
GOOD PRACTICE

Nachbarinnen in Wien

ADDRESSING WOMEN'S NEEDS IN LOCAL INTEGRATION STRATEGIES



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GOOD PRACTICE ID

Essential information



NACHBARINNEN
IN WIEN

Title of the practice

NACHBARINNEN in Wien (Neighbour Women in Vienna)

Theme

Women centred integration policies and practice

Geographical area

Vienna, Austria

Who leads on the practice?

The initiative was founded by Dr. Christine Scholten and Renate Schnee. It is coordinated by the Nachbarinnen in Wien association, with migrant women trained as social assistants ("Nachbarinnen") as the main actors.

Target Group(s)

Migrant women in Vienna and their families, especially those who are socially isolated or have limited access to public services.

Project duration

The project started in 2013 and has been running continuously since then.

Contact

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GOOD PRACTICE SUMMARY

Purpose, delivery and impact

Description of the practice

Nachbarinnen in Wien is a community-based integration and empowerment initiative. Trained migrant social assistants conduct outreach social work, especially home visits, to support migrant women and their families in their own language, offering guidance, integration support, and participation pathways.

Purpose, goals and evidence of needs

The practice was developed to address the isolation of many migrant women in Vienna, who faced language barriers, limited trust in public institutions, and restricted access to education, healthcare, and social services. Often confined to their homes and (economically) dependent on male family members but at the same time playing a central role in raising children and organising family life, these women lacked social participation and confidence. The initiative meets these needs by providing culturally sensitive support through trained migrant women from the same communities, helping beneficiaries navigate local systems improve access to education and services for their families (including educational support to children), and connect with the wider community.

How it works

Since 2013, the project trains migrant women from different backgrounds as “Nachbarinnen” (female neighbours) to provide culturally sensitive support to other migrant women and families in their own languages.

At the beginning the training program for the “Nachbarinnen” consists of a 300-hour (over 5 month) course covering topics such as health, education, social issues, and communication. This curriculum was developed in collaboration with the Alpen-Adria University in Klagenfurt. Upon completion, graduates are employed by the Nachbarinnen association to conduct outreach work in their communities. Women are approached by the “Nachbarinnen” at the mosques, in parks, outside kindergartens or in other public spaces. Communities, schools and other institutions also refer them to the initiative. New social assistants are now joining Nachbarinnen through on-the-job training and a peer mentoring approach.

The initiative uses a holistic, systemic model that combines personal outreach with social space orientation. Key methods include:

- Home Visits: Families are visited weekly to work with the entire household, with a focus on empowering the woman as the central figure. During each visit, the woman or family and the Nachbarin agree on at least one new step to be tried out before the next visit. This individual agreement is recorded in the woman's calendar (see below), and its progress is reviewed together at the following home visit, helping to build consistency, confidence, and a sense of responsibility.
- Accompaniment: Assisting women in navigating official procedures, and attending appointments.
- "Family Conference": Facilitating family meetings to promote equal decision-making and self-organization, helping families manage time and responsibilities effectively. Daily structure is given great importance, also serving as preparation for future employment. Each supported woman receives a calendar specifically designed for the Nachbarinnen program. She is guided on how to use it – using symbols for women who are not literate – to organize her own and her family members' schedules.
- Education & Employment: Encouraging participation in language courses, providing home-based language support, and offering guidance on further education and employment opportunities.
- Parent-Child Programs: Organizing educational breakfasts with speakers and experts (translated in 5 languages), parent meetings, and cultural outings to foster learning and integration.
- Learning support: Children receive individualized tutoring 2-3 hours per week that combines academic help with recreational activities, provided by freelancer/learning assistant who support them alongside their own studies, artistic pursuits, or retirement. The family pays a small contribution of 2 EUR per session.

Each year, 11 trained social assistants/Nachbarinnen support around 350 families through tailored assistance, staying with each family until they can manage independently. They are employed by the association and the activities of the "Nachbarinnen" are free of charge for the families, except the learning support.

Partnership and collaboration

The City of Vienna plays a significant supporting role. It supports the work of the association through basic funding, covering part of the Nachbarinnen activities financially. Additional funders include the Public Employment Service (AMS) and the WAFF (Vienna Employees' Promotion Fund). It also collaborates with local schools, cultural institutions such as the Mumok (Art Museum) or Dom Museum, and other partners who help extend the reach and impact of the programme (e.g. The floor is yours or Conversations through images).

Participation

The Nachbarinnen programmes were developed together with the employed women from the various communities. Over the years, for example, the 'education breakfast' emerged. Other programmes were selected by the management and operational leadership and tested together. Depending on how well they were received in the communities, they were incorporated into the Nachbarinnen programme. The employed Nachbarinnen are involved in all processes.

The projects (e.g. workshops in the museum) are selected by the management and operational leadership based on feasibility and meaningfulness, and are decided together with the Nachbarinnen.

Effectiveness and results

The Vienna University of Economics and Business was commissioned in 2014 to evaluate the project. The analysis of the Social Return on Investment Study (SROI) showed an SROI of 4.61. This means that each euro invested creates an impact with a monetary equivalent of €4.61; the impact in this case is therefore more than four times the investment. The evaluation – which was funded by Bank Austria and Coca-Cola Austria – assessed the project as successful and extremely effective. In addition to supporting women with a migrant background on their path to empowerment, there was also evidence of impacts on the entire family and other stakeholders, including staff and public bodies. The SROI will be carried out again in 2026. In addition, an internal evaluation of the Nachbarinnen's work is conducted every year together with the Nachbarinnen, and the insights gained are incorporated into the work programme. The initiative has received numerous awards over the years.

Funding and resources

Currently: Half of the budget comes from public funding bodies (such as the Ministry of Social Affairs, the City of Vienna, AMS, WAFF), and the other half of the income comes from the sewing workshop, private sponsors, and donations.

Staff: 6 staff members, 11 neighbours, 7 seamstresses.

TRANSFERABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

Topline issues

Success factors

- Peer mentoring / social assistants: Training migrant women to provide culturally sensitive support in their own languages could be implemented in other communities.
- Weekly agreements: The structured goal-setting approach to gradually build family autonomy could be applied in other social support or integration programmes.
- Educational breakfasts (Bildungsfrühstücke): Small, low-cost gatherings where migrant women can learn about local institutions, language, or parenting could be replicated in schools or community centers.
- Sewing workshops / skill-building labs: Vocational or social enterprises that combine skill acquisition with social support could be implemented as stand-alone initiatives to empower migrant women economically.

Context-specific factors

- Supportive local context: Vienna's long-standing tradition of community-based social work and its openness to intercultural approaches created fertile ground for developing Nachbarinnen. National and city-level policies on migrant integration and gender equality further strengthened political backing.

- Collaborative and tailored design: Programmes were co-developed with women from different communities, ensuring cultural relevance and trust. A one-year pilot with men – where fathers held guided parenting discussions – showed that replication for other groups is possible but requires an adapted concept and dedicated funding.
- Strong partnerships and funders: The commitment of key funders and cooperation with partner organisations have been essential to sustaining and expanding the work.
- Perseverance and shared vision: Continued commitment, resilience, and people who believe in the approach have been critical to keeping the initiative alive and growing over time.

Materials and support

All methods and tools, from initial contact to exit, are described in detail in a manual, which was jointly developed by the advisors and the social work management (Annual report (2023)). This internal ‘manual’ is intended for new colleagues, who should have a reference guide after their initial training.

Recommendations to another city – the dos and the don’ts

DO’S

1. Provide funds: Local authorities need to invest in community-based initiatives like Nachbarinnen. Sustainable funding allows trained migrant women to do outreach, accompany families, and build trust, things that can’t be achieved through short-term or volunteer-based projects.
2. Community work is important: Integration starts at the local level, through face-to-face contact and relationships of trust. Working directly in communities – in homes, neighbourhoods, and local spaces – is what makes this approach effective.
3. Let it grow – The model needs time and flexibility to take root.

DON’Ts

1. Do not create short-term projects that will be discontinued after a certain period.
2. Do not make quick decisions; take time to research thoroughly and listen closely to the communities and their needs.
3. Avoid relying solely on majority/native-led administrative structures.

