



Mutual Learning Conference on “Innovative approaches to integration and inclusion of migrants”

Thematic Discussion Paper

**Gender perspectives in integration policy
approaches**

Online, 26 November 2020

DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

Written by Alexander Wolffhardt & Olivia Long,
Migration Policy Group

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Unit EMPL C1

Contact: Miriam Toplanska

E-mail: empl-c1-unit@ec.europa.eu

Web site: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1274&langId=en>

European Commission

B-1049 Brussels

Mutual Learning Conference on “Innovative approaches to integration and inclusion of migrants”

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Table of Content

1	Introduction	1
2	Setting the scene: the labour market disadvantage of migrant women	1
3	Addressing the challenge: Evidence from policies and practices	4
3.1	From gaps to well-funded, mainstreamed policies.....	4
3.2	Three types of policy responses	5
3.3	Recent innovative trends.....	7
4	Conclusions	7
5	List of references	8
6	Annex.....	10

1 Introduction

Migrant women are a very heterogeneous group in terms of age, educational background and skills, or proficiency in the language of their host country. Research, including EU statistics, consistently confirms that they face a double disadvantage in comparison with migrant men and native-born women, but there is still insufficient focus on the integration of migrant women¹.

While gender equality has gained much attention in recent years and grown in importance within many policy agendas – in part due to increasing recognition of the cross-cutting principle of intersectionality² – migrant women continue to face particular integration-related challenges that must be taken into account. Their integration efforts are often hindered by family or childcare responsibilities, by a lack of formal education or certified skills, by limited recognition of their high educational attainment³ as well as by the impact of stereotypes. Furthermore, women are more likely to migrate for family reasons and less likely to migrate for economic reasons than men, and therefore tend to receive less integration support, thus reinforcing gender disparities in integration.

Foreign-born women face a double challenge, as migrants and as women. They are less likely to be in employment and more likely to be unemployed or inactive than both migrant men and native-born women. A recent Joint Research Centre (JRC) study suggests that this could in part be due to the non-transferability of higher education qualifications that women might hold, which is a common issue for non-EU born women in particular (Grubanov-Boskovic, Tintori and Biagi, 2020). Refugee women generally have worse integration and employment outcomes than migrant women arriving through other channels, and face a third challenge posed by their status as refugees. This underlines the need for targeted, tailored and gender sensitive initiatives to increase the participation of migrant women in the labour market.

2 Setting the scene: the labour market disadvantage of migrant women

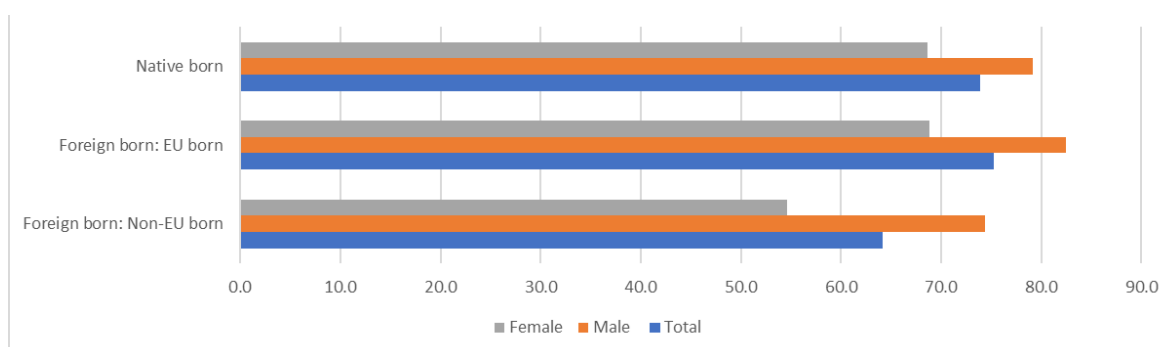
Overall, fewer migrant women are engaged in work than migrant men. Despite recent initiatives the gender gap in the labour market integration of migrants remains, as the JRC illustrates in a recent report, remarkable (Grubanov-Boskovic, Tintori and Biagi, 2020). According to Eurostat data, the employment gender gap among migrants in Europe reached 17.8 percentage points in 2019, and the employment gap between EU-born migrant women and non-EU born migrant women was also very high, at an average of 14 percentage points across the Member States (see *Figure 1 and Table 1*). By contrast the gap between EU-born migrant men and non-EU born migrant men was 8 percentage points. This said, according to a 2019 report by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) the employment rate for migrant women of Sub-Saharan origin in paid work in Austria is 20 percentage points higher than for men, and in Portugal it is 8 percentage points higher (FRA, 2019). Similar gaps may of course exist elsewhere but are not always recorded. According to a 2019 report by the European Migration Network (EMN), among third-country nationals women generally face particular obstacles in accessing the labour market in comparison with men in Austria, Belgium, Finland, Netherlands, Poland and Sweden.

¹ The term 'migrant women' is used in this paper to refer to both EU-mobile and non-EU born women. If referencing one of these groups in particular, the distinction will be made within the text.

² In the European Commission's Gender Equality Strategy (COM(2020) 152 final), adopted in March 2020, it was recognised that intersectionality (defined as 'the combination of gender with other personal characteristics or identities') should be adopted as a cross-cutting principle.

³ See JRC analysis <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/news/migration-gender-gaps>: migrant women with tertiary education have a lower labour market participation rate than all other groups, including EU-born women with a lower level of education.

Figure 1. Employment rates for population aged 20-64 years in EU27, by country of birth and by sex, 2019



Source: Eurostat (Ifsa_ergacob)

Table 1: Employment rates for population aged 20-64 years in all EU 27, by country of birth and by sex, 2019

	Native-born			Foreign-born					
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
EU - 27	73.9	79.2	68.6	75.3	82.5	68.8	64.2	74.4	54.6
Belgium	72.9	75.8	69.9	71.1	77.7	65.3	54.2	63.5	45.1
Bulgaria	75.0	79.3	70.7	:	:	:	69.5	75.0	66.0
Czechia	80.3	87.5	72.7	79.7	88.8	69.5	83.5	93.4	73.7
Denmark	79.9	83.0	76.8	79.3	83.6	74.8	62.3	70.1	55.3
Germany	82.8	85.8	79.9	81.3	88.0	74.6	67.4	76.3	58.2
Estonia	80.8	84.5	77.0	73.1	79.1	67.6	75.7	79.7	72.5
Ireland	75.2	80.9	69.6	81.5	89.3	74.2	69.0	79.1	59.2
Greece	61.9	71.6	52.3	53.5	68.7	43.4	54.7	68.9	41.7
Spain	68.5	73.9	63.0	71.3	78.5	64.8	63.9	72.8	56.2
France	73.4	76.0	70.9	71.4	74.5	68.4	58.0	69.4	48.3
Croatia	67.3	72.4	62.3	71.7	67.2	75.2	60.5	69.5	51.8
Italy	63.5	72.6	54.3	64.1	76.8	55.7	63.5	79.0	49.5
Cyprus	76.3	82.0	70.6	80.2	87.3	73.8	72.6	77.5	68.9
Latvia	78.0	79.7	76.3	62.9	55.8	69.6	72.2	77.0	68.6
Lithuania	78.5	79.1	77.8	72.2	84.3	60.6	73.4	75.5	71.7
Luxembourg	70.4	73.9	66.6	77.4	80.7	73.9	64.3	74.8	55.1
Hungary	75.2	83.2	67.4	80.5	85.9	75.9	76.6	77.7	74.9
Malta	75.5	85.9	63.6	86.9	89.2	84.3	78.2	88.6	66.7
Netherlands	82.5	86.5	78.3	77.9	81.8	75.0	64.0	73.0	55.7
Austria	78.7	82.2	75.0	76.6	82.0	72.0	66.1	74.4	58.0
Poland	73.0	80.7	65.3	71.2	80.5	:	79.2	87.3	70.1
Portugal	75.8	79.3	72.6	82.1	87.0	78.0	78.0	84.2	72.7
Romania	70.9	80.4	61.3	:	:	:	75.2	:	:
Slovenia	77.3	79.8	74.7	71.2	73.8	68.7	69.5	80.2	56.6
Slovakia	73.3	79.8	66.8	82.2	88.4	73.7	75.4	84.0	65.9
Finland	78.0	78.9	77.2	77.9	79.8	75.7	61.7	70.5	53.8
Sweden	86.2	87.2	85.0	81.1	85.3	77.4	66.1	72.8	59.1

Source: Eurostat (Ifsa_ergacob)

The proportion of the tertiary-educated among migrant women is similar to native-born and migrant men, implying that the worse employment outcomes of migrant women are not necessarily related to their educational level. Despite this, women born outside the EU are both more likely to be over-qualified for their job *and* less likely to be in employment than both migrant men and native women. The OECD – in a report that looks at all groups of migrant women across all OECD countries - found that overall, 29% of migrant women are more likely to be overqualified in their employment, while 28% of migrant men and 20% of native-born women are (OECD, 2020).

The aforementioned JRC study also confirms that migrant women born outside the EU are much more likely to be overqualified in their employment than any other group

(Grubanov-Boskovic, Tintori and Biagi, 2020). Those with primary education have a predicted labour force participation rate that is 1% lower than native women with primary education, but this gap widens to 5% among secondary educated women and reaches the height of 17% for those tertiary educated.

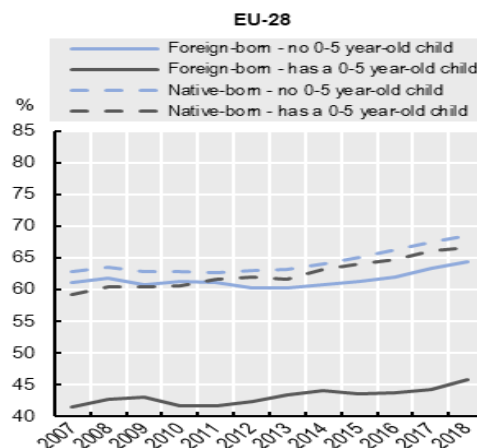
Data clearly shows different outcomes for migrant women across EU Member States: migrant women in Sweden, for example, have higher employment rates than native women in other Member States. This suggests that national policies play a crucial role in the labour market outcomes of migrant women, particularly policies concerning gender equality.

Migrant women themselves most commonly report family responsibilities as the reason for their inactivity in employment: 30% of involuntarily inactive migrant women in the OECD and 35% in the EU did so, compared to around one-quarter of their native peers in both areas (OECD, 2018). Research shows that migrant women bear most the consequences of having young children (see Figure 2). In 2019, their employment rate stood at 45.9% in European countries: an improvement of 4.3 percentage points since 2007, but still 21 points behind the employment rate of native-born women with children, which was 66.6% in 2019 (OECD, 2020).

In addition, there is little correlation between employment and gender differences in origin and in host counties (Liebig and Tronstad, 2018), suggesting that integration issues can be addressed by host-country employment and education policy instruments which equip women with the specific tools required for labour market integration. Better-supported access for women to skills training and language learning, for example, including tailored support for women with disabilities or help that alleviates the pressure of time-consuming childcare responsibilities, has been shown to improve labour market outcomes (OECD, 2020). The potential contribution of migrant women to economic growth is therefore not being fully exploited.

The COVID-19 pandemic is further restricting the integration of migrant women and therefore their potential contribution to economic growth. According to UN Women, migrant women who are domestic workers – who were often precariously employed prior to the pandemic - are at particular risk of losing their jobs in this context, as they are more likely than men to be informally employed and consequently unregistered and excluded from labour protection. There exist few assistance and protection mechanisms for these women, and this, combined with their social isolation due to language and cultural differences, an increase in unpaid workload in terms of family care responsibilities and the limited availability of accurate information, heightens their vulnerability during the pandemic (UN Women, 2020).

Figure 2: Percentage of households with a 0-5 years-old child in EU28, by country of birth, 2007-2018



Source: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

Spotlight on refugee women

As pointed out by the European Economic and Social Committee, there is increasing diversity among migrant women in the labour market across Member States in terms of legal status and rights (EESC, 2015), which requires a more holistic approach (EESC, 2020). For example, women with Blue Cards have immediate access to the high-skilled job market, while spouses admitted under family reunification arrangements sometimes have to wait a year before entering the labour market. Asylum seeking women often wait for long periods in many Member States before they are given the opportunity to stay or work, losing valuable early integration time.

Recent OECD evidence shows that it takes longer for refugee women than men to gain a foothold in the labour market (OECD, 2020). When employed, refugee women are frequently in part-time positions. They also have lower levels of host-country language skills compared to men in the first two to three years after arrival, related to the fact that they frequently receive less integration support than men (both in terms of language training and active labour market measures). Refugee women, therefore, face a third specific challenge in that they must tackle difficulties associated with being refugees in addition to being both women and migrants (Liebig and Tronstad, 2018).

3 Addressing the challenge: Evidence from policies and practices

3.1 From gaps to well-funded, mainstreamed policies

There remains a lack of specific policy focus when it comes to the integration of migrant women. A 2018 briefing paper by the European Court of Auditors, for example, pointed out that many Member States do not have policies specifically concerning female migrants. Additionally, a 2019 report by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) observed that a gender perspective is missing in the majority of national policies and measures for the integration of third-country nationals. A 2018 report by the FRA also confirmed that across all EU countries there is little evidence of migrant women-focused strategy. Discrimination is normally dealt with through anti-discrimination and gender equality legislation, without specific reference to migrant women as a distinct category (FRA, 2018).

The European Institute for Gender Equality has found that gender mainstreaming in policy remains a big challenge for Member States, despite the EU having committed to it in 1995 (EIGE, 2019). Segregated data is essential for gender mainstreaming: the designing, implementation and evaluation of gender-responsive policies for migrants will be constrained without gender statistics. Increased effort is therefore needed in the research and analysis of migrant women's integration as well as in the provision of support. Member States that do place special emphasis on women's integration have chosen specific funding priorities as an instrument for promoting it. As one of its five annual lines of funding, for example, Austria's national integration fund supported a total of 54 women-related projects in 2017 and 2018, representing roughly 10% of funds dispersed. In Sweden, the government's budget for 2021 includes a state subsidy for the support of initiatives providing informal education to migrant women who are currently excluded from or unable to access the labour market.

Civil society-led, bottom-up initiatives across Europe are filling the gaps in women-specific integration support that have been left by government policy responses. Local, grassroots groups are campaigning for rights and to raise awareness, offering classes and creating social integration programmes. An outstanding example of civil society-led practice is the Melissa Network in Greece, which promotes the empowerment and active citizenship of migrant women. It works to raise awareness of migrant women's rights and supports them in advocating for themselves, as well as running skills trainings and The EU's role in funding the integration of migrant women

Securing EU funding can be a welcome way to pilot women-specific initiatives. Most are aimed at migrant women in general, but there are also those which focus exclusively on refugee women. Often EU funding is essential in ensuring their continuation: it can be very difficult to secure sufficient funding from elsewhere, resulting in the closing of projects as soon as a funding cycle or stream closes

A 2020 report by the European Network of Migrant Women into the use of the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) to fund activities for migrant women and girls across Europe found that of 63 migrant-focused projects funded by AMIF, only four indicated a special focus on women. Key priorities within these four projects were access to workplace and labour market integration – such as in the Women's empowerment, integration and participation programme (WEIP) - and the promotion of migrant women's active participation in society, such as in the EnFem project.

The European Social Fund has funded many projects on labour market integration of migrant women, including the Officer Worker project in Italy, which offers unemployed migrant women professional and vocational training courses and work experience, the Mirjam project in Sweden which offers specialised support to migrant women looking for work or training.

3.2 Three types of policy responses

There are three main types of intervention when it comes to the integration of migrant women: those that focus on labour market integration, those that focus on social integration and those that focus on discrimination and access to rights. Successful integration requires a comprehensive approach including all three of these intervention types: the European Commission, for example, aims to support an integrated approach which includes connecting employment promotion programmes with initiatives providing access to social services, health or childcare and logistical support. As far as the first type is concerned, migrant women tend to be concentrated in a small number of employment sectors, such as health care, hospitality, catering, services to families and domestic work. Many initiatives therefore focus on these sectors, providing vocational training and internship opportunities. Integration is a dynamic process involving multiple dimensions simultaneously: economic as well as legal, social *and* linguistic elements must all be considered (Sansone, 2016).

Labour market integration

Interventions in labour market integration include training, mentorship, supporting parents, care and domestic sector work and entrepreneurship.

The most common stream of initiatives aims for labour market integration, recognising employment and independent income as key steps in the overall integration process of many migrant women. Many of these initiatives take a comprehensive approach to access to employment, including vocational education and training, as well as gender-sensitive assessment of (formal and informal) skills. Initiatives may also link these measures with other areas of life, such as education or care responsibilities.

Good practices in labour market integration include:

- SOFFA in Greece, which supports refugees and survivors of human trafficking through the integration process and into the workplace, teaching micro-entrepreneurship and essential employment skills with an unusual focus: environmental sustainability of fashion.
- The Karat Coalition in Poland which, through its feminist network of non-governmental organisations, provides language courses and workshops on employability, skills and labour rights to empower migrant women seeking employment, pushing for observance of women's rights and their socio-economic justice.
- <Code>YourFuture in the UK, which is a coding school for refugees. It teaches in six months enough knowledge for employment as a web developer. Although open to all refugees, the school has a high rate of women as students, improving the employability of migrant women in a sector where women are normally underrepresented.
- Project Gericuidar in Portugal, run by the Jesuit Refugee Service, which fostered the social and professional integration of migrant women through the development of technical, social and professional skills fundamental to domestic care for the elderly. Through the implementation of this unusual project a key gap in the labour market was filled.
- The Stark Im Beruf (Strong At Work) programme in Germany, funded by the European Social Fund, provides career orientation and individual support to mothers with a migrant background. It is a comprehensive and inclusive project, involving 90 projects across the country in cooperation with job centres, employment agencies, migrant organisations and social partners.

Social integration

Interventions in social integration include guidance, education and support networks.

Initiatives for social integration may focus on one area (e.g. education, language learning, peer support and childcare programmes) or take a broader perspective aimed at equipping migrant women with a set of skills to foster integration. Broader integration initiatives seem to play a major role in allowing migrant women to achieve a good level of integration as, for example, having a job might not necessarily facilitate a decent life in the destination country. Some interesting initiatives specifically focus on linking childcare to integration support, for instance. Other initiatives might focus on encouraging civic and political participation, providing women with valuable social contacts and a sense of self-determination or achievement through involvement and contribution. In turn, this can contribute to better labour market outcomes.

A good practice in this area is the *INTEGR8* project, which supported migrant women to drive their own integration, delivering practical, relevant training which is developed in partnership with migrant women themselves. Another is the AMIF-funded *FATIMA* project, supporting women's economic, social, cultural and political integration in the UK, Poland and Slovenia, while a third is the Open Schools to Parents for Children's Access programme in France. This programme provides language learning to women in

the same place that their children go to school, in so doing linking much-needed childcare with much-needed integration support

Discrimination and access to rights

Interventions in discrimination and access to rights focus on fighting multiple discrimination, supporting participation and combatting violence.

These interventions can include fighting discrimination and countering exploitation in the labour market, ensuring basic human rights and supporting victims of violence.

A good practice in this area can be found in *Women For Refugee Women* in the UK, which works to empower refugee and asylum-seeking women to become leaders and advocate for change. It offers English lessons and psychosocial activities that build confidence and skills, in addition to running campaigns by and with project participants and publishing extensive rights-related research.

3.3 Recent innovative trends

Recent innovative trends in policy approaches, representing pointers for policy development, include:

- Growing recognition of the need to avoid a 'one size fits all' approach. Examples of this can be found in Denmark, where programmes providing tailor-made learning modules adapted to different professions are being piloted, as well as in Germany, where IQ MigraNet Network developed pilot mentorship programmes to match migrant women with company mentors interested in their skills and professional background.
- Services which take women's overlapping social roles and needs as starting point, e.g. linking childcare to language learning and integration support (e.g. in Portugal's 'one-stop-shop' integration centers), or providing language learning for mothers where their children attend school (e.g. in Germany, France).
- Increased focus on supporting initiatives which aim to fight stereotypes or promote the empowerment of migrant women – as well as those projects which target *young* migrant women in particular – e.g. in Scandinavia. Targeted integration courses, extended for more effective length or aimed only at women, partly with an obligation to attend (e.g. in France);
- The involvement of migrant women themselves in the design and delivery of services. – e.g. in Greece, where in the Melissa Network, women run their own language classes based on their understanding of their own or additional tongues.
- Online initiatives and digitalisation of integration materials in order to facilitate access for migrant women and better share useful resources for people working in integration, such as the 'InCommon Toolkit'.

4 Conclusions

Successful, long-term integration and inclusion requires comprehensive support from the very beginning of a migrant woman's time in a new country. Developing workplace skills and finding employment is indeed key to the overall integration success of a migrant woman; so too is finding support networks and increasing her understanding of and participation in her new community. For women with children, programmes that offer childcare in order to allow mothers to spend time mastering the local language at an early stage are essential.

Civil society is currently leading the way in offering this kind of comprehensive integration support to migrant women. EU initiatives have tended to focus on building skills for labour market integration, but there have been recent positive movements towards a more integrated approach at EU-level. There remains a lack of tailored

support for migrant women, who face many additional barriers to labour market integration due to their migrant status. While focus on support for migrant women *is* demonstrably increasing within integration policies and initiatives at all levels, partnering with civil society may allow for improved, more comprehensive support.

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Project websites

<Code>YourFuture: codeyourfuture.io

EnFem: <https://www.enfem.eu/>

FATIMA: wonderfoundation.org.uk/fatima-project

InCommon Toolkit: http://www.documenta.es/web/incommon_toolkit/

INTEGR8: integrateproject.eu

Karat Coalition: karat.org

Melissa Network: <https://melissanetwork.org/>

Project Gericuidar: jrsporugal.pt

Projekt Mirjam: <https://arbetsformedlingen.se/om-oss/var-verksamhet/internationellt/eu-fonder/mirjam>

SOFFA: soffa.gr

Stark Im Beruf: starkimberuf.de

WEIP: www.lawrs.org.uk/empowerment-integration-and-participation/

Women for Refugee Women: refugeewomen.co.uk

6 Annex

Further good practices in the integration of migrant women:

(A large number of integration practice examples can also be found on the European Web Site on Integration: <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/home>.)

Active Citizenship and English (ACE), UK

Integration support for TCNs in the UK through a contextualised, integration-focused programme of language and cultural courses, training for teachers and volunteer befrienders, development of materials and research. The project encouraged active citizenship in order to help individuals meet UK citizenship application requirements.

Website: <http://www.learningunlimited.co/projects/ace/>

City Gateway Women's Programmes, UK

Provides opportunities for women to gain independence, grow in confidence, access employment and develop skills in a supportive community environment. The programmes are not aimed specifically at migrant women, but such women make up a large number of its beneficiaries.

Website: <https://www.citygateway.org.uk/womens-programmes/>

Fit4Life

Providing services to migrant women aiming to promote health, prevent social exclusion and improve quality of life. The project is structured around three key focuses: physical exercise/sports, nutrition, and motivation.

Website: <https://www.monaliiku.fi/hankkeet-projects/elamani-kunnossa-fit4life/>

I Am a Mom in Poland (Jestem Mamą w Polsce), Poland

Supporting migrant women with delivery preparation and baby care, as well as providing young migrant mothers with psychological help, legal advice and other forms of specialist support.

Website: <https://mamawpolsce.wordpress.com/>

InCommon Toolkit, EU-wide

Provides an innovative methodology for the individual guidance of migrant women, aiming to foster integration and active citizenship through participation in host community culture.

Website: http://www.documenta.es/web/incommon_toolkit/

INTEGRA-TRAIN, Malta

Training sessions - implemented with **The People for Change Foundation** - for women beneficiaries of international protection, in a range of integration-related areas such as education, employment and healthcare.

Website: <http://www.pfcmalta.org/integra-train.html>

IQ MigraNet Network, Germany

Runs mentorship programmes in five Bavarian cities, matching migrant women with company mentors who are interested in their particular skills or professional / employment background.

Website: <https://www.migranet.org/>

Irida Women's Centre, Greece

Offers protection & legal services, psychosocial support, education and other community-building activities. Organised around the four pillars of protection, empowerment, inclusion and integration.

Website: <https://www.igidcenter.org/>

Za'atar NGO, Greece

Provides tailored education, employment and social integration services to refugees, with particular focus on women (and their children), unaccompanied minors, LGBT refugees and prisoners. Runs **Orange House**, a long-term housing shelter for vulnerable migrant women and their children.

Website: <http://zaatarngo.org/projects/orange-house-shelter/>

