- AND STRESS-SENSITIVE RESEARCH STANDARDS

There is a need to develop **collective standards**, including trauma-sensitive protocols, guidelines for safe engagement in digital and physical spheres, and assessment of emotional and psychosocial risks. This aligns with the EPSR-AP's emphasis on inclusive, rights-based policymaking that promotes participation, respect, and dignity—particularly for vulnerable groups.



CHALLENGE

Research with **groups in vulnerable social positions**, such as migrantised women, poses significant ethical challenges due to unequal power relations between researchers and participants. Participants may face emotional distress, retraumatization, or fear of exposure, especially when discussing sensitive issues such as violence or exclusion. For researchers, navigating these complexities, building trust, and managing emotional labour requires **thorough preparation and ongoing consultation with ethical advisors**. Power imbalances, linguistic barriers, and cultural differences further complicate the process, demanding reflexivity and a trauma-informed approach.



FINDINGS

1. Ethical Complexity in Participatory Research

Participants in vulnerable positions (e.g., with migration backgrounds or experiences of gender-based violence) require a reflexive and protective approach throughout the research process. Without it, research risks reproducing inequalities instead of challenging them.

2. Beyond Compliance: Ethics as Ongoing Practice

While compliance with EU and national regulations (e.g., GDPR, consent, data protection) is essential, ethical responsibility goes further. Research must foster an active ethical culture through inclusive communication, accessibility, shared ownership, and reflection on anonymisation and authorship.

3. Trauma-Informed and Empowering Research Environments

Research can be empowering only if power asymmetries, emotional labour, and risks of retraumatization are addressed. ReIncluGen embeds inclusive facilitation, peer reflection, and safe communication, but there remains a need for institutionalised systems to prepare and support researchers.



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ETHICAL STANDARDS IN RESEARCH WITH VULNERABLE GROUPS THE NEED FOR STRESS AND TRAUMA SENSITIVE APPROACHES

1. Pre-Research Ethics and Trauma Sensitivity Training

Researchers working with vulnerable groups must undergo targeted, trauma- and stress-sensitive training prior to initiating research activities.

2. Continuous Group and Individual Supervision

Ongoing supervision and support must be provided both in group settings and individually.

3. Trauma- and Stress-Sensitive Research Standards

Collective standards for conducting trauma- and stress-sensitive research should be established



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METHODOLOGY

ReIncluGen is a participatory and creative research project that applies the framework of situated intersectionality (Yuval-Davis, 2015) to explore and promote the empowerment of migrantised women in Austria, Belgium, Italy, Poland, and Spain.

It expands traditional understandings of gender empowerment by incorporating social, cultural, and economic dimensions, while addressing their interconnection with class, race, and sexuality. This enables a deeper understanding of power relations across diverse contexts.

Ethics are a cornerstone of ReIncluGen. Working with vulnerable groups, the project underscores the importance of targeted ethics training and continuous trauma- and stress-sensitive supervision for researchers. **Ethical rigour is not limited to legal compliance but involves ongoing reflexivity, participant protection, and co-responsibility in knowledge production.**

ReIncluGen collaborates closely with civil society organisations (CSOs) and media actors to co-develop strategies for inclusion and empowerment.

Using **qualitative and participatory methods**—such as interviews, group discussions, and critical media analysis—the project captures the complexity of gendered power dynamics and prioritises lived experience over top-down narratives.

Yuval-Davis, N. (2015). Situated intersectionality and social inequality. *Raisons politiques*, (2), 91-100.



TO LEARN MORE

Van Praag, L., Miri, A., Klaver, K., & Deneva, N. (2025). Ethical considerations during photo-eliciting trajectories with migrantised women focused on 'gender empowerment' in civil society organisations. In *Reframing Qualitative Research Ethics* (Vol. 12, pp. 75-94). Emerald Publishing Limited.



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RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: FACILITARE L'ACCESSO ALL'ABITARE PER DONNE CON BACKGROUND MIGRATORIO

Scritto da: Veronica Alotti, Marco Cavaleri e Andrea Fleckinger, basandosi sugli approfondimenti emersi durante il progetto ReIncluGen

IL PROGETTO REINCLUGEN

Il progetto ReIncluGen, condotto in **Austria, Belgio, Italia, Polonia e Spagna**, esamina come le esperienze delle donne migranti si intersechino con il genere, l'etnia, la classe e altre dimensioni sociali. Il progetto si concentra sulla **violenza strutturale di genere**, sull'**empowerment** e sull'**inclusione** delle donne immigrate e su come questi temi vengono rappresentati nei discorsi dei media.

Attraverso una **ricerca d'azione partecipativa e co-creativa**, ReIncluGen collabora con **organizzazioni della società civile (OSC)** che lavorano con e per le donne immigrate.

Lo studio esplora temi chiave come l'equità dei generi, la violenza, la rappresentazione, la partecipazione socio-culturale e l'integrazione nel mercato del lavoro. Lo studio **mette in evidenza le diverse esperienze delle donne immigrate** e sottolinea la loro capacità di agire, sfidando le rappresentazioni omogenee e sostenendo un cambiamento sociale inclusivo ed equo.

Questo policy brief presenta **i risultati** che esaminano i significati dell'empowerment di genere da un approccio partecipativo e dal basso verso l'alto. Il policy brief formula delle **raccomandazioni** per dare una risposta ai bisogni emersi.

RACCOMANDAZIONI

SVILUPPO DI UN PORTALE ABITATIVO SPECIFICO PER DONNE MIGRANTI.

Creare una piattaforma multilingue digitale dedicata che centralizzi offerte abitative verificate, risorse informative e servizi di supporto.

FACILITARE L'ACCESSO AI CANALI ABITATIVI ESISTENTI.

Implementare programmi di mediazione abitativa per supporto pratico, come traduzione di documenti e assistenza nelle domande per alloggi pubblici. Introdurre incentivi per proprietari privati che affittano a donne migranti.

CREAZIONE DI UN SISTEMA DI CO-HOUSING INCLUSIVO.

Promuovere progetti di co-housing per donne migranti, combinando alloggi accessibili con spazi condivisi per supportare lo scambio interculturale. Questi progetti potrebbero essere co-finanziati da fondi pubblici e privati.

FORMAZIONE PER OPERATORI/TRICI SOCIALI.

Avviare programmi di formazione specifica per operatori/trici sociali. La formazione dovrebbe includere competenze interculturali, conoscenza delle problematiche abitative del target e strumenti per il supporto efficace nel percorso di ricerca di una casa.

SENSIBILIZZAZIONE DEL PERSONALE IMMOBILIARE.

Organizzare campagne di informazione e formazione per il personale che opera nel settore immobiliare, inclusi agenti e proprietari. Queste iniziative potrebbero ridurre la discriminazione e favorire una maggiore apertura verso il target.



DESCRIZIONE DEL PROBLEMA

L'**accesso alla casa** rappresenta una delle **principali sfide** per le donne con background migratorio, caratterizzate da condizioni di precarietà lavorativa, barriere linguistiche e discriminazione. Questo segmento di popolazione sperimenta difficoltà significative nell'orientarsi nel mercato immobiliare, trovandosi escluso tanto dal mercato privato quanto dai servizi abitativi pubblici. La **mancanza di soluzioni** adeguate perpetua situazioni di vulnerabilità sociale e limita l'integrazione socioeconomica.



RISULTATI

Tenendo il focus sulla situazione in **provincia di Trento**, la ricerca ha evidenziato **tre bisogni centrali** per affrontare le problematiche del territorio:

1. **facilitare la ricerca di alloggi sicuri e adeguati** per donne con background migratorio
2. **ridurre le barriere** di accesso al mercato abitativo, sia pubblico che privato
3. **promuovere soluzioni abitative** che favoriscano inclusione sociale e autonomia.

Con l'intento di esplorare il significato di empowerment di genere è emerso che sono presenti vari chiavi di lettura. Le CSO partecipanti hanno evidenziato **l'importanza di approcci bottom-up** che tengano conto delle esperienze vissute e degli ostacoli strutturali affrontati dalle donne migranti.

Considerando che empowerment è spesso inquadrato come il superamento di barriere (linguistiche, lavorative, etc.) **le prospettive delle donne migranti e delle CSO pongono l'accento sulla partecipazione comunitaria e il riconoscimento dei propri diritti.**

Le CSOs si trovano ad affrontare sfide significative, tra cui disuguaglianze sociali e dipendenza finanziaria dalle amministrazioni pubbliche.





RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: FACILITARE L'ACCESSO ALL'ABITARE PER DONNE CON BACKGROUND MIGRATORIO



NOTE METODOLOGICHE

ReIncluGen utilizza un **approccio di ricerca partecipativo e creativo**, basato sul concetto di **intersezionalità situata** (Yuval-Davis, 2015). Questo approccio va oltre la tradizionale nozione di empowerment di genere, integrando dimensioni sociali, culturali ed economiche e riconoscendone l'interdipendenza. Inoltre, considera aspetti legati a classe, razza e sessualità, garantendo una comprensione più approfondita delle relazioni di potere nei vari contesti sociali e geografici.

ReIncluGen concettualizza **l'empowerment attraverso la lente dell'intersezionalità situata**, studiando e co-sviluppando buone pratiche con organizzazioni della società civile (OSC) e media. Questo approccio sottolinea la specificità geografica, sociale e temporale delle relazioni di potere.

Questo **approccio comparativo e multi-scalare**, messo in campo attraverso metodi qualitativi, lavoro sul campo partecipativo e un'analisi critica dei medi e dei quadri normativi, permette di catturare la complessità e la dinamicità delle relazioni di potere di genere, **promuovendo strategie bottom-up** che riflettano le esperienze vissute, anziché limitarsi a politiche imposte dall'alto.

La ricerca ha coinvolto **5 partner accademici, 15 organizzazioni della società civile (OSC) locali e 150 donne migranti**. I dati sono stati raccolti tra maggio 2023 e dicembre 2024 attraverso osservazioni partecipanti, interviste individuali approfondite e discussioni in gruppi.

L'approccio partecipativo ha permesso di **individuare buone pratiche** e sviluppare strategie efficaci per potenziare ulteriormente **l'emancipazione e l'inclusione delle donne migranti**.

Yuval-Davis, N. (2015). Situated intersectionality and social inequality. *Raisons politiques*, (2), 91-100.



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<https://quwacconnect.eu>



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RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: FACILITATE ACCESS TO HOUSING FOR WOMEN WITH A MIGRATION BACKGROUND

Written by: Veronica Alotti, Marco Cavaleri and Andrea Fleckinger, drawing on insights gained during the ReIncluGen project

REINCLUGEN PROJECT

The ReIncluGen project, conducted in **Austria, Belgium, Italy, Poland, and Spain**, examines how the experiences of migrantised women intersect with gender, ethnicity, class, and other social dimensions. The project focuses on structural gender-based violence, the empowerment and inclusion of migrantised women, and the ways in which these issues are represented in media discourses.

Through **participatory and co-creative action research**, ReIncluGen collaborates with civil society organisations (CSOs) working with and for migrantised women.

The study explores **key themes such as gender equality, violence, representation, socio-cultural participation, and labour market integration**. It highlights the diverse experiences of migrantised women and emphasises their agency, challenging homogenising representations and advancing inclusive and equitable social change.

This policy brief presents findings that explore the meanings of gender empowerment from a participatory, bottom-up perspective. It also outlines the **specific needs identified in the Autonomous Province of Trento (Italy)**.

POLICY TAKEAWAYS

DEVELOPMENT OF A DEDICATED HOUSING PORTAL FOR MIGRANTISED WOMEN

Create a multilingual digital platform that centralises verified housing offers, informational resources, and support services.

FACILITATE ACCESS TO EXISTING HOUSING CHANNELS

Implement housing mediation programmes that offer practical support, such as document translation and assistance with public housing applications. Introduce incentives for private landlords who rent to migrantised women.

ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INCLUSIVE CO-HOUSING SYSTEM

Promote co-housing projects for migrantised women that combine affordable housing with shared spaces to support intercultural exchange. These projects could be co-financed through public and private funding sources.

TRAINING FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

Implement specialised training programmes for social workers, focusing on intercultural competences, an understanding of the housing challenges faced by the target group, and practical tools for effectively supporting migrantised women in their search for housing.

AWARENESS-RAISING FOR HOUSING PROFESSIONALS

Organise information and training campaigns for professionals in the housing sector, including estate agents and property owners. These initiatives could help reduce discrimination and foster greater openness towards the target population.



CHALLENGE

The core challenge is that **migrantised women face systemic exclusion** from both private and public housing, undermining their integration and autonomy. Migrantised women are frequently affected by precarious employment conditions, language barriers, and discrimination. The **difficulties they face in navigating the housing market are numerous**, and they often find themselves excluded from both the private rental sector and public housing services. The lack of adequate solutions perpetuates social vulnerability and hinders socio-economic integration.



RESULTS

Focusing on the situation in the **Province of Trento (Italy)**, the research identified **three central needs** in addressing local challenges:

- facilitating access to safe and adequate housing for women with a migration background;
- reducing barriers in both the public and private housing markets;
- developing housing solutions that foster social inclusion and autonomy.

In examining the meaning of gender empowerment, the study revealed multiple interpretative frameworks. Participating CSOs emphasised the **importance of bottom-up approaches** that take into account lived experiences and the structural barriers faced by migrantised women. While empowerment is often framed in terms of overcoming obstacles—such as linguistic and employment-related barriers—the **perspectives of migrantised women and CSOs** highlight the centrality of community participation and the recognition of rights. The findings also show that CSOs face significant challenges, including structural inequalities and financial dependence on public administrations.





RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: FACILITATE ACCESS TO HOUSING FOR WOMEN WITH A MIGRATION BACKGROUND



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By creating a vibrant and active community of practice, Quwa amplifies collective efforts, driving inclusive and impactful social change.

<https://quwacconnect.eu>

METHODOLOGY

ReIncluGen adopts a **participatory and creative research approach** grounded in the concept of situated intersectionality (Yuval-Davis, 2015). This framework goes beyond traditional understandings of gender empowerment by integrating social, cultural, and economic dimensions and recognising their interdependence. It also addresses factors such as class, race, and sexuality, enabling a deeper understanding of power relations across diverse social and geographical contexts.

ReIncluGen **conceptualises empowerment through the lens of situated intersectionality**, co-developing and analysing good practices with civil society organisations (CSOs) and media actors. This approach emphasises the geographic, social, and temporal specificity of power relations.

Using a comparative and multi-scalar methodology—including **qualitative methods, participatory fieldwork, and critical analysis of media** and legal frameworks—the project captures the complexity and fluidity of gendered power dynamics. It promotes bottom-up strategies that reflect lived experiences rather than relying on top-down policy models.

The research involved **5 academic partners, 15 local CSOs, and 150 migrantised women**. Data were collected between May 2023 and December 2024 through participant observation, in-depth individual interviews, and focus group discussions.

This participatory approach made it possible to identify good practices and develop effective strategies to further strengthen the empowerment and inclusion of migrantised women.

Yuval-Davis, N. (2015). Situated intersectionality and social inequality. *Raisons politiques*, (2), 91-100.



TO LEARN MORE

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RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: OLTRE LE BARRIERE: STRATEGIE PER RAFFORZARE L'EMPOWERMENT DELLE DONNE MIGRANTI DELL'ALTO ADIGE/SUEDTIROL

Scritto da: Jessica Fabbro e Andrea Fleckinger, basandosi sugli approfondimenti emersi durante il progetto ReIncluGen

IL PROGETTO REINCLUGEN

Il progetto ReIncluGen, condotto in **Austria, Belgio, Italia, Polonia e Spagna**, esamina come le esperienze delle donne migranti si intersechino con il genere, l'etnia, la classe e altre dimensioni sociali. Il progetto si concentra sulla **violenza strutturale di genere**, sull'**empowerment** e sull'**inclusione** delle donne immigrate e su come questi temi vengono rappresentati nei discorsi dei media.

Attraverso una **ricerca d'azione partecipativa e co-creativa**, ReIncluGen collabora con **organizzazioni della società civile** (OSC) che lavorano con e per le donne immigrate.

Lo studio esplora temi chiave come l'equità dei generi, la violenza, la rappresentazione, la partecipazione socio-culturale e l'integrazione nel mercato del lavoro. Lo studio mette in evidenza le diverse **esperienze delle donne immigrate** e sottolinea la loro capacità di agire, sfidando le rappresentazioni omogenee e sostenendo un cambiamento sociale inclusivo ed equo.

Questo policy brief presenta i **risultati** che esaminano i significati dell'empowerment di genere da un approccio partecipativo e dal basso verso l'alto. Il policy brief formula delle **raccomandazioni** per dare una risposta ai bisogni emersi.

RACCOMANDAZIONI

FINANZIAMENTI PUBBLICI MIRATI E STRUTTURALI

- Creazione di un sistema di sovvenzioni e finanziamenti pubblici specifici e strutturali, promuovendo processi di co-progettazione tra istituzioni e OSC.
- Semplificare le procedure amministrative per rendere più facile l'accesso ai fondi, riducendo gli oneri burocratici.
- Semplificare il carico burocratico per la gestione di tali progetti, riducendo il tempo e le risorse richieste alle OSC.

CREARE E FINANZIARE SPAZI FISICI E VIRTUALI DI COLLABORAZIONE INTER-ASSOCIATIVA

- Istituire finanziamenti pubblici per sostenere lo sviluppo di progetti inter-associativi volti a stimolare la cooperazione tra diverse realtà.
- Promuovere la creazione di hub locali, nazionali e transnazionali per la cooperazione a lungo termine, supportati da un coordinamento centrale.
- Prevedere sovvenzioni per coprire i costi dei progetti di scambio internazionale tra le organizzazioni della società civile (OSC).

FORMAZIONE E VALORIZZAZIONE DI PERSONALE SPECIALIZZATO SUL TEMA DELL'EMPOWERMENT DI GENERE E DELL'INCLUSIONE DELLE DONNE CON BACKGROUND MIGRATORIO

- Programmi di formazione pubblici basati su un approccio intersezionale situato, per l'istruzione e il riconoscimento di figure professionali specializzate.
- Creare opportunità di aggiornamento continuo per il personale delle OSC che lavora con donne migranti, con corsi specifici su inclusione sociale e interculturalità.



DESCRIZIONE DEL PROBLEMA

Nonostante il contesto privilegiato della Provincia Autonoma di Bolzano, le **donne migranti affrontano discriminazione, marginalizzazione e ostacoli all'integrazione**. Barriere linguistiche, culturali e burocratiche, aggravano la loro situazione e **limitano le possibilità lavorative**, rendendole maggiormente vulnerabili ed esposte al **rischio di povertà e sfruttamento**.

Nella Provincia Autonoma di Bolzano le **OSC svolgono un ruolo fondamentale**, ma il tema dell'accessibilità a risorse strutturali e condivise tra le diverse realtà sociali è una difficoltà comune: **scarsità di finanziamenti mirati, mancanza di spazi di collaborazione tra le OSC e la limitata formazione di professionisti/e** sulla specifica tematica riducono l'efficacia degli interventi.



RISULTATI

La ricerca condotta in **Provincia Autonoma di Bolzano**, ha evidenziato **tre bisogni centrali** per affrontare le problematicità del territorio:

- **Finanziamenti mirati**
- **Spazi adeguati di collaborazione**
- **Formazione dei/lle professionisti/e**

Le **CSO** partecipanti hanno evidenziato **l'importanza di approcci bottom-up** che tengano conto delle esperienze vissute e degli ostacoli strutturali affrontati dalle donne migranti.

Per affrontare queste sfide, è necessario **sviluppare politiche specifiche e mirate** per garantire un sistema di supporto strutturale ed efficace, in grado di realizzare una piena integrazione delle donne migranti nelle comunità sociali ed economiche di entrambe le province.





RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: OLTRE LE BARRIERE: STRATEGIE PER RAFFORZARE L'EMPOWERMENT DELLE DONNE MIGRANTI DELL'ALTO ADIGE/SUEDTIROL



NOTE METODOLOGICHE

ReIncluGen utilizza un **approccio di ricerca partecipativo e creativo**, basato sul concetto di **intersezionalità situata** (Yuval-Davis, 2015). Questo approccio va oltre la tradizionale nozione di empowerment di genere, integrando dimensioni sociali, culturali ed economiche e riconoscendone l'interdipendenza. Inoltre, considera aspetti legati a classe, razza e sessualità, garantendo una comprensione più approfondita delle relazioni di potere nei vari contesti sociali e geografici.

ReIncluGen concettualizza **l'empowerment attraverso la lente dell'intersezionalità situata**, studiando e co-sviluppando buone pratiche con organizzazioni della società civile (OSC) e media. Questo approccio sottolinea la specificità geografica, sociale e temporale delle relazioni di potere.

Questo **approccio comparativo e multi-scalare**, messo in campo attraverso metodi qualitativi, lavoro sul campo partecipativo e un'analisi critica dei medi e dei quadri normativi, permette di catturare la complessità e la dinamicità delle relazioni di potere di genere, **promuovendo strategie bottom-up** che riflettano le esperienze vissute, anziché limitarsi a politiche imposte dall'alto.

La ricerca ha coinvolto **5 partner accademici, 15 organizzazioni della società civile (OSC) locali e 150 donne migranti**. I dati sono stati raccolti tra maggio 2023 e dicembre 2024 attraverso osservazioni partecipanti, interviste individuali approfondite e discussioni in gruppi.

L'approccio partecipativo ha permesso di **individuare buone pratiche** e sviluppare strategie efficaci per potenziare ulteriormente **l'emancipazione e l'inclusione delle donne migranti**.

Yuval-Davis, N. (2015). Situated intersectionality and social inequality. *Raisons politiques*, (2), 91-100.



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<https://quwaconnect.eu>



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RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: BEYOND BARRIERS: STRATEGIES TO STRENGTHEN THE EMPOWERMENT OF MIGRANT WOMEN IN SOUTH TYROL

Written by: Jessica Fabbro and Andrea Fleckinger, drawing on insights gained during the ReIncluGen project

REINCLUGEN PROJECT

The ReIncluGen project, conducted in **Austria, Belgium, Italy, Poland, and Spain**, examines how the experiences of migrantised women intersect with gender, ethnicity, class, and other social dimensions. The project focuses on structural gender-based violence, the empowerment and inclusion of migrantised women, and the ways in which these issues are represented in media discourses.

Through **participatory and co-creative action research**, ReIncluGen collaborates with civil society organisations (CSOs) that work with and for migrantised women.

The study explores key themes such as gender equality, violence, representation, socio-cultural participation, and labour market integration. It highlights the diverse **experiences of migrantised women and emphasises their agency** in challenging homogenising representations and promoting inclusive and equitable social change. This policy brief presents findings that examine the meanings of gender empowerment through a participatory, bottom-up approach and offers **recommendations for the Autonomous Province of Bolzano** (northern Italy) in response to the needs that have emerged.

POLICY TAKEAWAYS

TARGETED AND STRUCTURAL PUBLIC FUNDING

- Establish a system of **dedicated, structural public grants** and funding schemes focused on the specific needs of migrantised women, promoting **co-design processes** between institutions and CSOs.
- Simplify administrative procedures** to facilitate access to funding, reducing bureaucratic barriers.
- Streamline the bureaucratic workload associated with managing such projects, minimising the time and resources required from CSOs, thereby enabling greater focus on participatory practices and co-design.

CREATE AND FUND PHYSICAL AND VIRTUAL SPACES FOR INTER-ORGANISATIONAL COLLABORATION

Establish public funding to support the development of inter-organisational projects fostering cooperation among diverse actors. Promote the creation of **local, national, and transnational hubs for long-term collaboration**, supported by central coordination. Introduce grants to cover the costs of international exchange projects between CSOs.

TRAINING AND RECOGNITION OF PROFESSIONALS SPECIALISED IN GENDER EMPOWERMENT AND THE INCLUSION OF MIGRANTISED WOMEN

Develop public **training programmes** grounded in a **situated intersectional approach** to educate and formally recognise specialised professionals (e.g., social workers, educators) in this field. Provide continuous professional development opportunities for staff in CSOs working with migrantised women, including specialised courses on social inclusion and intercultural competence.



CHALLENGE

Despite the privileged context of the Autonomous Province of Bolzano, **migrantised women continue to face discrimination, marginalisation, and barriers to integration**. Linguistic, cultural, and bureaucratic obstacles further exacerbate their situation, limiting employment opportunities and increasing their vulnerability to poverty and exploitation.

In the Autonomous Province of Bolzano, CSOs play a crucial role. However, access to shared and structural resources remains a common challenge. **Limited targeted funding, a lack of collaborative spaces among CSOs, and insufficient training of professionals** on the specific needs of migrantised women reduce the effectiveness of interventions.



RESULTS

The research conducted in the Autonomous Province of Bolzano identified **three central needs** for addressing the region's specific challenges:

- targeted funding
- adequate spaces for collaboration
- specialised training for professionals

Participating CSOs highlighted the importance of **bottom-up approaches** that take into account the lived experiences and structural barriers faced by migrantised women.

To address these challenges, it is essential to develop specific, targeted policies aimed at establishing a structural and effective support system capable of ensuring the full integration of migrantised women into the social and economic fabric of both provinces.





RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: BEYOND BARRIERS: STRATEGIES TO STRENGTHEN THE EMPOWERMENT OF MIGRANT WOMEN IN SOUTH TYROL



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METHODOLOGY

ReIncluGen employs a **participatory and creative research approach** grounded in the concept of situated intersectionality (Yuval-Davis, 2015). This approach moves beyond traditional notions of gender empowerment by integrating social, cultural, and economic dimensions and recognising their interdependence. It also addresses issues related to class, race, and sexuality, enabling a deeper understanding of power relations across diverse social and geographical contexts.

ReIncluGen conceptualises empowerment through the lens of **situated intersectionality, by researching and co-developing good practices with civil society organisations (CSOs)** and media actors. This approach highlights the geographic, social, and temporal specificity of power relations.

The project adopts a comparative and multi-scalar methodology, combining **qualitative methods, participatory fieldwork, and critical analysis** of media and regulatory frameworks. This allows for a nuanced understanding of the complexity and fluidity of gendered power dynamics, and supports the development of bottom-up strategies that reflect lived experiences rather than top-down policy prescriptions.

The research involved **five academic partners, 15 local CSOs, and 150 migrantised women**. Data were collected between May 2023 and December 2024 through participant observation, in-depth individual interviews, and focus group discussions.

The participatory approach enabled the **identification of good practices and the development of effective strategies** to further enhance the empowerment and inclusion of migrant women.

Yuval-Davis, N. (2015). Situated intersectionality and social inequality. *Raisons politiques*, (2), 91-100.



TO LEARN MORE

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RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: FROM SUPPORT TO EMPOWERMENT: RETHINKING LOCAL SERVICES FOR MIGRANTISED WOMEN IN AUSTRIA

Written by: Neda Deneva, Najwa Duzdar, Sarah Häckel

REINCLUGEN PROJECT

Growing **diversity in European societies**—in terms of gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, class, sexuality, residency status, and abilities—and the cumulative effects of multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantages in these categories present many societal challenges. An important step towards more egalitarian societies is to understand the intersections among these categories. In the ReIncluGen project, conducted in Austria, Belgium, Italy, Poland, and Spain, we focus on the **specific ways that being a migrantised woman interacts with these various social dimensions**. This project aims to conceptualise gender empowerment using the innovative theoretical framework of 'situated intersectionality'. It seeks to **study, co-evaluate, and co-develop best practices among civil society organisations (CSOs)** that address structural gender-based violence (GBV) and promote the empowerment and inclusion of migrantised women. Additionally, the project examines how these efforts are portrayed in media discourses. Through **participatory and co-creative action research**, the project includes a wide variety of CSOs working with and for migrant women, focusing on themes such as gender equality, GBV, representation, socio-cultural participation, and labour market integration.

POLICY TAKEAWAYS

DIVERSIFY LANGUAGE AND LITERACY PATHWAYS

Fund both certification-based and empowerment-oriented **language programmes**, including first-language alphabetisation. Support slow-paced, community-embedded learning models that reflect women's varied starting points, responsibilities, and learning speeds. EPSR Principles 1 & 17

RECOGNISE AND SUSTAIN SAFE SOCIAL SPACES

Support **informal, trust-building environments**—such as drop-in centres, peer groups, and cultural spaces—as critical foundations of empowerment. Adapt funding frameworks to value these spaces even when they do not yield immediate, quantifiable results. EPSR Principle 20

EMBED PEER-LED AND FEMINIST EMPOWERMENT PRACTICES

Provide long-term **support for migrant-led** mentoring, storytelling, arts-based programmes, and other creative or feminist pedagogies. Integrate these models into mainstream services through partnerships with grassroots organisations. EPSR Principles 3 & 16.

INSTITUTIONALISE TRAUMA-INFORMED, INCLUSIVE MENTAL HEALTH CARE

Ensure **multilingual and culturally competent psychosocial support** is embedded across integration, education, and family services—not restricted to short-term crisis intervention. Expand access to mental health care as a normalised, long-term component of empowerment. EPSR Principles 16 & 11.



CHALLENGE

Across Austria, **CSOs serve as key actors** in supporting migrantised women through counselling, education, language support, and informal networks of care.

Yet these services operate within policy environments that prioritise integration outcomes over inclusive empowerment.

Rigid funding criteria, short-term metrics, and narrow definitions of success often fail to account for the complex realities women face—such as legal dependency, trauma, and language barriers—limiting the ability of CSOs to sustain safe, empowering, and community-rooted practices.



RESULTS

Findings from the ReIncluGen project show that **empowerment is a gradual, relational process** shaped by access to housing, the ability to speak for oneself, family care, trauma recovery, and trust within social and institutional settings.

CSOs play a central role, offering first-language counselling, legal advice, childcare, support for survivors of gender-based violence, shelters, forced marriage counselling, trauma-informed care, safe social spaces, and empowerment-focused education. For many women facing barriers of legal status, isolation, trauma, and care responsibilities, they are the first point of contact.

Despite this, CSOs rely on short-term funding tied to rigid integration metrics. **First-language alphabetisation**—critical for many—is **rarely supported** (Bundeskanzleramt, 2024), while creative, **community-rooted initiatives remain undervalued** (Mlinarič, 2022). Administrative burdens, staff precarity, and lack of recognition further strain their work.

Empowerment, as women and providers stress, cannot be reduced to measurable outcomes. It requires self-determination, emotional safety, and inclusion, supported by grassroots expertise, sustainable services, and culturally rooted approaches—advancing Austria's EPSR commitments.



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe Research & Innovative Action under Grant Agreement No. 101093987



RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: FROM SUPPORT TO EMPOWERMENT: RETHINKING LOCAL SERVICES FOR MIGRANTISED WOMEN IN AUSTRIA

"Creating a supportive community is key to fostering self-determination and empowerment among women."

(Focus group discussion with CSO)

"I gained self-confidence here. As a woman I was not allowed to do many things back home, the men always decided for me. Women were not allowed to work or to go out alone. Here I see other women have an independent life and this gives me courage and confidence to do what I want."

(participating migrantised woman)

METHODOLOGY

The research followed a **participatory action research** approach, combining observations with multiple rounds of focus group discussions, including self-evaluation sessions with three civil society organisations (CSOs).

This participatory evaluation process made it possible to identify **good practices**, define **shared challenges and barriers**, and develop effective strategies to enhance the empowerment and inclusion of migrant women.

In addition, **28 migrantised women** who use the services of the participating CSOs were interviewed using a **narrative method** supported by **photo-elicitation techniques**.

The research also included an **analysis of policy and normative frameworks**, with a focus on national policies related to **gender equality and gender empowerment**.



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RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT TOWARD INCLUSIVE AND EFFECTIVE EMPOWERMENT POLICIES FOR MIGRANTISED WOMEN IN AUSTRIA

Written by: Neda Deneva, Najwa Duzdar, Sarah Häckel

REINCLUGEN PROJECT

Growing diversity in European societies—in terms of gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, class, sexuality, residency status, and abilities—and the cumulative effects of multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantage in these categories present many societal challenges.

An important step towards more egalitarian societies is to **understand the intersections** among these categories. In the ReIncluGen project, conducted in Austria, Belgium, Italy, Poland, and Spain, we focus on the **specific ways that being a migrantised woman interacts with these various social dimensions**. This project aims to conceptualise gender empowerment using the innovative theoretical framework of 'situated intersectionality'. It seeks to study, co-evaluate, and co-develop best practices among civil society organisations (CSOs) that address structural gender-based violence and promote the empowerment and inclusion of migrant women. Additionally, the project will examine how these efforts are portrayed in media discourses. Through **participatory and co-creative action research**, the project engages a wide variety of CSOs working with and for migrant women, focusing on themes such as gender equality, gender-based violence, representation, socio-cultural participation, and labour market integration.

POLICY TAKEAWAYS

REFRAME EMPOWERMENT IN LAW AND POLICY

Move beyond labour-centric definitions in the NAP on Gender Equality and Integration Plan. **Recognise empowerment as a multidimensional process** involving legal autonomy, safety, participation, and well-being. EPSR Principles 2, 3 & 20.

GUARANTEE LONG-TERM CORE FUNDING FOR CSOS

Reform the Basisförderung scheme into a multi-year institutional support model with proportionate reporting and transparent criteria. Include migrant- and women-led CSOs. EPSR Principles 17 & 20.

INSTITUTIONALISE CSO PARTICIPATION

Establish standing consultative bodies with CSOs at federal and regional levels, following co-design models from the National Roma Inclusion Strategy or youth policy frameworks. EPSR Principle 1 & 3.

ENSURE EQUAL ACCESS TO SERVICES REGARDLESS OF LEGAL STATUS

Establish **federal legal safeguards** to prevent denial of childcare, education, and mental health services based on migration or residence status.



CHALLENGE

Austria's gender equality and integration strategies—such as the National Action Plan on Gender Equality 2018–2023 and the National Action Plan on Integration—commit to inclusive participation and social cohesion.

Yet in practice, empowerment is narrowly defined through labour market participation, language acquisition, and compliance with integration norms.

This approach fails to address intersecting forms of structural exclusion faced by migrantised women. CSOs play a crucial role in bridging service gaps but remain underfunded and excluded from policy processes.



RESULTS

For many third-country national (TCN) women, access to rights depends on family- or employment-based residence permits. This **dependency restricts secure housing, formal employment, and protection from violence**, thereby institutionalising gendered dependency (Kogler and Perchinig, 2019).

The Basisförderung scheme provides limited institutional support to CSOs but operates in **one-year cycles with heavy reporting and no legal continuity** (Bundeskanzleramt, 2024). Project-based funding dominates, reinforcing short-term planning and undermining service stability—contradicting EPSR Principle 20 17.

Empirical findings show empowerment is not achieved through economic participation alone but through access to legal advice, psychosocial counselling, language support, and safe housing. **Migrantised women face prolonged residence uncertainty** and barriers due to legal or linguistic exclusion, often being channelled into precarious care work—contradicting EPSR Principles 2 and 5.

CSOs have responded with hybrid literacy, trauma-informed counselling, and flexible childcare, yet fragile funding leaves these proven initiatives without structural security.





RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT TOWARD INCLUSIVE AND EFFECTIVE EMPOWERMENT POLICIES FOR MIGRANTISED WOMEN IN AUSTRIA

"We work with them to lead a self-determined life, which they imagine for themselves or in the roles they would like to have for themselves, which were denied to them ... That includes very basic things of everyday life... but also the choice of my own future, what kind of education do I want to do, can I live alone, what do I want to wear, what clothes am I allowed to wear, how do I deal with my religion."

(Focus group discussion with CSO)

METHODOLOGY

The research followed a **participatory action research** approach, combining observations with multiple rounds of focus group discussions, including self-evaluation sessions with three civil society organisations (CSOs).

This participatory evaluation process made it possible to identify **good practices**, define **shared challenges and barriers**, and develop effective strategies to enhance the empowerment and inclusion of migrant women.

In addition, **28 migrantised women** who use the services of the participating CSOs were interviewed using a **narrative method** supported by **photo-elicitation techniques**.

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RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: GENDER EMPOWERMENT IN POLICIES AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS

Written by: Lore Van Praag & Loubna Ou-Salah

OVERVIEW

Gender Empowerment in Policy: Many governments, civil society organizations (CSOs), and policymakers promote gender empowerment as part of broader goals on gender equality, inclusion, and equal opportunities.

Role of CSOs in Belgium: In Belgium, particularly in Flanders, CSOs are key actors in realizing gender empowerment. Terminology Use: The term 'gender empowerment' appears mostly in the context of gender equality or women's empowerment in policy documents and dictionaries. Less attention to how empowerment is defined and can be measured.

Focus on empowerment often on 'women with a migration background' but **do not acknowledge existing knowledge, skills and empowering experiences** of this group. Large focus on ethnic minority groups as in need for empowerment, but ignores the large number of structural constraints people are facing. Additionally, homogenisation of group, in addition to contributing to 'making people migrants' (i.e., migrantising) while people did not migrate themselves, but for example are part of the 2nd 3rd or even 4th generation yet still considered migrants, and in this way, reinforcing a social exclusionary approach.

POLICY TAKEAWAYS

INSTITUTIONALISE AND PROFESSIONALISE REFLEXIVE MOMENTS IN CSOS

Concepts such as empowerment are often assumed to be needed when working with migrants/migrantised groups. As the provision of aid and services is key to CSOs, the **opportunities to reflect within the team/organisation on what empowerment means and how it is implemented in the organisation's practices** is often lacking. Certainly, alignment of defining such practices is needed across different functions within the organisation, but also with trusted outsiders.

SUPPORTING DIVERSITY AND REPRESENTATION IN CSO TEAMS VIA FUNDING SCHEMES

Safeguard representation of the target group in CSOs. By better **monitoring and mapping the diversity of teams** in funding programmes at all levels of the organisation, civil society organisations are encouraged to invest in diverse teams and the management of this diversity within teams, and support safe spaces for all members in these teams. This does not need to be monitored via self-identification of ethnic (or other) markers per person, as this could not feel comfortable for everyone. But – similar to Ethics plans in European funding schemes – one could **ask reflections on:**

- Diversity within the team
- Diversity management to ensure safety for all employees within the team,
- Doing so by not only including formal achievements, but make space for more invisible tasks, and roles of people, that relate to building trust with the target group of the organisation.



CHALLENGE

If policies **do not define 'empowerment' or 'inclusion'**, the interpretation of these concepts is left to individuals or organisations.

This could result in **reinforcing exclusionary discourses**, training, and opportunities.



RESULTS

Concrete definitions in empowerment policy could better support the realisation of specific goals.

Empowerment is an individual and context-specific process that is not suited to top-down policy objectives. Initiatives that invest in exploring intercultural dialogue and exchanging ideas on empowerment contribute to a better understanding of why some policies, practices, or approaches from CSOs do not work.

Example: participants evaluated by city representatives on their 'level of empowerment' to succeed in a trajectory or receive funding are overlooked, as this does not correspond to individual learning goals nor provide a safe learning space.

Example: initiatives that create space and time for participants to co-design or reorient the programme foster greater ownership and can lead to more long-lasting and empowering effects.

Existing CSOs often take an individualist approach **without addressing structural challenges**, reflected in the current range of activities.

Example: CSOs frequently support migrantised women to 'deal with' structural barriers such as discrimination, lack of suitable learning opportunities, or their identities not being recognised by official institutions and dominant actors.

Empowerment approaches are also often shaped by a monocultural lens and applied to target groups not represented within all layers of CSOs.





RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: GENDER EMPOWERMENT IN POLICIES AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS

REINCLUGEN PROJECT

The ReIncluGen project is funded by Horizon Europe. This project followed a participatory action research process and included 5 academic partners and 15 local CSOs as well as 150 migrantised women.

***“Whispering truths in many
ways & places”***

**defining empowerment requires
to reflect on the situation and
people’s positions in these
settings**

METHODOLOGY

Data was collected between May 2023 and December 2024 through participant observations, individual in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with CSO members and CSO advisory boards.

The **participatory evaluation approach** allowed identifying good practices and developing winning strategies to enhance further empowerment and inclusion of migrant women.

At the end of this evaluation trajectory, academic partners, CSOs and policy makers discussed how to strengthen these practices in existing policy frameworks and policies



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RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: SUPPORTING CIVIL SOCIETY TO DEAL WITH LOCAL NEEDS IN DIVERSE SOCIETIES

Written by: Lore Van Praag & Loubna Ou-Salah

OVERVIEW

Role of CSOs in Belgium: In Belgium, particularly in Flanders, civil society organisations (CSOs) are key actors in realizing 'gender empowerment'. However, to do so, they often do not use or explicitly describe this term in more detailed policy objectives. This may be due to **missing a literal translation of this term in Dutch**. Even when CSOs focus on realising 'empowerment', the CSOs often need **additional structural support to further realise empowerment and inclusion**. Most CSOs can only focus on one specific aspect of empowerment and its intersection with inclusion in society.

The ongoing CSO objectives and practices that refer to realising "empowerment" in society oftentimes reflect prevailing and very specific societal discourses on gender empowerment. These discourses are often specifically oriented at ethnic minority groups. As a consequence, when looking at CSO practices, it seems that only ethnic minority or migrantised women are in need of so-called empowerment, detaching it from broader societal structures, inequalities and policy/media discourses.

A **participatory evaluation approach** was conducted in this project, in which CSOs and academic partners in Belgium evaluated their practices critically, and reflected on improvements.

POLICY TAKEAWAYS

INVESTMENT IN OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

The CSO landscape needs to recognise outreach activities that engage different types of audiences, try out how to reach specific target groups and invest in long-term relations. Apart from some outputs that can be realised by CSOs, there is also a need to ensure that they can:

- Explore local needs
- Set up (smaller-scale or experimental) activities to test how to reach target groups, and also to build up a trustful bond with these target groups.

SUPPORTING MIGRANT-LED OR SELF-ORGANISATIONS

Many migrant-led organisations are considered as "alternative" – compared to the mainstream, or only asked to recruit people instead of seeing these organisations as valuable partners. This leaves their knowledge and skills undervalued. Nonetheless, investments in setting up umbrella organisations (e.g., Empact vzw) that support other migrant-led organisations could facilitate knowledge exchange and responding to local needs in society.

SECURING CIVIL SOCIETY LANDSCAPES

Guidelines should be developed for EU states (e.g., European Civil Society Strategy, 2025) to reflect on financing systems and the institutionalisation of civil society. The CSO landscape shapes how organisations respond to local needs, adapt to policy demands, and sustain services. Priorities include:

- Securing intersectional needs in policies.
- Developing collaborative CSO platforms (e.g., GemmA, Steunpunt gender & migratie).
- Providing seed funding with long-term evaluations to support professionalisation, outreach, and organisational sustainability.
- Avoiding funding schemes that pit similar CSOs against each other, undermining collaboration.



CHALLENGE

If policies do not specify how they measure 'empowerment' or 'inclusion', interpretation of this concept is subject to individual or organisations' **definitions** and **often does not involve the definitions of the persons involved**. This could result in reinforcing exclusionary discourses, trainings and opportunities, and exclude people from being accepted or recognised as part of society.



RESULTS

CSOs are dependent on subsidies defined by political actors. **Understandings of empowerment are therefore often shaped by political climates or organisational blind spots**, rather than participants' perspectives.

Staff composition can influence this: for example, CSO staff with religious affiliations were more likely to recognise the importance of festivities, practices such as prayer, or dietary restrictions, and to integrate these into activities.

Policies focusing on 'empowerment' often emphasise **output measures**. Quick results, such as KPIs or subsidy requirements, are prioritised over the gradual nature of empowering processes. **Policymakers frequently overlook the need to build trustful relationships** with individuals, groups, and communities.

Outreach is crucial to establish participation and mutual relations with underrepresented groups or newcomers, and should be seen as a precondition for meaningful outputs.

Competition for subsidies between CSOs working on similar themes creates rivalry rather than collaboration, limiting knowledge sharing and mutual support. Migrant-led or 'self-organisations' are often treated as alternative or instrumental partners rather than valued for their expertise. This undermines equal relations between CSOs and funders. Similar dynamics were observed across countries, not only in Belgium.





RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: SUPPORTING CIVIL SOCIETY TO DEAL WITH LOCAL NEEDS IN DIVERSE SOCIETIES



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RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH METHODS AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Written by: Loubna Ou-Salah & Lore Van Praag

OVERVIEW

Gender Empowerment in Policy: Many governments, civil society organizations (CSOs), and policymakers promote gender empowerment as part of broader goals on gender equality, inclusion, and equal opportunities.

CSOs focusing on empowerment in Belgium: CSOs are key actors in realizing gender empowerment. However, in doing so, the definitions and objectives when using this term are not clearly defined.

Policies and CSO practices insufficiently capture the **existing knowledge, skills and empowering or lived experiences of migrantised women in the organisation of their CSO and their practices.**

POLICY TAKEAWAYS

CENTRE LIVED EXPERIENCES THROUGH PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH (PAR)

CSOs and policymakers should embed participatory action research in their work so that migrant women's lived experiences inform policy and service design. This approach addresses structural inequalities, fosters empowerment, and creates accessible, experience-based communication to overcome language barriers. Involving migrantised women as co-researchers helps adapt training, digital literacy, and empowerment programmes to local needs, using clear and simple language and multilingual approaches. This aligns with the EPSR Action Plan on lifelong learning and gender equality.

SET UP COMMUNITY-LED FEEDBACK SYSTEMS TO MAKE LOCAL SERVICES FAIRER AND MORE RESPONSIVE

Local authorities and CSOs should **create simple ways for migrantised women to share experiences** and raise concerns about public services. Community-led feedback makes services more accountable, inclusive, and responsive, while helping to combat discrimination. This supports the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (Article 21) and strengthens local equality strategies.

SECURE AFFORDABLE, FLEXIBLE SPACES FOR CSOS THROUGH LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS

By encouraging CSOs, adult education centres, and migrant support providers to **share physical spaces and invest in the coordination of these spaces**. These 'one-stop hubs' give migrant women easier access to essential services in a single, familiar setting. Crucially, it fosters a culture of collaboration over competition, allowing organisations to learn from each other, align strategies, and respond more effectively to complex integration needs. In a funding landscape that often pits similar organisations against each other, co-location creates a shared infrastructure that supports collective impact. This directly advances the EPSR and strengthens local ecosystems of inclusive support.



CHALLENGE

Migrantised women across Europe continue to face **systemic exclusion from the design and delivery of local services and policymaking**. Their lived experiences, needs, and voices are often overlooked or insufficiently integrated into decisions that directly affect their lives. This exclusion manifests in multiple ways: **language and communication barriers, discrimination, lack of accessible and safe feedback mechanisms, and fragmented or hard-to-navigate support systems**. As a result, public services often fail to be inclusive, effective, or responsive to the realities migrant women face



RESULTS

Using a participatory evaluation methodology grounded in critical reflection, the ReIncluGen project highlighted both strengths and challenges within these organizations. A key finding was that **CSOs successfully developed a range of practices** that combined essential services innovative, community-driven approaches, like participatory theatre, artistic expression, and peer-led initiatives. These practices empowered migrant women by building practical skills, fostering peer solidarity, and addressing structural gaps in institutional support, particularly in areas like gender-based violence, digital literacy, and employability.

Our **findings underscored the importance of creative and participatory methods** in promoting critical reflection and collective action. An **intersectional approach** was central across all countries, with practices addressing the interconnected challenges of gender, migration status, economic vulnerability, and racial discrimination. Despite positive impacts on women's empowerment and organizational learning, challenges remain. **Tensions between immediate service provision and efforts toward structural change** were evident, with CSOs constrained by funding pressures and limited capacity. Participation among marginalized groups, particularly migrant women with caregiving duties, varied and highlighted the need for more inclusive strategies.





RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH METHODS AND CIVIL SOCIETY



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RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: HOW TO TRANSFORM EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM EMPOWERING MIGRANT GIRLS AND ADDRESSING STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

Written by: Idoia Landaluce & Elena Alfageme, with contributions from the Delegation of Catalonia – InteRed

OVERVIEW

Growing diversity in European societies—in terms of gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, class, sexuality, residency status, and abilities – and the cumulative effects of **multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantages** in these categories present many societal challenges. An important step towards more egalitarian societies is to **understand the intersections** among these categories.

In the ReIncluGen project, conducted in Austria, Belgium, Italy, Poland, and Spain, we focus on the specific ways that being a migrant woman interacts with these various social dimensions. This project aims to conceptualize gender empowerment using the innovative theoretical framework of **'situated intersectionality'**.

It seeks to study, co-evaluate, and co-develop best practices among civil society organizations (CSOs) that address structural gender-based violence and promote the empowerment and inclusion of migrant women. Additionally, the project will examine how these efforts are portrayed in media discourses. Through **participatory and co-creative action research**, the project includes a wide variety of CSOs working with and for migrant women, focusing on themes such as gender equality, violence, representation, socio-cultural participation, and labour market integration.

POLICY TAKEAWAYS

STRENGTHEN TEACHERS' CAPACITIES TO SUPPORT STUDENTS FROM A SITUATED INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH

Ministry of Education and Education Departments (from Autonomous Communities) should **prioritize continuous compulsory training to teachers to deconstruct and overcome stereotypes based on gender, race, and others**. Educational resources should be reviewed in this sense, emphasizing a **situated intersectional approach**. Educational resources should include characters and narratives that represent diversity and encourage migrant girls to identify themselves with successful stories.

NETWORKING AND PARTNERSHIPS

Public Policies should promote **regular and cross-cutting partnerships among diverse stakeholders**: schools, universities, and community associations (CSOs, migrant collectives, family associations, anti-racist groups, etc.) that are familiar with the local reality of girls and women from migrant background. Meaningful participation in designing educational initiatives, provision of spaces to meet and **allocation of funds** should be a must.

COMMITTEES FOR COEDUCATION, COEXISTENCE AND VALUES AT SCHOOLS

All schools should create and enhance interdisciplinary, intergenerational, and diverse (integrated by migrant students) **Committees for Coeducation, Coexistence and Values (COCOVALs)**, already recognised by educational laws, to guarantee the implementation of coeducation and coexistence plans at schools. The action plans should be endowed with budget, monitored and evaluated regularly together with the school board to **identify gaps and learning lessons**.



CHALLENGE

Institutional racism present in Spanish society is also reproduced at schools, restricting migrant girls access to quality education.

Only 28% of migrant children attend university, compared to 43% of native-born, reversing European trends where second generations surpass natives (FUNCAS, 2025). **Discriminatory experiences** in education rose from 13% (2013) to 20% (2020) (CEDRE). Prejudices and limiting stereotypes about migrants potential for development and learning in schools, coupled with migrant families economic precarity, create structural barriers. These factors contribute to **higher dropout rates among migrant girls** than native girls, though migrant boys remain most affected.



RESULTS

Educational centres mirror wider dynamics of domination, including sexism, classism, racism, xenophobia, LGBTphobia, and ableism, shaping students' experiences.

Migrant girls face intersecting barriers: they are pressured to fulfil traditional gender roles while achieving academically, lack racialised role models, and report bullying and racism.

Schools often deny racism, neglect multilingual and newcomer needs, and fail to offer adequate support (Comparative Report, p. 40). These conditions foster unease, low self-esteem, and early dropout. For CSOs, empowerment must link with broader social participation, encompassing language proficiency, employment, citizenship, representation, and political engagement. It should **strengthen women's and girls' collective agency to make decisions, pursue autonomy, and dismantle structural barriers**.

Crucially, empowerment must centre migrant women's perspectives and narratives, fostering community building with CSOs, schools, and institutions that play a decisive role in promoting coexistence and strengthening the social fabric.





RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: HOW TO TRANSFORM EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM EMPOWERING MIGRANT GIRLS AND ADDRESSING STRUCTURAL BARRIERS



Photographer: Loreley Ritta



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METHODOLOGY

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The research followed a **participatory action research process** and included 5 academic partners and 15 local CSOS as well as 150 migrant women.

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The **participatory evaluation approach** allowed identifying good practices and developing winning strategies to enhance further empowerment and inclusion of migrant women.



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RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: PROMOTING THE EMPOWERMENT AND INCLUSION OF MIGRANT WOMEN

Written by: Laia Narciso and Charo Reyes

OVERVIEW

The term **gender empowerment** is widely recognized and used in political and feminist discourse in Spain, supported by landmark laws such as the Ley Integral contra la Violencia de Género (Gender Violence Law, 2004) and the Ley de Igualdad (Equality Law, 2007), and consolidated through public policies and regional funding programs. However, its **definition remains ambiguous and varies across institutional documents, everyday practices**, and the experiences of participating women. This lack of clarity hinders its implementation and monitoring, despite recent European frameworks—such as the EU Gender Action Plan III and the Roadmap for Women's Rights—promoting a more intersectional and transformative approach.

POLICY TAKEAWAYS

RECOGNIZE THE DIVERSITY AND ADOPT AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH

Make visible the multiplicity of migrant women's experiences and their contribution to local development, breaking away from the homogeneous image of passive beneficiaries. Move beyond partial perspectives that prioritize nationality or religion and incorporate other equally relevant dimensions (such as age, generation, social class, or legal status) to design policies tailored to their concrete realities and to counter hate speech and exclusion.

REMOVE STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

Give priority to addressing structural obstacles such as administrative and legal hurdles (e.g., access to registration or nationality), lack of decent housing, difficulties in accessing education or in having qualifications recognized, the burden of care work, insufficient provision of physical and mental health services, and lack of labour rights—all of which inhibit any real possibility of empowerment.

MOVE BEYOND ECONOMISTIC VIEWS BY STRENGTHENING COLLECTIVE AND LONG-TERM PROCESSES

Empowerment should not be reduced to labour or productive integration but must also encompass political, social, and cultural dimensions. This requires funding sustainable and long-term projects that foster community networks, mutual support, and safe spaces to address gender-based violence, precarious work, and racism, ensuring empowerment as an ongoing and multidimensional process.



CHALLENGE

The ReIncluGen project has identified the persistence of a **dominant discourse that reproduces stereotypical images of migrantised women** as passive beneficiaries, rendering invisible their agency and their contribution to local development. This approach influences policies and programs, which often focus on facilitating social or labour adaptation without adequately addressing the structural conditions that shape their trajectories: **precarious and unprotected employment, legal and administrative barriers, or racial discrimination**. As a result, actions linked to empowerment tend to be used as a synonym for integration, lacking complex and strategic approaches, which may limit its potential as a collective right and as an emancipatory tool.



RESULTS

Research carried out in Spain shows that migrantised women, in all their diversity, experience empowerment processes in varied and context-specific ways.

Empowerment as a multidimensional process constrained by structural barriers and racism. The women interviewed revealed that empowerment cannot be reduced to economic autonomy or labour market integration—although these are key dimensions—but also requires support in areas such as education, health, and social and political participation. However, minimum conditions for empowerment—such as residence regularization, recognition of qualifications, housing stability, and access to health and education—are often not guaranteed. In addition, most participants reported experiencing racism in both public services and everyday life. These limitations affect their agency and participation, reducing the scope of empowerment policies.

Community spaces as drivers of empowerment.

CSOs provide safe environments, support networks, and collective tools for social transformation. However, many highlight the lack of mid and large-term funding and the risk of being limited by calls.





RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: PROMOTING THE EMPOWERMENT AND INCLUSION OF MIGRANT WOMEN



Vanishing points exhibition, BCN 2025



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RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: PROMOVER EL EMPODERAMIENTO Y LA INCLUSIÓN DE LAS MUJERES MIGRANTES

Elaborado por Laia Narciso y Charo Reyes

CONTEXTO GENERAL

El término empoderamiento de género está ampliamente reconocido y utilizado en el discurso político y feminista en España, respaldado por leyes pioneras como la Ley Integral contra la Violencia de Género de 2004 y la Ley de Igualdad de 2007, y consolidado en políticas públicas y programas autonómicos de financiación. No obstante, su definición sigue siendo ambigua y varía entre documentos institucionales, prácticas cotidianas y experiencias de las mujeres participantes. **Esta ambigüedad en su definición dificulta su implementación y monitorización**, pese a que los marcos europeos recientes —como el EU Gender Action Plan III o el Roadmap for Women's Rights— promueven un enfoque más interseccional y transformador.

CLAVES PARA LA INCIDENCIA

RECONOCER LA DIVERSIDAD Y ADOPTAR UN ENFOQUE INTERSECCIONAL Y SITUADO

Visibilizar la multiplicidad de experiencias de las mujeres migrantes y su contribución al desarrollo local, rompiendo la imagen homogénea de beneficiarias pasivas. Superar visiones parciales que priorizan nacionalidad o religión e incorporar otras dimensiones igualmente relevantes —como la edad, la generación, la clase social o la situación administrativa— para diseñar políticas ajustadas a sus realidades concretas y contrarrestar discursos de odio y exclusión.

ELIMINAR BARRERAS ESTRUCTURALES

Abordar de forma prioritaria los obstáculos administrativos y legales (padrón, nacionalidad), la falta de vivienda digna, las dificultades de acceso a la educación y a la homologación de títulos, la sobrecarga de cuidados, la cobertura insuficiente de servicios de salud física y mental y la falta de derechos laborales, que en conjunto limitan cualquier posibilidad real de empoderamiento.

SUPERAR LA VISIÓN ECONOMICISTA FORTALECIENDO PROCESOS COLECTIVOS Y SOSTENIDOS EN EL TIEMPO

El empoderamiento no debe reducirse a la inserción laboral o productiva, sino integrar también dimensiones políticas, sociales y culturales. Para ello es necesario financiar proyectos sostenibles y de largo plazo que impulsen redes comunitarias, apoyo mutuo y espacios seguros frente a la violencia de género, la precariedad laboral y el racismo, garantizando que el empoderamiento sea un proceso continuo y multidimensional.

PROBLEMA IDENTIFICADO

A través del proyecto ReIncluGen se ha identificado la persistencia de un discurso mayoritario que reproduce imágenes estereotipadas de las mujeres migrantes como beneficiarias pasivas, invisibilizando su agencia y su contribución al desarrollo local. Este enfoque repercute en las políticas y programas, que suelen centrarse en facilitar su adaptación social o laboral sin atender en profundidad los condicionantes estructurales que marcan sus trayectorias: la precariedad y la falta de protección en el ámbito laboral, las barreras legales y administrativas o la discriminación racial. Como resultado, las acciones vinculadas al empoderamiento tienden a utilizarse como sinónimo de integración, sin enfoques complejos ni estratégicos, lo que puede limitar su potencial como derecho colectivo y herramienta emancipadora.



RESULTADOS

Empoderamiento como proceso multidimensional condicionado por barreras estructurales y racismo.

Las mujeres entrevistadas señalaron que más allá de la autonomía económica o a la inserción laboral, aunque éstas sean dimensiones clave, ámbitos como la educación, la salud y la participación social y política requieren apoyo. Señalaron fuertes barreras, como la regularización administrativa, la homologación de títulos, la estabilidad habitacional o el acceso a la salud y la educación. Además, la mayoría afirmaron haber padecido racismo tanto en servicios públicos como en su vida cotidiana. Todo ello repercute en su capacidad de agencia y participación sociopolítica.

Espacios comunitarios como impulsores de empoderamiento.

Las OSC ofrecen entornos seguros, redes de apoyo y herramientas colectivas para la transformación social. Sin embargo, muchas denuncian la falta de financiación de procesos a medio y largo plazo y el riesgo de ser encorsetadas para encajar en las convocatorias.





RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: PROMOVER EL EMPODERAMIENTO Y LA INCLUSIÓN DE LAS MUJERES MIGRANTES



Exposición Puntos de fuga, BCN 2025

METODOLOGÍA

La investigación ha seguido un **proceso de investigación-acción participativa**, incluyendo a 5 universidades y 15 organizaciones de la sociedad civil en los 5 países, así como a 150 mujeres migrantes.

Los datos se recopilaban entre mayo de 2023 y diciembre de 2024 mediante observación participante, entrevistas en profundidad, creación de fotografías y debates en grupos focales.

El **enfoque de evaluación participativa** permitió identificar buenas prácticas y desarrollar estrategias para mejorar el empoderamiento y la inclusión de las mujeres migrantes.



QUWA

Quwa es una plataforma digital dinámica que facilita el empoderamiento de las organizaciones que trabajan en la igualdad de género e inclusión social.

Actúa como eje central para compartir conocimientos, ideas y herramientas prácticas, fomentando la colaboración y la innovación.

Quwa permite a sus miembros ponerse en contacto con socios potenciales, mostrar su trabajo y explorar nuevas ideas para hacer frente a los retos.

Mediante la creación de una vibrante comunidad de prácticas, Quwa amplifica los esfuerzos colectivos, impulsando un cambio social inclusivo con impacto.

<https://quwaconnect.eu>



TO LEARN MORE

www.reinclugen.eu



Securing Sustainable Funding for Women's and Refugee CSOs in Poland

Written by: Dagmara Szczepańska

Overview

Growing diversity in European societies—in terms of gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, class, sexuality, residency status, and abilities - and the cumulative effects of **multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantages** in these categories present many societal challenges. An important step towards more egalitarian societies is to understand the intersections among these categories. In the ReIncluGen project, conducted in Austria, Belgium, Italy, Poland, and Spain, we focus on the specific ways that being a migrant woman interacts with these various social dimensions. This project aims to conceptualize gender empowerment using the innovative theoretical framework of "situated intersectionality." It seeks to study, co-evaluate, and co-develop best practices among civil society organizations (CSOs) that address structural gender-based violence and promote the empowerment and inclusion of migrant women. Additionally, the project will examine how these efforts are portrayed in media discourses. Through **participatory and co-creative action research**, the project includes a wide variety of CSOs working with and for migrant women, focusing on themes such as gender equality, violence, representation, socio-cultural participation, and labour market integration.

POLICY TAKEAWAYS:

- 1. Stabilize funding frameworks:** Establish national grant schemes with long-term funding to reduce dependence on temporary projects.
- 2. Support smaller CSOs:** Introduce simplified funding criteria and capacity-building grants so grassroots organizations can access resources on par with larger entities.
- 3. Match EU efforts:** Align national funding strategies with the forthcoming EU Civil Society Strategy, ensuring Polish CSOs remain competitive in European networks.

"A lack of financial stability is the most important problem organizations face every day, and most believe this situation will only deepen over time."

Problem identified:

Polish women's and refugee-supporting CSOs remain highly dependent on short-term, project-based international funding. National resources are scarce, leaving organizations vulnerable to financial instability, staff burnout, and mission drift. Without sustainable funding mechanisms, CSOs risk losing capacity to provide critical services to migrant and refugee women, including psychological support, legal aid, and integration programs.

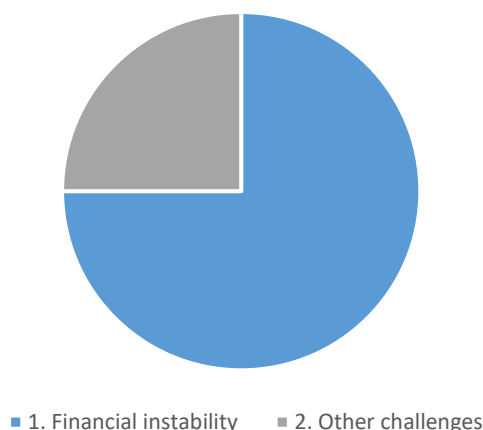
Findings:

Following the war in Ukraine, Polish CSOs rapidly expanded their support for refugees, with 23% of all registered organizations becoming involved in 2022 (Charycka et al., 2024). Many women's organizations redirected activities to serve migrant women, offering language courses, legal advice, and psychosocial support. However, 75% reported financial instability as their key challenge, with most funds coming from international actors like UNICEF. National support remains limited, making organizations highly vulnerable to shifts in donor priorities.

Institutionalized, professionalized CSOs (e.g., long-standing women's rights groups) were better able to secure funding and expand services, while smaller grassroots initiatives often struggled to survive. The reliance on short-term projects fosters staff turnover, burnout, and "mission drift", diverting organizations from their original objectives. This risks undermining their credibility and long-term effectiveness.

Ensuring stable, predictable funding is vital for safeguarding service continuity, retaining experienced staff, and maintaining specialized expertise in areas like gender-based violence, reproductive rights, and refugee integration. Sustainable financing would allow CSOs to maintain their mission while adapting to emerging needs. National authorities can play a decisive role in complementing EU-level initiatives with tailored support schemes for Polish civil society.

Main challenges of CSOs supporting refugees in Poland,
Charycka et al., 2024



METHODOLOGY

The research followed a **participatory action research** process and included 5 academic partners and 15 local CSOS as well as 150 migrant women. Data was collected between May 2023 and December 2024 through participant observations, individual in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The **participatory evaluation approach** allowed identifying good practices and developing winning strategies to enhance further empowerment and inclusion of migrant women.

REFERENCES

www.reincludgen.eu

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe Research & Innovative Action under Grant Agreement No. 101093987.



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QUWA

Quwa is a dynamic digital platform that empowers organisations focused on gender equality and social inclusion. It acts as a central hub to share knowledge, insights, and practical tools, fostering collaboration and innovation. Quwa enables members to connect with potential partners, showcase their work, and explore fresh ideas to tackle challenges. By building a vibrant community of practice, Quwa amplifies collective efforts, driving impactful and inclusive social change.

<https://quwaconnect.eu>



Building Durable Civil Society Networks for Inclusive Governance

Written by: Dagmara Szczepańska

Overview

Growing diversity in European societies—in terms of gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, class, sexuality, residency status, and abilities - and the cumulative effects of **multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantages** in these categories present many societal challenges. An important step towards more egalitarian societies is to understand the intersections among these categories. In the ReIncluGen project, conducted in Austria, Belgium, Italy, Poland, and Spain, we focus on the specific ways that being a migrant woman interacts with these various social dimensions. This project aims to conceptualize gender empowerment using the innovative theoretical framework of "situated intersectionality." It seeks to study, co-evaluate, and co-develop best practices among civil society organizations (CSOs) that address structural gender-based violence and promote the empowerment and inclusion of migrant women. Additionally, the project will examine how these efforts are portrayed in media discourses. Through **participatory and co-creative action research**, the project includes a wide variety of CSOs working with and for migrant women, focusing on themes such as gender equality, violence, representation, socio-cultural participation, and labour market integration.

POLICY TAKEAWAYS:

- 1. Support CSO coalitions:** Provide funding and incentives for cross-organizational partnerships, knowledge-sharing, and joint initiatives.
- 2. Institutionalize networking platforms:** Establish or support existing mechanisms for dialogue between CSOs, authorities, and international actors, like the QUWA platform.
- 3. Leverage EU Civil Society Strategy:** Position Poland as a leader in shaping European cooperation frameworks for inclusive governance.

"When there is money, cooperation appears; when money runs out, competition returns."

Problem identified:

Polish CSOs experienced both competition and collaboration depending on funding flows. The war in Ukraine temporarily fostered collaboration through increased resources, but looming financial cuts risk fragmenting networks. Without strategic support for cooperation, CSOs may revert to competition, weakening Poland's civil society and reducing effectiveness in supporting women.

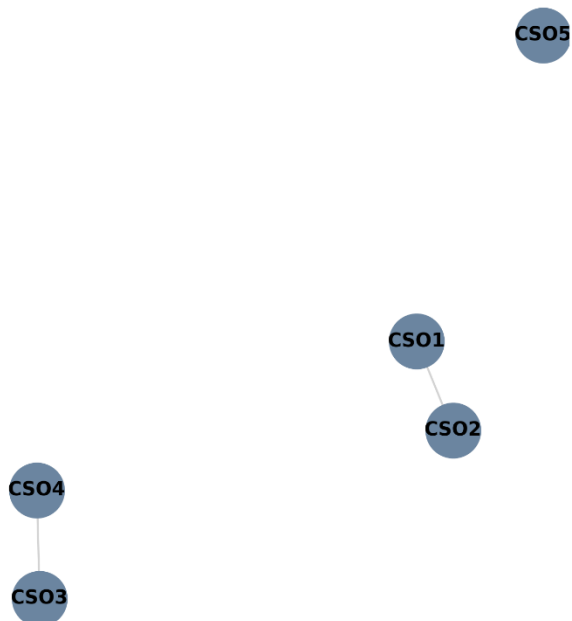
Findings:

The immediate refugee response after February 2022 required unprecedented cooperation among CSOs, local institutions, and international donors. Networking enabled effective service delivery, capacity-building, and information sharing. For instance, 90% of CSOs reported receiving non-material support (skills, knowledge transfer) through networks, which they viewed as more sustainable than financial aid. Smaller organizations benefited by gaining visibility and legitimacy through collaborations with larger partners.

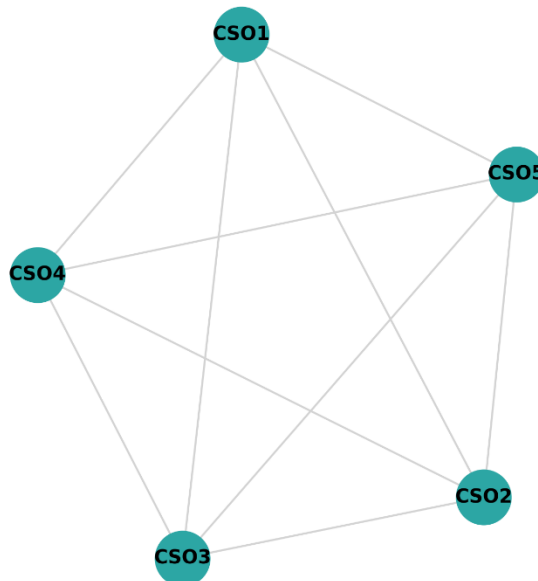
However, resource scarcity fosters competition. In 2021, competition for limited funds was cited as the third greatest threat by Polish CSOs (Charycka et al., 2024). Without continued investment in collaborative structures, partnerships built during the refugee crisis risk dissolving, leaving smaller CSOs isolated.

National authorities can mitigate this by supporting durable networking platforms that foster trust, reduce duplication of services, and amplify collective advocacy. This is particularly important as the EU develops its Civil Society Strategy, which emphasizes protecting civic space and fostering cross-border cooperation. By institutionalizing networks, Poland can ensure that civil society remains resilient, inclusive, and better prepared for future crises.

CSO Collaboration in Poland (Pre-2022)



CSO Collaboration in Poland (Post-2022)



From fragmentation to collaboration: Polish CSOs supporting refugees moved from weak, scattered ties before 2022 to strong, interconnected networks after the refugee influx. Sustaining these links requires long-term support.

METHODOLOGY

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