



Ways to Participation: Insights, Learnings, and Recommendations from GEtCoheSive



ISI Initiative Selbständiger
Immigrantinnen e.V.

Interreg
CENTRAL EUROPE



Co-funded by
the European Union

GEtCoheSive

Greeting

The GEtCoheSive project explores the question of how self-confident and active participation by immigrant women can succeed in our city of Berlin - and, above all, what our society can gain from this participation. The participants learnt that refugee women have an unbroken will to help shape society. At the same time, it became clear that integration can only succeed if both refugee women and social institutions treat each other as equal partners on an equal footing.

In my honourable function as a board member of ISI e.V., I would like to thank Negin Payam warmly for her practical recommendations for action - and especially for her committed and competent project management.

**Lucía Muriel -
Member of the Board of I.S.I. e.V.**



A word from the project manager

As a person with migration background, I learnt early on what it means when others speak for you without including your own voice. Even today, there is often a lack of trust in the ability of individuals with refugee or migration backgrounds to express their concerns, make their lived realities visible, and actively contribute to shaping societal processes. This experience shaped me—and sparked the vision for this project.

With GEtCoheSive at I.S.I. e.V., a space was created where refugee women are not seen as passive recipients of support, but as active agents—as experts of their own lived realities.

This booklet is not merely a project report, but a contribution to a much-needed shift in perspective: away from representation by others—toward self-representation.

Away from structures that decide over people—toward processes in which those affected co-create.

I would like to thank all participants, partners and supporters who have contributed to this project.

**Negin Payam,
Project Manager of the Pilot Programme**



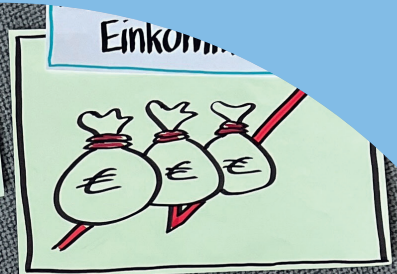
Table of contents:

- Introduction
- About I.S.I. e.V
- About GEtCoheSive
 - Main objectives of the project
 - Expected results
- GEtCoheSive at I.S.I. e.V
 - Increasing labour market opportunities for women with refugee experience
 - Project Goals of GEtCoheSive at I.S.I. e.V.
 - Guidelines for participatory work - "The I.S.I. e.V. Approach"
- Realisation of the project
 - Results of the workshop series
 - Final event „Hummus and Hustle“: Joint efforts to improve labour market access for refugee women
- Summary of recommendations for action for the labour market integration of refugee women
- Conclusion and outlook



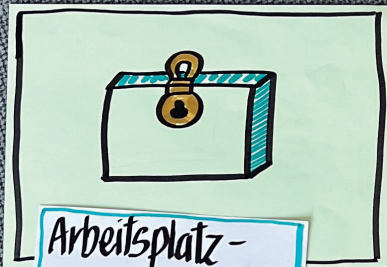


Kompetenz-
nachweis



Einkomm

Chancen auf dem
Arbeitsmarkt

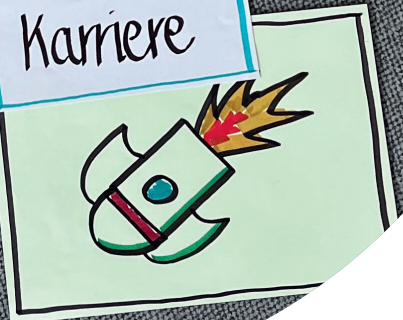


Arbeitsplatz-
sicherheit



Zugang zur
Bildung

Karriere



Introduction

Increasing labour market opportunities for refugee women

(The GEtCoheSive project in cooperation with I.S.I. e.V.)

The Governance Enhancement for a Cohesive Society (GEtCoheSive) project, in cooperation with Initiative Selbstständiger Immigrantinnen e.V. (I.S.I. e.V.), aims to address the challenges faced by refugee women—from language and cultural barriers to limited professional networks and insufficient resources. Through targeted workshops, specific topic areas, and platforms for exchange and participation, the project enables refugee women to sustainably improve their career and societal prospects.

About I.S.I. e.V. - „Initiative Selbstständiger Immigrantinnen e.V.“

(Initiative of Self-Employed
Immigrant Women)

I.S.I. e.V. is a non-profit organization based in Berlin dedicated to empowering migrant women by facilitating their access to self-employment and the labor market. The organization supports women with migration backgrounds in developing and implementing their own business ideas and establishing economic independence within German society.

By promoting entrepreneurship and professional integration, I.S.I. e.V. contributes to greater economic self-sufficiency and social inclusion. It offers a wide range of resources, training opportunities, and networking platforms to help women succeed in their professional and entrepreneurial endeavors.



About GEtCoheSive - Governance Enhancement for Cohesive Societies

GEtCoheSive is a project focused on developing and testing inclusive governance practices. It aims to promote citizen participation in local and regional political decision-making, particularly for people from vulnerable groups.

Main Project Objectives

1. Enhancing Citizen Participation:

The project responds to the growing interest of citizens in Central Europe to engage more actively in policymaking. Strategies are being developed to promote the inclusion and participation of citizens from underrepresented groups.

2. Development of Transnational Strategies:

In cooperation with partners from various cities, a transnational strategy is being developed to create local action plans. These plans aim to foster more cohesive societies in the participating cities.

3. Focus on Environmental and Social Policy:

The project places special emphasis on environmental policy and access to health and care services. It aims to improve participatory and deliberative processes that are crucial in these critical policy areas.

4. Co-Planning between Public Authorities and the Third Sector:

GEtCoheSive promotes collaboration between public authorities and third sector organizations to optimize access to services and the implementation of environmental policy measures.

5. Testing New Governance Practices:

By developing and testing new participatory governance practices, the project seeks to improve measures aimed at creating a fairer and more cohesive society.



Expected Outcomes

- **Higher Quality of Measures:**
Involving citizens from vulnerable groups will lead to improved quality in policy decisions.
- **Equality and Cohesion:**
The project aims to reduce social inequalities and strengthen community cohesion.
- **Strengthening Public Authorities:**
Enhancing the capacity of public institutions to communicate effectively with citizens and address their needs.

The GEtCoheSive project takes an inclusive approach to promoting an active civil society and improving governance on key social and environmental issues. The initiative aims to increase the participation and engagement of citizens while improving the quality of life in the participating cities.



GEtCoheSive at I.S.I. e.V.: Increasing Labor Market Opportunities for Refugee Women

As part of the GEtCoheSive pilot program, I.S.I. e.V. is implementing the project “Increasing Labour Market Opportunities for Refugee Women” (part of the EU-wide 12-pilot program) to improve the labor market opportunities and social participation of refugee women. The goal is to reduce structural barriers such as language obstacles, lack of networks, and limited access to information or political decision-making processes.

I.S.I. e.V.'s approach goes beyond traditional labor market measures: refugee women are specifically supported in advocating for their own interests autonomously and actively shaping societal frameworks, rather than being represented by NGOs or other third-party actors. Their perspectives are regarded as an essential contribution to building inclusive structures.

The project strengthens participants' agency, knowledge, and sense of self-efficacy, and provides a platform for active engagement. This not only fosters their individual integration but also contributes to the development of diversity-oriented political and social structures.



Relevance for Stakeholders

The project delivers concrete insights into barriers within the integration process and demonstrates how empowerment-based approaches can contribute to sustainable participation. Stakeholders from politics, administration, and civil society are encouraged to integrate these findings into their strategies and actions, and to systematically include refugee women as active co-creators.



Project Goals of GECohESive at I.S.I. e.V.

- **Empowerment of Refugee Women:**
Strengthening their ability to actively shape labor market and societal processes by removing structural barriers.
- **Amplifying Voices:**
Creating platforms where refugee women can share their experiences and are recognized as experts .
- **Removing Participation Barriers:**
Raising awareness within institutions and implementing targeted measures to improve access to the labor market, resources, and political processes.
- **Promoting Political Participation:**
Supporting refugee women in independently and visibly bringing their interests into political discourse—beyond traditional third-party representation.



Guidelines for participatory work - “The I.S.I. e.V. Approach”

In this pilot, a structured approach to **non-hierarchical** collaboration was developed and implemented, based on the principles of participatory governance (see box). The framework is built on five core principles that enable cooperative and fair collaboration:

- **Role Neutrality:**
Participants do not know who represents NGOs, public authorities, or other institutions—this prevents hierarchical dynamics.
- **World Café Methodology:**
A flexible discussion format that encourages open dialogue and free movement between groups.
- **Needs-Based Content:**
Content is tailored to diverse target groups, communication styles, and language needs (including, where needed, the use of visual tools).
- **Appropriate Feedback Mechanisms:**
Feedback mechanisms are integrated into the design of subsequent workshops, adapted to participants' language skills—to ensure greater transparency and comprehensibility.
- **Clear yet Flexible Structure:**
A clear framework for workshops, seminars, and dialogues that can be adapted to different contexts and needs.

Conclusion:

This methodology ensures that diverse perspectives are taken into account and supports the development of innovative, creative solutions. The structured approach makes participation processes inclusive, effective, and sustainable—with the active involvement of those directly affected.

Guidelines for the participatory approach

Basic principles of the approach

Objective:

This guide supports the long-term and effective implementation of participatory governance at the local level—with a focus on co-determination, empowerment, and sustainable participation.

Core Principles:

1. Empowerment:

Strengthen participants as experts of their own lived realities.

2. Accessibility:

Use low-threshold formats to reduce barriers.

3. Stakeholder Collaboration:

Foster close cooperation between communities and relevant actors.

Strategic Guidelines:

- **Inclusivity & Equity:**

Ensure the participation of all social groups, especially marginalized ones.

- **Sustainability & Scalability:**

Build long-term, adaptable participation structures.

- **Transparency & Trust:**

Create clear, understandable processes to build trust.



Methodological Implementation:

1. Community Outreach & Engagement

- Use multilingual information, local partners, and digital channels.

2. Workshops & Seminars:

- Multilingual, inclusive, and accessible (e.g., childcare, simultaneous interpretation).
- Non-hierarchical, open communication.
- Moderation with intercultural sensitivity.
- Flexible format: ongoing feedback and adaptation.

3. Strengthening Participants as Experts

- Promote practical learning methods, case studies, and peer-to-peer knowledge exchange within the community.



Implementation of the project

To strengthen the rights and opportunities of refugee women, I.S.I. e.V. conducted ten targeted workshops as part of the GEt-CoHeSive project. These workshops thoroughly prepared participants for a dialogue with political and societal decision-makers, which took place on September 4, 2024.

The workshops were held in the participants' native languages and focused on providing information, fostering self-determination, and strengthening awareness of personal rights. Topics included access to the labor market, legal frameworks, further education, and childcare. Using interactive and practice-oriented methods, the women were empowered to navigate social and professional life in Germany with greater confidence.

The highlight of the initiative was a dialogue event with representatives from politics, administration, and education, offering space for exchange, networking, and the joint development of concrete solutions to promote inclusive labor market integration.

Results of the workshop series

As part of the workshop series, key challenges and concrete solutions for the social and professional participation of refugee women were developed.

In terms of **access to the labour market**, the focus was on topics such as rights and obligations in the employment relationship, contract law and application practices. The obstacles identified included language barriers, unrecognised qualifications and stressful housing situations.

Solutions developed included labour market-oriented language courses, multilingual communication with authorities and flexible working models for mothers.

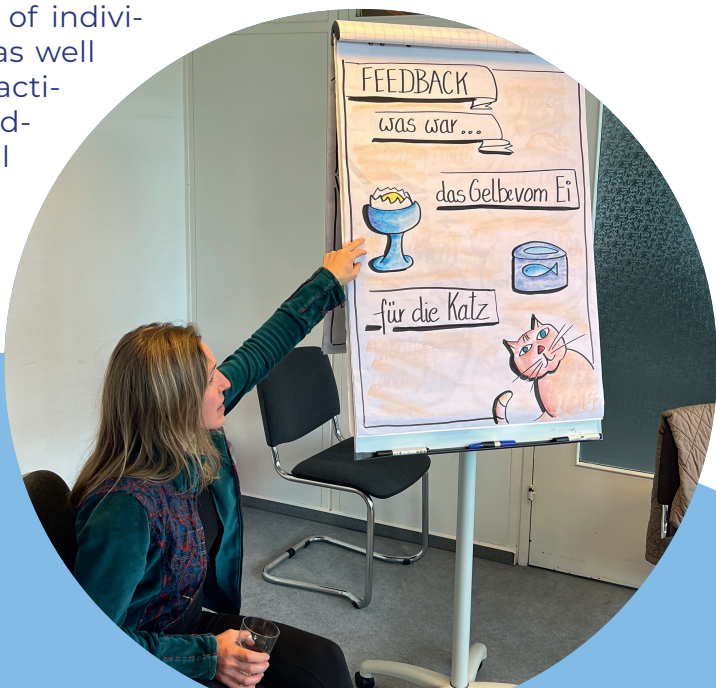


In the area of **career prospects**, the participants discussed possibilities for career guidance, qualification and motivation - for example through methods such as WOOP. A lack of information about local educational opportunities and Financial uncertainties were major obstacles. Language-adapted further education courses, scholarships and practical content to promote realistic career goals were suggested.

In the area of **further education**, the focus was on existing training programmes, Financing issues and digital research options. Language barriers, complicated recognition procedures and alack of childcare were identified as key challenges. Recommendations included in-service language support, simplified recognition procedures and family-friendly course formats.

Childcare was emphasised as another key aspect of social participation. The workshops provided information on legal entitlements, childcare vouchers and enrolment procedures. Long waiting times, language barriers and inflexible childcare times were cited as the biggest obstacles. Impulses for solutions lay in multilingual education, needs-orientated forms of childcare and better working conditions in the childcare sector.

Overall, the workshops showed that a holistic view of individual life situations as well as multilingual, practical and family-friendly services are crucial for successful social and professional participation.



Final Event „Hummus and Hustle“: Joint Efforts to Improve Labour Market Access to for Refugee Women

With “Hummus and Hustle”, an intensive workshop series came to a close—dedicated to strengthening labor market access for refugee women. The event created a space for genuine dialogue between refugee women and stakeholders from the fields of employment, education, and politics—with the shared goal of dismantling structural barriers and opening new pathways.

Objective

The focus was on how to sustainably improve refugee women’s access to the labor market. Beyond qualifications, the event highlighted systemic barriers and the need for political change. Participants were given a platform to directly share their experiences and perspectives—as experts of their own life realities.

Event Highlights

- **Personal stories** powerfully illustrated existing challenges—from complex recognition procedures to the lack of native-language support.
- **Katarina Niewiedzial**, Berlin’s Commissioner for Integration and Migration, acknowledged the women’s dedication and announced the introduction of an individual mentoring program—a key step toward tangible support.



Methodological Approach

The event was grounded in I.S.I. e.V.’s participatory Approach, which creates spaces for co-creation. The concept demonstrated how inclusive collaboration can lead to creative, practical, and lasting solutions.

Conclusion

“Hummus and Hustle” made one thing clear: refugee women not only show a strong willingness to integrate, but also bring valuable input for a more just and equitable labor market.

Systematically including their perspectives in political decision-making processes is essential for meaningful, long-term change.

The pilot project “Increasing Labour Market Opportunities for refugee women” has provided a vital platform for making these voices heard. This final event was not just a conclusion—but a beginning.

Summary of the recommendations for action for the labour market integration of refugee women

1. Faster Recognition of Qualifications

- **Multilingual Digital platforms** should simplify the recognition process (guides, with instructions, status tracking and automatic reminders).
- **Transparent evaluation procedures** in cooperation with chambers, universities and employers' organisations.
- **Free counselling** (online and in person) and mentors to support the recognition process.
- Pilot projects for **provisional recognition**
- **Flexible bridging qualification** with Financial support.



2. Alternative Certification Methods

- **Independent qualification assessment units** within existing structures (e.g. Chamber of Industry and Commerce) to assess undocumented professional experience.
- **Pre-certificates** for relevant work experience and skills provide employers with reliable assessment.
- **Sector-specific evaluations** via tests, interviews and work samples.
- Supplementary **Placement networks** and **digital learning opportunities** to upgrade specific skills

3. Flexible Transitional Solutions

- **Internships and trainee programmes** to gain work experience in Germany.
- **Temporary employment** during the recognition procedure.
- Legal certainty for transition models and **incentive systems for employers.**

4. Job-related language courses

- Sector-specific courses with practical content.
- Intergration with labour market measures, including **on-the-job language learning.**
- Flexible formats (part-time, e-learning) with a focus on **oral and job-related communication.**
- Close co-operation with companies for **practically designed curricula.**

5. Reduction of bureaucracy & Promoting Digitalization

- Central, multilingual platform for administrative processes (work permits, recognition of qualifications, further training funding, etc.).
- Digital application, video counselling, **automated evaluation procedures** (e.g. through the use of A.I.).
- **Strengthen cross-authority cooperation** by establishing a network and setting up a central „**one-stop shop**“ for bundled support and faster, standardized procedures.

6. Mentoring and Sponsorship Programmes

- **Professional mentors** support refugee women with applications, networking and goal setting.
- **Matching** based on career interests, language skills and culturally sensitive approach.
- **Creation** of a women as mentors network to address and share experiences of gender-specific challenges, who can act as multipliers.
- **Integration in companies** (e.g. sponsorship models), including training for mentors (e.g. coaching) and mentees (e.g. labour law).



7. Flexible work Models

- Customizable **part-time, flex-time** and **remote work** options.
- Flexible shift systems, lifetime working time models.
- Promote **a family-friendly corporate culture** with dedicated contacts for work-life balance issues.

8. Expansion of Childcare

- Expansion of available childcare spots, including **company-organised services**.
- Integration of childcare into training programs and **intercultural training for childcare staff**.

9. Awareness & Anti-discrimination in Companies

- Mandatory staff training on **diversity, intercultural competence** and **discrimination**.
- Clear anti-discrimination guidelines in corporate policies and contracts ; **anonymous reporting systems**.
- **Leader act as role models and multipliers**, inclusion of refugee women in training formats (e.g. round table dialogue).
- **Cooperation with specialist agencies and certification initiatives** for non-discriminatory companies.



10. Improved Cooperation between Authorities and Civil society

- **Regular exchange** between job centres, employment agencies, companies and civil society organisations to improve the placement of refugee women.
- **Cooperation programmes** where civil society organisations prepare applicants and public authorities match them with job openings.
- Workshops for companies on the **legal framework** and **funding opportunities**.

11. Establishment of a Central Contact Hub for Refugee Women

- A Centralized counseling center with **multilingual services**, connecting authorities, companies, training providers, and civil society actors.
- **Low-threshold access:** walk-in counseling without appointment, also available by phone and online.
- **Mobile counselling services** in shelters or neighbourhoods to target women who are difficult to reach.

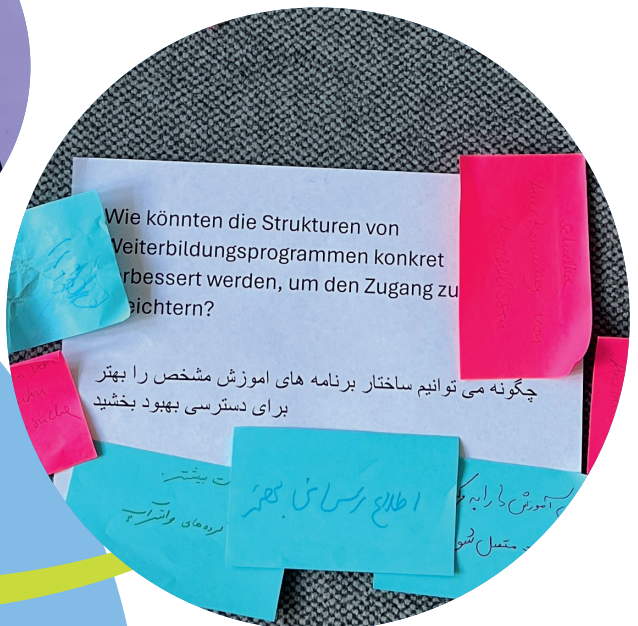


Conclusion and outlook

The proposed measures are crucial to dismantling structural barriers and improving refugee women's access to the labor market and full participation in society.

The GEtCoheSive project illustrates how targeted, needs-based approaches can support refugee women in overcoming barriers and unlock their potential. The combination of empowerment, practical workshops and active involvement in decision-making processes not only improved the professional opportunities of the participants, but also strengthened their long term integration into society.

The policy recommendations developed offer a solid foundation for future integration strategies — highlighting that successful integration is only possible through the combined efforts of politics, business, and civil society.





Projektumsetzung: Negin Payam

Redaktion:

Negin Payam

Prof. Dr. Shahin Payam

Website:

<https://isi-ev.de/getcohesive/>

<https://www.interreg-central.eu/projects/getcohesive/>



get_cohesive



<https://www.facebook.com/GovernmentEnhancementforCohesiveSocieties>



GEtCoheSive Governance Enhancement for Cohesive Society



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b6HfTuSnIC0>



Interreg
CENTRAL EUROPE



Co-funded by
the European Union



GEtCohESive

