



Immigrant women, e-skills & employability in Europe

*The case of Hungary, Italy,
the Netherlands, Romania & Spain*

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ABSTRACT

There is much research on the role of e-skills in advancing employability among disadvantaged groups, but little is known about the way in which these skills can promote the economic integration of immigrant women in the European Union, or how improving digital competences and access to computers and the Internet can foster social inclusion. This study contributes to filling this gap, investigating the role of e-skills in advancing the employability of immigrant women in four countries: Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, and Spain. Romania is included for comparison, as a source of migration. The conceptual framework builds on Amartya Sen's capabilities approach, as well as on the EU's *Framework on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning*. Based on a survey of 375 immigrant and 155 native-born women, and supplemented by interviews with staff at non-government organizations, this research examines three interrelated paths that, we argue, lead to improved employability: education and lifelong learning, social inclusion, and cultural inclusion. Findings suggest that strengthening e-skills among immigrant women is an important factor in advancing along these three paths, potentially improving women's position in the labor market. In addition, NGOs play a pivotal role in promoting social, economic, and cultural integration and in promoting many of the competences identified by the European Union as critical to succeed in today's labor market.

KEYWORDS

e-skills, immigrant women, employability, ICT skills, digital competences, ICTD, technology & social change

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the last decade, women are migrating in greater numbers — and with greater impact on their families, countries of origin, and host societies — for the purpose of finding work. Women now account for more than fifty percent of the immigrant population in most countries of the European Union, with the exception of Slovakia, Lithuania, and Romania, where male immigrants still dominate. Most of the current migration of women to the European Union is now employment-oriented. Nevertheless, it is widely recognized that this population of women faces a “double disadvantage” in the labor market, as women and as migrants.

This study examines the effects of non-governmental organization (NGO) e-Skills training programs on the employability and social inclusion of immigrant women in Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Hungary, and Romania. It investigates the social and economic trajectory of 530 women who have received e-Skills training and employability support services in 32 NGOs. It provides insights into the challenges facing immigrant women in the labor market, the role of NGOs’ e-Skills training and employability programs, and public policies and program elements that could further promote the social, economic, and cultural participation of immigrant women in the EU.

The study’s conceptual framework builds on the “capabilities approach” of Amartya Sen. It begins with a focus on the capabilities of the immigrant women, as they move from their countries of origin into a new life in their new home country. The process of adaptation and inclusion is conceptualized in terms of three “paths,” all leading towards a more fulfilling level of social and economic participation. These are the *education and lifelong learning path*, the *social inclusion path*, and the *cultural inclusion path*.

This path model of social integration in turn builds on the European Reference Framework on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning. The eight basic competences are identified as: communication in the mother tongue; communication in a foreign language; mathematical literacy and basic competences in science and technology; digital competence; learning-to-learn; interpersonal and civic competences; entrepreneurship; and cultural expression. This study draws on the discussion of the key competences, focusing on digital skills, language competence, social and civil skills, and cultural participation.

The study addresses three questions that are particularly relevant to the design of programs to support the integration of immigrant women in the EU:

- What role can digital competences play to promote the integration of immigrant women into the EU labor market?
- How are these competences linked to other key competences, such as social and cultural participation and skills?
- And what is the role that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play in different aspects of immigrant women’s lives?

The survey instrument (including open-ended as well as directed questions) was accordingly designed to yield a rounded picture of various aspects of the participants’ lives and backgrounds — including educational, cultural, and social aspects, as well as their employment situation and reasons for migrating. The study also focused on the role played by the NGOs in all these aspects of the women’s lives.

WOMEN'S PROFILE

The sample included 375 immigrant women and a group of 155 native-born women from the EU countries included in the study (Romania, Hungary, Italy, Spain, Hungary, and the Netherlands). The immigrant women came originally from 64 countries from different regions of the world, with half of them coming from five countries: Morocco, Ecuador, Nigeria, Peru, and Ukraine.

Most are fairly recent migrants: 80% immigrated within the past ten years. Their average age is 36, and most are between the ages of 25 and 49. There is some variation across countries: the immigrant women in the Netherlands are slightly older (average age 43) while women in Hungary are the youngest (average age 30). Most are married or have partners; most have children living with them, and the rest have children living in the country of origin.

Roughly half of the sample migrated to find employment; roughly one-third migrated to join family members or a spouse — again, with significant differences between countries. Most have (at most) a high school education (with variation between countries). Almost ninety percent speak a language in addition to their mother tongue, and most speak two or three additional languages.

EMPLOYMENT

Most of the immigrant women in the sample are of working age. Most had been employed in their country of origin, and more than one-third had held professional or technical positions. Less than half, however, are currently employed — and most of them are employed in service or elementary occupations (cleaning, restaurant work, caregiving, etc.).

Most of the women report that their earnings are not adequate to support their families, and they rely on additional sources of income. Only 13% rely on government unemployment subsidies.

Those with professional positions in their country of origin also held professional positions in the host country. This was not the case, however, for those holding technical and associate professional positions in the country of origin, or for skilled craft workers; these women tend to be limited to positions that make no use of their prior training and experience. In many EU-countries, research has shown that the overqualification rates for female migrants are significantly higher than for native-born women.

In general, we found a definite disconnect between the level of prior education/employment and their current employment situation, for most of the sample of immigrant women. Credentials are part of the problem: the lack of official recognition of home-country achievements severely limits access to educational as well as employment opportunities.

DIGITAL SKILLS

Most of the immigrant women have a basic level of computer literacy, but one-fifth reported having no computer or Internet skills. Another one-fifth reported having intermediate-level skills. There are significant differences among the countries: Italy has the highest percentage with *no* computer or Internet skills, followed by Hungary and Spain. The Netherlands sample has on average the highest e-Skills level.

Fully 70% of the immigrant women sampled use computers and Internet at least once a week, predominantly for communicating with distant family members, job searches, and studying.

NGO PARTICIPATION

After family/friends, NGOs are the most important channel for immigrant women in finding employment, improving their e-skills, and using information and communication technologies.

- NGOs serve as a channel for finding employment, either by employing women directly or by facilitating employment through a network of links.
- An important element of NGO services is providing training in e-skills, as well as free or low-cost access to PC and Internet. NGO training programs use interactive, informal teaching methods, presenting ICT in concrete ways by applying the new skills to practical tasks.

EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING PATH

Providing access to education and training is key to advance the employability of immigrant women. Immigrant women clearly identify access to education and training opportunities as critical to improve their social and economic status in the EU, even though most (especially those with middle or high education level) have jobs that do *not* utilize their education or specialization.

- Recognition of their educational credentials remains a central concern; e-government procedures, as a means of bureaucracy simplification, might be designed to alleviate this inequality.
- Non-recognition of educational credentials is a barrier to formal education as well as to employability. Many immigrant women take advantage of non-formal training courses offered by NGOs, and would undoubtedly benefit from more formal training in these areas.

Information and communication technologies (ICT) knowledge is relevant for their employability. There are strong correlations between length of residence and ICT skills level (the most recent immigrants tend to have the lowest digital competence level); between ICT skills level and educational background; and between ICT skills level and current employment status (immigrant women with basic or no ICT skills have higher levels of unemployment).

Immigrant women in general have a basic level of computer literacy, but there are differences among the countries. Italy has the highest percentage with *no* computer or Internet skills, followed by Hungary and Spain. The Netherlands sample has the highest ICT skill levels.

E-Skills can help in overcoming language barriers, a significant factor in finding employment. Migrant women are motivated to acquire both host-country language *and* digital competence. The process of language acquisition could be facilitated or accelerated by ICT in various ways, including e-learning as well as the non-formal learning that occurs in digital literacy courses.

The many opportunities presented by new technology constitute a challenge for the NGOs that serve as ICT learning channels for immigrant women. These important organizations need to adapt their strategies to fully address the needs of this population, taking advantage of e-learning and Web 2.0 resources for social, professional, and commercial networking.

Social organizations are aware that digital competence has a broad range of benefits. Most use e-skills training not only to enhance language skills but also to promote self-esteem, autonomy, and social and cultural skills. In keeping with their not-for-profit orientation, however, NGOs tend not to address the business potential of the Internet. We suggest that immigrant women — as people who have already embarked on a major undertaking in immigrating — should be encouraged to assume a reasonable risk and create their own job or business endeavor.

SOCIAL INCLUSION PATH

Both the immigrant women and the native-born group were active participants in various social spaces and civic networks, in most cases extending beyond their own ethnic communities.

SOCIAL AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

In general, NGOs serve a crucial function for immigrant women for both social integration and labor market integration. Overall, 88% of respondents participate in activities organized by the participating NGOs, with the immigrant women making more use of NGO services than the group of native-born women. Participation in NGO services is often the “diving board” for learning social and civic skills.

The overwhelming majority of both the immigrant women and the native-born group cited recommendations from friends and family and NGO as the most important links to finding a job. The most effective network channels, as cited by respondents, differ by country of residence: in the Netherlands and Spain it is NGOs (and, in Spain, employment agencies as well); in Italy and Hungary, family and friends networks are rated most effective.

EMPLOYABILITY

The non-profit “third sector” plays a fundamental role in supporting the employability of immigrant women. In addition to providing training in e-skills, several NGOs are also directly addressing three forms of labor discrimination that disadvantage women: wage differentials, vertical job discrimination, and professional segregation.

Another important dimension of NGO effectiveness is as a channel for finding employment: acting as a “greenhouse” by employing women directly, or facilitating employment through a network of links. In general, more respondents seek employment opportunities through their private social networks — including NGOs — than through public employment agencies.

Moreover, by participating in NGO activities, the women are able to enhance their “social and civic skills” — a competence that they rank as highly relevant for improving their employment situation. In general, the attitudes expressed by the sample of immigrant women show them to be “oriented to change,” in the phrase used by Muhammad Yunus, and ready to engage in paths of growth in order to improve their lives.

PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED BY RESPONDENTS

The public services of the four countries are far from fully adequate to address the specific needs of immigrant women. More efficient public services, tailored to meet women’s specific needs, could maximize their potential contribution and their opportunities to express their roles of social and economic agent.

Immigrant women in the sample cited different types of problems they face in the EU. These include: language-learning, employment issues, social marginalization, and bureaucratic procedures. The suggestions they offered tend to focus on social inclusion at the local and regional level, and particularly on the quality of public and non-profit services and employment centers.

CULTURAL INCLUSION PATH

We found that cultural skills were not generally accorded high ratings by the immigrant women. For those who rated cultural skills highly, however, the appreciation of cultural skills appears to “close the gap” in attitudes between the foreign-born and the European-born respondents.

The survey also asked respondents whether they participate in cultural and artistic activities. The group who ranked highest on this measure tended to have higher rates of employment, especially in high-skilled jobs and as entrepreneurs, and higher levels of job satisfaction. They were more likely to attend social events and vocational training, and had a higher level of competence in the host-country language (self-reported). They also use Internet significantly more than the rest of the sample, and are more likely to attend e-skills classes.

Finally, the more “culturally active” group are more likely to be members of nonprofit organizations, to work in the nonprofit sector, and to participate in social networks. This finding appears to support one of our working assumptions: Cultural participation and expression may be related to active participation in intercultural groups and social networks, fostering leadership roles and a sense of social responsibility. This is a complex question that would repay more detailed study in future research.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Most immigrant women experience difficulties such as lack of employment opportunities or underemployment, bureaucratic restrictions on the formal transfer of educational credentials, problems of family-work reconciliation, limited knowledge of local language, and lack of familiarity with information and communication technologies. These issues need to be addressed with targeted strategies.

PUBLIC SERVICES

When asked what the EU can do to improve their lives, most of the women wanted increased assistance to find employment, and to facilitate the process of obtaining residency papers or work permits.

A particular issue to resolve is the *transfer of educational credentials*, to facilitate not only employability but also further educational opportunities. E-government procedures, as a means of bureaucracy simplification, could be designed to address this critical issue.

Targeted awareness-raising campaigns could do much to promote the opportunities that technology offers for self-employment, entrepreneurship, and commercial initiatives. Related initiatives could emphasize the importance of lifelong learning, and open channels for dialogue with public agencies.

ICT TRAINING

ICT training makes a difference. Immigrant women who have had e-Skills training show higher computer and Internet skill level and more diverse activities using computers and Internet (especially for job search). e-Skills can also help in overcoming language barriers, a significant factor in finding employment. *The process of language acquisition could be facilitated or accelerated by ICT in various ways, including e-learning as well as the non-formal learning that occurs in digital literacy courses.*

NGO SERVICES

There is much room for expanding and improving the e-Skills training offered by NGOs. With currently limited facilities, organizations are unable to meet the demand for courses and for access to computers. NGOs that seek to update and expand their digital literacy programs are limited by lack of resources.

- One suggested strategy is to develop *e-learning resources* that could be shared by many organizations, such as the European project “Key Competences for All.”
- NGO ICT training could become still more valuable if their programs could provide some *official certification*.
- The many opportunities presented by new technology constitute a challenge for NGOs to mobilize these resources, including Web 2.0 resources for social, professional, and commercial networking.

In keeping with their not-for-profit orientation, NGOs tend not to address the business potential of the Internet, a channel that presents a range of opportunities for immigrant women. Indeed, as people who have already embarked on a major undertaking in immigrating, immigrant women should be encouraged to consider undertaking entrepreneurial projects more generally. NGOs can help them to explore the opportunities for independent jobs, teleworking, and commercial activities.

In view of the critical role they play in advancing social and economic inclusion, NGOs represent a high-return area for public and private funding and support. In general, the overall picture of the background, activities, and aspirations of the immigrant women surveyed give strong support to an approach that views them as partners in the process of advancing their social, cultural, and economic inclusion in the host country.

1

INTRODUCTION: THE ROLE OF DIGITAL COMPETENCES IN ADVANCING THE EMPLOYABILITY

OF IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Fostered by globalization, human mobility persists and even increases, migrating from underdeveloped countries to Europe and across borders within Europe. The old continent debates whether to reject the mass of population who are currently unable to pass through the gateways of legality (work and residence permits, citizenship),¹ or whether to bow to economic need and incorporate massive numbers of immigrants into local labor markets. Such an approach would not only fill the many job positions undesired by native workers, but also help sustain social security systems² — and even guarantee enhanced labor rights to native workers.³

Meanwhile, migrants don't stop coming to Europe. And these migrations are increasingly feminized, in some countries. While countries with a longer tradition of welcoming immigrants — such as the Netherlands, in our sample — begin to accept their multiculturalism, newly receiving countries tend to show more prejudice and social rejection toward the foreigners. This is especially the case when economic crisis generates panic about the future, as in Italy or Spain.

In this context, immigrant women face a double challenge, as migrants and as women. Even the best educated immigrant women suffer discrimination, relegated to the less desired jobs at the base of the pyramid; and even when they have the resources to progress to better jobs, there is normally a significant gap between their prior training and their current employment. In other words, their capacities are not always recognized, validated, or well utilized.

1.1 Migrant women's "double disadvantage" in the EU labor market

The so-called "double disadvantage" experienced by migrant women in the labor market is in part the result of an environment of unequal opportunity which negatively affects both women and migrants.⁴ Migrant women have more difficulties integrating into the labor market than either native-born women or migrant men. Indeed, they face a double battle: first, to integrate socially and culturally as foreign-born people in their host country; second, and equally important, to overcome the gender bias in the labor market as well as in other areas of social, political and economic life (including difficulties in balancing work and family life, especially for those bringing up children). Migrant women may also face additional hurdles, including some arising from cultural orientations in their country of origin, relating to their role in the family and their ability to contribute financially to the household.

Any discussion of ways to improve the employability of immigrant women in the EU labor market must consider an array of factors that may not necessarily apply to other groups that also face barriers to

¹ As discussed by José Martínez de Pisón from a Philosophy of Rights perspective in Martínez de Pisón (2004).

² *Inmigración y Economía Española* (2006).

³ For example, the domestic employment of migrant women supported equal job opportunities for native women, as explained in Rissola et al. (2009).

⁴ Rubin et al. (2008).

employment. A recent study by Rand Europe⁵ succinctly outlined some of the most important factors affecting the employment opportunities of migrant women and their position in the labor market, relative to both native women and migrant men:

- Migration patterns differ significantly between the “old” migrant-receiving countries of Western Europe (UK, France, Germany, Netherlands, etc.) and the “new” migrant-receiving countries, most notably Italy, Spain, and some countries of Eastern Europe.
- Third-country (non-EU) migrant women in Europe have on average higher unemployment rates than native-born women, EU-born migrant women or third-country migrant men.
- Migrant women experience a much greater disparity in unemployment rates in the “old” migrant-receiving countries of Western Europe than in other European countries. Furthermore, migrant women experience a disparity in earnings, compared to native-born women in the host country, of around 40% at the time of their arrival.⁶
- Underemployment is greater among migrant women than among either migrant men or native-born women. As many as a third of the migrant women in the labor forces of Belgium, France, and Sweden are either unemployed or involuntarily part-time employed, as are a quarter of the female migrant labor forces of Spain and Greece.
- Rates of temporary-contract employment are generally higher for migrant women than for native-born women. More than half of all employed migrant women in Spain and Cyprus have temporary contracts, compared to a third of native-born women in those countries.

Apart from labor market inequalities, other factors shape employment opportunities for immigrant women. Critical factors include not only the particular “incorporation model” of cultural diversity⁷ in each country, but also the initial conditions that motivated their migration, and the character of the social networks through which they integrate into the labor market. The hurdles migrant women face as they integrate into the receiving country labor market are complex, reflecting their personal motivations for migration, family structures and women’s role within the household, cultural traits and social networks, and the political environment in the host country.

In this context, what role can digital competences play to promote the integration of immigrant women into the EU labor market? Can these skills support the employability of individuals who are doubly disadvantaged, as immigrants and as women? Are digital competences linked to other key competences, such as social and cultural participation and skills? Are digital competences related to other aspects of educational achievement, or other socio-demographic characteristics? What circumstances favor increased and better use of ICTs? Under what conditions does ICT enhance employability? These are some of the most pressing questions we examine in this research.

These questions also have broad — and increasing — relevance for labor market policies, as the EU economies evolve in the digital era towards a productive system based primarily on information and knowledge.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Adsera et al. (2007).

⁷ Kluzer & Hache (2009) identify the dominant incorporation models for migration as *assimilation* (until the end of the 1970s) and later *integration* (starting from the 1980s), which often aimed, implicitly or explicitly, at having the immigrants adopt the host-country culture.

1.2 Preparing the EU workforce to succeed in the knowledge society: Key Competences for Lifelong Learning

In March 2000, the Lisbon European Council set a new strategic goal for the European Union: to become “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.” To achieve this, Europe’s education and training systems were required to adapt to the demands of the knowledge society, as well as to the need for an improved level and quality of employment.

One of the main components of this approach is the promotion of basic skills that everyone should have the opportunity to acquire through lifelong learning, skills that become the essential basis for further learning. These “key competences” are: *literacy and numeracy (foundation skills); basic competences in mathematics, science and technology; ICT and use of technology; learning to learn; and social skills, entrepreneurship, and general culture.* The Barcelona Council’s conclusions (2002) stressed the need for action to improve the mastery of those basic skills, notably *digital literacy* (together with *foreign languages*). Subsequently, a special working group on key competences introduced a *European framework for the eight key competences* (2004) outlining the corresponding knowledge, skills, and attitudes that relate to these domains.⁸ This document became an essential reference for the “Education and Training 2010” work program, for the Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013, and for national policies in many European countries.

EUROPE 2020: LABOR MARKET TRENDS AND RELATED SKILL NEEDS

A predictive analysis by CEDEFOP of the skill needs in Europe for 2020⁹ provided the basis for the EC communication *New Skills for New Jobs - Anticipating and matching labor market and skills needs*,¹⁰ underlining the skills challenge Europe will face during this decade. The analysis predicts an accelerating pace of change in labor market and skill requirements due to many factors, including globalization and increased international trade, aging populations, urbanization, and evolution of social structures. Despite the current unpredictable scenario due to the financial crisis, there are two factors that offer great potential for the creation of sustainable jobs: the shift to a low-carbon economy and the growing importance of the knowledge economy across Europe (exemplified by the diffusion of ICTs and nano-technologies). These new jobs will undoubtedly require more sophisticated abilities on the part of workers.

CEDEFOP’s long-term forecast anticipates the emergence by 2020 of 80.4 million replacement jobs and 19.6 million new jobs, almost 75% of them in services. The new jobs will be generated predominantly by business services, while the primary sector could lose 2.9 million jobs. As construction stabilizes, manufacturing would experience a net loss of 800,000 jobs, despite an increase in engineering jobs — and in spite of strong replacement demand in manufacturing.

The middle-term forecast, up to 2015, predicts net job creation in several fields: business services (such as IT, insurance, or consultancy), health care and social work, distribution, personal services, hotels and catering, and to a lesser extent in education. It predicts that the transition toward a low-carbon economy will increase employment in several fields — energy, water and waste treatment,

⁸ See: *Key Competences For Lifelong Learning - A European Reference Framework* (2007).

⁹ CEDEFOP, *Skill Needs in Europe. Focus on 2020. Luxembourg*, 2008. CEDEFOP is the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training.

¹⁰ Communication of the European Communities (DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities) (2008).

construction, transport, industry, agriculture and forestry. Europe's demographic deficit will be ameliorated by the increasing participation of older workers, women, and migrants; even so, there is a risk of future labor shortages.

Skill level and qualification requirements will increase significantly, across all types and levels of occupation, creating a need to ensure a better long-term match between skill supply and labor demand. Jobs requiring high levels of educational qualification (beyond high school diploma) are predicted to rise from 25% to 31% by 2015; jobs requiring medium-level educational qualification would also increase slightly, from 48% to 50%, while jobs requiring low levels of educational qualification would *decline* dramatically, from 26% to 19%.

Non-manual skilled occupations will mainly require highly qualified workers; and higher skill levels will be necessary across all occupations. Workers with medium educational qualifications will increasingly fill skilled manual occupations and even elementary jobs. Only half of elementary jobs will be held by workers with low educational attainment, with overall education rates increasing at a faster rate than labor market expansion.

IMPACT ON EUROPE'S WORKFORCE PROFILE

This trend to expansion of high-skilled jobs also entails an emerging risk of labor market polarization. Net job creation projections indicate:

- 17.7 million additional jobs created in high-skilled non-manual occupations: administrative, marketing, logistics and sales managers, IT systems administrators, teaching professionals, technicians
- Low or even negative job creation in some skilled occupations
- 5 million additional elementary jobs, mainly in the service sector: security, domestic work, cashiers, cleaning services
- Job growth at the higher and lower ends of the spectrum will leave a shrinking middle range of employment. These labor market changes are related to trends in technology:
- New technologies and modern work organization drive job expansion at the higher level of the job spectrum.
- New technologies can displace medium-skilled, routine tasks and repetitive work through automation and computerization — tasks that can also in many cases be outsourced; technology cannot substitute for the "non-routine" tasks that are typical of both high- or low-skilled occupations.

Service sector employment will also experience significant changes. There is a clear trend in the service sector towards a broader skills portfolio for *all* occupational levels, driven by the application of technologies (especially ICT) as well as by changes in work organization, including, of course, changes responding to technology. ICT professionals will have to develop skills in marketing or management; service workers will have to develop customer orientation skills and digital literacy; knowledge-intensive sectors require both managerial skills and scientific knowledge; and social care and education positions will require further skills upgrading, including digital competence. This pattern is seen in the growing demand by employers for transversal key competences, such as problem-solving and analytical skills, self-management and communication skills, linguistic skills, and more generally, "non-routine skills."

"Low-skilled" service sector jobs thus increasingly require more demanding, non-routine tasks, but there is little financial recognition of the new competences and skills they require. Thus, while gender may be no longer a discriminatory factor in other areas, migrant women may continue to experience a gender disadvantage because they disproportionately hold service sector jobs.

1.3 EU labor markets: Prospects and policies

CEDEFOP's projection of labor market needs through 2020 envisions significant potential for employment creation in Europe in the medium and long term, but this trend (as we have seen) demands upgrading skills — both for high-tech jobs and for low-skilled workers who are at risk of exclusion from the labor market.

To respond to the nature of the new jobs, and to improve the adaptability and employability of workers, European education and training systems must generate those new skills, including the basic skills and learning that are pre-requisites for further updating of skills. The European Economic Recovery Plan includes a major initiative aiming to promote employment and reintegration into the labor market through *activation, retraining and skills upgrading*.

A central challenge, however, will be to address the individual circumstances of various member states and regions, with their widely differing workforce skill profiles and sector distribution of employment. So far, too little is being done to increase and adapt the skills of an aging workforce, despite the fact that, for most member states, skills mismatches in the labor market have been a growing concern. As the EC Communication emphasizes, upgrading skills to promote employability is a necessity not only for those involved in high-tech jobs, but for *all* segments of the workforce,.

Some groups need special attention:

- the low skilled, who are more vulnerable in any crisis context and who are much less likely to participate in lifelong learning
- the aging workforce, for whom too little has been done to increase or adapt their skills to the new scenarios
- the migrant population, who face many problems in adapting their skills to the requirements of host labor markets — usually learning through alternative non-formal and informal channels, or even autonomously

The Communication in fact accords special attention to the migrant population. It identifies as a matter of economic policy the goal of ensuring that *non-EU migrants' skills can be used at an optimal level*. The geographical mobility of immigrants can help reduce regional skills mismatches — but this would require coordinated action for the benefit of the whole workforce: removing obstacles to the free movement of workers in the EU; more transparent information on labor market trends and skill requirements; enhanced coordination between various public employment services and social security systems; and, in the case of migrant women, reducing gender imbalances (e.g., in technical and managerial occupations).

THE ROLE OF E-SKILLS AS A CATALYST OF EMPLOYABILITY IN EUROPE'S KNOWLEDGE-BASED ECONOMY

The i2010 Annual Report¹¹ found that, in 2007, a full 40% of the EU population have *no* Internet skills. Even higher percentages are seen for older age groups, those outside the labor force, and those with a low level of education. The percentage of women with no Internet skills is similar to that of men.

Over the past decade, EU policies have fostered three generations of digital literacy programs: the first stage focused on extending access; the second stage promoted basic Internet use; and the third stage aims to promote more sophisticated and sustainable digital skills. The 2008 Digital Literacy European Commission Working Paper and the High Level Expert Group, in a joint evaluation, judged that the first- and second-generation programs have resulted in regular use of the Internet, supported by increased computer and Internet skill levels. Nevertheless, a lot still needs to be done to improve the position of disadvantaged groups.

We also see a need to address an emerging secondary digital divide, relating to quality of use. There is evidence that disadvantaged groups use the Internet less intensively than other groups. A first step would be to increase confidence and trust in the use of technologies for these groups. People with a low level of education, those outside the labor force, and older users lack confidence to transact business online and use public electronic services. Another important step is to improve the skills for critical thinking, in all age groups. This is part of the third stage focus on promoting critical thinking, trust, and confidence, as well as multiplatform use; most EU countries are currently starting to develop these third-generation initiatives.

Both initiatives on the ground and research studies have shown the importance of addressing digital literacy needs in the context of local socio-economic trends and policies. Equally important is to promote online public services (such as eGovernment and eHealth) and formal and informal networks, adapting them to the specific requirements of targeted populations. Such initiatives can help upgrade skills and avoid creating new marginalized groups of the digitally disadvantaged. It is widely recognized that, for disadvantaged groups, a key role is played by local social structures such as PIAPS (Public Internet Access Points), NGOs, etc.¹²

Gender equality also emerges as a key factor in responding to new skill needs, as it could ameliorate future skill shortages, for example in technical and managerial occupations. Along the same lines, the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum highlights that employment and geographical mobility of third-country (non-EU) immigrant workers can help reduce skills mismatches, and ensure that their skills can be used at the optimal level; indeed, the successful integration of migrants and their descendants is considered a key factor for EU economies and societies. In this context, e-skills training might act as a catalyst for improving the employability of immigrant women in the framework of a European knowledge-based economy.

While recent policies and programs launched by the Commission stress the importance of the upcoming Knowledge Society and the Lisbon Goals, there are still important differences to be resolved between European policy and member countries' policies, relating to migration, gender, training and employment, and e-Inclusion. Debate continues around the increasingly multicultural character of European society, accelerated by internal mobility and massive migrations from third countries. Much still needs to be done, in terms of engendering public support, to appropriately address the situation of migrant women in labor and education policies and programs.

¹¹ Communications for the European Commission (2008).

¹² Rissola (2007a) & Rissola (2007b).

THE ROLE OF EU SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS IN PROMOTING “KEY COMPETENCES” FOR DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

Social organizations and NGOs play a key role as intermediaries between disadvantaged groups and the labor market, in the European Union and around the world. Dozens of NGOs¹³ in the European Union provide basic digital competence training, as well as a wide range of employment and social services to prepare a workforce to meet the demands of today’s labor market. Even though NGOs are only one provider of basic ICT skills among many, we argue that these organizations are particularly suited to function as intermediaries between the most disadvantaged groups and the labor market, as compared to private training providers and even, in some cases, government programs.¹⁴

There are several reasons why social organizations are often more successful in reaching disadvantaged groups:

- Many NGOs have a well-established relationship of trust with the communities they serve.
- In many cases, NGOs represent an important social hub, where people can learn and develop a variety of social skills through interaction with other trainees while expanding their social network.
- Several NGOs incorporate employability outcomes as part of their social mission, and make basic ICT training and other services more accessible for more-at-risk groups (immigrant groups, people with physical disabilities, etc.).
- In many places, NGOs uniquely provide basic ICT training that is affordable or free for low-income groups.
- These organizations function as bridges to expanded social networks, allowing members of disadvantaged communities to develop new ties, new relationships, and new social skills that are just as important as ICT skills for success in the labor market.
- NGOs often design their ICT training programs as a catalyst to develop other skills that are pivotal to succeed in the labor market, such as teamwork, collaboration, and communication.

1.4 Objective and structure of the report

Although there is a plethora of research around the role of digital competences in enhancing the employability of disadvantaged groups, there is little specific information about the situation of immigrant women. How can these competences advance the economic integration of immigrant women into the EU labor market? Can these skills promote social and cultural integration as well?

The objective of this study is to understand the contribution of digital competences to advance the employability of immigrant women in five European Union countries: *Spain, Italy, The Netherlands, Hungary, and Romania* (as a source country). Based on a survey administered to 375 immigrant women and 155 local women (as a comparison group), and interviews with the staff of social organizations, the research explores the role of digital competences in relation to three interrelated paths to improving employability:

1. *Education and Lifelong Learning path*

¹³ Consult Telecentre-Europe for information on many social organizations that provide digital competence training and other social services for disadvantaged groups in the EU: <http://telecentreeurope.ning.com/>.

¹⁴ Chapple (2005); West & Garrido (2007).

2. *Social inclusion path*

3. *Cultural inclusion path*

In addition, the research highlights the role of social organizations in promoting social, economic, and cultural integration of immigrant women, and in advancing many of the “key competences” identified by the European Union as critical to succeed in today’s labor market. Conceptually, the research draws on Amartya Sen’s *capabilities* approach as well as on discussions of *employability in the knowledge economy*, as advanced by researchers and policy-makers in the recent decade.

In this chapter, we have reviewed the European Union policy context regarding “key competences” for advancing employability in a knowledge economy, highlighting the role of digital competences in the employment equation and the role of NGOs in helping disadvantaged groups acquire these competences. The structure of the rest of the study is as follows:

Chapter 2 describes the theoretical framework that guides this research as well as the methodology.

Chapter 3 presents a brief socio-demographic profile of the immigrant women who participated in the study.

Chapters 4 to 6 analyze the survey data and interviews in relation to the three paths to employability, assessing the contribution of e-skills to autonomy, access to training opportunities, social networking, and cultural participation.

Chapter 7 elaborates the overall findings in relation to the research hypothesis: that e-skills can serve as a catalyst, helping to advance important elements of the three paths leading to employability.

Improving the opportunities and employability of immigrant women in Europe is more than an issue of individual and social well-being. The current economic crises highlight the urgency of crafting new policies that will optimize the participation of workforces in European economies. In that context, enhancing the participation of immigrant women will be an essential component of success.

2 RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

In the last decade, women are migrating in greater numbers — and with greater impact on their families, countries of origin, and host societies — for the purpose of finding work. Once, women migrated primarily to form a family or reunite with their love ones living abroad.¹⁵ Today, a growing number of women migrate across borders in pursuit of better employment opportunities¹⁶ and for a chance to lead a life they have reason to value, in a society and culture different from their own. Women now account for more than fifty percent of the immigrant population in most countries of the European Union, with the exception of Slovakia, Lithuania, and Romania, where male immigrants still dominate.¹⁷ Most of the current migration of women to the European Union is now employment-oriented.

This increased feminization of migration flows¹⁸ is the result of many concatenated factors and development processes. Among the most cited¹⁹ are:

- The shrinking opportunities for male employment and the disappearance of more traditional forms of economic survival, as foreign investment pressures economies towards export industries.
- The increased participation of women in the workforce in more developed countries increases the demand for women immigrants to fulfill traditional family caring needs, for example, taking care of children or the elderly.

Despite the increased presence of women in migration flows, research on the factors that affect their labor participation and social participation in host countries remains unsatisfactory and incomplete at best. In many policy and academic circles, participation in the host countries' labor market is perceived as the main avenue for social inclusion of immigrant women in the host societies. From this perspective, "exclusion and marginalization are mainly constructed as exclusion from and marginality to paid employment. Integration into society is elided with integration into work."²⁰ Our aim in this study is rather to understand the employment dynamic of immigrant women as part of a broader process of social inclusion.

We also see an overemphasis on national statistics to probe the pervasive inequality that exists in labor participation — both between immigrant women and native-born women, and between immigrant women and men. The result is an incomplete picture of the capabilities of immigrant women to participate economically, socially, and culturally, *despite* these systemic inequalities.

More recent studies are beginning to address this criticism, teasing out different aspects of the experiences of immigrants and discussing such topics as the importance of social networks for labor

¹⁵ Dumont & Liebig (2005).

¹⁶ Sassen (2001).

¹⁷ Herm (2008); Dumont & Liebig (2005).

¹⁸ Sassen (2002).

¹⁹ Sassen (2001).

²⁰ Levitas (1996) in Sammers (1998: 126).

integration,²¹ the aspirations and resources of immigrant groups,²² and the effects of the migration and integration process on their children.²³ The study presented here falls into this category of research.

The underlying premise of the research is that immigrant women are active participants in different economic, social, and cultural spaces in their host societies. Rather than framing immigrant women as “victims” of an unfair and discriminatory system, we recognize that they possess capabilities to shape their places of residence, their families, and the life they’ve chosen for themselves.

By approaching the study of immigrant women from this perspective, the research does not seek to minimize the very real sources of deprivation and inequality. As described in the introduction, there are many factors that hinder the successful integration of immigrant women into the labor market, and many of them are systemic or even endemic in the host societies. Nevertheless, the women dealing with these larger constraints cannot simply wait for broad policy improvements as they pursue a range of strategies on the ground, trying to improve their lives in the host country. The focus on immigrant women’s capabilities can provide important guidance for the efforts of policy-makers and social organizations to smooth the process of integration and expand the opportunities for marginalized groups. Such a perspective may ultimately encourage more systematic efforts to address the underlying sources of discrimination.

2.1 Theoretical Framework: Amartya Sen’s Capabilities Approach

The theoretical framework that informs this research is broadly based on the “capabilities approach” developed by Amartya Sen in the late 1990s. Sen defines development as “a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. Development requires the removal of major sources of economic unfreedom: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance of over activity of repressive states.”²⁴

The capabilities approach challenges in many significant ways the dominant conceptions of development that have permeated the field and that have shaped policy initiatives in the last sixty years. The most important contribution of Sen’s work is that he starts from the premise that, with “adequate social opportunities, individuals can shape their own destiny and help each other.”²⁵ For Sen, the emphasis should be placed on “the agency role of the individual as member of the public and as a participant in economic, social, and political actions (varying from taking part in the market to being involved, directly or indirectly, in individual or joint activities in political and other spheres).”²⁶

This conceptualization of development, and the active role of individuals and their communities, is a dramatic departure from the commonly assumed view of development as a process in which “the poor or marginalized” must rely on the help of “the expert” in order to overcome poverty and exclusion. This approach views the individual as the principal agent and the most important actor in this process. The focus is on understanding the sources of “unfreedom and deprivation” that constrain the capabilities of this actor to have a fulfilling life.

²¹ Drever & Hoffmeister (2009).

²² Van Meeteren, et al. (2009).

²³ OECD (2008).

²⁴ Sen (1999: 1).

²⁵ Ibid, p. 10.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 19.

Applying Sen's understanding of development and agency to immigrant women, we can see that — despite the fact that many of them are *de facto* excluded, for example, from the labor market — there are many ways in which immigrant women “participate daily in shaping their spaces of residence in ways which enrich their lives.” Looking at the “capabilities” of immigrant women from the perspective of their employment status or income level eclipses and limits our view of the role they have in their communities, their homes, their diasporas, etc. The sources of unfreedom or deprivation, as conceptualized by Sen, would be in this case the discrimination in the labor market, the lack of educational opportunities for immigrant women, cultural traditions that may limit their “agency” and participation in different levels of society, etc. Although it is very difficult to map all these sources of unfreedom and deprivation, it is possible to identify the main sources and how they affect immigrant women's capabilities for having a fulfilling life, however they may define fulfillment and happiness.

The conceptual framework therefore begins with a focus on the *capabilities* of the immigrant women, as they move from their previous environment into a new life in their new home country. The process of adaptation and inclusion is conceptualized in terms of three “paths,” all leading towards a more fulfilling level of social and economic participation. These are the *education and lifelong learning path*, the *social inclusion path*, and the *cultural inclusion path*.

This path model of social integration in turn draws on the discussion of digital competences on the European Reference Framework on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning. The eight basic competences are identified as: communication in the mother tongue; communication in a foreign language; mathematical literacy and basic competences in science and technology; digital competence; learning to learn; interpersonal and civic competences; entrepreneurship; and cultural expression. For our purposes, four of these competences are central to the analysis: language competence, digital competence, social and civic competence, and learning to learn.

The study particularly addresses three practical issues in the design of programs to support the economic and social integration of immigrant women in the EU. What role can digital competences play to promote the integration of immigrant women into the EU labor market? How are these competences linked to other key competences, such as social and cultural participation and skills? And what is the role that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play in different aspects of immigrant women's lives?

2.2 The Paths to Employability

Based on the capabilities approach, the research proposes an analytical framework to understand the contribution of digital competences to improve the employability of immigrant women in the European Union. There are three deeply interrelated building blocks or paths that constitute the main framework of the analysis: the *education and lifelong learning path*, the *social inclusion path*, and the *cultural inclusion path* (See Figure 1).

Figure 1. The Paths to Employability

Paths to Employability		Capabilities
E M P L O Y A B I L I T Y	Education & Lifelong Learning Path	- Participation in training and educational activities
		- Perception of importance of EU Key competences
		- Entrepreneurial skills
		- Level of digital competences and frequency and diversity of ICT use
	Social Inclusion Path	- Participation in social spaces
		- Diversity of social networks
		- Host country language skills
		- e-Skills training as a catalyst to develop social skills
	Cultural Inclusion Path	- e-Skills as a mechanism to diversify social networks
		- Participation in local cultural activities
- Consumption of different media forms		
- Production of cultural artifacts or activities		
		- Use of ICTs for cultural participation

THE EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING PATH

This path is broadly defined as: “The capabilities and competences necessary for immigrant women to secure a job, maintain or upgrade a position, develop entrepreneurial skills, and prepare the foundations for lifelong learning (as defined by the European Union).”

The education path embraces two kinds of learning. First are the specific capabilities that could enhance the role of agency of immigrant women, capabilities developed through participation in training and educational activities. Second is a broader category of “key competences,” including the ability to communicate in the host country language, learning to learn, a sense of initiative, and digital skills, as well as the lifelong learning opportunities that can help individuals achieve those competences.

In mapping some of the elements of the education and lifelong learning path for migrant women, we analyze four encompassing factors. (Table 1 gives the variables included in each factor)

1. Immigrant women’s educational background, supplemented by their learning in Europe, affects their opportunities in the labor market.
2. Host-country language and ICT competences play a key role in advancing their employment opportunities.
3. E-skills training courses give them the opportunity to enhance other basic competences: local language, social and civic skills, learning-to-learn, and sense of initiative.
4. NGOs aid their economic and social integration by providing non-formal ICT training opportunities (among other services).

Table 1: Exploring the Education and Lifelong Learning Path for immigrant women

FACTORS	LEVELS OF PRIMARY ANALYSIS	LEVELS OF SECONDARY ANALYSIS
Educational Level	- Prior to migration	- Multicountry analysis (Italy, Hungary, Spain, and The Netherlands) - Comparative analysis with the control group (native-born women) - Importance of education and lifelong learning to employability
Training in host country	- Participation in training - Types of training courses - Reasons for not attending courses	
Language Skills	- Host-country language level - Other languages	
Digital Competences	- Computer skill level - Internet skill level - Activities using computers and Internet - ICT Access places - Training programs	
Education and training in the context of the EU Key Competences²⁷	- Importance of education and training in comparison to the other seven competences	

THE SOCIAL INCLUSION PATH

This study defines the social inclusion path for immigrant women as a product of the *capabilities* required to further promote social participation and mobilization, the *diversification* of social and civic roles, and the *opportunities* for expanding the links into social networks.²⁸ In this context, we examine in particular the role that e-skills and communication technologies play in helping migrant women along a social mobility path. Social inclusion is a complex phenomenon; our definition is not intended to be comprehensive, but rather to help shift the frame of reference for migrant women from “victims” to “active participants,” capable of shaping their social spaces and the societies where they now live.

In mapping some of the elements of the social inclusion path for migrant women, we analyze five encompassing factors. (Table 2 gives the variables included in each factor.)

1. Awareness of the problems they face in the host society (i.e., sources of unfreedom) and of potential solutions to overcome these obstacles
2. Participation in different social spaces, indicated by their participation in social events and in non-governmental organizations
3. The diversity of their social networks, specifically as they relate to social participation and the labor market

²⁷ The “other language” skills have been split into two elements, as migrant women are speakers of their own mother tongue, and often other languages too.

²⁸ This definition is in part based on the definition of interpersonal, intercultural and social and civic competences outlined in the *European Framework for Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (Key Competences (2007))*.

4. The role of NGO-offered training and services in promoting social participation and social and civic skills
5. The role of digital competences and ICT access and use, as a catalyst to promote further social participation

Table 2: Exploring the Social Inclusion Path toward employability for immigrant women

FACTORS	LEVELS OF PRIMARY ANALYSIS	LEVELS OF SECONDARY ANALYSIS
Immigration decision	- Motivation to come to Europe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Multicountry analysis (Italy, Hungary, Spain, The Netherlands) - Comparative analysis with the control group (native-born women) - Importance of social and civic skills in relationship to employability
Immigration problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Problems encountered in European receiving countries - Recommendations to EU/national/regional/city authorities 	
Social participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participation in social spaces - Participation in non-governmental organizations - NGO Membership - Diversity of social networks 	
Role of NGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The role of NGOs - The value of NGO services 	
Social and civic skills in the context of the EU Lifelong Learning competences ²⁹	- Importance of social and civic skills in comparison to the other seven competences	

THE CULTURAL INCLUSION PATH

The cultural inclusion path includes a number of different capabilities and attitudes of immigrant women: to acquire local language(s) and culture(s) while maintaining their own; to increase local awareness of their own culture and to learn from local culture(s); to create positive links between different cultures and promote intercultural dialogue; to participate in intercultural groups and activities; and to create artistic/cultural experiences/objects. An example of mobilizing the cultural inclusion path might be to participate in "designing ICT" initiatives that involve socially excluded groups in the development of technological platforms tailored to their needs.

In mapping some of the elements of the cultural inclusion path for migrant women, we analyze encompassing factors (Table 3 gives the variables included in each factor):

²⁹ The "other language" skills have been split into two elements, as migrant women are speakers of their own mother tongue, and often other languages too.

Table 3: Exploring the Cultural Inclusion Path toward employability for immigrant women

FACTORS	LEVELS OF PRIMARY ANALYSIS	LEVELS OF SECONDARY ANALYSIS
Cultural Consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kind of cultural products - In language of country of origin - In language of host country 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Multicountry analysis (Italy, Hungary, Spain, The Netherlands) - Comparative analysis with the control group (native-born women) - Importance of social and civic skills in relationship to employability
Cultural participation, self-expression and creativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Type of participation - Roles played - Use of multimedia technology in cultural production 	
Cultural participation in the context of the EU Key Competences for Lifelong Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Importance of cultural participation in comparison to the other seven competences 	

The conceptual framework is not intended as a comprehensive tool that includes all the variables and factors that affect each of the three paths towards the employability of immigrant woman. We have narrowed the scope to focus on some of the most relevant variables to help us understand how digital competences might contribute to improve the lives of immigrant women in the European Union.

2.3 Methodology | Operationalizing the Three Paths to Employability

The research combines quantitative and qualitative methods. In collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that provide training and services to immigrant women in Spain, Italy, Hungary, the Netherlands, and Romania,³⁰ we surveyed 375 immigrant women and 155 native-born women between May and August, 2009. (See Table 4 for the distribution of the sample per country.) The immigrant women were selected using a convenience sampling technique; for this reason, it is difficult to assess how representative these women are of the population that receives NGO training and other social services. With the agreement of the organizations, we offered symbolic compensation as a token of appreciation for participating in the survey: one hour of their time, compensated at the official minimum wage. The surveys for both groups (immigrant and native-born women) were implemented at the organizations using individual and group interviews.

³⁰ See Appendix 1 for the list of organizations.

Table 4: Distribution of the sample per country

Country	# of Foreign-born women	# of native-born women	# of NGOs per country	Geographical Scope of Sample
Italy	136	26	4	Regional (7)
Spain	126	11	14	Regional (5)
Hungary	40	42	9	Border regions (3)
The Netherlands	69	10	3	Urban (Amsterdam)
Romania	(source)	67	2	Regional (2)
Total	375	155	32	--

The survey³¹ was specifically designed to explore the three paths to employability. It included a set of questions that could better help us understand the women's employment experiences, family dynamics, and aspirations for improving their opportunities in the European Union. In addition, the survey included a couple of open-ended questions that allowed the immigrant women to discuss the main problems they faced when first migrating to the host country and the issues they consider critical to advance the position of women in the European Union. The employment history (occupations before migrating and at the country of residence) was recoded following the International Labor Organization's International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-88).³²

The survey for the group of native-born women captured the same information, without the questions regarding migration. For both groups, immigrant and native-born women, the surveys were translated into six languages: Spanish, English, French, Dutch, Romanian, and Hungarian. (See Appendix 2 for the immigrant women survey instrument and Appendix 3 for the native-born women survey.)

In addition, we interviewed more than 40 representatives from the non-profit social organizations to better understand the nature of the training programs and social services they offer, and the obstacles and opportunities they perceive as most critical. Social organizations play a key role as bridges to different social spheres of the host countries. We map the various programs and services the organizations provide for immigrant women and examine the way the training, services, and other activities contribute to pave these three paths and to improve the quality of life for these women.

CRITERIA FOR SELECTING THE EU-HOST COUNTRIES

The five EU countries represented in the research were selected in part to reflect the difference in migration dynamics between "old" and "new" Europe, as well as to explore some regional differences within the countries. For example, Italy and Spain have shifted from being emigrant countries (up to

³¹ See Appendix 2 for the English version of the immigration women survey and Appendix 3 for the native-born women survey

³² See <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/stat/isco/index.htm>.

end of the Second World War and the Spanish Civil War) to become receivers of massive immigration, over a time period of merely 10-15 years.

Despite the similarities between the cultures of Spain and Italy, there are significant differences in political environment that require a critical comparison of the factors affecting immigrant women's integration into the host society. (A recent illustration of this difference in environment is the declaration of an Italian minister suggesting that the Romani living Italy should move to the more permissive environment of Spain.) For Italy and Spain, we also sampled different regions to understand the impact of local labor dynamics.

The Netherlands has a very long history of receiving immigrants. For more than five centuries³³ people have come to the Netherlands to seek refuge and work, and after the Second World War, the numbers of immigrants dramatically increased. For many of the migrants, the incentive was reaching towards modernization. The Netherlands has long been known for accepting immigrants to ameliorate an overall shortage of labor, especially workers willing to take unskilled jobs. At the end of the 1950s, big companies started to actively seek labor immigrants. At first most of these "guest workers" came from the south of Europe (Spain, Greece, Italy, etc.); later they came from Turkey and Morocco. Many came from former Dutch colonies: first the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia), and later Suriname and the Dutch Antilles.³⁴ For the Netherlands, our research was limited to the city of Amsterdam .

Hungary was selected because, as one of the more prosperous countries of the enlarged European Union (EU25), it has received an increased migration flow of various origins in the recent years. For example, Békéscsaba city (capital of Békés County, an agro-industrial region), situated 20 kms from the Hungarian-Romanian border, is a multinational town with the highest percentage of Slovak population in Hungary, as well as an increasing number of Romanians — many of them ethnic Hungarians.

Romania was selected as a source country — one of the main source countries of migration to the European Union.

DEFINITIONS AND TERMINOLOGY

Immigrant women. Women who do not hold citizenship of the country of residence. We use the terms immigrant, migrant women, and foreign-born women interchangeably

Native-born women. Women born in the five EU host countries included in the study (Spain, Italy, Hungary, Romania, and the Netherlands). However, the proportion of women in this sample is not equal among countries; women from Romania and Hungary represent 70% of the population of this group.

Computer skill level. The EU Digital Literacy Model measures *Computer skills* using six computer-related tasks: copy or move a file or folder; use copy and paste tools to duplicate or move information within a document; use basic arithmetic formulas (add, subtract, multiply, divide) in a spreadsheet; compress files; connect and install new devices, e.g., a printer or modem; write a computer program using a specialized programming language. Low level of basic computer skills is defined as ability to carry out 1 or 2 of the 6 tasks. Medium level of basic computer skills: ability to carry out 3 or 4 of the 6 tasks. High level of basic computer skills: ability to carry out 5 or 6 of the 6 tasks.

<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/web/table/description.jsp>

³³ Five Centuries of Migration, a website about the migration history of the Netherlands; <http://www.migratiegeschiedenis.nl/>.

³⁴ Ibid.

Internet skill level. The EU Digital Literacy Model measures Internet skills level using six computer-related tasks: use a search engine to find information; send an e-mail with attached files; post messages to chatrooms, newsgroups or any online discussion forum; use the Internet to make telephone calls; use peer-to-peer file sharing for exchanging movies, music, etc.; create a web page. Low level of basic internet skills: ability to carry out 1 or 2 of the 6 Internet-related tasks. Medium level of basic internet skills: ability to carry out 3 or 4 of the 6 tasks. High level of basic internet skills: ability to carry out 5 or 6 of the 6 tasks. <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/web/table/description.jsp>

3 GETTING TO KNOW THE IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN OUR STUDY

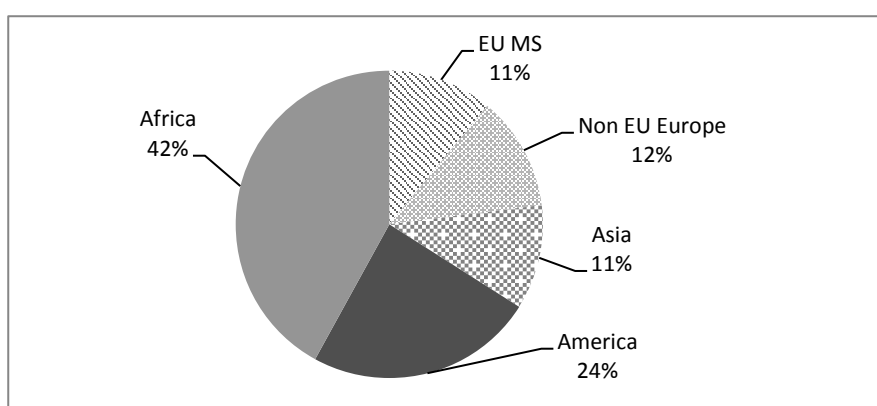
The study captured the experiences of 375 immigrant women from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. The diversity of the sample reflects the composition of the immigrant groups in each of the countries studied. This chapter describes the regions where these women come from, their educational level and languages spoken, their employment situation at the time of responding to the survey, and their overall level of digital competence.

3.1 Who are these immigrant women, and where do they come from?

The immigrant women sampled in the study — the “respondents” — come from very diverse backgrounds in terms of nationality, family structure, languages spoken, and education level. These women represent a total of 64 countries from different regions of the world, with half of them coming from six countries: Morocco, Romania, Ecuador, Nigeria, Peru, and Ukraine. Respondents come primarily from Africa (42%) and the Americas (24%); smaller numbers come from Non-EU Europe (12%), Asia (11%), and EU Member States³⁵ (11%). (See Figure 2 below for the breakdown by region; see Appendix 4 for the list of countries of origin, for each of the four host countries.)

The average age of the surveyed women is 36, with some variation across countries; most of them (75%) are between the ages of 25 and 49. In other words, most of the women are of working age, which is consistent with the motivation for many of them to migrate: to find a better job to provide for themselves and their families. Immigrant women in the Netherlands are slightly older (average age 43) while women in Hungary are the youngest (average age 30). (See Table 5)

Figure 2. Immigrant women in the study by region of origin



³⁵ EU Member States: refers mainly to Romanian and Bulgarian citizens who were beneficiaries of an up-to-two-years moratorium following the entry of Romania and Bulgaria to the EU on January 1st 2007, which allowed them to freely circulate across Europe. Unless they obtained permission from the host country, however, they were allowed to reside *but not to work* until the end of the moratorium. In Spain, since January 1, 2009, they do not need to obtain a job permit.

In terms of family structure, 62% of the women have partners (married or cohabitating). 72% have partners of the same nationality, 22% have partners from the host country, and 7% have partners from other countries. The vast majority of their partners live in the country of residence (81%). Most of the women have children over the age of five (70%); 33% have children under age five. 66% have children living in the host country, while the rest have children living in their home country or somewhere else.

Table 5. Average age of the sample, by country

Country	Average Age	N
Italy	36.83	135
Spain	34.58	125
The Netherlands	43.39	69
Hungary	30.41	44
Total	36.53	373

3.2 How long ago and for what reasons did they migrate?

Most of the women are fairly recent migrants: 42% migrated in the last 6–10 years and 38% in the last five years (See Table 6). The top two reasons for migrating were for work (52%) and for family reunification (32%). Relatively few women migrated for humanitarian reasons or to study (11% and 15% respectively). There were important regional differences in reasons for migrating: 78% of women from the Americas and 67% of women from EU Member States migrated to find jobs, compared to 35% of women from Africa and 36% of women from Asia. Among women from Africa, the most common reason for migration was to join a family member (45%). (See Table 7 reasons for migration by geographic region).

Table 6. Length of residence in host country

Length of time in host country	% of total sample	N
0–5 years (2009–2004)	39.6	142
6–10 years (2003–1999)	41.5	149
More than 10 years	18.9	68
Total	100.0	359

There also emerged significant differences in immigrants' motivation across the four countries in the study: 66% of the immigrant women in the Netherlands migrated to join their families, compared to 21% in Italy, 29% in Spain, and 28% in Hungary (see Table 8). (Note that many of the immigrant women sampled in the Netherlands come from Africa—the geographic region in our sample with the highest percentage of women migrating to join family members.)

Table 7. Reasons for migrating by Geographical Region of origin

Reasons for migrating	Geographic Region				
	Africa	Asia	America	Non EU Europe	EU MS
To study	15%	10%	19%	9%	13%
To join my family	45%	21%	21%	17%	39%
To work	35%	36%	78%	59%	67%
For medical care/health reasons	3%	0%	3%	7%	8%
Political and humanitarian reasons	9%	39%	3%	17%	3%
Other	21%	10%	12%	13%	10%

Table 8. Reasons for migrating by EU country of residence

Reasons for migrating	EU Country of Residence			
	Italy	Spain	The Netherlands	Hungary
To study	19%	14%	5%	21%
To join my family	21%	29%	66%	28%
To work	63%	73%	5%	28%
For medical care/health reasons	2%	6%	0%	7%
Political humanitarian reasons	7%	4%	10%	44%
Other	8%	10%	43%	9%
Total number	135	125	67	43

More than half of the immigrant women in our sample were economically active (employed) before migrating (almost 60%): over a third had worked as professionals, technicians, or associate professionals; 20% had worked as clerks; and only 9.6% had worked in elementary occupations in their country of origin.

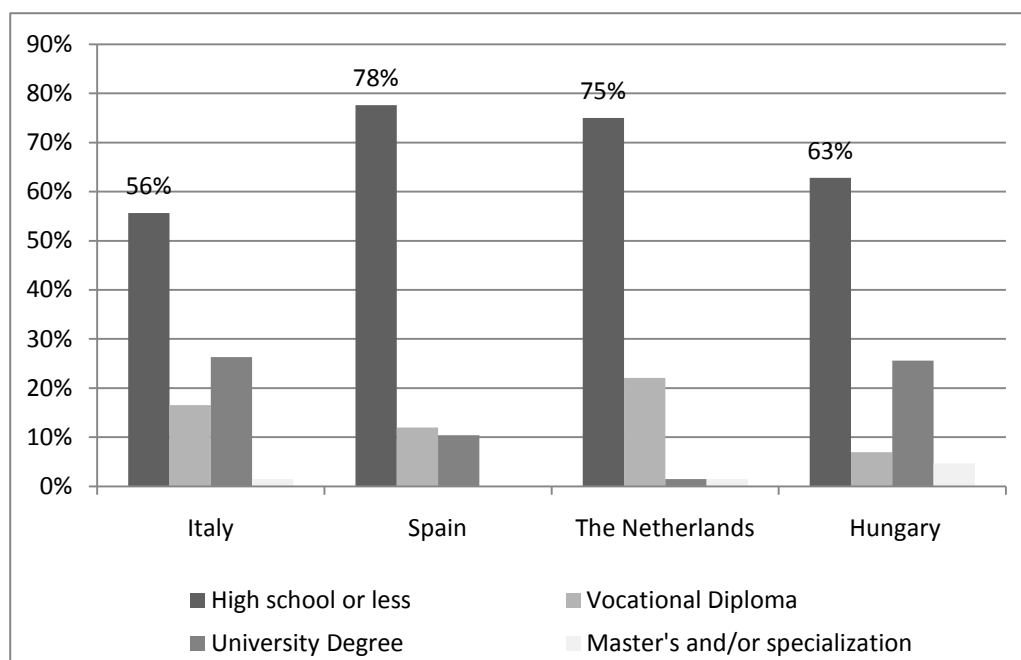
3.3 How many languages do they speak, and what is their educational level?

In addition to their mother tongue, 89% of the women reported speaking more than one language, and a majority speak two or more foreign languages. All told, the women we surveyed speak 67 languages. The five most common mother-languages are Arabic, Spanish, Romanian, Russian, and Ukrainian. The most common second and third languages are Italian (41%), English (36%), French (21%), Dutch (20%), and Spanish (18%).

In terms of their educational qualifications, 62% have at most a high school diploma. However, one-third of the women have a vocational qualification or university degree. There is some variation across

the four host countries: a higher percentage of respondents in Spain and the Netherlands have at most a high school diploma — 78% and 75% respectively;³⁶ while Italy and Hungary show the highest percentage with a vocational degree. (See Figure 3 for educational level by country of residence)

Figure 3. Education level of immigrant women in the sample by country of residence



Regardless of their academic and vocational credentials, it was rare for immigrant women to have their home-country qualifications recognized by the educational system of the host country (less than 11%). The absence of such recognition presents one of the biggest obstacles for immigrant women wanting to improve their opportunities in the labor market. Moreover, although more than half of the employed group are working as professionals, technicians, or associate professionals, only 18% of this relatively well-employed group reported that their job was “completely” related to their area of study.³⁷

3.4 What is their e-skills level, and where do they access ICT?

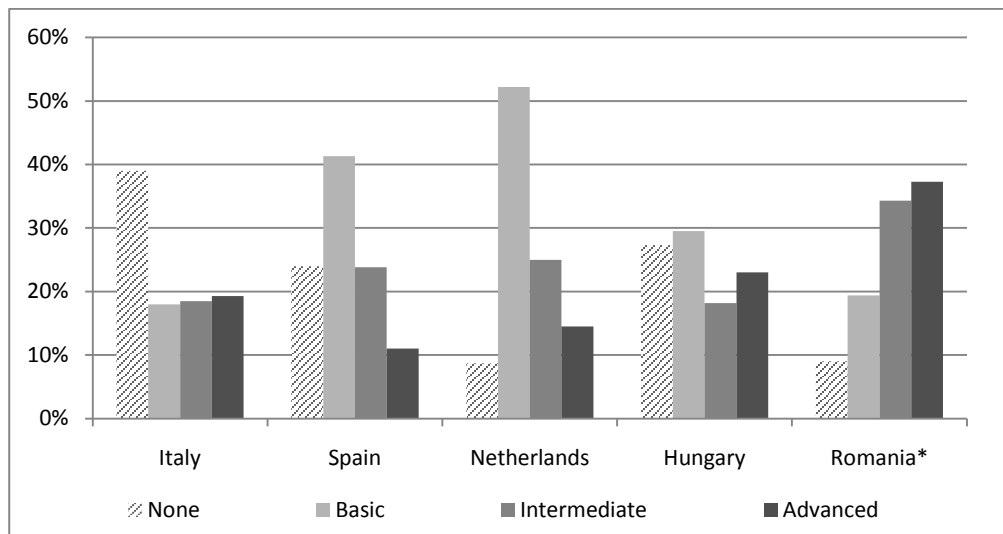
About a third of the immigrant women have basic computer and Internet skills³⁸. 32% have intermediate computer skills and 22% intermediate Internet skills. Slightly over 20% of the women reported no e-skills at all. Immigrant women in Spain and the Netherlands show the highest percentage with basic computer and Internet skills, while the highest proportion of women with advanced skills are in Italy and Hungary. Interestingly, Italy also shows the highest percentage with *no* computer and Internet skills. (See Figures 4 and 5 below, for computer and Internet skills level by country of residence.)

³⁶ Netherlands also has the highest percentage with a vocational degree, while Italy and Hungary have the highest percentage with a university degree (Level 1 and higher).

³⁷ For information on the ILO job categories (ISCO 88) see: <http://laborsta.ilo.org/applv8/data/isco88e.html>

³⁸ Computer and Internet skills level were calculated using EUROSTAT’s indicators

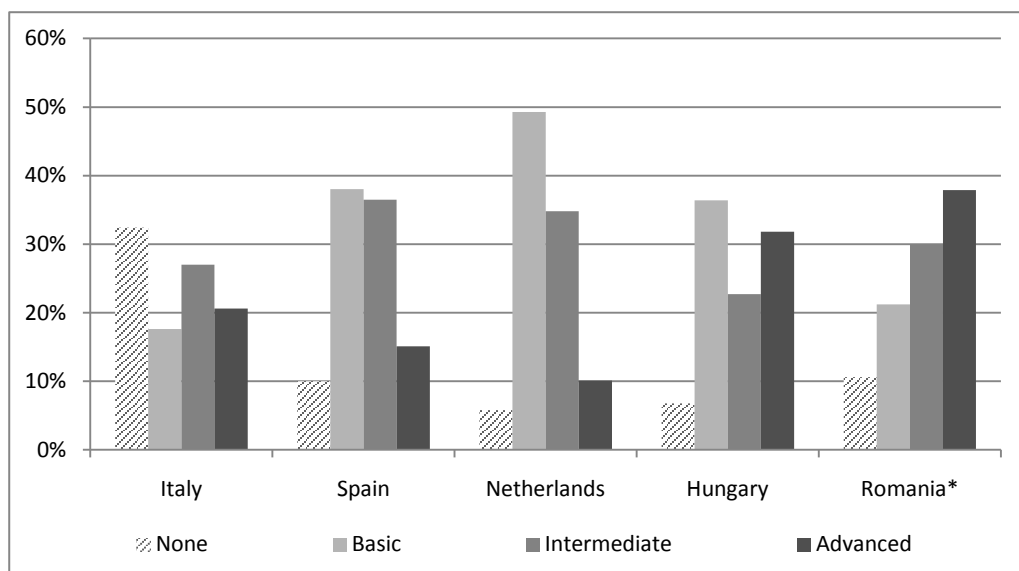
Figure 4. Computer skill level of immigrant women by country of residence



* Romania is included as a source country of migration rather than a host country; the percentages for Romania apply to a sample of native-born women.

For accessing computers and the Internet, the three most commonly used places are home, centers run by non-governmental organizations, and homes of friends and family. This suggests that more informal, friendly, and comfortable environments are preferred over formal educational institutions such as universities and public locations.

Figure 5. Internet skill level of immigrant women by country of residence



* Romania is included as a source country of migration rather than a host country; the percentages for Romania apply to a sample of native-born women.

3.5 What is their employment situation?

Currently, 44% of the immigrant women are employed, and another 43% are looking for a job. The majority of the unemployed women live in Spain and Hungary (66% and 58% respectively). An additional 14% reported that they were unemployed but were not currently looking for a job; the majority of this group lives in the Netherlands. (See Table 9 for employment status of immigrant women by host country.)

Table 9. Employment status by host country

Host Country		Employment status			
		Yes	Unemployed looking for job	Unemployed NOT looking for a job	Total
Italy	N	95	35	4	134
	% country	71%	26%	3%	100%
Spain	N	32	83	10	125
	% country	26%	66%	8%	100%
The Netherlands	N	21	12	28	61
	% country	34%	20%	46%	100%
Hungary	N	10	25	8	43
	% country	23%	58%	19%	100%
Total	N	158	155	50	363*
	% country	44%	43%	14%	100%

* 12 missing cases are excluded from this analysis.

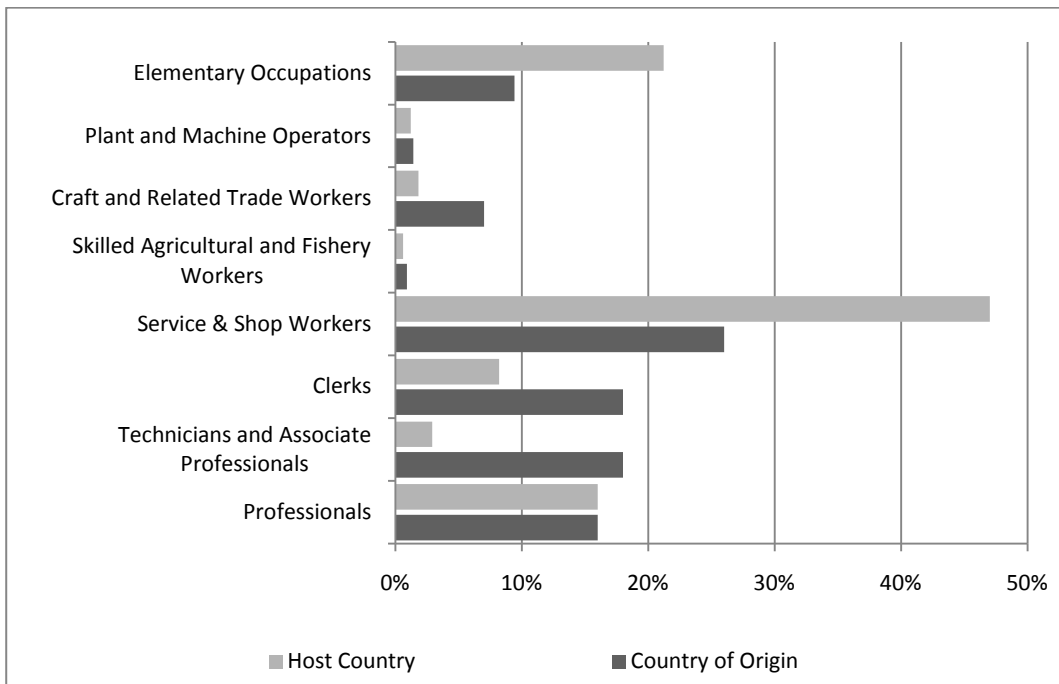
Of the respondents with jobs, most work in services or elementary occupations —that is, in restaurants, cleaning houses, or taking care of children or the elderly. (See Figure 6 for distribution of occupations in host country compared with the country of origin.) Those with professional positions in their country of origin also held professional positions in the host country; this was not the case, however, for those holding technical and associate professional positions in the country of origin, or for skilled craft workers. In many EU-countries, the overqualification rates³⁹ for female migrants are significantly higher than for native-born women. Furthermore, these overqualification rates appeared to be more pronounced in Southern European countries, and more acute among immigrant women from non-EU countries.⁴⁰

Only 39% of women with jobs reported that their incomes are sufficient to cover their basic needs; most (61%) reported that their income was not sufficient. In fact, the vast majority (68%) of these employed women rely on other sources of income, primarily a salary from another member of their family, to provide for their families and themselves. (See Figure 7 for sources of additional income of employed immigrant women.) Only 13% rely on government unemployment subsidies as an additional source of income.

³⁹ Dumont & Liebig (2005: 7) define overqualification for immigrant women as: “the proportion of women whose educational attainment is higher than the general requirements for the occupation which they hold.”

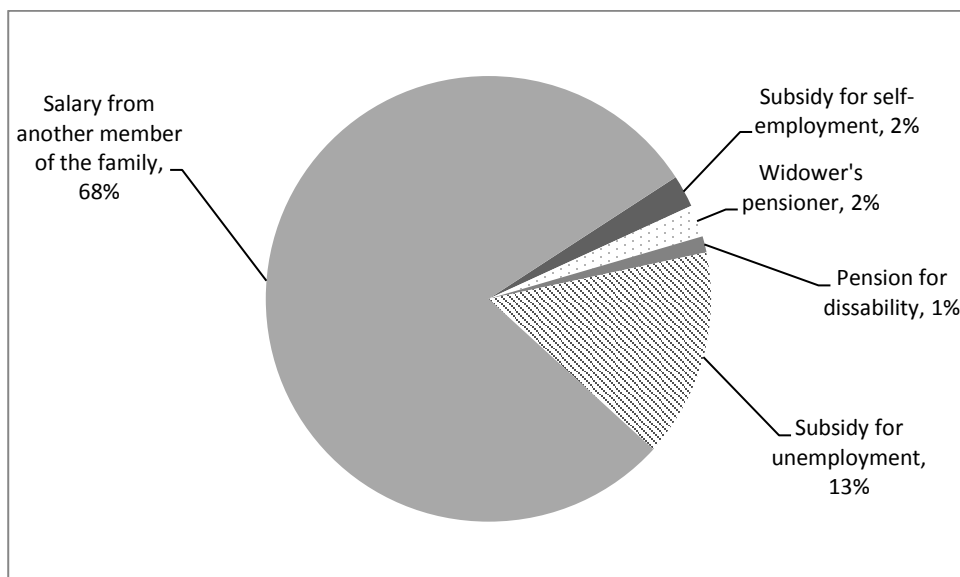
⁴⁰ Ibid.

Figure 6. Comparison of occupational status of immigrant women in country of origin and country of residence



Notes: Percentages for distribution of occupations in country of origin are based on 218 responses (66% of sample). Percentages in host country are based on 170 women employed at the time of the survey.

Figure 7. Additional sources of income for the immigrant women employed



3.6 What issues do they consider most important to improve their situation?

Respondents were asked what the EU can do to improve lives of immigrant women. Most wanted either increased assistance to find employment / improve employment conditions (34%), or assistance to facilitate the process of obtaining residency papers or work permits (24%). Two other areas they considered important were (1) the promotion of women's rights — balance between work and family, equal pay for equal work, investing in female-friendly social policies, and addressing discrimination and violence — and (2) access to higher education and training. We also surveyed a small sample of native-born women as a comparison group. The key issues they cited to improve the opportunities of women in the European Union were: assistance in finding employment (60%); and access to higher education and training (15%).

4 Education and Lifelong Learning Path

4.1 Introduction

Immigrant women face a double challenge, as migrants and as women. Even the best educated immigrant women suffer discrimination, often channeled into elementary and service employment. If they have the resources to progress to better jobs, there is in most cases little congruence between their employability profile — their prior training, education, and experience — and their current employment. In other words, their capacities are seldom fully recognized, validated, or well utilized.

THE “CAPABILITIES” APPROACH

Rather than focusing on “victims” of the system, we focus on their unexploited human potential. For this we base our analysis on the capabilities approach of Amartya Sen. As explained in the Conceptual Framework, this approach considers individuals as principal agents in the development process. It focuses on understanding the sources of “unfreedom and deprivation” that limit the individual’s capability to shape a fulfilling life.

When we apply this approach to the labor market of the Knowledge Society, we can identify important challenges for potential workers (males and females, natives and foreigners):

1. Technological and organizational changes require new sets of skills, if workers are to become and remain competitive in the labor market.
2. These important skills include computer skills, problem-solving skills, critical thinking, language skills, teamwork and collaboration skills.
3. Individuals with high barriers to employment are more likely to suffer from the obsolescence of their skill set, potentially widening the existing economic and social gaps.

In particular, most immigrant women experience such difficulties as limited training opportunities, bureaucratic restrictions on the formal recognition of competences acquired abroad, problems of family-work reconciliation, limited knowledge of local language, and lack of familiarity with information and communication technologies (where much of the knowledge economy is conducted). These issues need to be addressed with targeted strategies.

The Training and Education Path embraces two kinds of learning. First are the specific capabilities that could enhance the role of agency of immigrant women, through participation in training and educational activities. Second is a broader category of “key competences,” including the ability to communicate in the host country language, learning to learn, a sense of initiative, and digital skills, as well as the lifelong learning opportunities that can help them achieve those competences.

WORKING HYPOTHESES

Several working hypotheses guide our analysis:

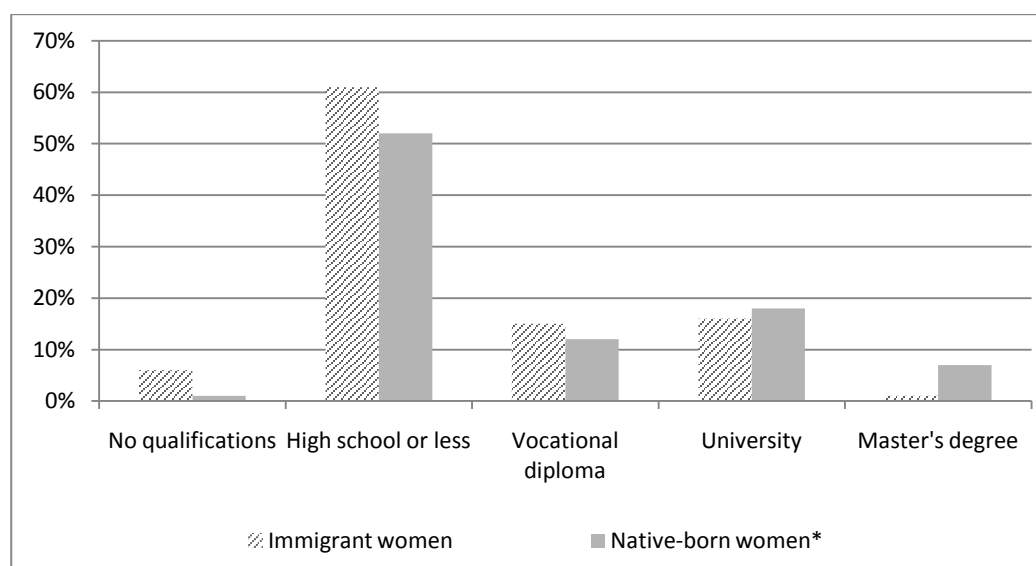
1. Immigrant women's educational background, supplemented by their learning in Europe, affects their opportunities in the labor market.
2. Host-country language and ICT competences play a key role in advancing their employment opportunities.
3. E-skills training courses give them the opportunity to enhance other basic competences: local language, social and civic skills, learning-to-learn, and sense of initiative.
4. NGOs aid their economic and social integration by providing non-formal ICT training opportunities (among other services).

Guided by these hypotheses, we explore in this chapter the educational background of immigrant women prior to migration to Europe, as well as their training efforts, digital skills, and language skills in their countries of residence. We examine how these skills can help them meet labor market requirements both directly and by developing other key competences; and how the NGOs that offer digital literacy training and other services are providing some of the tools they need for becoming more autonomous in a Knowledge Society.

4.2 Educational background of immigrant women prior to migration

Our sample shows that almost one-third of the migrant women have gone beyond secondary education: 15% have a vocational training diploma and 17% have a university degree. Almost another third (28%) have a high school diploma. Their education level is only slightly lower than that of the comparison group of women born in the host countries; however, their labor opportunities are notably more limited (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Highest educational qualifications obtained by immigrant women in home country compared to native-born women



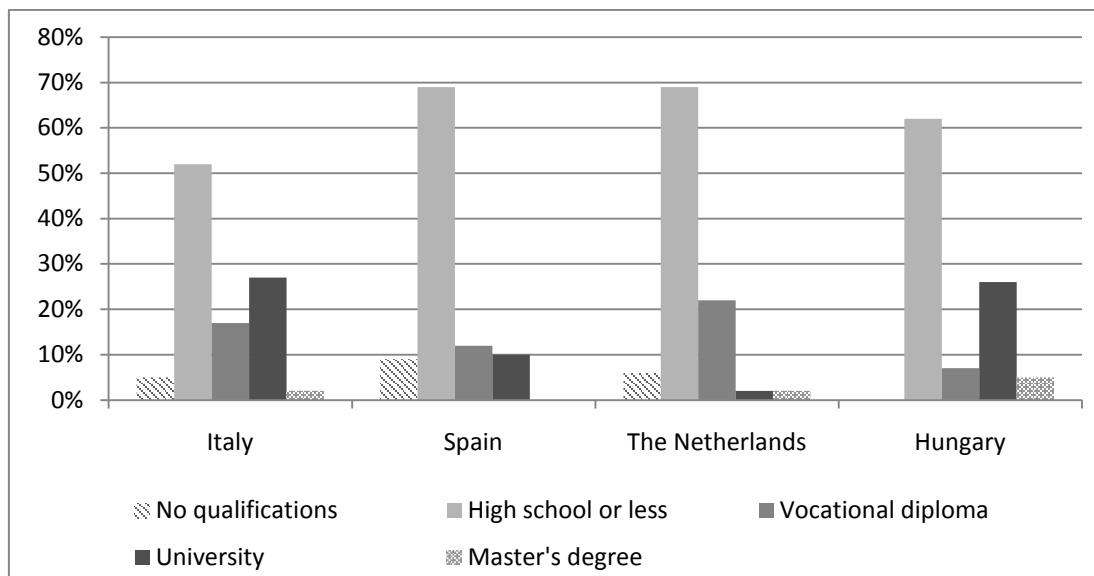
* Refers to women born in the EU countries included in the study: Romania, Hungary, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands.

The educational profile differs among the four countries of residence. In all countries, *a sizeable majority have secondary or higher qualifications.*

- Migrant women in Italy show an educational profile comparable to the native-born group: almost a third (32% for both groups) have a high school diploma and almost half (48% and 47% respectively) have a higher (tertiary level) certificate or degree.
- The lowest educational levels are found in Spain: over one-third have a high school diploma (37%), but less than one-quarter have a tertiary level qualification (22%).
- In the Netherlands, close to half have a high school diploma (44%) and one-third third have a tertiary level certificate (33%).
- In Hungary, 23% have a high school diploma, and over one-third (38%) have a tertiary level certificate.

The differences in educational profile may help explain why the unemployment level for our sample is only 27% in Italy and a whopping 66% in Spain.⁴¹ We note, however, that national statistics for Spain (2008) show only 21% of immigrant women unemployed, with an overall national unemployment rate at 14%.⁴² Clearly, our sample is skewed to overrepresent the unemployed group. Still, it is likely that women with more education find employment more easily (even if it is a “non-qualified” or extralegal job, or one below the level of their training). This “vertical segmentation” inside the group of immigrant women was widely noted during the massive regularization in Spain in 2005, where well-educated immigrant women were legalized as domestic servants, eventually to move to better-suited jobs.⁴³

Figure 9. Highest educational qualifications by country of residence



⁴¹ Of course there are other concurrent reasons: Spain has the highest percentage of recent immigrants (within past five years); those with regular jobs may receive unemployment subsidies, unlike in Italy; the economy and labor market are less varied in Spain than Italy, especially in the trading and services sectors (where many migrants are employed); etc.

⁴² According to Eurostat, at the end of December 2009 this rate had climbed to 19.5% (19.6% men, 19.4% women). No data is provided by Eurostat regarding the percentage of unemployed immigrant women.

⁴³ Rissola et al. (2003), p. 32.

Table 10 suggests a correlation between employability and education level. Roughly 20% of those with lower qualifications (primary level) are currently employed, compared to about 40% for secondary level and 60% for tertiary level. The overall difficulty of finding employment is also evident however, since around 40% of the highest educated group remains unemployed, although almost all of them are seeking a job.

Table 10: Employment status by educational level

	Employed	Unemployed looking for a job	Unemployed not looking for a job
No qualification	17%	57%	24%
Primary school	23%	52%	25%
Middle School	35%	41%	24%
High School	46%	44%	11%
Vocational diploma	62%	32%	6%
University Degree (Level 1)	59%	41%	0%
University Degree (Level 2)	61%	36%	3%
Masters Degree	0%	80%	20%

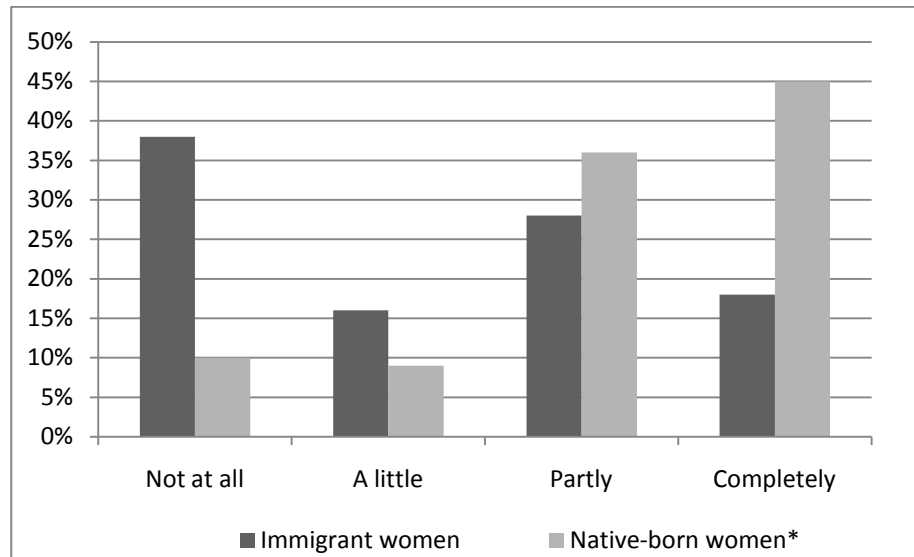
Important differences in education level emerge according to region of origin.

- Asians, non-EU Europeans and EU nationals show relatively high percentages with tertiary qualifications (47%, 55% and 46% respectively); those from the Americas and Africa have lower percentages (27% and 22% respectively).
- Africa has by far the highest percentage with at most a primary school certificate (27%).
- The regions with the highest percentage of high school diplomas are the Americas and EU MS (45% and 33%).
- The regions with the highest percentage of specialized university degrees are EU and non-EU Europe (21% and 26% respectively).
- For the Asian region the education levels are remarkably evenly distributed: 26% have a primary or middle school certificate, 26% a high school diploma, 22% a vocational training diploma, and 26% a university degree.

Overall, the sample shows a significant educational background, which represents a valuable resource for the local labor market — a resource that is far from fully utilized. A big problem faced by immigrant women across Europe is the long and costly process of validation and recognition of studies. Only 3% report that their study certifications were recognized, even after several years. In addition, inflexible work permits often prevent them from working and studying at the same time. Not surprisingly, their employment is only weakly related to their field of study: more than half report little or no relationship.

In the group on native born women, contrastingly, that relationship is stronger, with almost half reporting that their work is completely related to their education or training. (See Figure 10.)

Figure 10. Is your occupation related to your field of study?



* Refers to women born in the EU countries included in the study: Romania, Hungary, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands.

In the group of non-immigrants, contrastingly, that relationship is stronger, with almost half reporting that their work is completely related to their education or training. Accordingly, the immigrant women with jobs are overwhelmingly employed at the base of the employment pyramid (cleaning services, caregivers, waiters), even if they are qualified for better jobs. The EU-born women tend to be better positioned in the labor market, even if they still suffer inequalities as compared with native males (for example, in the wage differential seen in Spain).

This situation might improve if the competences acquired in their countries of origin were formally recognized in their hosting country. The European Commission is making positive efforts to provide formal recognition for competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning settings, through initiatives like the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). This system will facilitate the accumulation and official recognition of knowledge, skills, and competences acquired in different learning environments.⁴⁴ Such a system could benefit immigrants in particular.

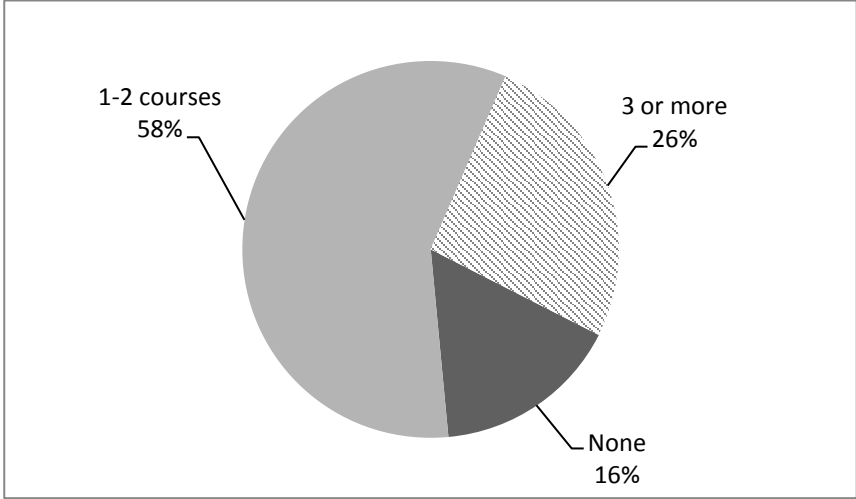
4.3 Training efforts of immigrant women in host countries

Immigrant women are building lifelong learning paths in their new countries, enhancing their prior educational background. In our sample, 364 women reported attending 612 training courses. Only one-sixth of the sample (58 women) participated in *no* training courses, while one quarter had taken three or more training courses since arriving in Europe. (See Figure 11.)

^R Rissola et al. (2003).

They evidently view *training* as an important way to improve their employability and their lives. This pattern has been observed for Latin Americans: training, as a resource to cope with instability or crisis, is highly valued in most of the region.⁴⁵

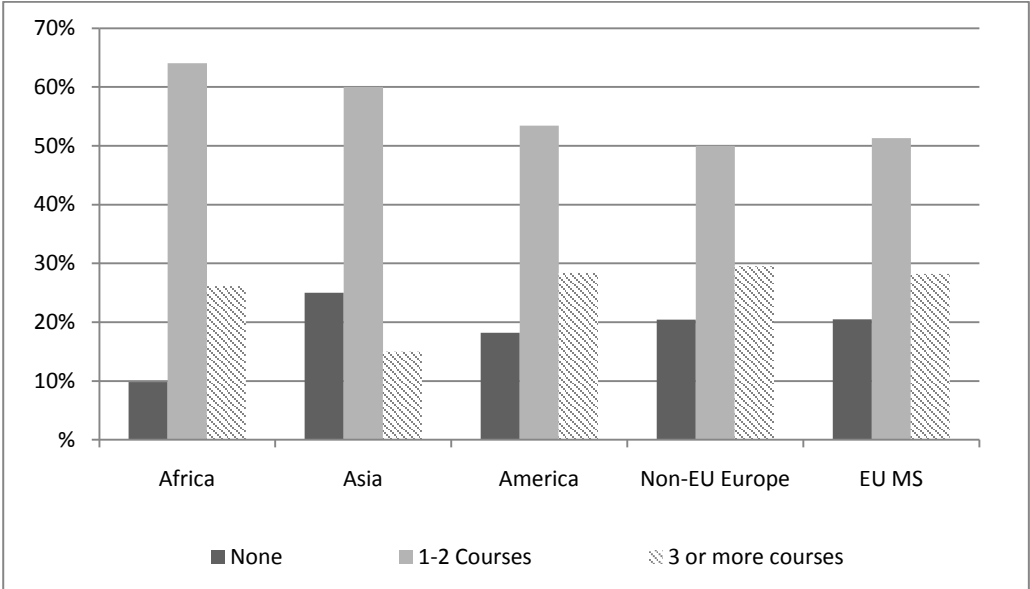
Figure 11. Number of training courses attended by immigrant women in host country



DISTRIBUTION OF TRAINING COURSES

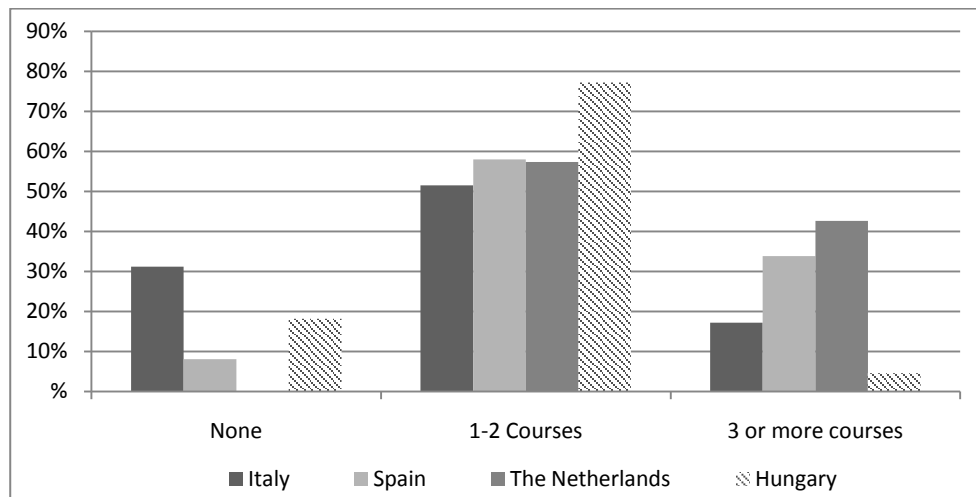
A breakdown by *region of origin* shows a relatively homogenous distribution of training activities. A slightly higher percentage of Africans participate in training, possibly to remedy a relatively lower overall level of education. In contrast, Asians have the lowest percentage attending training courses, probably because they tend to have more formal education. (See Figure 12.)

Figure 12. Number of training courses attended in host country by region of origin



By *country of residence*, the distribution is less homogeneous, possibly reflecting different national public policies. In Spain and the Netherlands, the average number of courses is 2 and 2.5, respectively; all the respondents in those two countries have taken at least one course, and more than 40% have taken three or more. In Italy, by contrast, fully 31% have taken *no* training courses, and the average is 1.5 courses. In Hungary, only 5% have taken three courses or more (the average is 1.3 courses). (See Figure 13.)

Figure 13. Number of training courses attended in host country, by country of residence



There are differences in national contexts that may contribute to these patterns:

1. In the Netherlands, people must attend training courses regularly in order to receive national unemployment subsidies.
2. In Spain, NGO courses are free of charge, and people can participate regardless of legal status.
3. In Italy, people are required to show an identity card even to use public Internet resources;⁴⁶ courses are not completely free of charge.
4. In Hungary, the surveyed group is mainly composed of refugees and asylum seekers; training is part of a broader social inclusion strategy of the NGOs serving them.

TYPES OF TRAINING COURSES

Of those who attended courses (306 women), those who took three or more courses preferred vocational training courses, followed by e-skills courses. Those who took one or two courses concentrated more on local language training and secondarily on e-skills.

Overall, the most popular area of training was *e-skills* (43%, combining basic and advanced levels).⁴⁷ The other two areas were roughly equally popular: host-country *language* (30%) and *vocational training* (27%). Vocational training included training in social assistance (cultural mediation, social

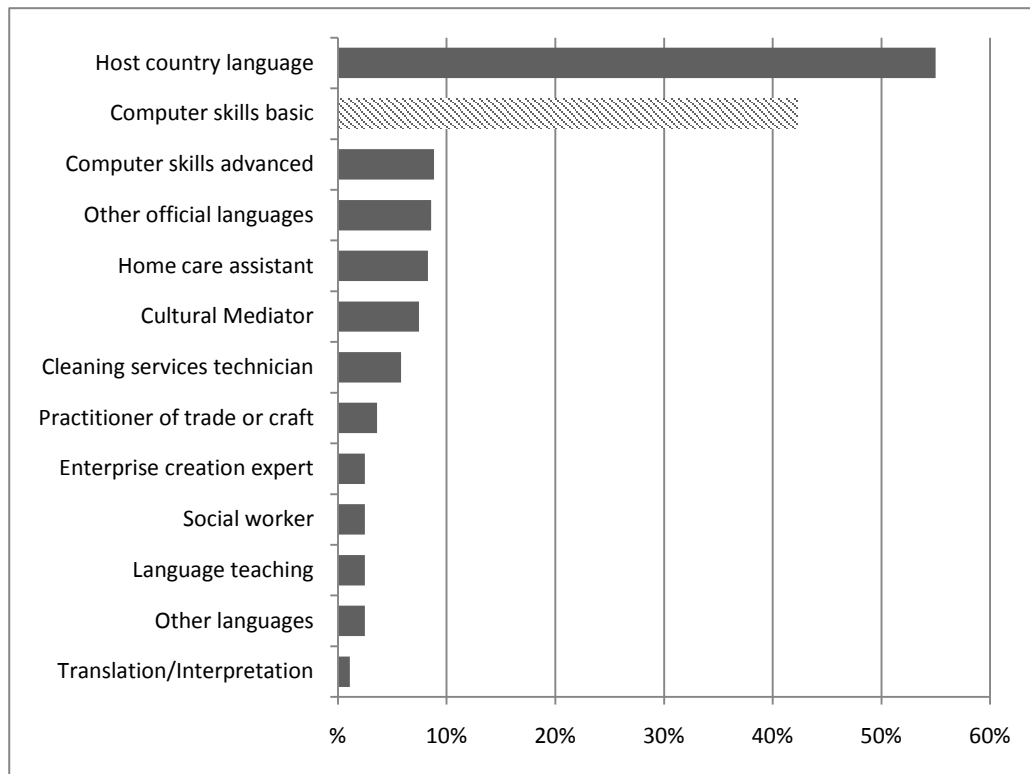
⁴⁶ Italian anti-terrorism laws require those using a public Internet center to show an identity card and sign in person every time they access the internet.

⁴⁷ These high figures could be influenced by the fact that the NGOs that collaborated in the survey are in most cases providers of digital literacy courses — with the exception of the organizations in Italy and Hungary.

work, and job guidance); care-giving (home care assistance, nursery, and baby sitter); business (tradedcraft, enterprise creation and management, craftwork); language-related employment (e.g., interpreter); and ICT-related employment. For the sample as a whole, the variety of training courses is far richer than their actual areas of employment. (See Figure 14.)

Different patterns can be seen at the country level. In Hungary and Italy, the most popular training subject is the host-country language (54% and 52% respectively), whereas e-skills courses are the most popular in the Netherlands and Spain (97% and 55%). Other popular courses in Hungary relate to other official languages, trade and craft practice, and e-skills. In Netherlands, language courses are a close second to e-skills (91%), and 21% attend advanced computer skills courses. (Note that *all* the participating NGOs in the Netherlands offer e-skills courses, unlike Italy, for example.) In Spain, the second most popular subject is the language (38%), followed by other official languages (19%), home care training (16%) and cleaning services training (14%); 9% attend advanced computer skills courses. Italy has a lower percentage attending training courses (31%); the second most popular subject was cultural mediator (14%) followed by basic computer skills (13%). (See Table 11.)

Figure 14. Training courses taken by immigrant women in host countries



Note: Percentages are based on total number of *cases* — that is, the total number of responses (where respondents can give more than one response to a question).

We found no clear relationship between the number of courses taken and the individual’s current employment situation. Of the group that took no training courses, over half are currently employed. Of those who took three or more courses, the employed group is only a few percentage points above the unemployed group — and for those who took one or two courses; the unemployed group outnumbers the employed group by a few percentage points. (See Figure 15.)

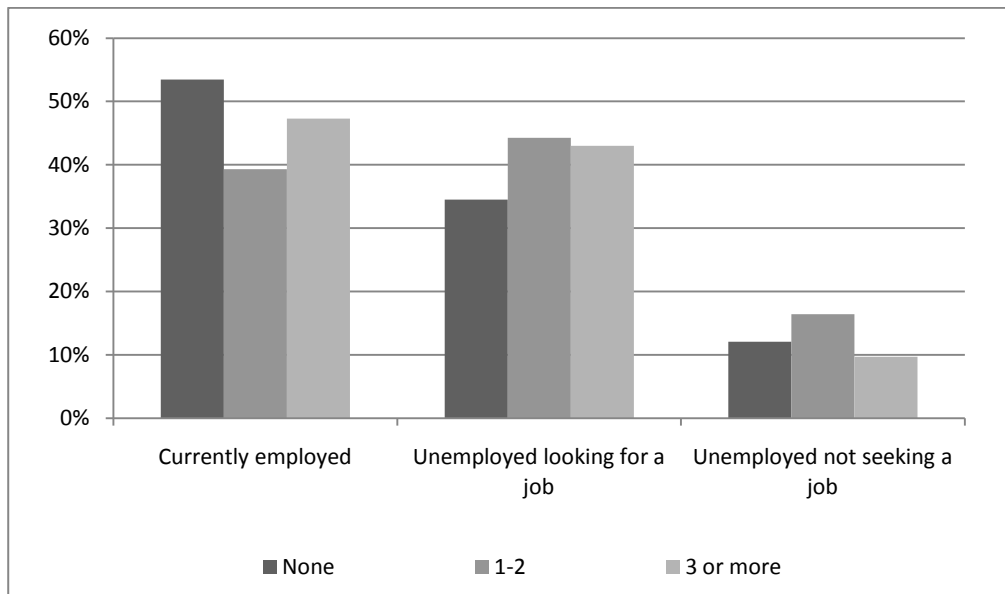
This could be seen as refuting our working assumption that progress in the Education and Training path improves employability. There may be other factors involved, however. With some knowledge of the NGO training programs, we suggest that the programs offered may be failing to reflect the changing needs of the labor market, since the NGOs tend to focus more on the social dimension than the economic dimension. Another factor, no doubt, is the stigmatization of immigrant women in the labor market.

Table 11. Training courses taken by immigrant women, by host country

Training Courses	Host Country				Total N
	Italy	Spain	The Netherlands	Hungary	
None	31%	8%	0%	16%	57
Host Country Language	52%	38%	91%	54%	199
Other official languages	.8%	19%	4%	9%	31
Other languages	.8%	3%	4%	2%	9
Language teaching	4%	.8%	2%	5%	9
Translation/Interpretation	2%	.0%	2%	2%	4
Cultural Mediator	14%	2%	5%	5%	27
Social worker	4%	2%	.0%	5%	9
Home care assistant	6%	16%	4 %	0%	30
Cleaning services technician	2%	14%	3%	0%	21
Trade or craft	4%	3%	2%	7%	13
Enterprise creation expert	2%	2%	2%	5%	9
Computer skills basic	13%	55%	97%	7%	153
Computer skills advanced	5%	9%	22%	2%	32
Other	15%	26%	12%	9%	63
Total No per host country	128	123	68	43	362

Those respondents who have not attended any training courses give various reasons. In Italy the main reason given is lack of time. This may reflect their greater participation in the job market: employment rates for the sample were 71% in Italy, compared to 34% in the Netherlands, 26% in Spain and 23% in Hungary.⁴⁸ In Spain, respondents cite the high cost of enrollment (for private training, not NGO courses). Cost is also the reason most cited in Hungary and the second most cited in the Netherlands (where the main reason cited is difficulty with the local language).

Figure 15. Number of training courses taken, by employment status



Note: Percentages based on total number of respondents (N=364)

There is more broad agreement on this question when comparing region of origin. Respondents from *all* regions cited lack of time as the main reason for not taking courses. Respondents invest a lot of time in their jobs (more than eight hours a day) besides taking care of family matters, often without the support of close relatives. Africans and non-EU Europeans also cite problems with the local language, and Americans and Asians cite the high cost of enrollment, in addition to language and time concerns.

Online courses represent a resource that could help overcome the main constraint cited, a lack of time; these, however, are not widely used. Those who report attending at least one online course represent just 21% of the whole sample: none in Hungary, and only 10% of respondents in Spain, but 25% in Italy and an impressive 90% in the Netherlands.

We hypothesize two different reasons for the lower percentages, which may also reflect opportunities:

- **Preparedness.** Respondents may lack the basic competences required to learn online, including basic e-skills, knowledge of local language, and the ability to (self)learn — that is, to actively look for relevant information — as well as the ability to learn in collaboration with peers through electronic means (at-a-distance mutual learning).

We note that the experience of online learning is itself a practical way to acquire those

⁴⁸ In terms of vocational training participation, the Italian sample is second highest (31%) soon after Spain (41%) and before Hungary (27%) and The Netherlands (25%).

competences, and immigrant women should therefore be encouraged to experiment with these resources.

- **Availability.** NGO staff reported that the e-learning opportunities available on the Internet are difficult to identify and, when free of charge, of low quality. Only a few organizations offer their own appropriate e-learning resources. A notable exception is the Esplai foundation in Spain, which has developed numerous online resources that they share with other social organizations that provide digital literacy training with a community orientation. High-quality resources in general tend to be subject to license (at a price unaffordable by the NGOs), or else were developed through project funding (often non-sustainable) and are narrowly designed to fit needs which are not broadly relevant.

In our vision, widely available e-learning resources represent a potential area of investment for public and private funds; the resulting learning programs could be shared by “third sector” organizations⁴⁹ working in the field of e-inclusion. We note that the framework of NGO services leads them to prefer face-to-face courses, as a way of building trust and a sense of belonging as well as promoting ties with other individuals and with the local community. These are important benefits for those with limited circles of family and friendship. Nevertheless, e-learning could be an excellent *second step* for those who have finished a digital literacy course and want to continue the learning process. Such courses also represent an opportunity for NGOs to multiply their impact. Moreover, the Internet can also be an important means of creating social links and enlarging networks. The positive example of the Netherlands should be further explored as a model for programs in other countries.

4.4 Key competences to live and work in Europe

The European Reference Framework on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning,⁵⁰ as mentioned in the Introduction, identifies eight “competences” — defined as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes corresponding to a specific domain — which are considered crucial for three basic aspects of life:

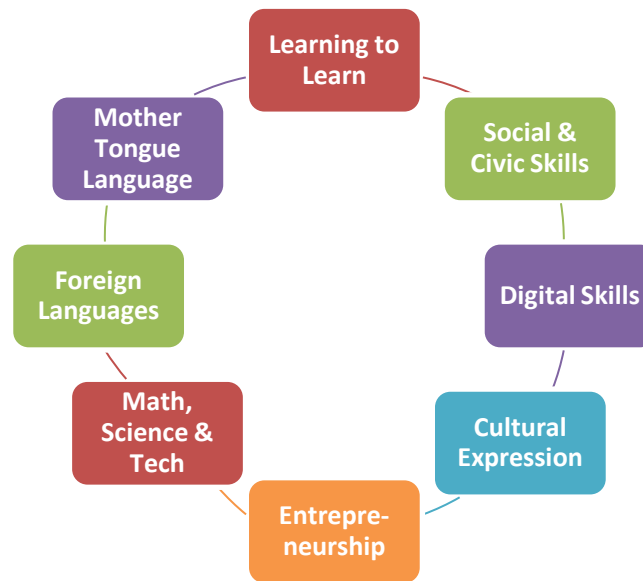
1. Personal fulfillment and development throughout life (cultural capital)
2. Active citizenship and inclusion (social capital)
3. Employability (human capital)

The eight competences are: communication in the mother tongue; communication in a foreign language; mathematical literacy and basic competences in science and technology; digital competence; learning-to-learn; interpersonal and civic competences; entrepreneurship; and cultural expression.

⁴⁹ Third sector, voluntary sector, civil sector or non-profit sector are different ways to refer to the sphere of social activity undertaken by organizations that are for non-profit and non-governmental. It is called third sector as it is neither public nor private sector.

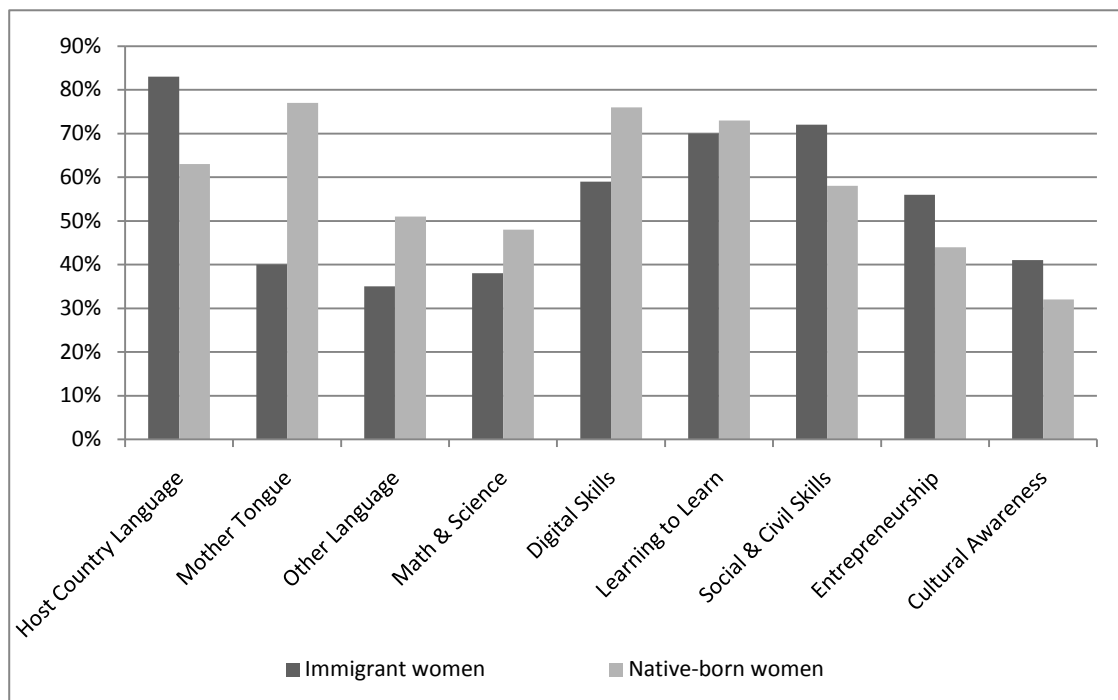
⁵⁰ *Key Competences* (2007).

Figure 16. The Eight Key Competences for Lifelong Learning



The surveyed women were asked to rate each of these key competences (slightly adapted to the context of the research) according to its importance for improving their labor situation in the host country. Figure 17 shows the percentages in each sample that rated a particular competence as *very important* (5) or *important* (4).

Figure 17. Most Valued Key Competences to improve the employment situation of women



* Refers to women born in the EU countries included in the study: Romania, Hungary, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands

The immigrant women in the sample clearly recognize the need to acquire competence in the *language of the host country* (83% of immigrant women; 77% of native-born women). The immigrant women who are employed (or seeking employment) are more focused on learning the local language than those who stay at home, or than native speakers (the group of native-born women). Note, however, that for some of the immigrant sample, the mother tongue is the same as the host-country language (e.g., Latin Americans living in Spain), a factor which may reduce the overall percentage.

The second most valued competence is *Social and Civic Skills* (72%). This area, too, is less highly rated by native-born women in the host countries (58%), probably because they have less need to focus on new social ties, and they can take for granted the cultural conventions and civic norms that govern community life. Next most important is *Learning to learn* (70% for immigrants and 73% for the group of native-born women), a very promising finding both for their potential empowerment and for the success of policies aimed at promoting lifelong learning.

Digital skills are particularly valued by native-born women (76%) and less by immigrant women (59%), reflecting their different backgrounds. It is likely that immigrants, coming from countries where the informal economy provides the main source of jobs, do not immediately recognize the facilitating role of ICT in Europe. Indeed, for those coming from economies where ICT is poorly represented it is hard to recognize the necessity of dealing with technological media even in elementary jobs such as elder care and restaurant work.

Sense of initiative/entrepreneurship is somewhat highly rated by both groups, at over 50%, suggesting an interest in building self-employment opportunities.

It is interesting to compare these responses with the European policymakers' vision, as expressed at the Barcelona Council (2002). The main competences identified as most critical for life and work in Europe were *Foreign language* and *Digital competences*.⁵¹ These are competences that are also valued by the immigrant women in our sample.

For most of the immigrant women, of course, the host-country language is in fact a foreign language (with some exceptions, like the Latin Americans whose native language is Spanish)⁵²; they naturally emphasize the importance of improving their competence in this area. However, they tend to underestimate the importance of mastering their own language, as well as other key languages like English; for many, no doubt, their immediate daily needs are too pressing to allow them to pursue training to improve their medium- or long-term employability.

Regarding *digital competence*, more than two-thirds of the respondents rated it as important (rating 3, 4, or 5). These findings should be taken into account by public administrations and public or private initiatives involved in improving their training, employment, and social integration.

LANGUAGE SKILLS OF IMMIGRANT WOMEN

The existing language skills of immigrant women represent valuable cultural and human capital for occupational and social mobility. These skills can be used for the benefit of both the host country — to

⁵¹ Commission of the European Communities (2004a: 1).

⁵² Note that for many migrants from former Spanish colonies — in Latin America (Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador) or in Africa — their mother tongue is a tribal language (e.g., Quechua), and Spanish is a second language, often requiring further training.

facilitate intercultural understanding, for example as *cultural mediators* — and their countries of origin — as agents of *co-development*⁵³; both countries can benefit from migration flows.

There is remarkable diversity of mother tongue languages in the sample of 375 immigrant women, with a total of 61 languages represented. Arabic (22%) and Spanish (20%) prevail, with the other languages each spoken by less than 10%. There are also small numbers of native speakers of a *lingua franca* such as English or French (4% and 3%), and of other host-country languages (Dutch, 3%; Hungarian, 3%; Italian, 0.5%). A number of other spoken languages reflects the diversity of the immigrants' origins: Romanian (6%) and Bulgarian (1%) — the last two countries to join the EU; Russian, Ukrainian, Moroccan, Turkish, and Nigerian, each between 2% and 5%. (See Table 12 for list of more commonly spoken languages.)

Only 11% of the respondents reported that they speak only one language (see Table 13). We can compare this figure with the results of the Adult Education Survey (AES) in EU27:⁵⁴ a 2007 self-assessment of language skills shows that 36% of the adult EU population (ages 25 to 64) speak only one language; 36% speak one foreign language, and 28% speak two or more foreign languages. Three of the countries in our survey show lower than average numbers in the AES survey: Hungary (75% speak only one language, the lowest ranking in language ability in the AES); Spain (47%); and Italy (39%).⁵⁵ (See Table 14.) The surveyed immigrant women overall have a richer linguistic capital than the average European citizen.

Table 12. Top ten spoken languages by immigrant women in addition to mother tongue

Language	N	Percent of Cases
Italian	130	41%
English	114	36%
French	66	21%
Dutch	64	20%
Spanish	57	18%
Hungarian	17	5%
Russian	13	4%
Romanian	10	3%
Catalan	10	3%
Arabic	8	3%

⁵³ Nair & de Lucas (1998).

⁵⁴ The Adult Education Survey (AES) is a pilot exercise carried out between 2005 and 2008 by Member States in the EU, EFTA, and candidate countries. The survey covers participation in education and lifelong learning activities (formal, non-formal and informal learning), as well as self-reported skills including foreign languages and IT.

⁵⁵ Comparison with the Netherlands and Romania is not possible due to lack of data in the AES.

Table 13. Number of *other* languages spoken by immigrant women, by host country

No. of Languages*	Host Country				
	Italy	Spain	The Netherlands	Hungary	Total
1	.0%	31%	3%	.0%	11%
2	35%	37%	46%	44%	39%
3	41%	21%	39%	40%	34%
4	16%	9%	8%	9%	11%
5	8%	.0%	3%	7%	4%
6	0%	2%	0%	0%	.5%
7	0%	0%	2%	0%	3%
Total % in country	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

*Refers to languages spoken in addition to mother tongue

But although immigrant women may speak more languages, *competence in the local language* is for many a significant barrier to get a (better) job and become more integrated in local society. They are aware of it, as indicated by their reported motivation to learn the language of their country of residence: *Integration with local society* (39%) and *To work* (33%) emerged as the main reasons.⁵⁶

The most prevalent second (or even third) languages are Italian (25%), English (23%), French (13%), Dutch (13%), Spanish (11%), and Hungarian (3%). (Recall that for 79 individuals in the sample, Spanish is their first language, so the total percentage of Spanish-speaking respondents would be much higher than 11%.) For Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands, 80-90% of the immigrant women speak the host-country language. For Hungary, the percentage is 73%.

The survey also asked them to self-assess their *level of understanding of the host-country language*. More than two-thirds (68%) did not speak the language before entering the EU. About one quarter (26%) have only a basic language ability, and one-third (36%) have medium ability. The remaining 38% report a high skill level, including those for whom it is their native language. Respondents report higher ability in comprehension than speaking, and lower ability in writing

In Italy and Spain, around half of respondents report a *high level* understanding of the local language; in the Netherlands, around half have only a *basic level*, despite the government efforts to promote the learning of Dutch.⁵⁷ (See Table 15 for host country language ability.)

⁵⁶ Respondents: 325 answers given by 241 immigrant women. Total percentages by region can be over 100% because of multiple answers.

⁵⁷ Both Dutch and Magyar (Hungarian) are considered especially difficult languages to learn.

Table 14. Self-reported language competence of EU population (European survey, 2007)

	No foreign languages	1 foreign language	2 or more foreign languages	Best known foreign language
EU*	36	36	28	English
Hungary	75	18	8	English
Portugal	51	22	26	English
Spain	47	35	18	English
Bulgaria	44	30	26	Russian
Greece	43	45	12	English
France	41	36	23	English
Italy	39	34	28	English
Poland	37	39	24	Russian
UK**	35	65	Not available	French
Belgium	32	16	52	English
Czech Republic	32	35	34	English***
Croatia	31	40	29	English
Germany	29	41	30	English
Austria	20	50	29	English
Finland	16	16	68	English
Cyprus	15	59	26	English
Estonia	14	30	56	Russian
Slovakia	8	24	68	Czech**
Slovenia	8	21	72	English
Latvia	5	40	55	Russian
Sweden	5	45	50	English
Lithuania	3	32	66	Russian
Norway	3	22	75	English

Source: Adult Education Survey (AES).⁵⁸

Notes: The survey included adults aged 25 to 64. It covered the EU27 Member States except Denmark, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, and Romania.

* EU average is based on available Member States and excluding the United Kingdom.

**The questionnaire for the United Kingdom only distinguishes "no foreign language" and "one foreign language."

*** Slovakian is not recorded as a foreign language in Czech survey, whereas Czech is recorded as a foreign language in the Slovakian survey.

⁵⁸ Eurostat Newsrelease 24/09/2009.

We also saw differences according to region of origin. Migrants from the Americas have the highest percentage of *high skill level* responses (for comprehension, speaking, and writing, 70%, 61%, and 58% respectively); note that these numbers include immigrants to Spain, where many of them are native speakers of the national language. Non-EU Europeans have the next highest percentages (comprehension, speaking, and writing are 53%, 34%, and 28% for high level; 36%, 51%, and 40% for medium level). Immigrants from Africa are mostly at the *middle-basic level* (comprehension, speaking, and writing are 41%, 45%, and 32% for medium level; and 34%, 37%, and 48% for basic level). Those from Asia appear only slightly higher: comprehension, speaking, and writing are 48%, 50%, and 35% for medium level and 28%, 30%, and 40% for basic level.

Table 15. Fluency level in host country language

Ability Level in Host Country Language									
HOST COUNTRY	COMPREHENSION			SPOKEN			WRITTEN		
	Basic level	Medium level	High level	Basic level	Medium level	High level	Basic level	Medium level	High level
Italy	9%	90%	52%	11%	51%	38%	29%	42%	28%
Spain	13%	32%	55%	17%	33%	51%	17%	28%	55%
The Netherlands	46%	37%	16%	51%	39%	10%	64%	28%	8%
Hungary	33%	16%	39%	30%	38%	33%	49%	19%	32%

An analysis of age groups shows that the younger groups have increasingly better skills in the host-country language. The youngest group also has evenly balanced skills in all three aspects of language: the 15-to-24-year-old group reports *high skill level* for comprehension, speaking, and writing at 46%, 45%, and 43% respectively. In contrast, immigrants between 50 and 64 years old have high-skill percentages at 37%, 25%, and 20%. Many of those in the youngest group attended school in the host country, providing them an opportunity (however stressful) to learn the local language through an immersion process.

In terms of length of stay in the host country, there are also significant differences between subgroups of immigrants. According to the profile (Chapter 3), roughly 38% arrived within the last five years, and almost 40% arrived six to ten years ago. Only 18% have lived in the host country more than ten years. We find that the middle group (resident in-country between 6 and 10 years) has higher local language skills than the other groups: around half report having high-level skills. This seems to confirm a finding of *Migrant women in the EU labour force*,⁵⁹ that a long process of adaptation is required, particularly in countries with a longer history of immigration (e.g., the Netherlands). Surprisingly, however, respondents who arrived more than 10 years ago have the *lowest* percentage of high-level skills: comprehension and speaking are reported at 30% and 22% respectively; for writing, high-level skills are negligible, and almost half (47%) report only basic level skills. One contributing factor is undoubtedly the relative lack of affordable opportunities to study the local languages until recent years, when

⁵⁹ Rubin et al. (2008).

national and EU efforts have increasingly promoted such programs.⁶⁰ Moreover, a significant part of this sub-group belongs to the Moroccan community in Amsterdam, who came mostly to reunite with their families rather than to work.

Another factor correlating with local language competence is *educational background*. In general, the higher the educational qualification, the higher the local language skills. More than half of the respondents with a secondary or higher education (high school/VET/university) have high-level comprehension and medium-high speaking skill; of those with lower educational qualifications, more than one-third have only basic comprehension and speaking skills, and around half have only basic writing skill.

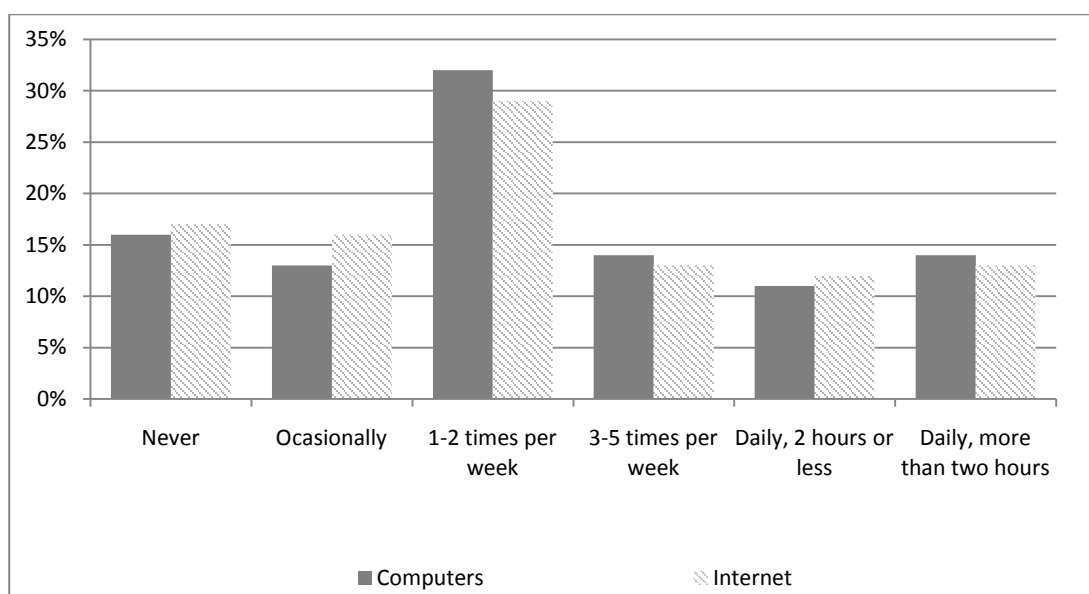
DIGITAL COMPETENCIES

E-skills are one of the most essential basic skills required to live and work in a knowledge economy. One of our working hypotheses is that digital skills contribute across all four paths, improving employability. Here we describe the digital profile of our target group, their e-skill training opportunities, and how NGOs are helping them to acquire and improve these skills.

For the entire sample of immigrant women, around 30% use computers and Internet one to two times per week. That frequency corresponds to the schedule of lessons for digital literacy training courses; many lack online access at home or at work, and they avoid spending money on cybercafes (in favor of more urgent needs), so they are limited to using Internet on the days when they visit the NGOs.

Regular users of computer and Internet — including those attending classes as well as the more frequent users — amount to an impressive 70% of the entire sample (see Figure 18). A small percentage (16% of the total sample) reported never using the computer or the Internet. Their two main reasons cited for not using ICT are lack of ICT skills (32 cases) and lack of access or opportunity (15 cases); only 7 women responded they have no need to use ICT.

Figure 18. Frequency of COMPUTER and INTERNET use

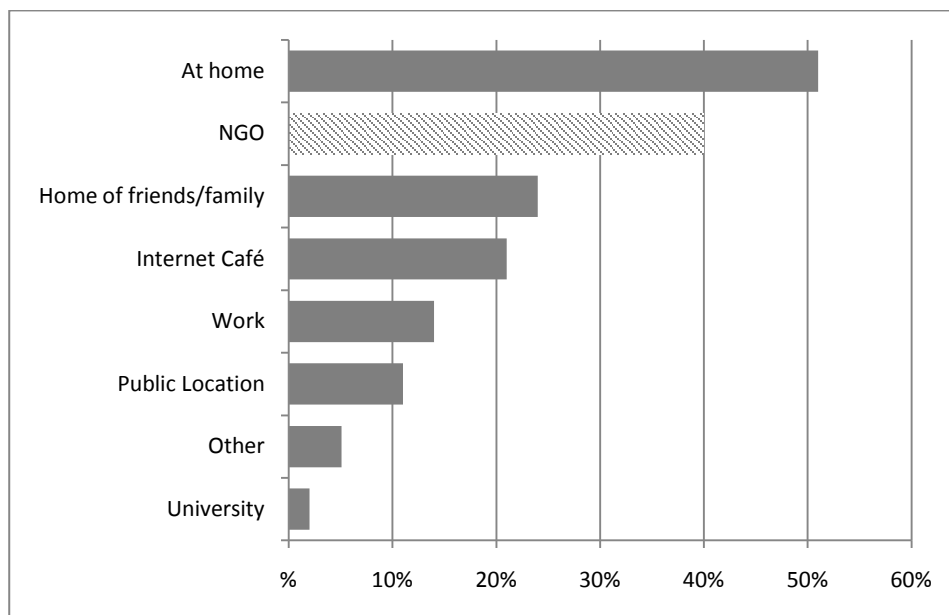


⁶⁰ See for example the Lingua programme of DG Education and Culture of the European Commission: http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/socrates/lingua/index_en.html

The three sites where they use computers and Internet most often are *at home* (51%); *NGOs* (40%); and *at the home of family & friends* — an extension of home-based usage (24%). (See Figure 19.) The relevant context is the high penetration of Internet in households across Europe, reported at 65% for the European Union. For the four countries in this study the average penetration of Internet is 63%: 90% in Netherlands, 55% in Hungary, 54% in Spain, and 53% in Italy.⁶¹

Lack of Internet access from home seems to be conditioned by several factors: first, the price of the service — often unaffordable for immigrant women who are unemployed or underemployed; second, the instability of housing (especially for those most newly arrived) — which makes them avoid buying “luxury” equipment; third, their age (older respondents are apparently more reluctant to invest in technology). NGOs not only provide digital literacy training but also PCs and access to Internet free of charge. With better facilities, it appears, respondents would make more frequent use of these opportunities. Interviews with NGO staff reveal that the factor limiting frequency of use is the insufficient quantity of IT equipment; some mentioned that, due to limited facilities, they had to restrict use by assigning timeslots.

Figure 19. Most common places to access COMPUTER and INTERNET



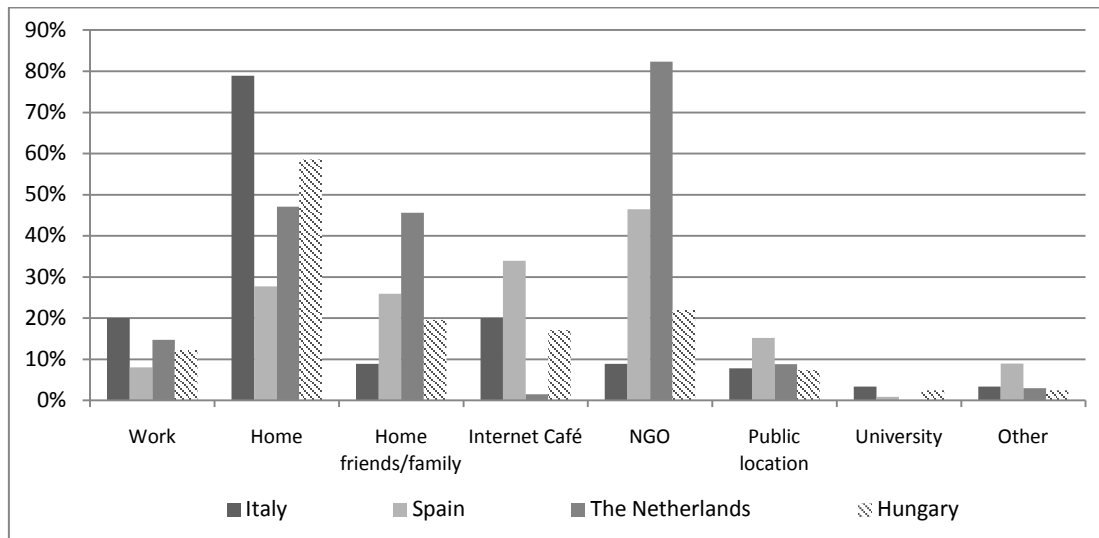
Note: Percentages are based on total number of cases — that is, the total number of responses (where respondents can give more than one response to a question).

By countries, there are significant discrepancies. In Italy, the preferred place to connect to Internet is *at home* (79%, higher than the national rate of household connection to Internet); use of NGOs for Internet is very low (8%). In Spain, however, 46% of the users access Internet from NGOs, 34% from private centers, and 15% from public locations like libraries — heavily favoring social spaces overall. In the Netherlands, NGOs represent the preferred channel (82%) followed by home connections (47% at own home, 45% through friends and family). Hungary shows a pattern more like that of Italy, with 59% accessing from home (see Figure 20).

⁶¹ Eurostat 2009.

We might hazard a connection between these patterns and the socio-political conditions of immigration in each country. The tendency to “home reclusion” or agoraphobia in Italy may be related to an element of denigration and even demonization of immigration, by the government and society; immigrants may be discouraged specifically by the requirement to show an identification card in order to make use of NGO services. In Hungary, the same tendency could reflect the fact that most of the respondents are refugees or asylum seekers. In the Netherlands and Spain, there is almost no sense of being systematically excluded, and immigrants are much more likely to frequent social spaces to access the Internet.

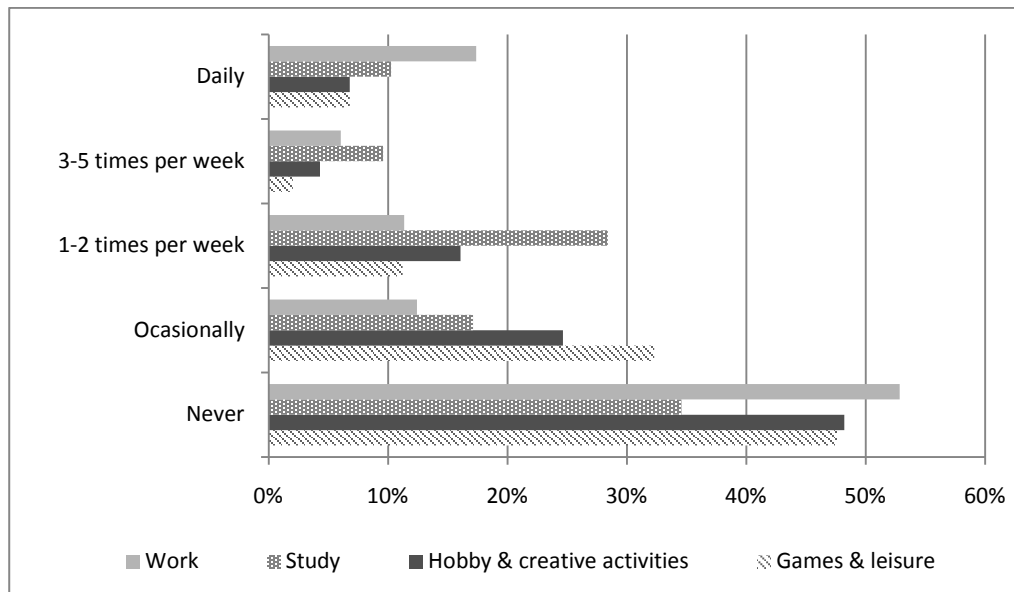
Figure 20: Places to access Internet (by country)



What do respondents use computers and Internet for? We asked about games and leisure, work, study, hobbies and creative activities, and household matters; respondents could rate each item “never,” “occasionally,” “once or twice a week,” “three to five times a week,” or “daily.” If we combine all the positive responses (excluding “never”), we find that roughly half the sample of ICT users engages in each of these activities. An exception is *study*, approaching two-thirds, probably because this figure includes those who were taking an ICT course at the time of the survey. (This is consistent with the frequency given for studying, *one or two times a week*.)

Daily ICT use for working was more prevalent than daily use for studying, and responses were polarized: those whose work requires using a PC must do so *daily*; those whose work does not require it *never* do it. The other activities — household affairs, hobby & creative activities, games & leisure — are predominantly *occasional*. (See Figure 21.)

Figure 21. Frequency of use by kind of activity

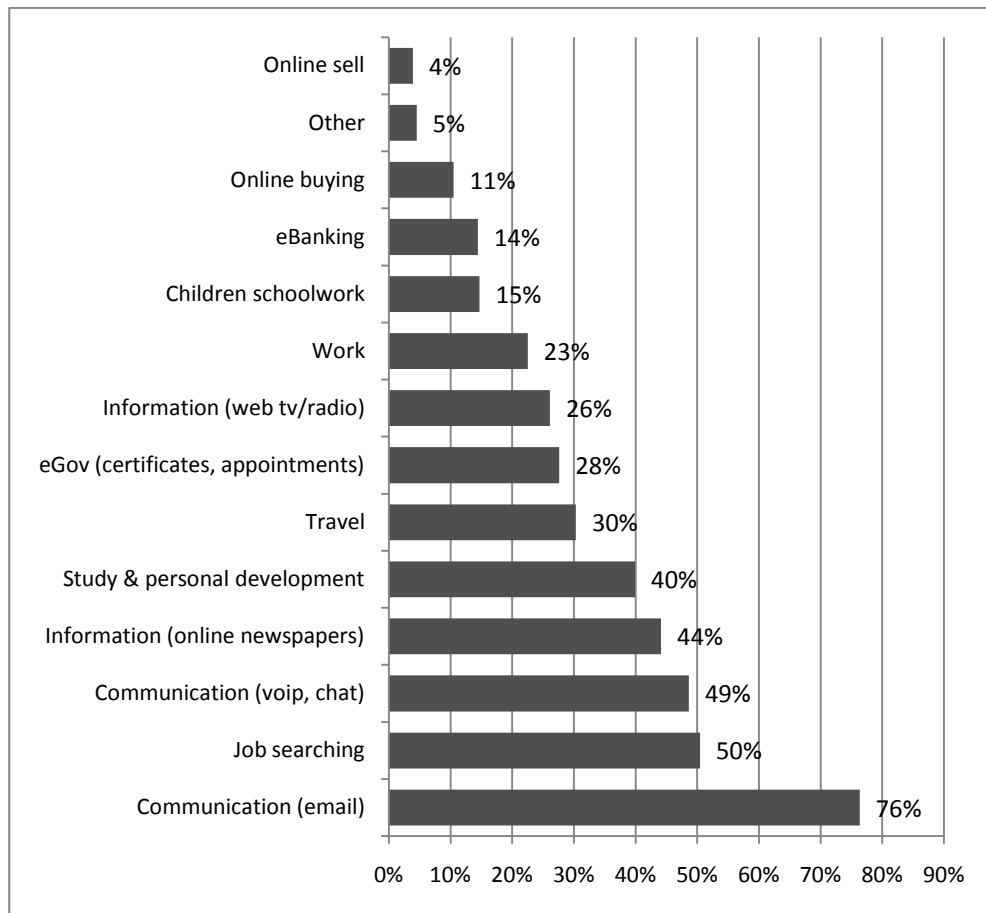


Whatever the preferred activity, the major factor is *access*. Respondents access from home if they can afford the cost (often sharing it with apartment mates), or from NGOs (free of charge), or from friends' and relatives' homes.

An analysis of Internet usage in the 12 months prior to participation in the survey shows that:

- *Communication* is the predominant use, including email (76%) and other means, such as chat and VoIP (44%). They use technology to communicate with close relatives, to exchange photos, and to interact with their parents or kids by webcam. ICT development has shortened distances around the world, but cost matters: respondents rarely access Internet from a cybercafe.
- The second most popular use is for *job searching* (50%), while only 23% use it for working.
- Although not all jobs require use of computers for *work*, respondents tend to overlook the possibility until the need occurs, and then they use NGOs almost exclusively. Nurse assistants, for example, find that their profession is increasingly dependent on technology, requiring professional requalification training; nursing students are assumed to be familiar with computer use. For immigrants, NGOs offer more accessible digital training than any other channel.
- 40% use Internet to *study*. An e-learning component — low-cost (or no-cost) and high-quality — would be an excellent way of enhancing lifelong learning for this group.
- Other uses include *personal and household affairs*: travel (30%), e-government services (28%), e-banking (14%), and children's schoolwork (14%). Apparently, almost all the respondents who have children living with them (15% of the sample) are using Internet to help them with schoolwork, suggesting that this is an important way to interest them in technology — and also in the local language.
- *E-commerce* is rarely used: only 11% buy online, and 4% sell items online. Apparently most respondents are not aware of the commercial possibilities ICT offers those oriented to entrepreneurial activity.

Figure 22. Use of Internet during the last 12 months



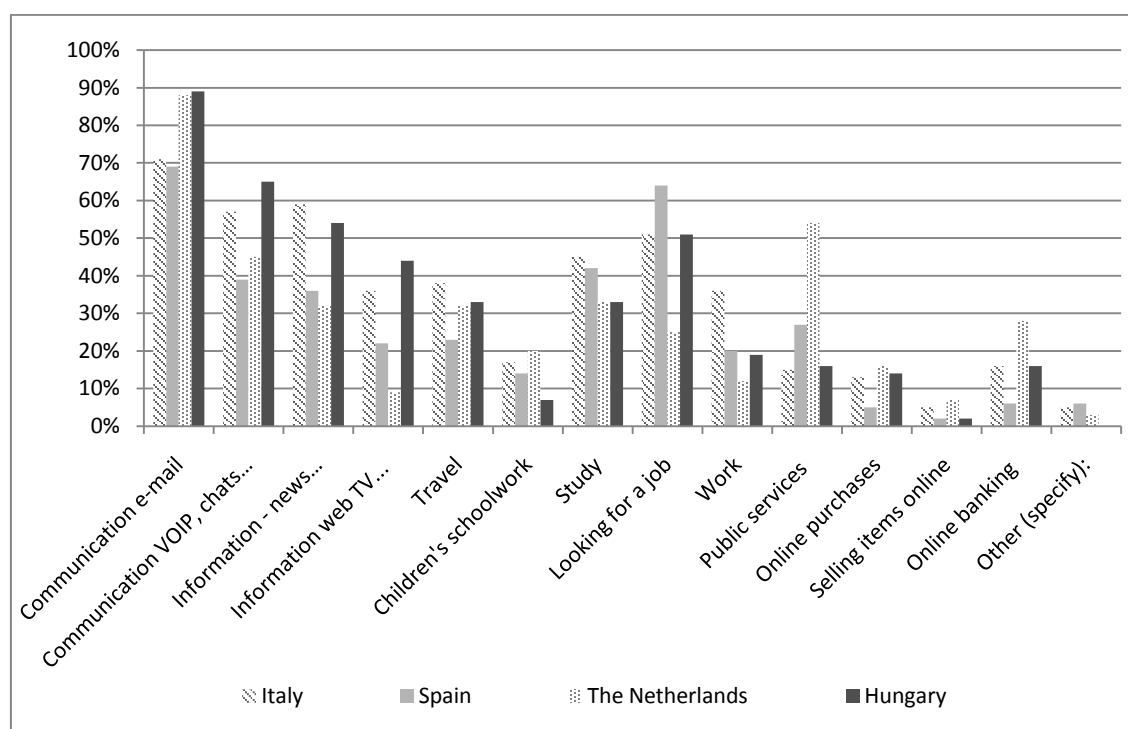
Another dimension of the digital world is the knowledge and use of Web 2.0 resources — the networking and collaborative dimension of the Internet. This dimension has low penetration among this population; not surprisingly, those who like using these features are the youngest age group. Overall, only 18% reported taking part in a *social networking* site: 40% of those under 25 years of age; 20% of those in the range 25-49; and just 5% of those 50 and older. 8% have a *personal blog*: 20% of those under 25; 8% of those in the range 25-49; and no one older than 49. 6% *write online news* or participate in forums: 13% of those under 25; 6% of those in the range 25-49; and no one older than 49.⁶²

We found only minor differences in Internet use between countries (Figure 23):

- Communication and information functions are used slightly more in Hungary and Italy.
- Job seeking is a widely used function in Spain (64%), and somewhat less in Italy and Hungary (51%); in the Netherlands it is less used (25%).
- Italy has the highest percentage using Internet for work (36%).
- Netherlands has the highest percentage using e-government (54%) and online banking (28%).

⁶² A recent study by Eurostat shows a similar pattern. A large majority of young people in EU-27 used the internet daily (more than 70% of those aged 16-24) while older people do it much less frequently (around 50%) (Löf & Seybert (2009)).

Figure 23. Use of INTERNET for specific activities, by host country

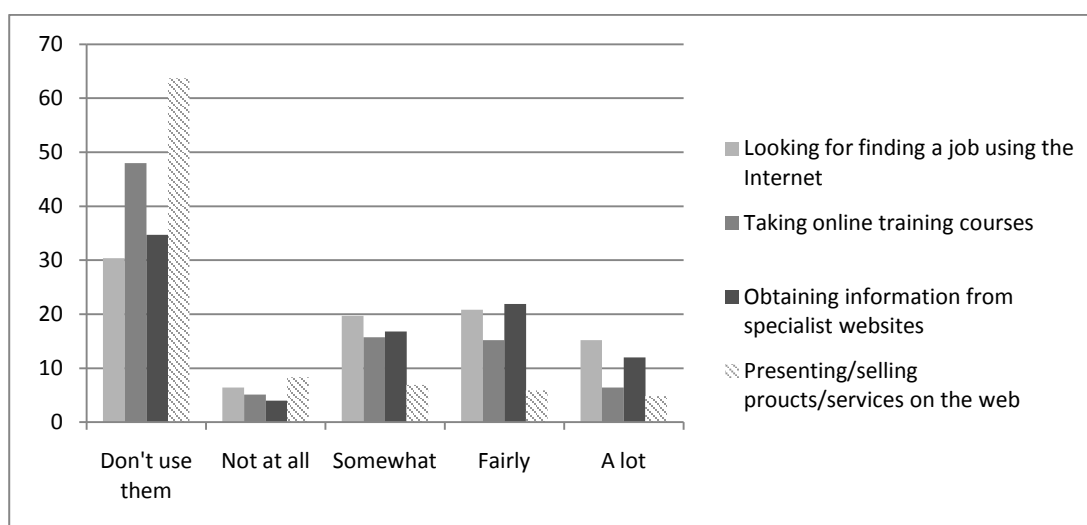


4.5 E-skills as a pathway to wider training and job options

E-skills are widely seen as a “shortcut” to finding and utilizing training opportunities, and as a means of improving basic competences and thus employability. When we asked about the usefulness of ICT for training and work, however, we found that the respondents’ use of this approach was limited (see Figure 24):

- A significant number don’t use Internet for *training or employment* purposes, probably because they are unaware of its usefulness. (NGOs could help through targeted awareness-raising actions).
- The most often used employment-related activities were *Looking for a job using the Internet* and *Obtaining information from specialist websites*.
- *Taking online training courses* is not widely used. A somewhat more popular function is *Acquiring competences in the programs learned*, which might be practical way to introduce the use of Internet for learning.
- *Presenting/selling products/services on the web* is practically ignored.

Figure 24. Usefulness of Internet for training and employment



We also assessed the level of respondents' e-skills, as self-reported, using EUROSTAT categories.⁶³ We found:

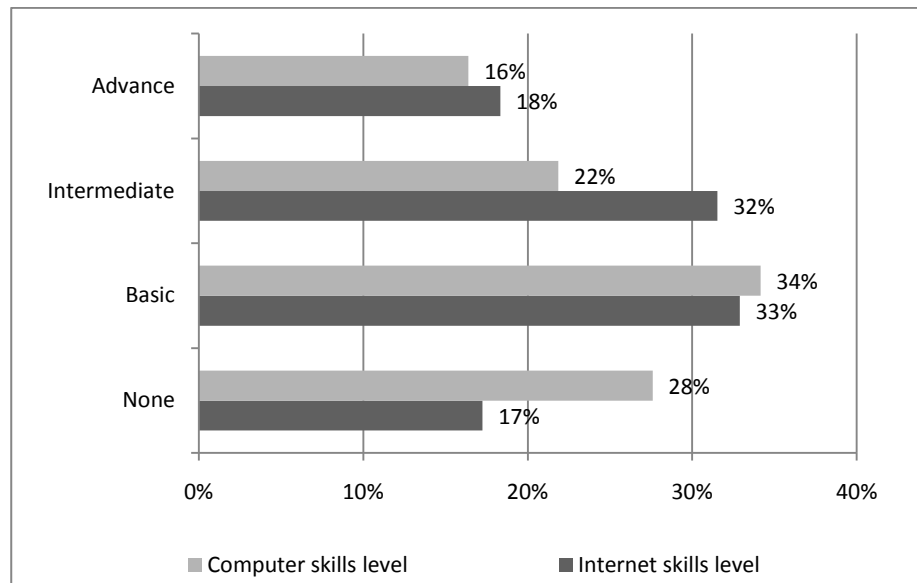
- a balanced distribution of levels of competence (Gauss bell)
- better knowledge of Internet than of the computer (Figure 25)
- 17% with advanced ICT skills — mostly concentrated in the younger age range and in the Netherlands
- 17% with *no knowledge* of Internet, and a full 28% with *no knowledge* of the PC

Internet is more familiar than the PC because the women use ICT more to communicate with relatives abroad than to write documents or process data; also, a number of them (mainly from Africa) use cell phones instead of PCs to access the Internet.

The last two findings indicate that the digital divide persists. For the group with no knowledge of ICT, this lack of competence is a barrier to full functioning in a digitalized world, as well as to employment opportunities (including ICT-related jobs as well as Internet job portals). NGOs engaged in the e-Inclusion field play an important role in bridging the gap by providing digital literacy and other training courses, even in the absence of supportive public policies and funding.

⁶³ As explained in Chapter 2, our survey included two questions based on the 2007 *Community Survey on ICT Usage in Households and by Individuals*, each organized around six different basic ICT operations. For the Level of Competence, NONE means that the respondent does not practice any of the 6 operations; BASIC LEVEL means able to do 1 to 2 of the operations; MEDIUM LEVEL, 3 to 4; and HIGH LEVEL, 5 to 6.

Figure 25. eSkills level (by EUROSTAT categories)



For the sample of immigrant women, there is still much room to increase their involvement in ICT training. Only half have attended digital training courses: 41% have taken basic e-skills training, and 9% have taken advanced courses. There are also important contrasts among the countries studied:

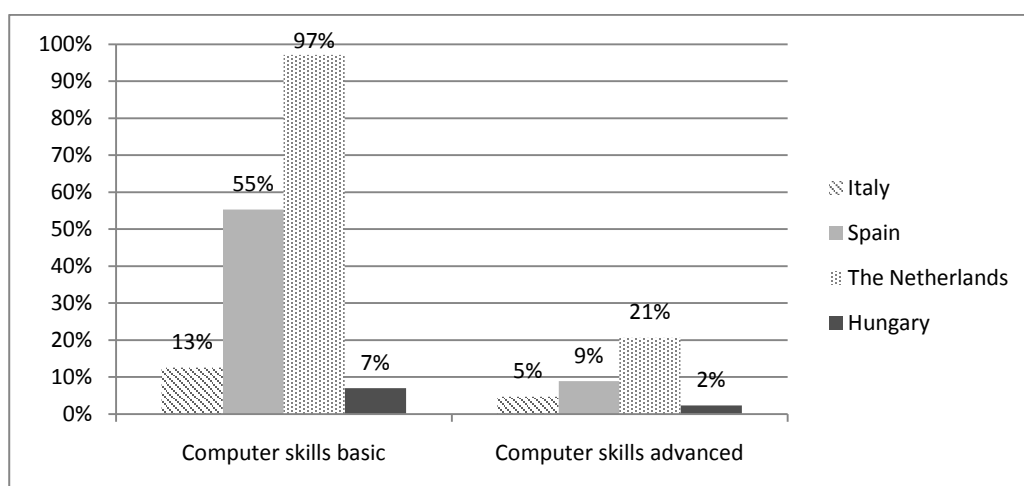
- In the Netherlands, practically the whole of the immigrant sample had trained in basic e-skills (97%); one-fifth had advanced training (21%).
- Spain is close to the average, with 55% and 9% taking basic and advanced training, respectively.
- In Italy and Hungary, only 13% and 5% trained in basic skills; 7% and 2% had trained in advanced skills.⁶⁴

The countries also differ in their national policies in this area. The Netherlands government promotes e-skills training aggressively: training is *mandatory* for immigrants to continue to receiving government financial support. Spain has several public funds, as well as central and other initiatives, promoting the Information Society by creating infrastructure and services. In Italy, however, public initiatives are more scarce and concentrated in the richer regions; in Hungary, public initiative is practically nonexistent in this field.

Of the respondents who have some level of digital skills, half or more have attended e-skills courses: 58% and 46% of those with *basic* skills (PC and Internet respectively); 60% of those with intermediate e-skills; and less than 50% of those with advanced skills. In addition, 12% of those with no ICT skills reported taking a course, no doubt including many who were surveyed at the beginning of their digital literacy training. (See Figure 26.)

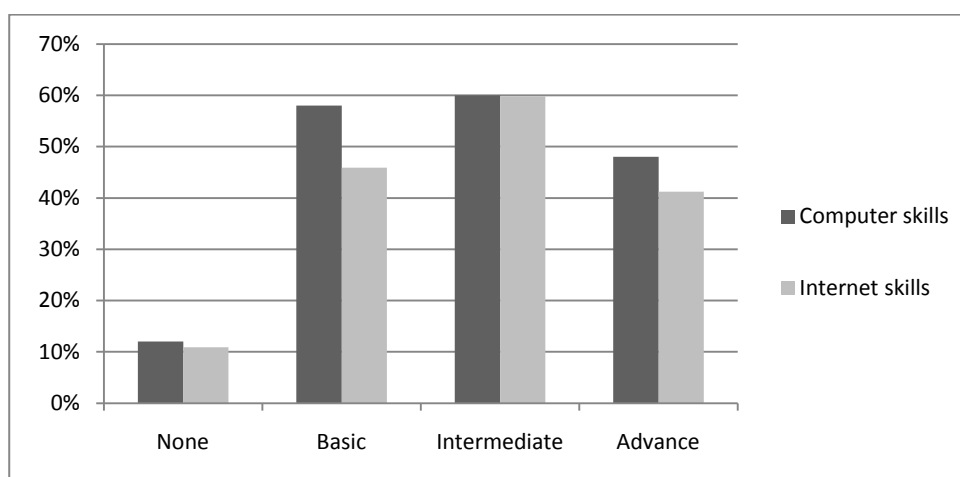
⁶⁴ Nevertheless, in both these countries, self-learners (with no formal training) have attained medium/advanced levels of ICT skills: 40% in Italy and 42% in Hungary, compared to 39% and 35% in the Netherlands and Spain.

Figure 26. Participation in computer skills training, by host country



Available data indicate that the NGO courses are not tailored to cover more sophisticated needs, but are rather oriented to assist people at the beginning stages of acquiring digital literacy. NGO staff interviews highlighted the lack of equipment, staffing, and funding to provide advanced ICT skills training. (One explained that they couldn't train in multimedia editing due to the lack of appropriate peripherals and software.) More advanced training, however, could prepare a number of migrant women for employment as software programmers, graphic designers, or multimedia producers. A significant portion of the users (around 40-50%) continue learning on their own, or with help of friends and relatives.

Figure 27. Percentage of immigrant women who attended a course on e-Skills by skill level

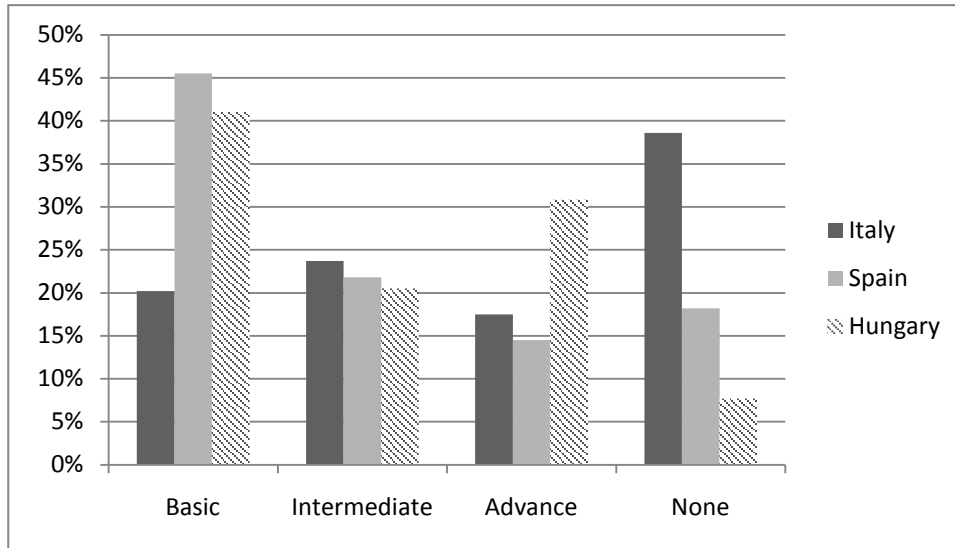


Note: e-Skill level according to Eurostat indicators.

Of the women who have taken *no e-skills courses*, a sizeable percentage has no computer skills (30% in Hungary, 44% in Spain, and 48% in Italy). (Netherlands is not included, since almost all respondents have taken such courses.) The rest have some computer skills, as shown in Figure 28, including some with advanced skills: 9% in Spain, 17% in Italy, and 21% in Hungary. For Internet skills, skill levels are somewhat better. Those with no e-skills make up 39% of this subgroup in Italy and 18% in Spain, but only 8% in Hungary; those with basic skills are 20% in Italy, 46% in Spain, and 41% in Hungary. And notable percentages have advanced skills: 15% in Spain, 18% in Italy, and 31% in Hungary.

The analysis strongly suggests that *training really matters*: competence levels are lower for those not trained. But there are some differences between countries. In Italy, most have not taken any e-skills course (109 out of 136) and this sample also shows the lowest e-skills levels of the four countries. In Hungary, too, most of them have no training (39 out of 44), but this sample has higher skill levels than in Italy: almost a third of them have acquired advanced digital competence on their own.

Figure 28. Computer skills level of women *who did not* participate in e-Skills courses



Note: Based on 109 cases in Italy, 55 in Spain and 39 in Hungary; Netherlands is not represented because there only 2 valid cases.

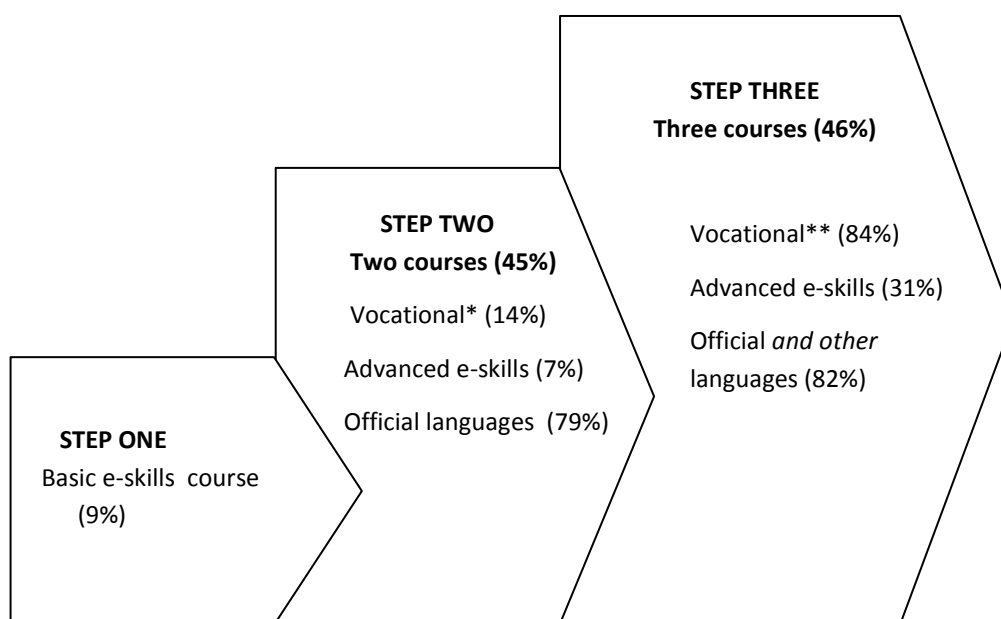
E-SKILLS AS A CATALYST FOR OTHER TYPES OF TRAINING

The data also suggest that e-skills courses contribute to enhance the overall training activities in which immigrant women participate. 152 immigrant women in the sample (41%) have taken a *basic e-skills course*; on average, this group has attended 2.4 courses, of various kinds. A small minority (9%) of this group have taken *only* the e-skills course; the rest have participated in two or even three courses (45% and 46% respectively). This suggests that ICT training may act as a gateway to wider training and self-improvement pathways. For the respondents who have taken *two courses*, the other course is most often in a host-country language — either the official language (67%) or another host-country language (12%). Only 7% take an advanced e-skills course. Less than 15% have taken a vocational training course.

A different pattern is seen for those who have attended *three courses* in the last five years. They are more likely than the others to take vocational training courses (84%) and e-skills advanced courses (31%); and they are equally likely to take language courses.

It seems likely that the first courses immigrants attend are those they consider most necessary to allow access to the social and training programs of the host-country (language and basic e-skills). After that, they take vocational training courses in order to get professional training certification, to upgrade their job skills, and to improve their position in the local job market.

Figure 29. Learning path: training courses



* Includes cultural mediation, cleaning services, language teaching.

** Includes home care assistance, cleaning services, cultural mediation, informatics-related job profiles, administrative profiles, shop assistance, SVCA Clients, assertiveness skills training.

Less than one-tenth of the sample (32 respondents) have attended an *advanced e-skills course*. This group has also taken the highest number of training courses (3.3 on average) as compared to other groups — those who took a basic e-skills course (2.4), and those who attended at least one training course of any kind (2.0). This pattern illustrates the role of e-skills as a gateway for additional training opportunities, in sustaining educational and professional upgrading.

As to the type of courses taken by this group, *around 86% are related to vocational training* — roughly the same proportion as for the same subgroup who have attended a basic skills course (82%). In summary, even for these more advanced e-skills students, ICT may act as a catalyst for the world of training, multiplying the opportunities for adult education and supporting the upgrade of participants' professional competence.

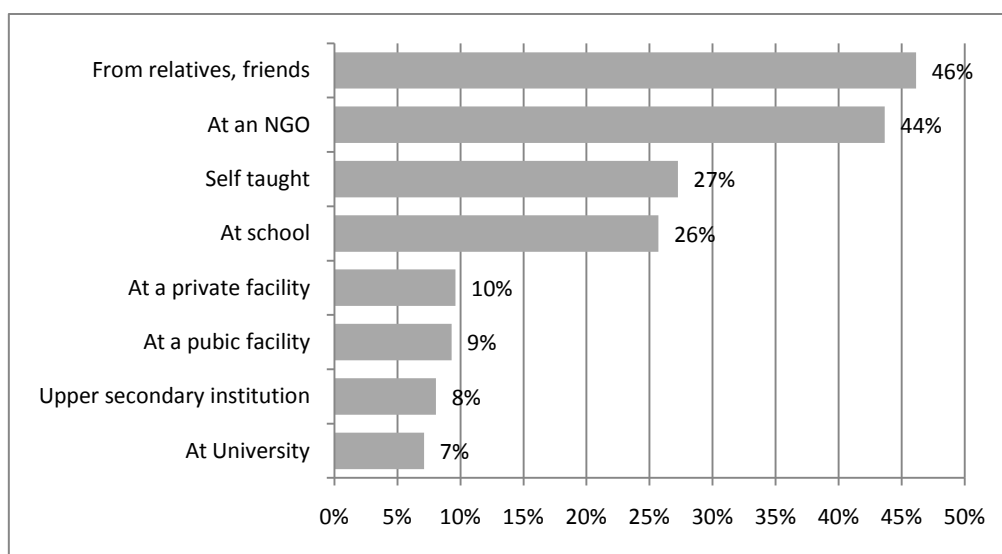
Several studies and evaluation reports sponsored by the European Social Fund have documented the difficulties faced by immigrant women in accessing vocational training programs. In many cases they are required to provide a certificate of secondary education (i.e., high school diploma), and for many this documentation is not available, even when requested from their embassies or cultural delegations. In addition, the course schedules are often inconvenient or impossible, especially for those who work more than 10 hours a day (as in home services). Finally, it is rare for employers to accommodate the training efforts of their immigrant employees. The reports also cite several positive steps taken by NGOs: organizing courses within a modular, flexible structure; establishing educational certification through curriculum assessment methods; arranging for reimbursement for participants' attendance; and supporting them with study facilities.

4.6 The importance of NGOs in e-Skills training

People who are not familiar with their work might not associate social organizations with digital literacy courses. How important is their contribution to training in basic e-skills?

Respondents were asked where they learned ICT. The most often-cited answer is “self-taught” (27%), and the next most-cited, “at a non-profit facility” (25%). Other options tend to be less accessible, due to admissions requirements (e.g., schools, upper secondary institutions, universities) or cost (private facilities). NGOs have other advantages as well: as they increasingly offer a range of non-formal training courses, they become a valid adult training and lifelong learning channel.

Figure 30. Places for e-Skills training



Digital literacy courses offered by the participating NGOs cover a wide range of ICT-related training aspects. All of them offer training in basic use of PC and Internet:

- Computer fundamentals (how to use the mouse, keyboard, etc.)
- Word processing (Word, Google Docs, etc.)
- Spreadsheets (for example, Excel)
- Presentation software (for example, Power Point)
- Internet browsing
- Email and chat
- Photo, video and music sharing (Flickr, YouTube, etc.)
- Social networking sites (Facebook, MySpace)

And a few also cover advanced applications such as e-administration, social networking, web design, or multimedia production.

While NGOs offer this training outside of any formal training system, in most cases they provide a certificate. Even if it only proves attendance at the course, such certification has symbolic value for the

participant and contributes to her self-esteem and empowerment. These certificates could become still more valuable if the NGOs could overcome the formalities required for *official recognition* — an effort that has so far been unsuccessful, despite some scattered efforts. The European Commission is currently promoting instruments to recognize the competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning settings, creating an opportunity for NGOs to explore, in partnership with public bodies, how these certificates might formally validate a level of competence. At least for courses more closely related to professional training (for example, advanced ICT skills), NGO certification might be integrated into the formal vocational training system.

The NGOs consider basic e-skills critical to increase the employability of immigrant women. They report that the most common ICT activities, for both samples of women, are editing their CV and job seeking; the second most common activities are study and self-training (usually related to a training course taken at the NGO). The immigrant sample also uses ICT to communicate with relatives in their native countries.

The NGOs would like to make their digital literacy courses available to more participants, but they are limited by lack of resources. Obsolete facilities and equipment, as well as lack of funds, prevent them from updating their courses, adapting them for new audiences, or offering more specialized courses such as photo and video editing. One suggested strategy is to develop e-learning resources that could be shared by many organizations, such as the European project “Key Competences for All”⁶⁵ — an employability toolkit, currently under development, designed to be used in different languages and contexts.

⁶⁵ *Key Competences* (2007).

4.7 Summary of findings for the Education and Lifelong Learning Path

PROVIDING ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND TRAINING IS KEY TO ADVANCE THE EMPLOYABILITY OF IMMIGRANT WOMEN

- Immigrant women clearly identify access to education and training opportunities as critical to improve their social and economic status in the EU, even though most (especially those with middle or high education level) have jobs that do *not* utilize their education or specialization.
- Recognition of their educational credentials remains a central concern; e-government procedures, as a means of bureaucracy simplification, might be designed to alleviate this inequality.
- Non-recognition of educational credentials is a barrier to formal education as well as to employability. Many immigrant women take advantage of non-formal training courses offered by NGOs, particularly courses in *language* and *basic computer skills*, and vocational courses for *home care and nurse assistants* and *cultural mediators*. Many would undoubtedly welcome an opportunity for more formal training in these areas.
- Immigrant women in Italy and Hungary show the lowest participation in training courses, reflecting both local conditions and migrant patterns. Training opportunities for immigrants in Italy are rather limited; while respondents in Hungary are mostly refugees and asylum seekers who are not formally entitled to the full range of public social services.

PARTICIPATION IN ICT SKILLS TRAINING AND EMPLOYABILITY VARIES AMONG COUNTRIES

- Immigrant women in the Netherlands have the highest participation in basic e-skills training, but also the highest percentage that are neither working nor looking for a job.
- Immigrant women in Spain have the second-highest participation in e-skills training, but also the highest unemployment rate. This reflects the national employment crisis: in January 2010, Spain's unemployment rate was 19.6%, the highest in the Eurozone and the second highest in EU27 (after Latvia).
- In Hungary and Italy, high percentages of migrant women are self-learners who have reached medium or high levels of ICT competence on their own.

ICT KNOWLEDGE IS RELEVANT FOR THEIR EMPLOYABILITY

- The three most common places to access ICT are: own home, social organizations, and home of friends or family.
- There are strong correlations between length of residence and ICT skills level (the most recent immigrants tend to have the lowest digital competence level); between ICT skills level and educational background; and between ICT skills level and current employment status (immigrant women with basic or no ICT skills have higher levels of unemployment).
- Immigrant women overwhelmingly use Internet for looking for a job; they rate as less important other uses such as practicing e-skills or taking online courses.
- They indicate little appreciation for the opportunities that technology offers for entrepreneurship and commercial initiatives, reflecting the lack of specific support given by NGOs to this particular economic path — a topic for further research.

- Innovative use of ICT (e.g., Web 2.0 tools) could help them diversify and expand their social and professional networks, and thus their employment opportunities; however, social networking sites and blogs are little used by our sampled population.

DIGITAL COMPETENCE IS ESSENTIAL AND VARIES WIDELY

- Immigrant women in general have a basic level of computer literacy, but there are differences among the countries. Italy has the highest percentage with *no* computer or Internet skills, followed by Hungary and Spain. The Netherlands sample has the highest ICT skill levels.
- E-Skills can help in overcoming language barriers, a significant factor in finding employment. Migrant women are motivated to acquire both host-country language *and* digital competence. The process of language acquisition could be facilitated or accelerated by ICT in various ways, including e-learning as well as the non-formal learning that occurs in digital literacy courses.

E-SKILLS COURSES OFFERED BY PARTICIPATING NGOS

- Social organizations are aware that digital competence has a broad range of benefits. Most use e-skills training not only to enhance language skills but also to promote self-esteem, autonomy, and social and cultural skills.
- In keeping with their not-for-profit orientation, NGOs tend not to address the business potential of the Internet. We suggest that immigrant women — as people who have already embarked on a major undertaking in immigrating — should be encouraged to assume a reasonable risk and create their own job or business endeavor.
- The many opportunities presented by new technology constitute a challenge for the NGOs that serve as ICT learning channels for immigrant women. These important organizations need to adapt their strategies to fully address the needs of this population, taking advantage of e-learning and Web 2.0 resources for social, professional, and commercial networking.

5 THE SOCIAL INCLUSION PATH

“Women not only wanted, and want, to abolish and diminish any inequalities suffered, and acquire the right to be free to decide on their lives; but they have also made evident to everyone’s eyes both problems and social and cultural behaviours so innovative that it would be impossible to define conceptually the contemporary world without taking into account their reflections and actions.”

— Alain Touraine, 1997)

5.1 Introduction

The growth of migration to the European Union in the last decade has prompted a debate about strategies to assist immigrant groups to further their social inclusion in host societies. Social inclusion is emerging as a top policy agenda for the European Commission, and various programs are being designed and implemented to promote and increase immigrants’ social and civic participation in EU host societies. Nevertheless, there are sometimes underlying assumptions relating to the definition of social inclusion that obscure the potential for immigrant groups to participate actively in shaping their social spaces, building new ties, and strengthening supportive social networks. It is vitally important to take into account the strategies developed by immigrants themselves, to cope with the demands and challenges of living within a culture different from their own.

The commonly-used definition of social inclusion assumes a binary process, *excluded or included* — a problematic assumption. As Sammers has noted, although *de facto* exclusion is a problem for immigrant groups in European societies, it is “often not specified what are immigrants exactly excluded from — the labor market, social welfare, political participation.”⁶⁶ We argue that a more useful way to conceptualize social inclusion for immigrant women is as a *path*, rather than as a binary concept: a path that has multiple roads and turns and that is by no means linear. By conceptualizing social inclusion as a path, we acknowledge from the start the multiplicity of ways in which immigrant women are socially active *at different stages*, recognizing that social inclusion is a process rather than a steady state.

We start from the premise that immigrant women are active participants in the societies where they live, and that they are capable of shaping and reshaping the social spaces they value. Applying Amartya Sen’s⁶⁷ definition of development and agency to immigrant women, we can say that there are many ways in which immigrant women “participate daily in shaping their spaces of residence in ways which enrich their lives” — despite the fact that many of them are *de facto* excluded from the labor market. If we were to assess the capabilities of immigrant women to participate in the host country labor market exclusively on the basis of employment status or income level, we would limit our understanding of the role they play in their communities and their homes, and their contributions to the host societies.

⁶⁶ Sammers (1998: 126).

⁶⁷ Sen (1999: 1).

There is no doubt that immigrant women experience several sources of unfreedom or deprivation, as conceptualized by Sen, such as discrimination in the labor market, lack of educational opportunities, and cultural traditions that may limit their “agency” and participation in different levels of society. However, this overt emphasis on the sources of unfreedom promotes “a victim perspective that can obstruct our understanding of the ways they manage to improve their situation.”⁶⁸

This study rather defines the social inclusion path for immigrant women as a product of the *capabilities* required to further promote social participation and mobilization, the *diversification* of social and civic roles, and the *opportunities* for expanding links into social networks.⁶⁹ In this context, we examine in particular the role that e-skills and communication technologies play in helping immigrant women along a social mobility path. Social inclusion is a complex phenomenon; our definition is not intended to be comprehensive, but rather to help shift the frame of reference for immigrant women from “victims” to “active participants,” capable of shaping their social spaces and the societies where they now live.

In mapping some of the elements of the social inclusion path for immigrant women, we analyze five encompassing factors (Table 16 gives the variables included in each factor):

1. Awareness of the problems they face in the host society (i.e., sources of unfreedom) and of potential solutions to overcome these obstacles
2. Participation in different social spaces, indicated by their participation in social events and in non-governmental organizations
3. The diversity of their social networks, specifically as they relate to social participation and the labor market
4. The role of NGO-offered training and services in promoting social participation and social and civic skills
5. The role of digital competences and ICT access and use, as a catalyst to promote further social participation

All these factors are cross-analyzed with respect to a common set of underlying variables: reasons for migrating, country of residence, geographic region of origin, and length of stay in the host country. At the broadest level, the analysis of the Social Inclusion Path would entail a full descriptive picture of the relevant social dimensions in the four European countries included in the research, a level of detail which is beyond the scope of this study. Here we focus on a secondary level of investigation, involving a detailed overview of the data, according to two main *dimensions of comparison*, aimed at identifying common elements and contrasting patterns among the four locales (Table 16 illustrates the levels of analysis of the Social Inclusion Path):

- **Multicountry analysis.** A comparison of the four participating EU receiving countries: Hungary, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands. The specific argument is that the context of integration plays a major role in shaping social inclusion processes as well as employability routes.
- **Parallel review.** Immigrant women are generally considered to suffer a double disadvantage, as *immigrants* and as *women*. We surveyed a comparison group of women native to the host country, to isolate some of the effects of migration on inclusion and employability. (As mentioned in the methodology chapter, this comparison is largely limited to a sample in Romania, and to a lesser extent, Hungary.)

⁶⁸ Van Meeteren et al. (2009).

⁶⁹ This definition is in part based on the definition of interpersonal, intercultural and social and civic competences outlined in the *European Framework for Key Competences for Lifelong Learning*.

Table 16. Exploring the Social Inclusion Path toward employability for immigrant women

FACTORS	LEVELS OF PRIMARY ANALYSIS	LEVELS OF SECONDARY ANALYSIS
Immigration decision	- Motivation to come to Europe	- Multicountry analysis (Italy, Hungary, Spain, The Netherlands) - Comparative analysis with the control group (native-born women) - Importance of social and civic skills in relationship to employability
Immigration problems	- Problems encountered in European receiving countries - Recommendations to EU/national/regional/city authorities	
Social participation	- Participation in social spaces - Participation in non-governmental organizations - NGO Membership - Diversity of social networks	
Role of NGOs	- The role of NGOs - The value of NGO services	
Social and civic skills in the context of the EU Lifelong Learning competences ⁷⁰	- Importance of social and civic skills in comparison to the other seven competences	

5.2 What sources of unfreedom do immigrant women encounter in the European Union?

The 375 immigrant women in the sample are a diverse group, comprising 90 nationalities and 12 religions. They do have some commonalities:

- Most are between 15 and 49 years old. Most have substantial sentimental ties in the host country: many have a partner of that nationality, and most have children living with them.
- Most are working and/or seeking work (86% of the immigrant sample, compared to 89% for the native-born⁷¹). Most are interested in pursuing further education or training opportunities (61% of immigrant women and 79% of the native-born).

⁷⁰ The “other language” skills have been split into two elements, as migrant women are speakers of their own mother tongue, and often other languages too.

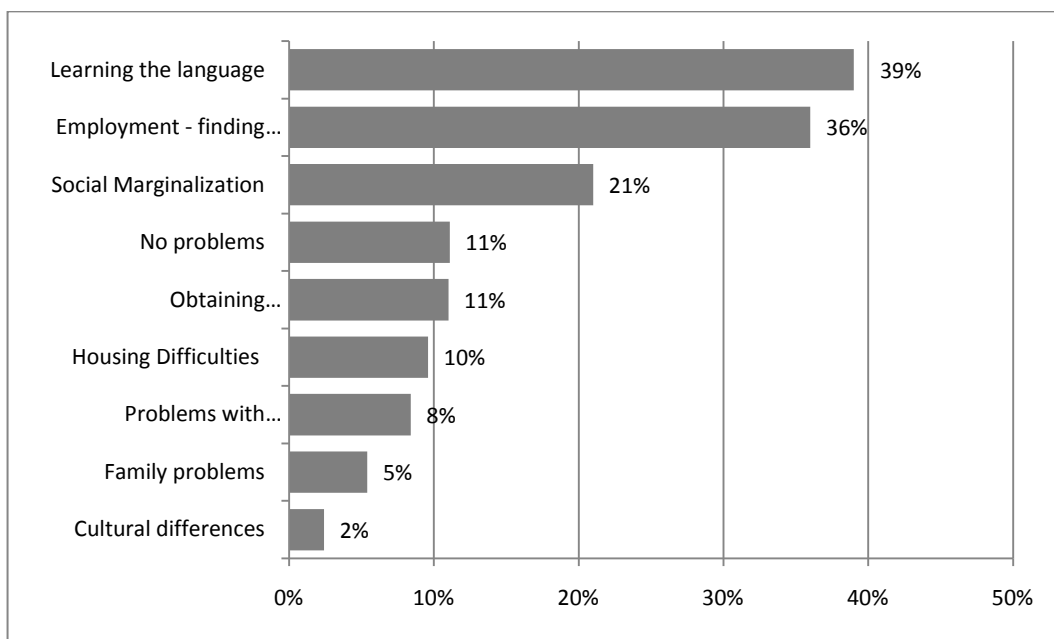
⁷¹ “Native-born” refers to women born in the EU countries included in the research (Spain, Italy, The Netherlands, Hungary, and Romania). The sample of native-born women includes 155 respondents, 70% of them in Romania and Hungary.

- 81% of the immigrant women entered the EU within the last 10 years. (Many of the other 19% live in the Netherlands, long a destination of immigration.)

Their reasons for coming to Europe, however, are significantly diverse: 52% came “to work,” 32% “to join their families,” 15% “to study,” 11% for “political and humanitarian reasons,” and 3.5% for “medical care.”⁷² (The predominant reasons for immigration differ among the receiving countries.)

Figure 31 illustrates the range of problems related to the social inclusion path and the acquisition of social and civic skills. Problems include language learning, employment issues, social marginalization (including racism and other discrimination), and bureaucratic procedures (especially relating to residence permits and citizenship).

Figure 31. Problems encountered by immigrant women in the EU



Note: The categories outlined in the graph were coded from an open-ended question, asking immigrant women to identify the problems encountered in the EU host country. The total is not equal to 100, as most provided more than one response.

The difficulty most often cited is learning the host country *language*. Most of the women who cite *no language* problems come from ex-colonies of three of the countries sampled (Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands), or from other countries with a European official language or European-oriented school curriculum. Language problems were most often cited by women in the Netherlands (64% of that sample), Hungary (43%), and Italy (39%).

The challenges of for finding *employment* appear to be more critical in Spain and Hungary, cited by two-thirds of the immigrant women in those samples. Rates of unemployment for the sample are also higher in these two countries (75 and 77%, respectively). In the Netherlands, although 66% of the sample is unemployed, only 21% are currently looking for a job; 45% migrated primarily for the purpose of joining their families rather than for work (compared with only 21% of the immigrant women in Italy and 29% in Spain).

⁷² The total is not equal to 100%, as respondents could indicate up to two reasons for migrating to Europe.

In Italy, by contrast, the large majority (71%) of the interviewed women currently work; they also report earning adequate wages to cover for their families' needs, more so than in the other countries (48% of cases, compared to 23%–30%). On the other hand, those in Italy are less likely to have additional sources of income than those in the other countries (56%, compared to 90% in Hungary, 83.5% in the Netherlands, and 62.5% in Spain). Finally, 85% of the sample in Italy have medium- or high-skilled jobs — service workers, professionals, technicians and associate professionals, and clerks. In Spain and the Netherlands, by contrast, a large portion of the sample is employed primarily in elementary occupations (47% and 40%, respectively).

These contrasts reflect differences in motivation for immigration and also in family composition. In Italy, immigrant women tend to live on their own salary more than in the other countries. Fewer of the Italian sample have husbands/partners living with them (75%, as compared with 93% for the Netherlands, 85% for Hungary, and 79.5% for Spain).

Social marginalization is most often cited in the Netherlands and Hungary. The Netherlands also has the highest percentage who have already applied for citizenship (80%, as compared with around one third (or less) in Hungary, Spain, and Italy). A key factor in social marginalization is the difficulty of learning the Dutch and Magyar languages, as an avenue into the host country culture.

Applying for *citizenship* is cited as a problem most often by immigrants of five years or less (53%); it is most cited also by those living in Spain (77%). In Italy, a significant percentage has no interest in obtaining citizenship (23.4% — three times higher than elsewhere); and many in Italy also report that citizenship is a difficult objective (14%). Finally, of those immigrant women who cited problems with *bureaucracy* (as, in their words, “complex, contradictory, and puzzling”), half are resident in Italy and another 36% in Hungary.

For the group of native-born women,⁷³ the most-cited issues were finding or improving their job (46%), the “promotion of women’s rights” (15%), and “the provision of access to higher education” (15%). They do not mention bureaucracy as an area for improvement, even though most report dissatisfaction with public services (60%, including 18% “not at all” satisfied and 42% “somewhat” satisfied).

5.3 Immigrant Women Offer Their Suggestions

The respondents were then asked to suggest ways of improving their life conditions in Europe. Note that this issue has broader implications as well: national policies on immigration flows and related issues — especially equal opportunity regulations (interpreting EU legislation) — are important factors conditioning the integration processes.

Well over half gave full responses to this open-ended question (82%) — almost as many as responded to the question about “problems they encountered” (89%). The issue most often cited is *employment services*, followed by “simplification of the bureaucracy,” “improvement of services,” and the promotion of “women’s rights.” (See Figure 32.)

A crucial issue for immigrant women is the effectiveness of *public services*, and specifically the availability of tailored social support, training, and employment programs. The opportunity to access local services to improve their health and their opportunities — social, cultural, training, and employment — is critical to their self-esteem and to capacity-building processes. One-fifth of the sample (24%) cited a need for improvement of services addressed to immigrants, with a slightly higher percentage reported in Hungary. Many also cited a greater need for receiving specific information in

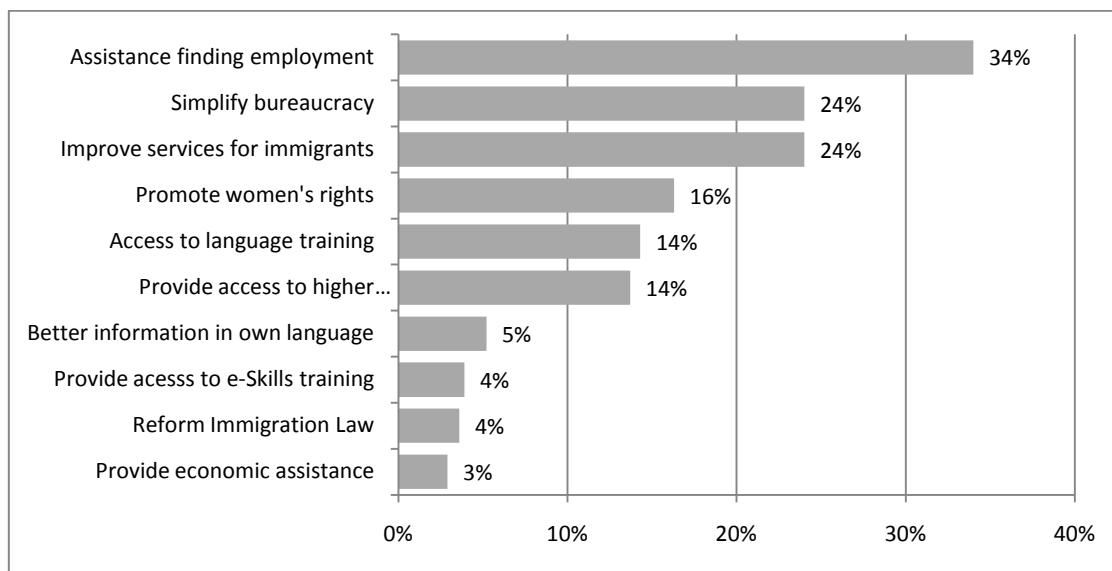
⁷³ Only 98 of the native-born sample answered this question (63.2% compared to 82% of the immigrant women).

the native language, particularly in the Netherlands and Hungary — countries with more difficult languages to master.

Immigrant women were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with various aspects of public services. More than 60% of the employed group expressed *dissatisfaction* with public services in supporting mobility and employment, responding either “not at all” satisfied (34.5%) or only “somewhat” satisfied (26.5%). This category showed wide variation, both between countries and within countries. The Netherlands fares the worst, with 55% responding that they were “not at all” satisfied; Italy fares slightly better, with 36.6% expressing dissatisfaction with public services. (Rome, however, represents a low point, with only 35% *favorable* to public services, rating their satisfaction as “fair.”) Spain shows regional variation between southern and northern areas: 30% of the women employed living in the southern regions showed high level of dissatisfaction with public services; while 45% of women in Cataluña and 29% in Madrid rated their level of satisfaction as “fair.” In terms of immigrants’ region of origin, those from Asia are the least satisfied (48% report services “not at all” useful), while those from Eastern European countries are the most satisfied (73% rate services “somewhat/fairly” useful).

Satisfaction with public services is strongly related to the reported quality of the *bureaucracy*. In three of the countries studied, significant and comparable percentages of respondents expressed a desire for simplified bureaucratic procedures affecting them and their families: 32% in Spain (mostly in Cataluña, with its two official languages), 26% in Hungary, and 25% in Italy. In terms of region of origin, the American-born women are the least satisfied (30% negative) followed by Asians (29%). In contrast, the women born in the former Communist states of Eastern and Central Europe, who have passed part of their lives under centralized bureaucratic systems, were less likely to express criticism of the bureaucracy (15%).

Figure 32. Suggestions for improvements offered by immigrant women



Note: Percentages are based on cases — that is, the total number of responses (where respondents can give more than one response to a question)

A crucial issue for immigrant women is the effectiveness of *public services*, and specifically the availability of tailored social support, training, and employment programs. The opportunity to access local services to improve their health and their opportunities — social, cultural, training, and employment — is critical to their self-esteem and to capacity-building processes. One-fifth of the

sample (24%) cited a need for improvement of services addressed to immigrants, with a slightly higher percentage reported in Hungary. Many also cited a greater need for receiving specific information in the native language, particularly in the Netherlands and Hungary — countries with more difficult languages to master.

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Slightly more than one-tenth of the immigrant women cited “*promotion of women’s rights*” as a priority for improvement. This group comes primarily from Africa (40%) and America (26%); most are living in Spain (48%) and Italy (26%). This group tends to be slightly younger than the sample average, but most migrated more than six years ago (73%). They tend to have higher levels of education, and almost half of them have applied for citizenship (47% compared to 35% of the overall sample). They are more likely to work as artists, organizers, translators, promoters, and teachers (42% compared to 29% of the whole sample), and are somewhat more likely to be members of an NGO (29% compared to 20% of the whole sample). They are less likely to pursue vocational training or language courses and more likely to attend e-skill courses (52% compared to 40%). They are also more likely to use PC and Internet weekly, and they tend to have higher digital skill levels.

As emphasized by many authors,⁷⁴ women worldwide have the capacity to play a leadership role — in managing difficult issues, in problem solving, and in mediation and negotiation. The roles of immigrant women within the host country are complex, with much of their time devoted to the care of the family (children, the elderly, disabled, etc.). *More efficient public services, tailored to meet women’s specific needs, can maximize their potential contribution and their opportunities to express their roles of social and economic agent.*

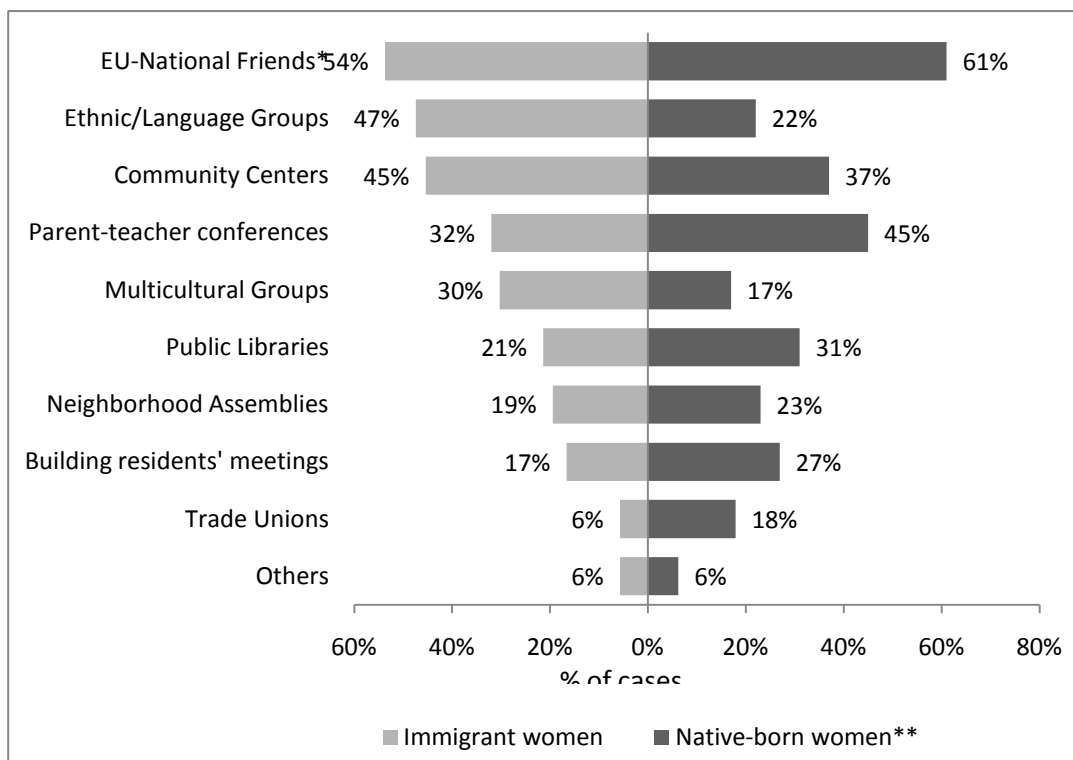
⁷⁴ Among them are Muhammad Yunus and Amartya Sen, Nobel Prize winners.

5.4 Paving the social inclusion path: the participation of immigrant women in social and civic spaces

PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL EVENTS

Immigrant women in the sample, like the native-born sample, are active participants in various social and civic spaces.⁷⁵ Nearly all of them reported attending social events frequently: around 98% for the Netherlands and Hungary, and 90%–93% for Italy and Spain. Among the wide range of types of social interaction, the immigrant group and the native-born group showed somewhat different combinations of activities (see Figure 33). The immigrant women are more active in more ethnic and multicultural groups, while the native-born women are more involved in meeting their children’s teachers, joining public libraries, and meeting with neighbors (i.e., building residents). It is notable that, for both groups, the most regular social participation involves meeting with host-country friends (52% for immigrant women and 61% for the native-group).

Figure 33. Social and Civic participation of immigrant and native-born women



Note: Percentages are based on cases — that is, the total number of responses (where respondents can give more than one response to a question).

*EU-National friends refers to citizens of the host country.

** Refers to women born in the EU countries included in the study: Romania, Hungary, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands.

⁷⁵ The findings presented in this section refer to questions with multiple answers; for this reason the answers do not equal 100%.

Table 17 shows the breakdown of types of social interaction of the immigrant women by country of residence. Respondents in the Netherlands show stronger participation at the local community level, focused on community centers. In Italy and Hungary, immigrant women’s social participation is dominated (more or less equally) by interaction with EU-national friends and with their own ethnic or language groups. In Spain, respondents participate almost equally with EU-national friends and with the local community centers. Immigrant women in Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands show substantial involvement in their children’s schools (28%, 39%, and 32% respectively). The lower participation in Hungary in parent-teacher meetings is explained in part by the fact that a smaller percentage of immigrant women in that country have children.

Table 17. Social and civic participation of immigrant women by host country

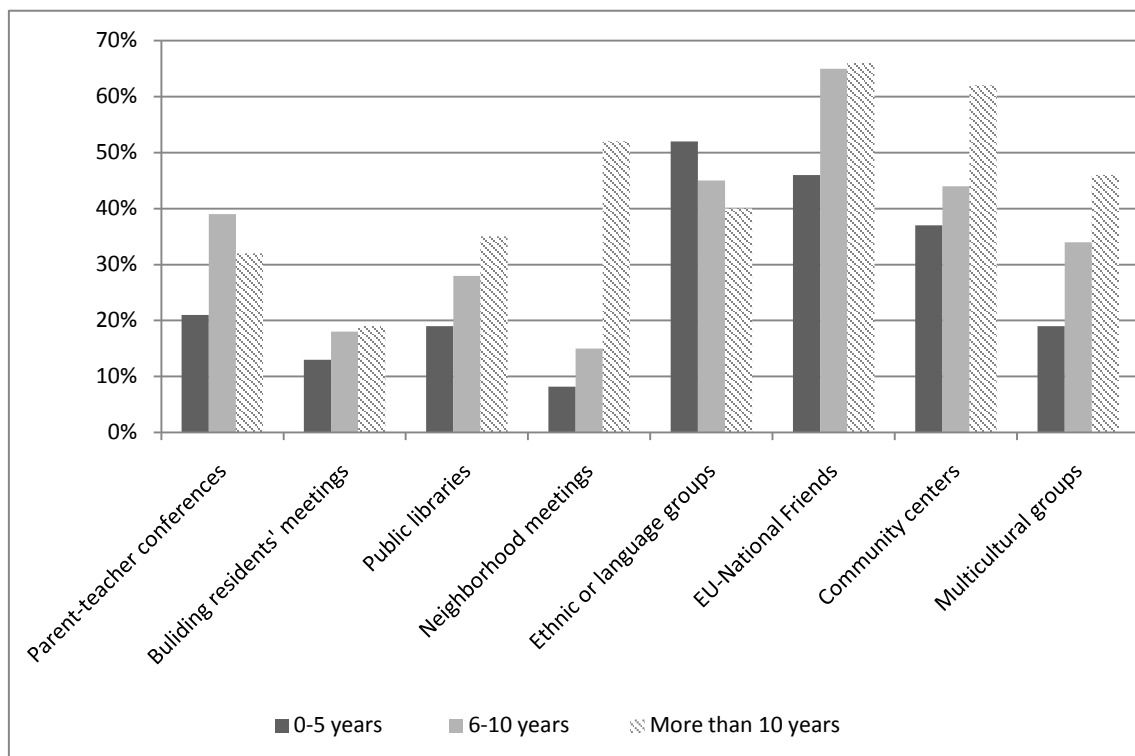
Social and civic events	Italy	Spain	The Netherlands	Hungary
Parent-teacher conferences	28%	39%	32%	26%
Building residents' meetings	12%	24%	7%	23%
Public libraries	18%	36%	35%	14%
Neighborhood meetings	5%	11%	63%	14%
Ethnic or language groups	62%	36%	40%	51%
EU-National friends	63%	48%	38%	67%
Community centers	25%	47%	87%	36%
Multicultural groups	27%	22%	49%	33%
Trade unions	8%	3%	3%	9%
Total N by country	122	117	68	43

Another interesting perspective to analyze the ways in which immigrant women shape and reshape their social spaces is by taking into account their length of residence in the host country. If we view social inclusion as a path rather than as a condition, the period of stay in the host country may be a useful proxy to indicate how their social participation adapts and transforms over time, as immigrant women grow more aware of the various spaces available to them and more knowledgeable of the cultural and social codes of the host countries, and as their family, employment, and other circumstances change.

The vast majority of immigrant women in our sample migrated to the EU host country within the last ten years. 40% migrated between 2004 and 2009, and 42% between 1999 and 2003. The remaining 18% have been living in the country of residence longer than ten years. Hungary and Spain show the highest number of recent immigrants: 73% and 56% of women migrated in the last five years, compared to just 32% in Italy. The Netherlands shows the highest proportion that arrived *more* than ten years ago.

Controlling for all other factors, the length of stay appears to influence how immigrant women reshape their social participation in the host country. As Figure 34 shows, participation in building residents' meetings, neighborhood gatherings, and public libraries increases steadily with the length of residence. Even more striking is the increased participation with EU-nationals, community centers, and multicultural groups. Interestingly, social participation in events with own ethnic or language group decreases significantly — by almost 20% — for immigrant women that have lived in the host country for more than ten years.

Figure 34. Participation in social and civic events by length of stay in host country



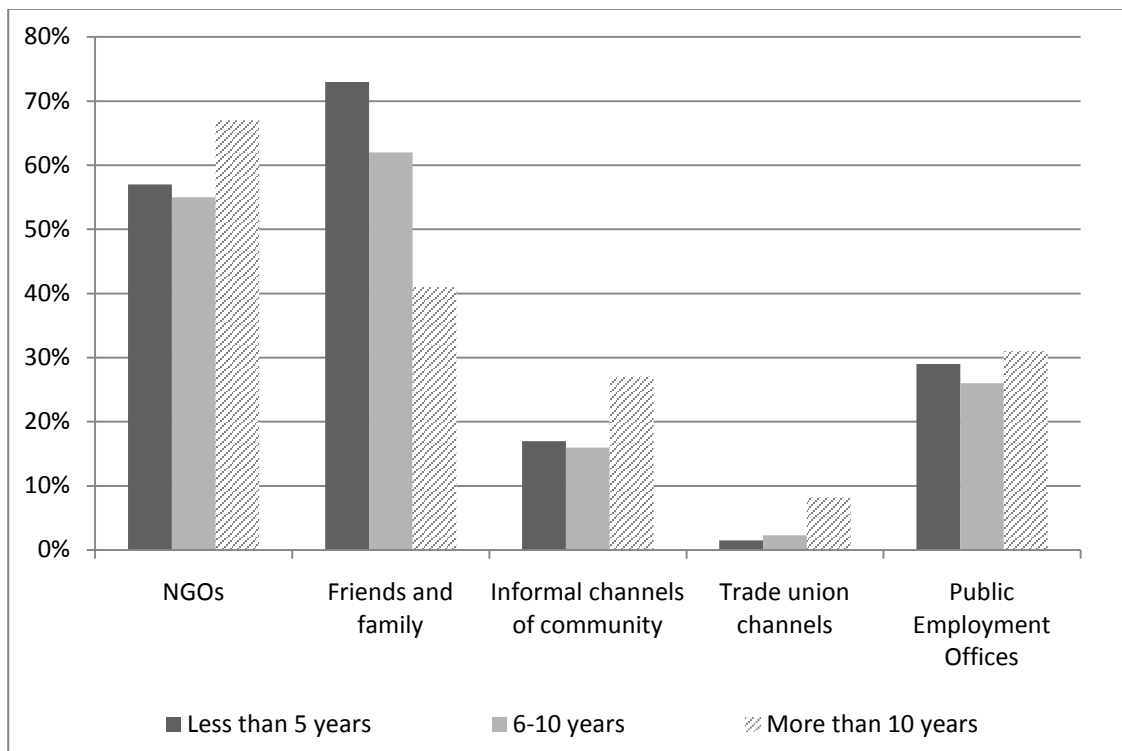
Note: Percentages are based on cases — that is, the total number of responses (where respondents can give more than one response to a question).

PARTICIPATION IN NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

The participation of immigrant women in various NGOs is used here as another indicator of social and civic involvement. Although the nature and purpose of individuals' participation was not captured in the survey, the diversity of NGOs they frequent is a reflection of their civic engagement and, in some cases, of the social issues they value. NGO participation is affected by a wide variety of factors, ranging from personal motivation to the availability of organizations near their communities.

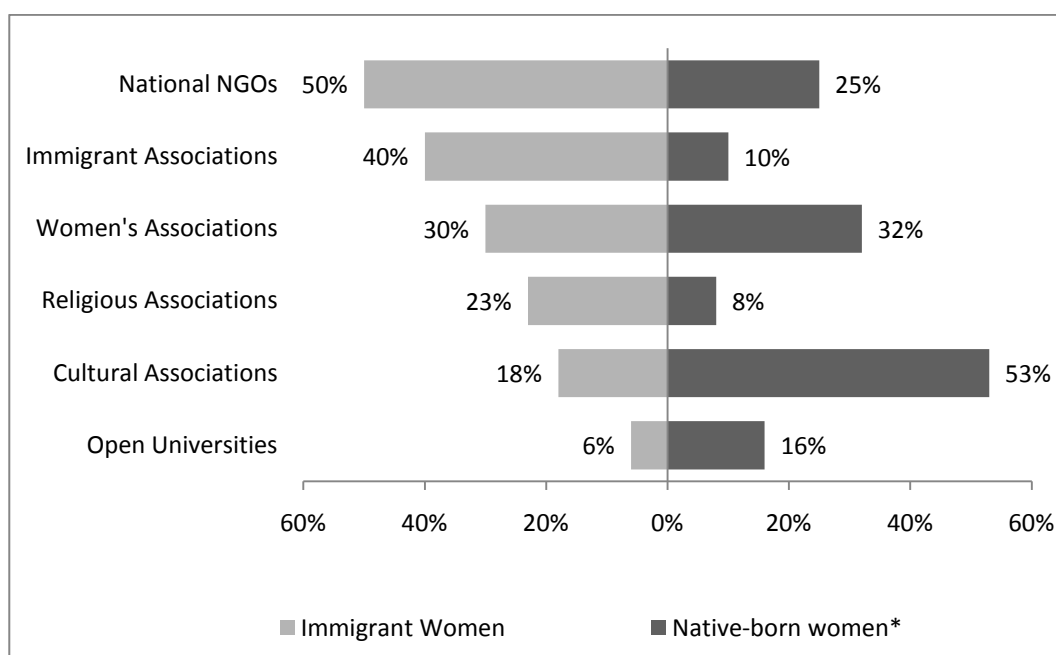
Overall, 88% of the immigrant women in our sample participate in NGO activities. Immigrant women in Italy and the Netherlands show the highest participation in NGOs, with roughly 80% participating in more than one organization. Hungary and Spain show the highest percentage of women who do not attend any organization (39% and 21% respectively). The mix of activities offered by NGOs varies significantly between countries, as do the predominant types of NGO the women attend. The most-cited organizations in the Netherlands are *women's associations*; in Italy, they are the large *national organizations*; and in Hungary and Spain, *immigrant associations* (see Figure 36). In contrast, for the group of native-born women, the most prevalent organizations are cultural organizations and women's associations (see Figure 36).

Figure 35. Participation of immigrant women in NGOs



Note: Percentages are based on total number of *cases* — that is, the total number of responses (where respondents can give more than one response to a question).

Figure 36. Participation of immigrant and native-born women in NGOs



Note: Percentages are based on total number of cases — that is, the total number of responses (where respondents can give more than one response to a question).

* Refers to women born in the EU countries included in the study: Romania, Hungary, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands.

Women cited as the most useful channels for connecting with NGOs “recommendations from family and friends” (44%), “community informal channels” (16%), “courses” (12.4%), and “the street” (9.3%). Again, if we think of social integration as a process or a path, we can understand that participation in NGO activities serves several interrelated functions for immigrant women. In addition to providing assistance with a range of practical challenges, and in addition to the specific training programs they offer, NGOs also serve as a kind of *social space* — less familiar than the circle of family and ethnic community, certainly, but more readily navigated than schools, jobs, and agencies. The NGOs tend to be well aware of this function as a social “gateway,” and they design their programs to meet their clients halfway, often with bilingual staff and written materials and with a social networking component.

NGO MEMBERSHIP AS AN INDICATOR OF SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

Another indicator of social and civic involvement of immigrant women is their *membership* in non-governmental organizations. NGO membership, although useful, is a limited indicator of social participation: not all organizations in all countries are structured to support a membership system. Italy has such a structure; some of the national umbrella organizations there have a membership system that entails paying a nominal annual membership fee. NGO membership entails different types of benefits and obligations in different systems.

With this caveat, we briefly analyze in this section social participation of immigrant women through the lens of their membership in NGOs. 20% of the immigrant women are members of nonprofit organizations, as are 31% of the group of native-born women.

The members of NGOs tend to have more extensive *education*, compared to the rest of the sample. They have also attended a higher number of lifelong learning courses than non-members: 49% (compared to 16%) attended three or more learning/training initiatives since immigrating; 69% (compared to 49%) participated in EU-country language lessons; 59% (compared to 38%) have taken e-skill courses; and 51% (compared with 26%) attended vocational courses. A similar pattern holds for the native-born women: for members of NGOs, 87.6% have a secondary education degree or higher; and most have taken four or more training/learning courses, at a rate four times that of non-members.

The level of *digital skills* is significantly higher for those immigrant women who are members of NGOs. 62% report medium/high competence with computers,⁷⁶ compared to 33% of non-members; and 65% report medium/high competence with Internet (compared to 43% of non-members). Substantial numbers also make use of digital social networking. For the group of immigrant women that are NGO members, this primarily means using Internet communication channels (43% use chat or videocalls) and participating in online courses (21%, as compared to just 6.5% of immigrant women who are not members of NGOs). For the group of native-born women, NGO members are more likely to be members of online “social networks” (41%, as compared to 18% of non-members) and to participate in an online forum (8%, as compared to 6% of non-members).

Here, too, there are significant differences between countries of residence. Computer skills are especially strong among members of Spanish NGOs: 71% report medium/high skill level, compared to 61% in Italy and 58% in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, however, Internet skills are higher (79% rate medium/high, compared to 64% in Spain and 62% in Italy). This pattern also holds for the group of native-born women: NGO members report a higher level of knowledge and use of computers (77%, compared to 59% for non-members) and Internet (83%, compared to 52% for non-members).

Internet use is also substantially higher for NGO members. The immigrant women who are NGO members utilize the Internet to support their children’s studies and for online banking at a rate three times that of non-members. They also access public administration online services at a rate two-and-a-half times that of non-members, and they are twice as likely to use the Internet for work or for writing in online forums and blogs.

Employment profile

If membership in NGOs represents a maximum degree of social integration and civic involvement, we might expect to see a positive correlation with employability. Employability is measured here by four dimensions: 1) Employment rate; 2) Job type; 3) Satisfaction with current employment status; and 4) wages. We examine each of these three factors in relation to the level of social integration and civic involvement.

Employment rates. The data suggest that NGO membership is a potential asset for obtaining a job, both for immigrant and native-born women. 158 immigrant women were employed at the time of their interview (43.5% of the sample); 74 of them are NGO members (47% of the employed group), and 23 are employed directly by an NGO (14.5% of the employed group).

To view the numbers another way, 64% of the NGO members in the sample have jobs, compared to 38% of the non-members; approximately 40% of that group are employed in the nonprofit sector itself. It may be that the women who are NGO members are particularly attracted to that field because of their interest in social and civic issues, or it may be that membership provides an important network for

⁷⁶ The degrees of e-skills knowledge and practice were defined by applying the EUROSTAT reference Model for the Community Survey on ICT usage in households and by individuals.

finding employment in the non-profit field. A similar pattern holds for the native-born women: NGO members are more likely to be employed than non-members.

Job type.⁷⁷ The immigrant women who are members of NGOs are somewhat more likely than non-members to be self-employed (18% compared to 14%), and far more likely to work as entrepreneurs (13% compared to 1%). For the group of native-born women, we see a somewhat different pattern: NGO members are much more likely than non-members to be self-employed (14% compared to 3%), but *less* likely to be “entrepreneurial” (0% compared to 5%). (See Table 18.) Overall, we can say that, for the immigrant women, NGO membership appears to support the development of professional and entrepreneurial skills, while for the native-born group, membership is associated with developing a managerial rather than an entrepreneurial career.

Table 18. Type of job by NGO membership between immigrant and native-born women

Type of Job	Immigrant women		Native-born women*	
	Non-members	NGO members	Non-members	NGO members
Employee	85%	69%	92%	86%
Self-employed	14%	18%	3%	14%
Entrepreneurial	1%	13%	5%	0%

* Refers to women born in the EU countries included in the study: Romania, Hungary, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands.

3. Job satisfaction. For immigrant women, NGO membership is associated with a somewhat higher level of satisfaction with the current job (70% compared to 62%). Again, this suggests the overall benefit of social and civic skills in assisting integration into society and the workforce. However, for the native-born group, this pattern is reversed: 74% of NGO members express at least partial satisfaction with their job, compared to a striking 87% of non-members. (See Table 19.) This may in fact reflect their motivation for joining an NGO, as a path to finding a better job — since women born in the host country are less in need of the basic acculturation services (and social and civic skills) supported by NGOs.

Table 19. Job satisfaction and NGO membership | comparison between immigrant women and native-born women

Type of Job	Immigrant women		Native-born women	
	Non-members	NGO members	Non-members	NGO members
Job related to training	43%	51%	82%	81%
Satisfied with current job	62%	70%	87%	74%

Note: Percentages are based on responses “partially” or “completely” satisfied

⁷⁷ The questions regarding job status, position and job type were only answered by women who were employed at the time of answering the survey.

* Refers to women born in the EU countries included in the study: Romania, Hungary, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands.

The research team expected to find that the level of job satisfaction reflects (in part) whether the job is related to the individual’s training or field of study — that is, its degree of *congruence with career aspirations*. Here again, there was a difference between the immigrant women and the native-born women. For native-born women, the percentages for “satisfied” and “job is related to training” showed similar patterns: NGO members were actually *less* satisfied with their jobs than non-members (74% compared to 87%), even though the jobs were mostly related to their training (81%). For the immigrant women, there appears to be no correlation between satisfaction and congruence: for NGO members, both job satisfaction and congruence are higher than for non-members — but for both groups, job satisfaction is much *higher* than congruence with training (62% compared to 43%, and 70% compared to 51%).

The finding that the immigrant women are satisfied with jobs that are not congruent with their previous study or training probably reflects their sense of having found a new life. The migration to Europe in effect divides one’s life into two parts — the part “before” and the part “after” the trip. The immigrant group are also more “satisfied” with success in finding any job, especially for the 52% who came to Europe to find work; and they are no doubt aware that many remain unemployed (like 56.5% of the survey sample).

4. Remuneration. The survey asked respondents two key questions relating to remuneration: whether they considered their employment income as “enough to cover the basic needs of their families”; and whether they had other sources of income within the family. The responses to these two questions were strikingly similar across all four sub-groups, varying within a 10-percentage point range (see Table 20). Most reported having another source of income; and only a minority of each group considered their remuneration sufficient for the family’s needs. The sub-group *least likely* to have an additional source of family income were the immigrant women who are *not* members of an NGO, at 68%. The sub-group most likely to consider their remuneration sufficient were the immigrant women who are members of a NGO, at 43%.

Table 20. Income and NGO membership

Type of Job	Immigrant women		Native-born women	
	Non-members	NGO members	Non-members	NGO members
Income from job enough to cover needs	36%	43%	33%	33%
Other sources of income	68%	70%	73%	75%

5.5 The importance of social networks to advance employment outcomes

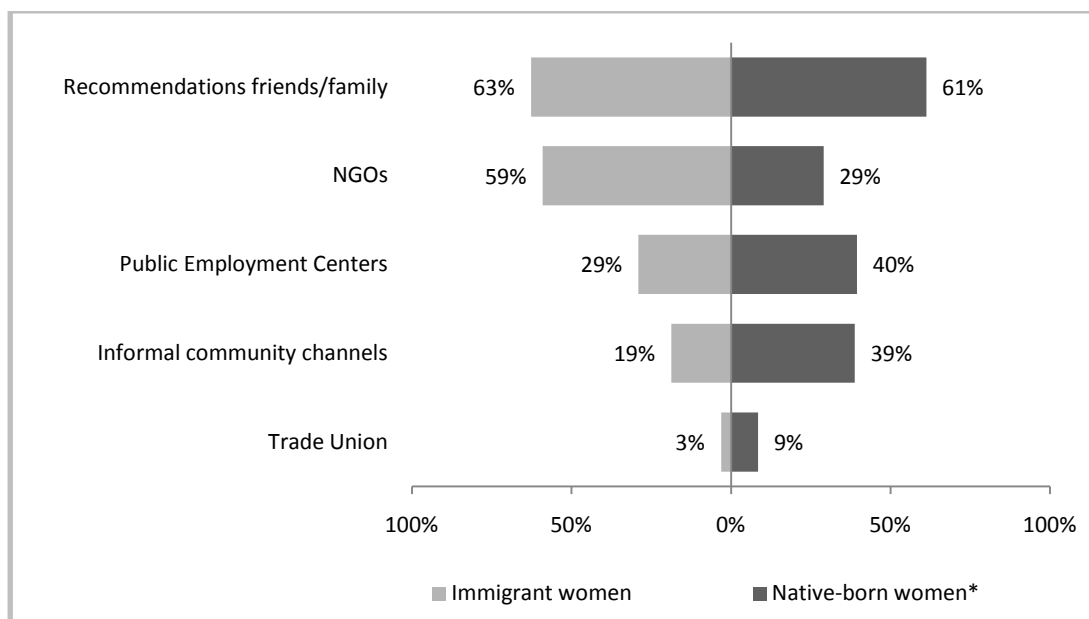
The value of social networks in advancing employment opportunities for individuals has long been recognized. The extent to which an individual is able to establish diverse social connections can be an

important factor in her successful incorporation into the labor market and her upward mobility.⁷⁸ Numerous field studies indicate that a large portion of workers find their jobs through their social networks. In Europe and the U.S., it is estimated that about half of all jobs are obtained through social contacts.⁷⁹ Online professional networks such as LinkedIn, Xing, and Viadeo are accessed by many job-seekers and by medium and large enterprises around the world.

For immigrant communities, the discussions of the importance of social connections to find jobs focus primarily on the question “whether the path to successful economic absorption lies in developing contacts with co-ethnics or by assimilating into the mainstream.”⁸⁰ For example, a study on immigrant population and employment outcomes in Germany found that nearly half of all “immigrant-origin job changes” were to jobs found through ethnic networks, and these channels seemed to be even more important for immigrants who faced higher barriers to employment (the youngest and the least educated).⁸¹ Other studies argue that the ability of immigrant groups to establish connections to networks *outside* their ethnic groups is a key factor, not only to improve their employment opportunities but also to soften cultural differences and facilitate social inclusion in the host society.⁸²

We asked respondents to cite the channels that were most important for them in finding employment. The overwhelming majority of both, the immigrant women and the native-born group cited recommendations from friends and family and NGO as the most important links to the job market (see Figure 37). The most effective network channels, as cited by respondents, differ by country of residence: in the Netherlands and Spain it is NGOs (and, in Spain, employment agencies as well); in Italy and Hungary, family and friends networks are rated most effective. (See Table 21.)

Figure 37. Most valued channels to improve, keep, or find employment opportunities



⁷⁸ Drever (2008).

⁷⁹ Armengol (2006).

⁸⁰ Drever (2008: 427).

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² See for example Alba and Nee (1997).

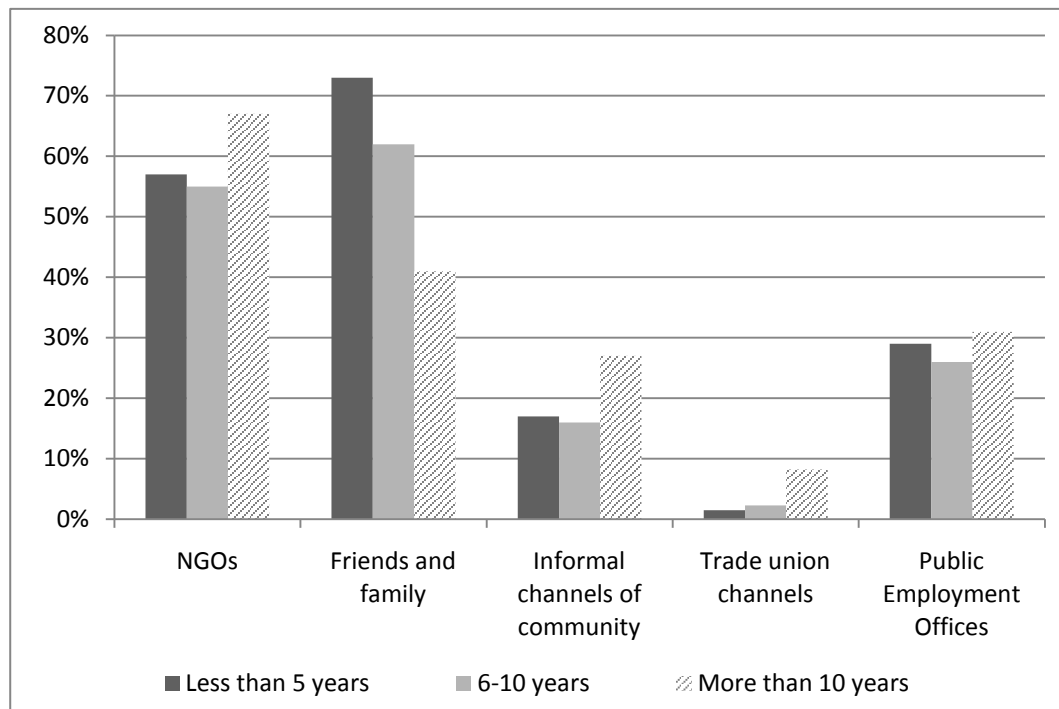
Note: Percentages are based on total number of cases — that is, the total number of responses (where respondents can give more than one response to a question).

Table 21. Channels to improve employment (by country of residence)

Channel for Jobs	Netherlands n = 38	Hungary n = 42	Italy n = 127	Spain n = 120
NGOs	89%	45%	43%	71%
Family and friends	24%	71%	71%	63%
Informal community channels	40%	24%	14%	9%
Public employment agencies	29%	19%	10%	49%

If we conceive of the process of social inclusion as a path rather than a condition, we might expect that longer residence expands the composition of immigrants' social networks. The responses confirm that the importance of NGOs increases significantly with the length of residence, while the opposite trend holds for the importance of family and friends. And, as might be expected, the value of informal community channels increases: only 17% of the more recent immigrants cite them as important, as compared to almost 30% of those who immigrated at least 10 years ago. (See Figure 38.)

Figure 38. Value placed on social networks for employment (by length of residence)



Note: Percentages are based on *cases* — that is, the total number of responses (where respondents can give more than one response to a question).

The diversity of social networks, established over time, is a critical factor for understanding the opportunities for immigrant women in the host-country labor market. There may also be a “multiplier effect,” as social connections not only lead to jobs but also serve as links to further social participation, including access to ICT training and use. Becoming more connected through particular social relationships and activities creates an advantage for progressing along each of the paths of learning and inclusion.

5.6 Social and civic skills in the context of the Key Competences for Lifelong Learning

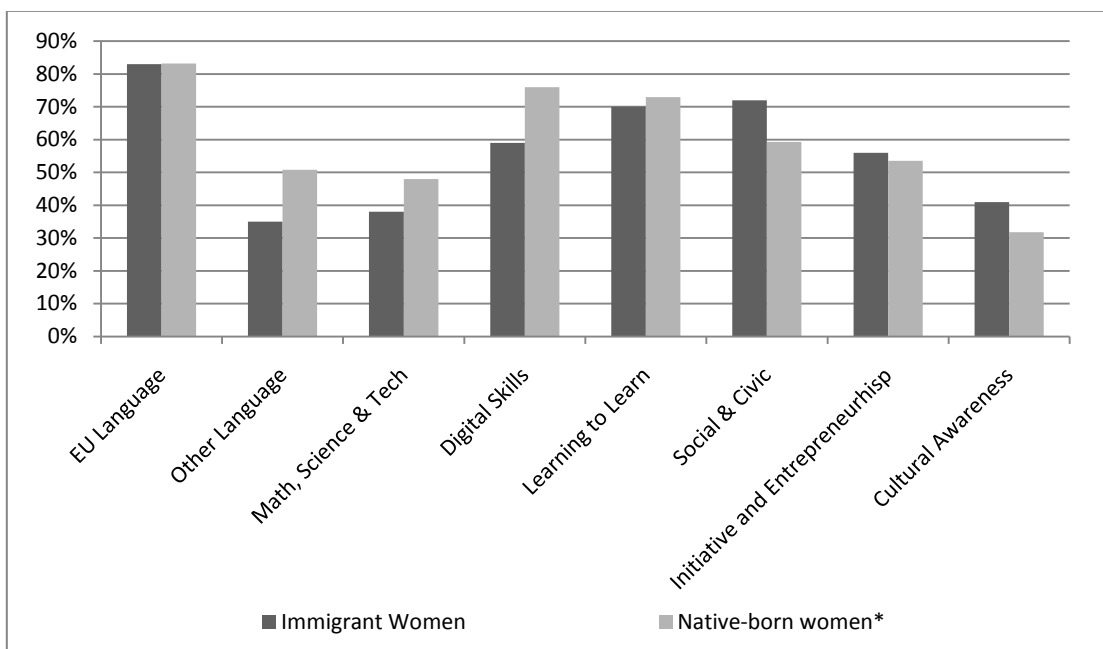
A set of critical capabilities are the *key competences for lifelong learning*, described in the 2006 recommendation of the European Parliament and Council.⁸³ As defined in that recommendation, “Social and Civic Skills” are understood to include “personal, interpersonal, and intercultural competence.”⁸⁴ For our study, both groups of women (immigrants and native-born) were asked to

⁸³ Commission of the European Communities (2006).

⁸⁴ “These skills cover all forms of behaviour that allow individuals to participate in an effective and constructive way in social and working life, and particularly increasingly diverse societies, and to resolve conflict where necessary. Civic competence allows individuals to fully participate in civic life, based on knowledge of social and political concept and structure and a commitment to active and democratic participation. . . . Civic competence is based on knowledge of the concepts of democracy, justice, equality, citizenship, and civil rights. . . . Skills for civic competence relate to the ability to engage effectively with others in the public domain, and to display solidarity and interest in solving problems affecting the local and wider community. This involves critical and creative reflections and constructive participation in community or neighbourhood activities, as well as decision-making at all levels, from local to national and European level, in particular through voting.” (Ibid., p. 17.)

assess the importance of each of the eight key competences to improve their employability. *Social and civic skills* ranked second in importance for immigrant women, after language of the host country. Almost 75% rated social and civic skills as *highly relevant to improve their employment opportunities* in the host-country labor market. For the group of native-born women, social and civic skills ranked fifth. (See Figure 39.)

Figure 39. Self-Assessment of the Degree of Relevance of the LLL Key Skills to Improve One's Work Situation



NOTE: Percentages show the ratio of “highly relevant” responses in relation to total responses (a rating of 4 or 5 on the scale of 0 to 5).

*Refers to women born in the EU countries included in the study: Romania, Hungary, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands.

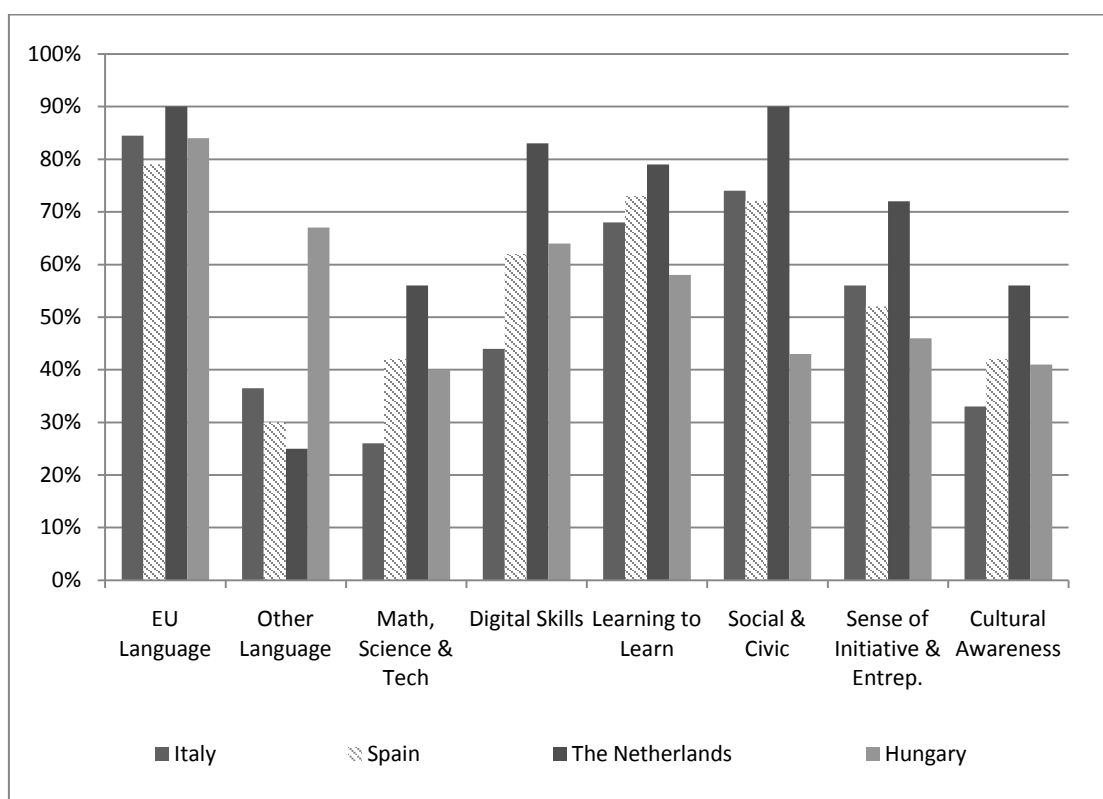
A comparison of host countries shows that respondents in the Netherlands (with its long-standing immigrant community) value these skills especially highly. Respondents in Hungary show relatively low valuations, except for learning the host-country language, digital skills, and “learning to learn.” (See Figure 40.)

The respondents who gave high relevance scores for “social and civic skills” (i.e., a score of 4 or 5 on a scale of 0-5) had significant shared characteristics:

1. They showed a higher degree of integration into the host society, and they reported stronger ability in the host-country language. (74% reported having “medium-high” competence in the written language, compared to 52% for respondents who rated social and civic skills as less important.)
2. They have stronger social connections and higher levels of civic participation. A remarkable 93.5% participate in NGOs (compared to 72% for the group who rated “social and civic skills” lower). 18% are associated with three or more NGOs (compared to 6%) and 27% are *members* of NGOs (compared to 10%).

3. They have stronger educational background, both in terms of formal certification (66% have at least a high school diploma, compared to 51% of the others) and in educational activities in the host country. 50% of them have attended e-skills courses, compared to 23% of the others, and 39% have vocational training, compared to 23% of the others.
4. They have longer experience in the host country: 66% arrived at least six years ago, compared to 43% of the others. They tend to be older as well: the high-rating group includes 57% of those under 25; 73% of those ages 25–49; and 81.6% of those 50 or older. (The same pattern holds also for the group of native-born women.)
5. They are more likely to be employed (51%, compared to 33.3% of the others). (This pattern does not hold for the native-born group, however, where both subgroups have similar rates of employment.) Note that employment correlates also with participation in an NGO: for those who *do not* attend NGO activities, the employment rate is only 24%, compared to 46% for those who attend one or more NGOs.

Figure 40. Self-assessment of the relevance of the LLL key-skills to improve one's work situation, by country of residence



NOTE: Percentages show the ratio of “highly relevant” responses in relation to total responses (i.e., a rating of 4 or 5 on the scale of 0 to 5).

5.7 The importance of NGOs

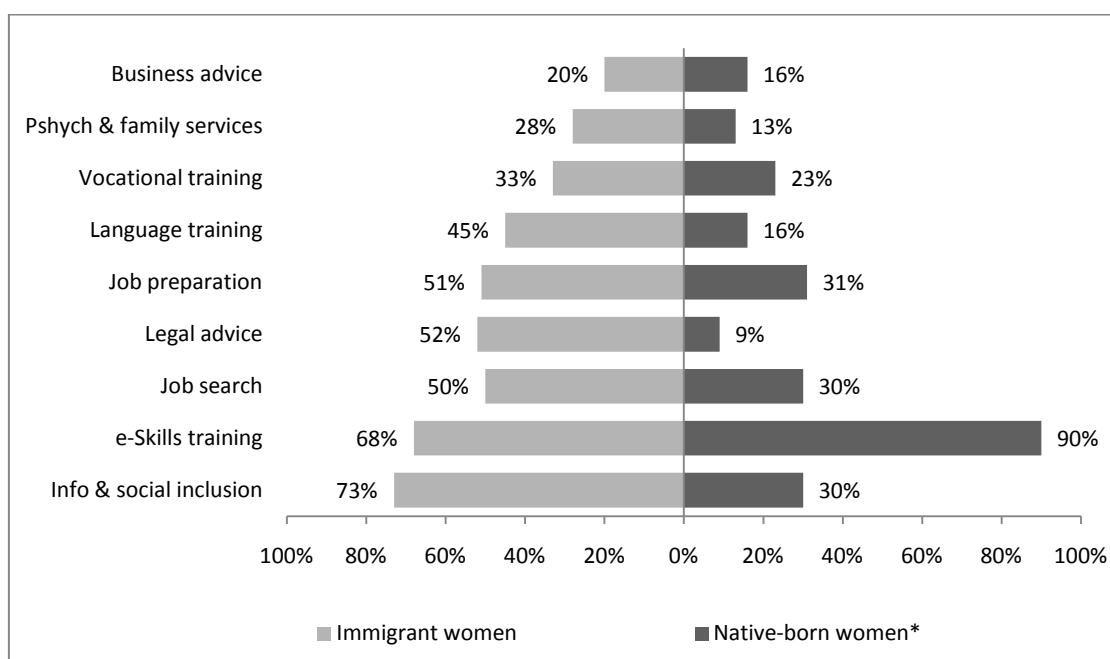
The study centered on 32 very diverse NGOs, varying in size, social mission, and the range of services they offer. All the organizations are active in social inclusion, e-inclusion, and educational issues. All are members of one or more regional, national, or European networks. At the same time, they have diverse legal status, as associations, foundations, unions, or charities. They also have different missions: they may focus primarily on the educational, social, or cultural dimension; and they may be generalist or specialist in orientation — focused primarily on immigrants’ issues, for example, or on e-inclusion. But all play an important role in assisting immigrant women with a range of services.

USE OF SERVICES

Figure 41 shows a high level of use of NGO services by immigrant women, ranging from 20% who accessed “business advice” to more than 70% who accessed general information and social inclusion services.

In general, the immigrant women reported using NGO services far more frequently than group of native-born women — with one notable exception. While both groups made frequent use of NGOs’ e-skills training programs, a stunning 90% of native-born women used this service, as compared to 68% of the immigrant group. For the immigrant women, e-skills training ranked second to general information and social inclusion services (cited by 73%). Also striking was the difference in use of NGOs’ legal services: 52% of the immigrant women made use of these services, compared to only 9% of the native-born group, no doubt reflecting the difference in the two groups’ legal situation. For the immigrant group, until they obtain citizenship, their lives are organized around maintaining their residence status and complying with administrative and legal requirements. The two groups were roughly equal, however, in their use of NGOs for business advice (20% of immigrant women and 16% of European-born women).

Figure 41. NGO Services used by immigrant and native-born women

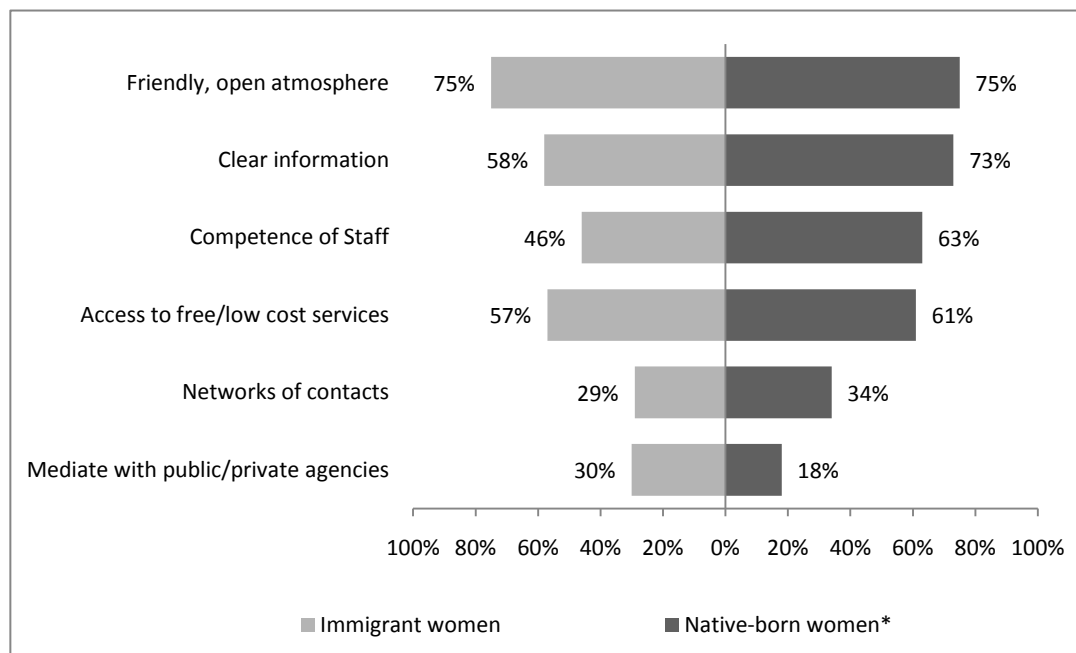


*Refers to women born in the EU countries included in the study: Romania, Hungary, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands.

Respondents were asked to choose, from a list, their main reasons for using NGO services. Both the immigrant women and the native-born group cited most often the “friendly, open atmosphere.” Both groups also frequently cited three additional reasons (with the native-born group citing them more frequently): “clear information,” “free or low cost services,” and “competence of staff.” Less often cited, for both groups, was accessing their “networks of contacts” and “mediating with public and private agencies.” This last reason, “mediating with public and private agencies,” was cited by immigrant women almost twice as often as by native-born women, no doubt reflecting the more difficult legal situation of the immigrants. (See Figure 42). It is relevant here to recall that the bureaucracy is cited as a major problem by respondents, who identify public services as a key factor that should be improved to enhance women’s condition.

The emphasis on a “friendly, open atmosphere” is significant. It points to a relationship between the beneficiaries and the suppliers of services that is “informal,” based on trust and voluntary involvement, as a critical value.

Figure 42. Most Appreciated Aspects of NGO services



*Refers to women born in the EU countries included in the study: Romania, Hungary, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands

Clearly, NGOs serve a crucial function for immigrant women, in both social integration and labor market integration:

1. Welcoming immigrants and providing a shelter to those in difficulty
2. Introducing women to a network that can support their integration (or re-integration)
3. Empowering women to become self-respected, autonomous individuals, “respected by others”

4. Empowering women as a group: to become aware of their rights, to take an active role in the wider society, to take part in social awareness initiatives and other campaigns, and to contribute to improving public services and conditions for immigrant women
5. Enhancing the competence of members and non-members through lifelong learning programs; and supporting alternative certification methods such as “curriculum assessment” (“balance de compétence”) — particularly relevant for those who come from a different European social/educational/employment system
6. Acting as a “greenhouse”: employing women directly or facilitating employment through a network of links

The non-profit sector thus plays a fundamental role in supporting the employability of immigrant women. One dimension of this function is providing training in e-skills. For both immigrant women and the native-born group, while the primary source of ICT learning was the personal network (family and friends), their secondary source was the non-profit sector.

1. NGO training programs use interactive, informal teaching methods, such as “group dimension” and blended learning patterns.
2. NGO training programs present ICT in concrete ways by applying the new skills to practical tasks: for example, using online private or public (e-government) services, as well as social networks.
3. NGOs encourage responsible Internet use, for “study and personal development” and to do work or search for a job.
4. Many NGOs promote e-inclusion as part of a broader mission of social inclusion.
5. NGOs provide free or low-cost access to PC and Internet. For the immigrant women, the non-profit center is the second most-used facility to connect to the Internet (the most often used is home); for the native-born women, the centers represent the third most often used access point.

Interviews with NGOs administrators and staff indicate that these organizations embrace a mission of inclusion. They directly or indirectly combat social and cultural barriers and prejudices, aiming more broadly to transform the “male-centered” organizational culture to one that is more respectful of equal opportunities. More specifically, several NGOs are directly addressing three forms of labor discrimination that disadvantage women: wage differentials, vertical job discrimination, and professional segregation.⁸⁵ Finally, in some of the participating countries, beneficiaries are frequently given paid or volunteer assignments within the NGO, to serve as multilingual, quasi-professional staff in roles such as “cultural mediator,” “social outreach operator,” “trainer,” “welcoming operator,” “guidance expert,” etc.

⁸⁵ *Tendencias* (November 2008).

5.8 Summary of Findings for the Social Inclusion Path

PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED BY RESPONDENTS

Clearly, the public services of the four countries are far from fully adequate to address the specific needs of these immigrant women. The roles of immigrant women within the host country are very complex, with much of their time devoted to the care of the family. More efficient public services, tailored to meet women's specific needs, can maximize their potential contribution and their opportunities to express their roles of social and economic agent.

Problems cited by respondents include language-learning, employment issues, social marginalization, and bureaucratic procedures. The suggestions they offered tend to focus on social inclusion at the local and regional level, and particularly on the quality of public and non-profit services and employment centers.

INVOLVEMENT WITH NGOS

Definite patterns distinguish the four countries, in terms of immigrants' initial motivation as well as the host country's institutional services — including the pattern of use of NGOs by immigrant women. There are also significant differences between the experiences of immigrants and the European-born women.

Both the immigrant women and the native-born group were active participants in social and civic networks, in most cases extending beyond their own ethnic communities. The two groups differ in the predominant type of social involvement, as do the immigrant samples in the four countries.

In general, however, NGOs serve a crucial function for immigrant women for both social integration and labor market integration. Overall, 88% of respondents participate in activities organized by the participating NGOs, with the immigrant women making more use of NGO services than the native-born sample. Participation in NGO services is often the “diving board” for learning social and civic skills.

EMPLOYABILITY

The non-profit “third sector” plays a fundamental role in supporting the employability of immigrant women. One dimension of this function is providing training in e-skills. Several NGOs are also directly addressing three forms of labor discrimination that disadvantage women: wage differentials, vertical job discrimination, and professional segregation.

Another important dimension of NGO effectiveness is as a channel for finding employment: acting as a “greenhouse” by employing women directly, or facilitating employment through a network of links. In general, more respondents seek employment opportunities through their private social networks — including NGOs — than through public employment agencies.

Moreover, by participating in NGO activities, even apart from actual employment training and services, women are able to enhance their “social and civic skills” — a competence that they rank as highly relevant for improving their employment situation. The respondents who rated “social and civic skills” more highly, taken as a group, exhibit a higher degree of employability: they are better integrated in the host society, more self-confident, and conscious of their “human capital.”⁸⁶ These findings support

⁸⁶ Human capital refers to the knowledge, skills and attributes that are embodied in each person and that facilitate the creation of different forms of well-being” (Keeley, 2008). Adam Smith talked about human capital more than

an important theme of current research on employment: several studies at the regional European level have demonstrated the positive effect of “the social economy.”⁸⁷

In general, the attitudes expressed by the sample of immigrant women show them to be “oriented to change,” in the phrase used by Muhammad Yunus, and ready to engage in paths of growth in order to improve their lives.⁸⁸

three centuries ago, arguing that economic activity is fueled not by workers as a collective mass but by the “acquired and useful abilities of all inhabitants or members of society”; Commission Report (2009).

⁸⁷ CIRIEC (2000). Note that the Jacques Delors EC Presidency put forward, in the 1990s, a “Programme regarding the 17th New Sources of Jobs,” citing the social, cultural and communication services as fields of local development and urban regeneration. 2006 Nobel Award winner Muhammad Yunus has said that poverty can be defeated only if new economic models take place, based on “social businesses” rather than on profit maximization.

⁸⁸ Yunus (1997).

6 CULTURAL INCLUSION PATH

“Globalisation is not only an economic and social process built around *production*, the *market* and the *global consumers*, is not simply a political, administrative or a strategic fact, but it is also a new historical condition to produce meanings, for instance for the symbolic production of reality by means of ICT, through the universalisation of “ethnicity,” and transcultural situations.”

— Gerhard Steingress, 2002.

6.1 Defining “Culture”

The term “culture” may be defined in numerous ways. UNESCO provides several definitions:⁸⁹

1. “the whole set of signs by which the members of a given society recognize...one another, while distinguishing them from people not belonging to that society”
2. “the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of a society or social group... [encompassing] in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs”
3. “all the factors that pattern an individual’s ways of thinking, believing, feeling and acting as a member of society”
4. “Culture is at the core of individual and social identity and is a major component in the reconciliation of group identities within a framework of social cohesion.”

For present purposes, definition (2) is the most relevant, as the aspect of culture that is most accessible to immigrants to a given society. Immigrant women have varying degrees of access to cultural experience and participation, reflecting a number of social variables: prior education, as well as education and training in the EU-receiving country; type of employment; existing cultural habits; level of digital inclusion; level of awareness of the host culture; and host-country differences related to cultural offerings.

A number of working assumptions guided the analysis:

- “Cultural awareness and expression” skills may be related to educational level and work experience, professional status, ability in the local language, and digital skills.
- Cultural skills may be a powerful stimulus to learn to learn — that is, motivation to upgrade skills, as well as a factor in self-confidence and enhanced autonomy.
- Cultural skills may support routes of professional improvement and satisfaction; they may play a key role in improving the employability of immigrant women and encouraging their career goals and plans.

⁸⁹ UNESCO’s “Guidelines on Intercultural Education” (2006).

- Cultural participation and expression may be related to active participation in intercultural groups and social networks, fostering leadership roles and a sense of social responsibility.
- The cultural sector may also be a possible source of employment.

It must be emphasized that cultural participation is very difficult to measure, as people don't all define "cultural activities" in the same way. Cultural awareness and expression are even more difficult to pin down quantitatively. The variables examined here give only a glimpse of the cultural participation of the sample groups; they are not intended to provide a definitive picture of how active they are culturally. Our aim is to understand some general patterns of participation and cultural consumption. The levels of analysis for the Cultural Inclusion Path are outlined in Table 22.

The study as a whole uses an analytical framework based on four interrelated building blocks or paths, including the "Cultural Inclusion" Path, which we define as follows:

The capabilities and attitudes of immigrant women

- to acquire local language(s) and culture(s) while maintaining their own;
- to increase local awareness of their own culture and to learn from local culture(s);
- to create positive links between different cultures and promote intercultural dialogue;
- to actively participate in intercultural groups and activities;
- to create artistic/cultural experiences/objects;

Table 22. The Cultural Inclusion Path and employability

FACTORS	LEVELS OF PRIMARY ANALYSIS	LEVELS OF SECONDARY ANALYSIS
Cultural Consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kind of cultural products - In language of country of origin - In language of host country 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Multicountry analysis (Italy, Hungary, Spain, The Netherlands)
Cultural participation, self-expression and creativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Type of participation - Roles played - Use of multimedia technology in cultural production 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Comparative analysis with the control group (native-born women)
Cultural participation in the context of the EU Key Competences for Lifelong Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Importance of cultural participation in comparison to the other seven competences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Importance of social and civic skills in relationship to employability

6.2 Education, employment, and cultural consumption

We compared the samples in different countries with respect to education level, type of employment, and cultural consumption (primarily digital media). In the multi-country comparison, immigrant women in Italy and Hungary have the largest percentages with university-level educational qualifications. If we combine the percentages of high school, vocational, and university qualifications, those in Italy have the highest level of prior education: 76% of the Italian sample have secondary-tertiary education, compared to 60% for the overall sample.

As might be expected, the type of employment correlates with the level of prior education, at the country level. The samples in Italy and Hungary show the highest percentage of women employed in non-elementary occupations. The combined percentages of professional, clerk, and service employment are 87% for Italy and 100% for Hungary, compared with 42% for Spain and 50% for Netherlands (Table 23).

Italy also has the highest percentage that are employed, at 71%, compared with just 44% for the entire sample of immigrant women. (See Table 23.)

Table 23. Vocational training and work (by country)

	Immigrant Women	Immigrant women in each host country				Native-born women*
		ES	IT	HU	NL	
Work	44%	26%	71%	23%	34%	65%
Unemployed	43%	66%	26%	58%	20%	24%
Prevailing Job Types		Elementary Occup. (47%)	Service workers (58%)	Service workers (46%)	Elementary Occup. 40%	
		Service Workers (42%)	Professionals 20%	Clerks 36%	Professionals 25%	
					Clerks 25%	
Vocational Training in Host Country	33%	41%	31%	27%	25%	NA
Most common vocational courses		Home care	Cultural Mediator	Cultural Mediator	Cultural Mediator	NA
		Cleaning technician	Social Worker	Social Worker	Translator	NA
		Entrepreneur	Interpreter	Interpreter	Home care	NA

Note: Spain (ES), Italy (IT), Hungary (HU), and the Netherlands (NL).

* Refers to women born in the EU countries included in the study: Romania, Hungary, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands

LANGUAGE AND DIGITAL SKILLS

Knowledge of the host-country language would presumably affect the type of media consumed: for instance, listening to the radio (apart from music) requires some knowledge of the host-country spoken language. This helps explain why the sample in Hungary, with greater language difficulties, have lower rates of use of such media as radio and cinema than those in Spain and Italy. (See Tables 24 and 25.) Language knowledge and practice is a basic skill for immigrant social integration, not only as a “visiting card” — a way to be accepted by country nationals — but also as a means to exchange or acquire information and to participate actively in society.

Table 24. Fluency level of host-country language

	Immigrant Women (Total sample)	Immigrant women in each host country*			
		<i>ES</i>	<i>IT</i>	<i>HU</i>	<i>NL</i>
They knew the host-country language before migrating	30%	57%	19%	23%	6%
Medium/High knowledge of the host-country language	Comprehension: 80%	86%	91%	67%	54%
Medium/High knowledge of the host-country language	Spoken: 77%	83%	89%	51%	49%
	Written: 66%	83%	71%	30%	36%
N. of languages spoken	3 or more: 50%	32%	65%	56%	51%

Note: Spain (ES), Italy (IT), Hungary (HU), and the Netherlands (NL).

Education correlates with access to culture, at least using digital media. The Italian sample, with the highest overall educational level, is also more likely to be cultural consumers, in several categories of Internet use: online magazines and newspapers (59% compared to 39% overall); web radio and TV (36% compared to 23%); share music and video files (48% compared to 31%). The women in Hungary also have high levels of use of internet for these three categories. The control group, who also have high levels of education, showed similarly high rates of cultural consumption. (See Figure 43.)

Table 25. Digital Skills Level and Frequency of Computer and Internet Use, by host country

	Immigrant women	Immigrant women in each host country*				Native-born women**
		ES	IT	HU	NL	
Access to courses on e-skills	43%	56%	14%	9%	97%	
Access to Internet *	Home*** : 51%	28%	79%	58%	47%	72%
	Work: 14%	8%	20%	12%	15%	42%
	NGO: 40%	46%	9%	22%	83%	19%
Use of Internet: 3-5 times a week/Daily	38%	33%	36%	75%	28%	60%
Use PC 3-5 times a week/ Daily to Work	23%	25%	33%	22%	10%	49%
Use PC 3-5 times a week/ Daily to Study	20%	19%	29%	26%	8%	22%
Use Internet for Studying and for personal development	36%	42%	45%	33%	33%	52%
Basic computer skills level	34%	41%	19%	30%	52%	29%
Intermediate/Advanced computer skills level	38%	35%	40%	42%	39%	58%
No computer skills	28%	24%	41%	28%	9%	8%
Basic Internet skills level	33%	38%	18%	37%	49%	29%
Intermediate/Advanced Internet skills level	50%	42%	50%	56%	45%	65%
No Internet skill level	17%	10%	33%	7%	6%	6%

Notes: Computer and Internet skill levels are based on EUROSTAT measurements

* Spain (ES), Italy (IT), Hungary (HU), and the Netherlands (NL).

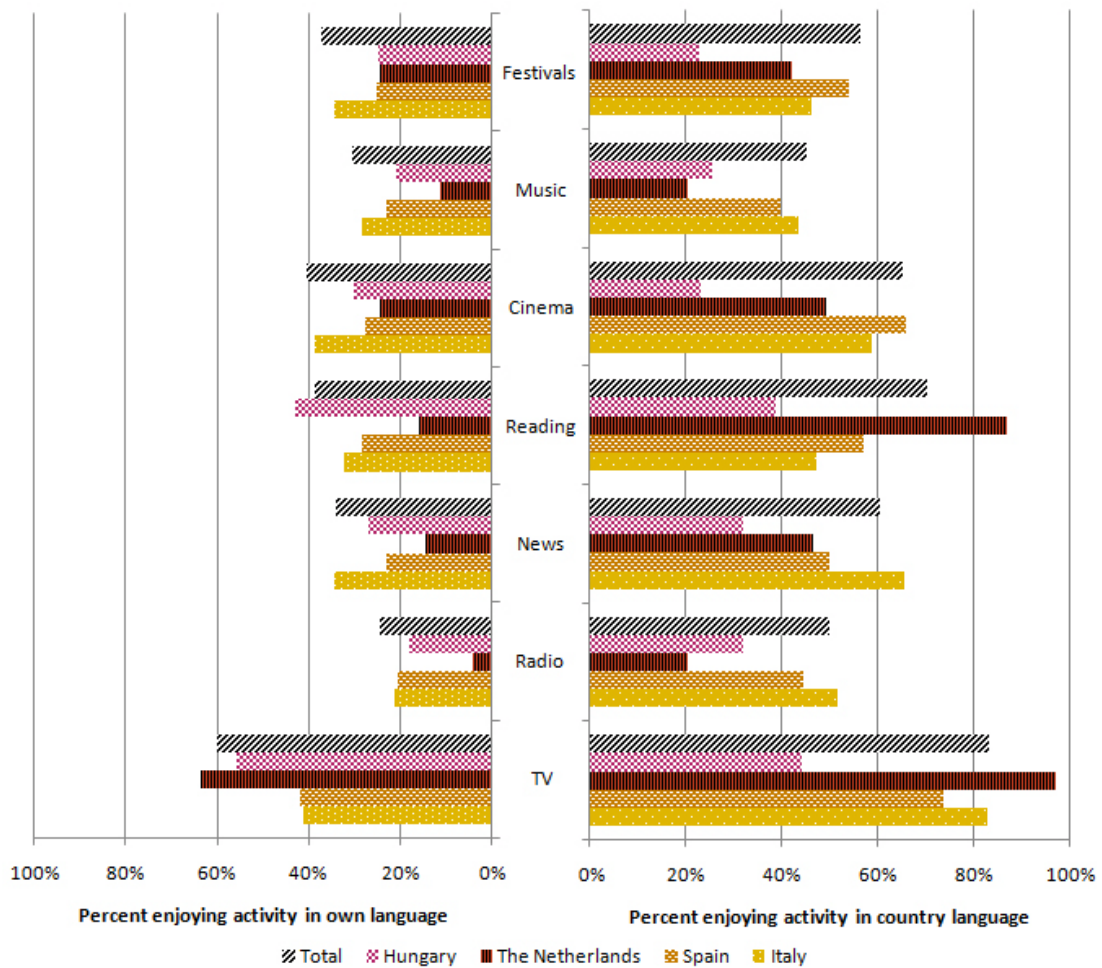
** Native-born women refers to women born in the countries included in the study, primarily Romania (RO) and Hungary (HU)

6.3 Participation in Cultural Activities

A clear indicator of cultural awareness and expression is to participate directly in cultural activities (production or sharing). The survey included the question, “Do you take part in artistic-cultural activities?” 108 of the immigrant women (29%) answered this question positively, as did 52 of the group of native-born women (34%).

The profile of the immigrant women who reported been more “culturally active” is similar to that of the whole sample, with regard to their reasons for migration (with particular reference to “studying”) and their prior education. They live in all four countries — somewhat more in Italy (37%), and the least living in Spain (22%). They are somewhat younger than the sample: 80% are between 29 and 49 years old (compared to 75% of the whole sample).

Figure 43. Cultural Consumption of immigrant women and native-born women



* Spain (ES), Italy (IT), Hungary (HU), and the Netherlands (NL).

** Native-born women refers to women born in the countries included in the study, primarily Romania (RO) and Hungary (HU).

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But they show a different kind of involvement in the host societies and cultures. They attend social events in higher proportions than the others. 40% are members of a participating NGO (twice the rate of the whole sample). 35% of them are part of a social network, compared to 21% of the whole sample.

In 57% of cases, the immigrant women who practice regular cultural activities do so as part of a group, whether as artists, organizers, promoters, interpreters, or teachers. In making recommendations for improvements in their host country, they emphasize “promotion of women’s rights,” “access to higher education,” and “language training.” Their (self-evaluated) competence in the host-country language is substantially higher than for the whole sample — especially in the two countries where immigrants experience greater language difficulties (Hungary and the Netherlands). (See Table 26.) And more of them participate in vocational training (49% compared to 32% for the whole sample).

The culturally active group uses Internet significantly more than the whole sample, and attends e-skills classes at a higher rate (Tables 26 and 27). Using the Internet 3-5 times a week and/or daily characterizes 60% of those who are culturally active, compared to 38% of the whole sample. (For the native-born group, that figure is 82%.) Similarly, their knowledge and practice of the Internet (as measured through the EC Survey on Households and Individuals Model)⁹⁰ is higher than for the whole sample, except in Italy (see Tables 25 and 27). For the native-born group, the percentage with medium-to-high knowledge of the Internet reaches 87%.

Computer skills, however, are *lower* than for the whole sample, for the culturally active (immigrant) group in all four countries. For the native-born group, on the other hand, computer skills tend to be higher for the culturally active group. Interestingly, there are some differences in reasons for using computers. The culturally active group is more likely to use computers for work than the rest of the sample (100% more likely) as well as for study (70% more likely). 20% of them can use “specialist programming languages,” compared to 12% of the whole sample.

Table 26. Language knowledge and training participation of immigrant women who are more culturally active

	Immigrant women	Immigrant women in each host country*				
		ES	IT	HU	NL	
They knew the host-country language before migrating	26%	59%	20%	23%	0%	
Medium/High knowledge of the host-country language	Comprehension	86%	92%	91%	70%	77%
	Spoken	85%	92%	93%	56%	59%
	Written	75%	88%	77%	67%	73%
Vocational Training	49%	67%	52%	39%	27%	
Access to courses on e-skills	48%	59%	30%	0%	100%	

* The four host countries included in the study are: Spain (ES), Italy (IT), Hungary (HU), and the Netherlands (NL).

⁹⁰ This survey does not take into account the difficulty of a particular practice or skill; it merely counts the number of types of Internet use.

Table 27. ICT knowledge and practice by immigrant and native-born women who are more culturally active

	Immigrant women	Immigrant women in each host country*				Native-born women**
		ES	IT	HU	NL	
Medium/High Level of Internet Knowledge/Practice	67%	66%	65%	77%	63%	87%
No Internet Knowledge/Practice	14%	4%	22%	8%	14%	0%
Medium/High Level of PC Knowledge/Practice	55%	52%	59%	46%	55%	83%
No PC Knowledge/Practice	21%	15%	26%	23%	18%	0%

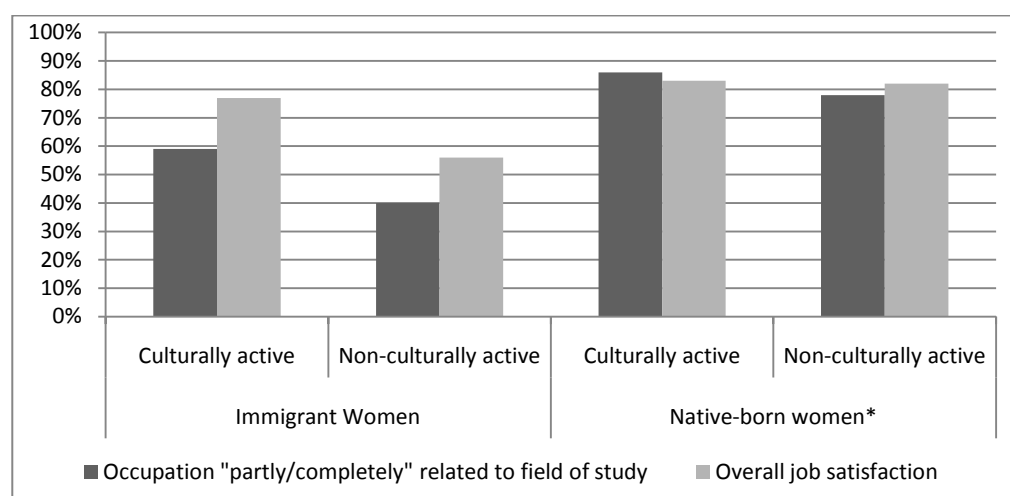
* Spain (ES), Italy (IT), Hungary (HU), and the Netherlands (NL).

** Native-born women refers to women born in the countries included in the study, primarily Romania (RO) and Hungary (HU)

EMPLOYMENT AND JOB SATISFACTION

The culturally active group is 1.6 times more likely to be employed than the rest of the sample (58% compared to 36%). They are slightly more likely to be self-employed or entrepreneurs. They are 2.6 times more likely to be professionals (48% compared to 19%). The rate of job satisfaction is 1.4 times higher for the culturally active group than for the rest of the sample (Figure 44). In contrast, the native-born group shows far less correlation between cultural activity and employment, apart from a higher percentage of managerial positions. Possibly cultural activity provides the immigrant women a springboard into the labor market that the European-born women do not require.

Figure 44. Types of ICT use by immigrant and native-born women who are more culturally active



** Native-born women refers to women born in the countries included in the study, primarily Romania (RO) and Hungary (HU)

Table 28. Types of ICT use by immigrant and native-born women who are more culturally active

	Immigrant women	Immigrant women in each host country*				Native-born women**
		ES	IT	HU	NL	
USE OF INTERNET						
Use of Internet: 3-5 times a week/Daily	60%	61%	56%	69%	57%	82%
Use Internet for studying and for personal development	57%	48%	68%	64%	31%	77%
Use of shared files, exchange of music/videos in Internet	53%	52%	62%	54%	36%	75%
Participate in Social Networks	35%	33%	31%	62%	30%	48%
Are able to create web pages	17%	30%	18%	0%	9%	35%
Have their own website	16%	37%	12%	0%	5%	24%
Have a personal blog	14%	28%	18%	0%	0%	17%
Write to online newspaper, web radio, TV	12%	13%	16%	15%	0%	22%
USE OF PC						
Use PC 3-5 times a week/Daily to Work	46%	58%	54%	8%	35%	64%
Use PC 3-5 times a week/Daily to Study	34%	35%	49%	23%	18%	41%
Are able to write a program using specific programming languages	20%	23%	19%	8%	23%	14%
Use PC 3-5 times a week/Daily for Hobbies/Creative Projects	18%	35%	15%	11%	8%	23%
Use of different languages in artistic work	13%	7%	21%	3%	12%	20%
Use of multimedia technologies in cultural work	10%	7%	17%	5%	8%	59%

* Spain (ES), Italy (IT), Hungary (HU), and the Netherlands (NL).

** Native-born women refers to women born in the countries included in the study, primarily Romania (RO) and Hungary (HU)

6.5 Cultural awareness and expression skills

“Cultural awareness and expression” has been defined as follows: “Appreciation of the importance of the creative expression of ideas, experiences and emotions in a range of media, including music, performing arts, literature, and the visual arts. . . . Skills relate to both appreciation and expression: the appreciation and enjoyment of works of arts and performances as well as self-expression through a variety of media using one’s innate capacities. Skills include also the ability to relate one’s own creative and expressive points of view to the opinions of others and to identify and realize social and economic opportunities in cultural activity.”⁹¹

The main questions of this section are the following.

- Are “cultural awareness and expression” skills a stimulus to upgrade other skills, and to learn to learn? Are cultural skills and participation in cultural life a factor supporting social participation? Do “cultural awareness and expression” skills increase self-confidence and job opportunities?

This study examined the importance individual respondents attach to cultural awareness and expression, as compared to a range of other skills and attitudes. Respondents were asked to assign ratings (from 0 to 5) to nine skill areas in terms of their importance for improving their employment situation. Figure 45 gives the results, showing the percentage of high ratings for each skill category. Cultural awareness and expression skills rank sixth overall for the sample of immigrant women, ahead of knowledge of the mother tongue, other languages, and math and science. The cultural skills were ranked last (ninth place) by the group of European-born women, perhaps because they can take these skills for granted. Note that for all the other skills (except for Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship) the native-born group rated the skills more highly than the immigrant women.

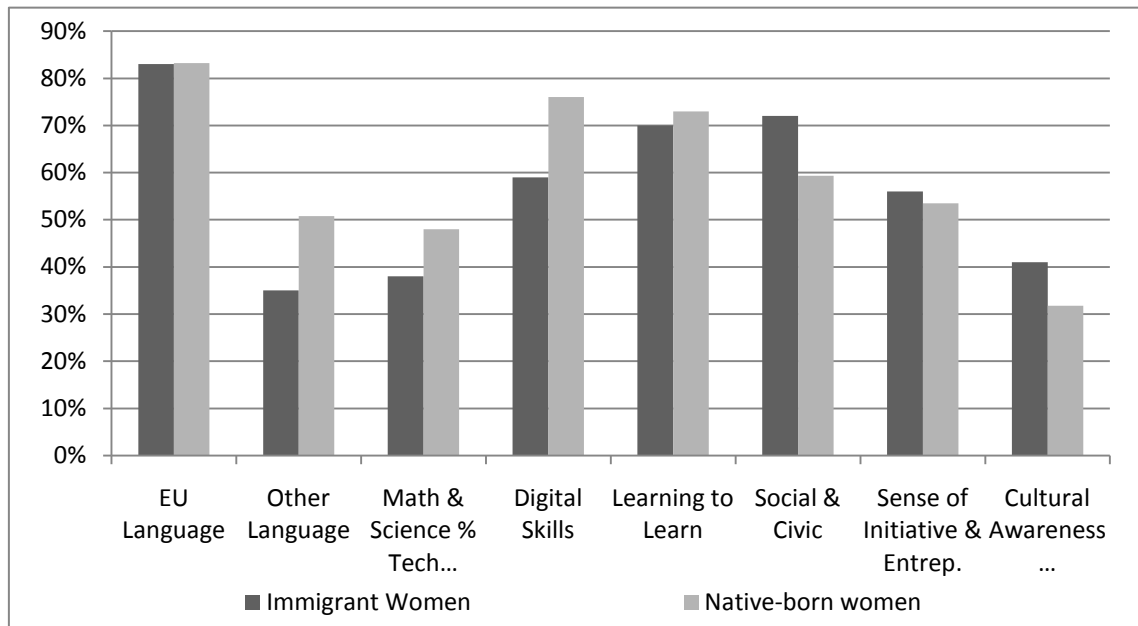
It is striking that the respondents assign relatively low importance to cultural skills as a way of improving their working situation — even though, as described above, those who are “culturally active” have better and more satisfying jobs. Individuals employed at NGOs are more likely to assign importance to cultural skills (61%), as do those employed as “professionals,” “technicians,” or “clerks” and those employed in the craft sector.

We also found differences in responses by country. The Netherlands and Spain showed the highest level of responses to this question. Respondents in these two countries had also taken more training courses in the host country, and they have a lower level of formal education. Training programs undoubtedly help them to compensate for a relative lack of formal education — and perhaps help them to appreciate the importance of the cultural skills that enhance the training. The Netherlands sample are also more active in community women’s associations.

In contrast, the sample in Italy has a higher educational profile and far higher employment rates (twice or three times as high as other country samples). This group relies more on “learning to learn” and the “sense of initiative and entrepreneurship,” although cultural skills are highly rated in the regions of Campania, Puglia, and Lazio.

⁹¹ Commission of the European Communities (2006).

Figure 45. Self-Assessment Of The Degree Of Relevance Of The LLL Key-Skills To Improve One's Work Situation



NOTE: Percentages show the ratio of “highly relevant” responses in relation to total responses (a rating of 4 or 5 on the scale of 0 to 5).

*Refers to women born in the EU countries included in the study: Romania, Hungary, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands

Interestingly, the respondents who gave the highest rating to “cultural awareness and expression” (139 immigrant and 48 native-born) also give a higher rating to *all* the LLL skills. Moreover, except for the category “mother tongue,” the immigrant group and the native-born group are remarkably close in their ranking of these skills, suggesting that an appreciation of cultural skills in effect helps to close the gap between the foreign-born and the European-born respondents.

6.6 Summary of Findings Cultural Inclusion Path

Our working assumptions included an important role for cultural awareness and expression, in relation to educational level, work experience, professional status, ability in the local language, and digital skills. We did not attempt to measure cultural skills directly: instead, respondents were asked to rate an array of skills in terms of their importance for employment, including the item “cultural awareness and expression.”

We found that the cultural skills were not in fact generally accorded high ratings; those skills ranked sixth out of the nine skills for the sample of immigrant women, and last (ninth place) for the group of European-born women. (That difference is interesting, suggesting that those born in the host country simply take these skills for granted.) It may be that cultural skills in general tend to be less visible, more “taken for granted,” as compared to language skills and digital skills. Interestingly, those respondents who gave the highest rating to “cultural awareness and expression,” in both groups, also give a higher rating to *all* the LLL skills. Moreover, except for the category “mother tongue,” the immigrant group and the native-born group are remarkably close in their ranking of these skills, suggesting that an appreciation of cultural skills in effect helps to “close the gap” in attitudes between the foreign-born and the European-born respondents.

The survey also asked respondents whether they participate in cultural and artistic activities. The group who ranked highest on this measure (the “culturally active” group) also shared some other characteristics in common. The culturally active group tended to have higher rates of employment, especially in high-skilled jobs and as entrepreneurs, and higher levels of job satisfaction. They were more likely to attend social events and vocational training, and had a higher level of competence in the host-country language (self-reported). They use Internet significantly more than the rest of the sample, and are more likely to attend e-skills classes; they are also more likely to use computers for work or study than the rest of the sample, though their overall (self-reported) computer skill level is lower.

Finally, the culturally active group are more likely to be members of nonprofit organizations, to work in the nonprofit sector, and to participate in social networks. This finding appears to support one of our working assumptions: “Cultural participation and expression may be related to active participation in intercultural groups and social networks, fostering leadership roles and a sense of social responsibility.” This is a complex question that would repay more detailed study in future research.

7 CONCLUSION

This study examines the role of e-skills in advancing the employability of immigrant women in four countries: Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, and Spain. The conceptual framework emphasizes (1) the *agency* of the immigrant women themselves (the “capabilities approach” rather than a victimization perspective), and (2) the importance of inclusion *processes* (rather than a binary model of inclusion/exclusion). These processes are conceptualized as three interrelated paths toward greater economic and social participation: education and lifelong learning, social inclusion, and cultural inclusion.

7.1 FINDINGS

Most of the immigrant women in the sample are fairly recent migrants: 80% immigrated within the past ten years. In general, the attitudes expressed by the sample of immigrant women show them to be active participants, ready to engage in paths of growth in order to improve their lives. Fully 70% use computers and Internet at least once a week. Most of the immigrant women have at least a basic level of computer literacy, with dramatic variation among host countries.

Most of the immigrant women in the sample are of working age. Most had been employed in their country of origin, and more than one-third had held professional or technical positions. Less than half, however, are currently employed — and most of them are employed in service or elementary occupations (cleaning, restaurant work, etc.).

In general, we found a dramatic disconnect between the level of prior education/employment and their current employment situation, for most of the sample of immigrant women. Credentials are part of the problem: the lack of official recognition of home-country achievements severely limits access to educational as well as employment opportunities. E-government procedures, as a means of bureaucracy simplification, need to be put in place to alleviate this inequality.

Providing access to education and training is key to advance the employability of immigrant women. Our sample clearly identifies access to education and training opportunities as critical to improve their social and economic status in the EU, even though most (especially those with middle or high education level) have jobs that do not utilize their education or specialization. Non-recognition of educational credentials is a barrier to formal education as well as to employability. Many immigrant women take advantage of non-formal training courses offered by NGOs, and would undoubtedly benefit from more formal training in these areas.

Information and communication technologies (ICT) skills are relevant for their employability. There are strong correlations between length of residence and ICT skills level (the most recent immigrants tend to have the lowest digital competence level); between ICT skills level and educational background; and between ICT skills level and current employment status (immigrant women with basic or no ICT skills have higher levels of unemployment).

ICT training makes a difference. Immigrant women who have had e-skills training show higher skill level and more diverse activities using computers and Internet (especially for job search). However, taking training courses does not directly correlate with employment outcomes.

7.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

The combination of developing e-skills with the training experience itself can help immigrant women expand their social networks, while imparting confidence in their ability to learn. E-skills can also help in overcoming language barriers, a significant factor in finding employment. The process of language acquisition can be facilitated or accelerated by using ICT in various ways, including e-learning as well as the non-formal learning that occurs in digital literacy courses.

The survey asked the women to identify problems they face, and to suggest some policy improvements. Problems cited by respondents include language-learning, employment issues, social marginalization, and bureaucratic procedures. The suggestions they offered tend to focus on social inclusion, and on the quality of public and non-profit services and employment centers.

More efficient public services, tailored to meet the specific needs of immigrant women, can maximize their potential contribution and their opportunities to express their roles of social and economic agent. In addition, targeted awareness-raising campaigns could do much to promote the opportunities that technology offers for self-employment, entrepreneurship, and commercial initiatives. Related initiatives could emphasize the importance of lifelong learning, and open channels for dialogue with public agencies.

Survey responses indicate that NGOs serve a crucial function for immigrant women, for both social integration and labor market integration. Overall, 88% of respondents participate in activities organized by the participating NGOs, with the immigrant women making more use of NGO services than the group of native-born women. Friends/families and NGOs are the two most important networks through which immigrant women find channels to secure employment, to improve their e-skills, and to access and use information and communication technologies. NGOs play a pivotal role in promoting social, economic, and cultural integration and in promoting many of the competences identified by the European Union as critical to success in today's labor market.

- Participation in NGO services often serves as the “diving board” for learning social and civic skills. NGOs also serve as a channel for finding employment, either by employing women directly, or facilitating employment through a network of links.
- An important element of NGO services is providing training in e-skills, as well as free or low-cost access to PC and Internet. NGO training programs use interactive, informal teaching methods, presenting ICT in concrete ways by applying the new skills to practical tasks. NGO ICT training could become still more valuable if their programs could provide some form of official certification.
- NGOs seeking to update and expand their digital literacy programs are limited by lack of resources. One suggested strategy is to develop e-learning resources that could be shared by many organizations, such as the European project “Key Competences for All.”

Social organizations are aware that digital competence has a broad range of benefits. Most use e-skills training not only to enhance language skills but also to promote self-esteem, autonomy, and social and cultural skills. Nevertheless, the many opportunities presented by new technology constitute a challenge for the NGOs that serve as ICT learning channels for immigrant women. These important

organizations need to adapt their strategies to fully address the needs of this population, taking advantage of e-learning and Web 2.0 resources for social, professional, and commercial networking.

In keeping with their not-for-profit orientation, NGOs tend not to address the business potential of the Internet. We suggest that immigrant women — as people who have already embarked on a major undertaking in immigrating — should be encouraged to assume a reasonable risk and create their own job or business endeavor.

NGOs serve a crucial function for immigrant women for both social integration and labor market integration. In view of the critical role they play in advancing social and economic inclusion, NGOs represent a high-return area for public and private funding and support.

Both the immigrant women and the native-born group were active participants in various social spaces and civic networks, in most cases extending beyond their own ethnic communities. In general, the overall picture of the background, activities, and aspirations of the immigrant women surveyed give strong support to an approach that views them as partners in the process of advancing their social, cultural, and economic inclusion in the host country.

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Appendix 1. List of organizations that participated in the study

Organization	Country	City	Website
L'APIS	Italy	Roma	on remake
ARCI	Italy	Roma	www.arci.it
CGIL	Italy	Roma	www.cgil.it
CNCA	Italy	Roma	www.cnca.it
UPTER	Italy	Roma	www.upter.it
Reformed Mission Centre	Hungary	Budapest	www.misszio.reformatus.hu
DEMNET Foundation for Development of Democratic Rights	Hungary	Budapest	www.demnet.org.hu
Menedék - the Hungarian Association for Migrants	Hungary	Budapest	www.menedek.hosting1.deja.hu
Southern Great Plain Regional Telecottage	Hungary	Szeged	www.telehaz-del-alfold.hu
TÁRKI Social Research Institute	Hungary	Budapest	www.tarki.hu/en/
Artemisszio Foundation	Hungary	Budapest	www.artemisszio.hu
Asociación Candelita	Spain	Madrid	www.candelita.org
Asociación Iniciativas Fontarrón	Spain	Madrid	www.iniciativasfontarron.org
Asociación Proyecto San Fermín	Spain	Madrid	www.san-fermin.org
Asociación Redes Extremadura Cultura y Desarrollo ACUDEX	Spain	Badajoz	www.acudex.org
Cooperativa Abierto hasta el amanecer	Spain	Madrid	www.abiertomadrid.coop
Federación de Mujeres Progresistas	Spain	Madrid	www.fmujeresprogresistas.org
Fundación Adsis	Spain	Madrid	www.fundacionadsis.org
Fundación Akwaba	Spain	Barcelona	www.fundacioakwaba.cat
Fundación Balia	Spain	Madrid	www.fundacionbalia.org
Fundación CEPAIM Acción Integral con Migrantes	Spain	Sevilla, Almeria	www.cepaim.org

Fundación Esplai	Spain	Barcelona, Madrid, Valencia	www.esplai.org
Fundación Jovesolides	Spain	Valencia	www.jovesolides.org
EOS	Romania	Timisoara	www.eos.ro/
Civitas	Romania	Transilvania	www.civitas.ro
ComputerWickj	The Netherlands	Amsterdam	www.computerwijk.nl/
Buurtonline	The Netherlands	Amsterdam	www.buurt-online.nl
Dock	The Netherlands	Amsterdam	www.dock.nl