
GOOD PRACTICE

Nachbarinnen in Wien

ADDRESSING WOMEN'S NEEDS IN LOCAL INTEGRATION STRATEGIES



Find out more in the [Policy brief](#)

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.

GOOD PRACTICE

The “Possible” project in Berlin

BUILDING MIGRANT WOMEN’S CONFIDENCE AND TRUST IN
JOBCENTRES FOR LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION



Find out more in the [Policy brief](#)

GOOD PRACTICE ID

Essential information

Title of the practice

Project “Possible”: Building migrant women’s confidence and trust in jobcentres for labour market integration in Berlin

Theme

Migrant women integration into the labour market

Geographical area

Berlin, Germany

Who leads on the practice?

La Red e.V. and Frauenalia jointly.

Target Group(s)

Migrant women in Berlin, who have limited (formal) qualification and an increased need for support.

Project duration

January 2023–December 2025

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GOOD PRACTICE SUMMARY

Purpose, delivery and impact

Description of the practice

Project "Possible" (delivered by La Red e.V together with Frauenalia Frauenalia) is a free, personalised empowerment and job-orientation programme for migrant women living in Berlin. It offers individual counselling, group workshops and peer-led activities that support the pathway into employment, vocational training or further education.

Purpose, goals and evidence of needs

Launched in January 2023 under the national ESF+ programme MY TURN – Women with migration experience get started, "Possible" aims to empower migrant women with limited formal qualifications to access the labour market and training opportunities in Berlin. It strengthens employability and self-confidence through counselling, coaching, and empowerment workshops, supporting women's labour market integration in cooperation with Jobcenters and local partners.

In 2024, the project gained new relevance with the rollout of the nationwide Job-Turbo initiative, which seeks to accelerate refugees' entry into employment in Germany. Misinformation about this initiative circulated widely on social media channels such as Facebook and Telegram, particularly among Ukrainian women. A persistent rumour claimed that they would be forced into low-skilled jobs or risk losing benefits, creating anxiety and mistrust toward Jobcenters and other public services.

"Possible" responded by building trust between migrant women and institutions, disseminating verified information through trusted channels, and addressing fears related to Jobcenters' role. This targeted "trust-building and misinformation" component became a key part of "Possible"s broader mission of empowerment and inclusion, helping ensure that women can confidently use and benefit from the support available to them.

How it works

"Possible" combines individual support, group empowerment, and outreach to build migrant women's confidence and improve access to employment services. Key activities include personalised counselling and career planning, as well as workshops on job applications, job-related German, communication with Jobcentres, and recognition of qualifications.

Using the **Digital Street Work methodology** (see below), the project identified widespread misinformation about the Job-Turbo initiative among Ukrainian women in Berlin, leading to mistrust and fear of engaging with Jobcentres. To respond, "Possible" implemented targeted trust-building activities:

- Outreach in Ukrainian through social media groups for migrant women, followed by in-person information sessions (over 100 participants in four meetings) organised by trusted partners La Red and Frauenalia.
- Workshops in German and Ukrainian on further training and communication with Jobcentres, addressing fears of being forced into underqualified jobs.
- Empowerment LABs, short programmes focused on competence assessment, intercultural skills, and interview techniques.
- Networking breakfasts with Ukrainian role models who shared first-hand experiences of finding employment and interacting with Jobcentres.
- Joint meetings with Jobcentres to exchange information and foster mutual understanding between staff and participants.

The bilingual and low-threshold approach created a safe environment for participants to express concerns and receive verified information. Insights from women's experiences were shared with employment agencies, helping them adapt their practices and improve communication with migrant communities.

Partnership and collaboration

Cooperation agreements between "Possible" and Jobcentres or employment agencies connect participants to the labour market. Jobcentre representatives also join workshops and networking events, explaining procedures, answering questions, and addressing misunderstandings, which helps humanise institutions, reduce fear, and build trust among migrant women.

Participation

Participants shape the practice at every stage:

- They chose which accompanying measures they want to get.
- They co-design their support plans with coaches.
- Feedback is systematically collected after collective empowerment measures.

Insights from participants are shared back with Jobcentres, enabling institutional learning and adjustments.

Effectiveness and results

In comparison to 2023, Ukraine became in 2024 the most represented country of origin in the project (30%). From 8 women in 2023, 76 women from Ukraine joined the project.

The circulation of verified information, participation in empowerment measures, and discussions on labour market strategies strengthened their confidence in engaging with jobcentre advisers. Direct contacts between project advisers and jobcentre staff helped prevent miscommunications, enabling several women to take concrete steps toward desired jobs or qualifications. Word of mouth among participants further enhanced the project's credibility and trust in public authorities.

One year after, 43% of them had a positive outcome: 21% of these women found a job; 22% began an educational or training measure. Only 15% of them didn't pursue the project and stopped without a positive outcome. The rest is still active in the advising process.

Funding and resources

The „Possible“ project is funded by the German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the European Union via the European Social Fund Plus (ESF Plus) as part of the MY TURN program “Women with migration experience get started”.

The project runs for three years, from 2023 to 2025, ensuring stability in terms of resources and team structure, as well as in the establishment of networks. The team consists of 10 people, which corresponds to 6.5 full-time equivalents. The team is spread across two sites. All those working on the project are women, most of whom are migrants themselves.

Sustainability in the long term

Both organisations La Red and Frauenalia are continuing their work in the field of supporting employment for migrant women. The contacts they have established are a valuable asset. These include the network of local institutions as well as other migrant organisations or the project participants themselves.

The organisations has applied for an extension of fundings for the project in the second period of support of the ESF Plus Federal Programme 2021-2027.

TRANSFERABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

Topline issues

Success factors

- Empowerment LABs, networking breakfasts, and peer involvement gave women practical skills and increased confidence.
- Direct participation of Jobcentre staff in workshops and events helped clarify procedures and reduce fear.
- Providing time, space, and proximity for dialogue allowed meaningful trust-building between participants and institutions.

Context-specific factors

- Very good cooperation between La Red and Frauenalia.
- Strong pre-existing partnerships with the Jobcentres, and other local organisations.
- Three-years-funding by the German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the European Union via the European Social Fund Plus (ESF Plus) as part of the MY TURN program “Women with migration experience get started”.
- The flexible framework of the MY TURN programme enabled quick adaptation to emerging needs, such as responding to Job-Turbo rumours.
- Established migrant networks in Berlin facilitated outreach and community mobilisation.

Materials and support

The publications of projects done by Minor Digital, a.o. the projet “Neu in Berlin Pro”: <https://minor-digital.de/nib-pro/>

Risks and challenges

- Identify institutional partners and ensure their openness before reaching out to communities. It can be the opportunity to create this trusted and strong relationship, if it didn't exist before.
- Challenge in articulating the multilingual aspect of collective offers: While group activities are generally conducted in German to enable language practice, we also wanted to offer activities in Ukrainian. The idea was to promote easy access to this target group. Articulating this offers with the German language wasn't easy because of the very diverse expectations of the participants.
- Difficulties in conducting group activities between Russian- and Ukrainian-speaking participants due to political situation.

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

DO'S

1. Engage trusted community organisations to ensure effective outreach and credibility.
2. Create direct interaction opportunities between migrant participants and public institutions to foster understanding and responsiveness.
3. Offer multilingual, low-threshold spaces and allow sufficient time for participants to share experiences and gain confidence.

DON'Ts

1. Substituting for and acting on behalf of migrant women seeking advice: the aim is to provide tools and empower them so that they can themselves establish contact with institutions and engage in constructive discussion for both parties.
2. Try to solve a problem alone. Nobody has all the answers.
3. Rush the process. Good and open communication takes time.

Digital Street Work method

“Digital Street Work” brings the principles of traditional street outreach—meeting people where they are, building trust, and offering easy, barrier-free access—into online spaces. It reaches people who are marginalised or not well served by conventional face-to-face services.

Key features and practices:

- Proactively locating and monitoring platforms/groups used by target communities, using relevant languages, “buzzwords”, and joining closed and open groups.
- Answering gaps: responding to mis- or un-answered questions, providing up-to-date, legally correct, accessible info about rights, procedures, benefits, etc.
- Multilingualism & cultural proximity: using many languages reflecting actual communities, often with staff who are migrants or have migration backgrounds.
- Referrals and crisis intervention: when urgent issues arise (domestic violence, access to services etc.), offering concrete help (contacts, hotlines, safe services) and linking to local, in-person or institutional support.
- Use of new tools/formats: extending outreach via platforms like Telegram, TikTok especially for people who may be less literate or less engaged in traditional social media.
- Example: The Fem.OS Plus project by Berlin-based association Minor – Digital applies this approach to support migrants via social media: <https://minor-digital.de/fem-os-plus/>

