

Labor Market Integration of Women with Migrant Background: Baseline Findings from a Model Project in Germany

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Abstract

To advance the integration of women with migrant background on the labor market, an innovative project was initiated in a mid-sized city in Germany in 2018. The four-year project is implemented by a team of female (social) workers and aided by coaches to support migrant women's entry into the labor market and foster their social integration. Following an orientation phase, the women, who enter the program sequentially in cohorts of about 20, start apprenticeships, finish educational requirements, or participate in language courses before entering vocational training. The goal is to complete the training and to then enter the skilled labor market. This paper uses baseline survey data, which was collected as part of an ongoing formative evaluation of the project. Descriptive findings are presented on women's (n=98) expectations for project participation, their demographic profiles, psychosocial stressors and resources, and status at the midpoint of the project. Furthermore, the role of coaches (n=27) is examined. Establishing initial profiles and gaining an understanding of the characteristics and experiences of women and coaches serves as the basis for the conceptual development of the project, as well as addressing gaps in the literature. Implications for project development and future analysis are discussed.

Keywords: Labor market integration, Women with migrant background, Migration and refugees, Integration programs.

Introduction

Women and especially mothers play a special role in the context of integration. According to the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (2019), the employment of mothers from immigrant families has a positive effect, not only on the integration of the women themselves, but also on the integration of the family and particularly their children. However, women with migrant background are disproportionately affected by (unwanted) unemployment (Bedaso, 2021; Federal Ministry for Families Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women, and Youth, 2019). Promoting the employment of individuals with migrant background, particularly women, is a current objective of the German government and is based on the assumption that integration on the labor market is linked to improved social and cultural integration (The Federal Government, 2007).

A parallel, but interconnected development involves the shortage of skilled workers on the German labor market, specifically in healthcare and social-services sectors (Flake et al., 2018; Klusemann et al., 2020). The federal government's 2018 "strategy for skilled workers" [*Fachkräftestrategie*] responds to this problem by aiming to activate and recruit domestic workers as well as skilled workers from Europe and beyond (The Federal Government, n.d.). Thus, the targeted promotion of women with migrant background as one of the goals of German integration policy must also be understood in relation to the shortage of skilled workers in Germany. To address this multilayered challenge, various labor market integration projects and programs have been initiated in recent years.

The project under study – “New Opportunities in the Social Economy - Qualification Perspective for Migrant Women”¹ – is an innovative and collaborative effort by the Hessian Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration and the city of Kassel to secure employment or vocational training for women with migrant background who so far have had limited involvement with the German labor market. The aim is for at least 50 women to enter and complete qualified vocational training in the health and/or social-services sector over the course of the project (fall 2018 to summer 2022). Given the typical two- to three-year duration of vocational training in Germany, this goal is ambitious.

The current paper presents first results from a formative evaluation, which accompanies this model project with the aim of undergirding the project concept with empirical data. Following a synthesis of salient literature, the paper provides an overview of the project concept as well as the overall aims and methods of the evaluation. It will then present baseline data on participating women and the coaches that support them in the project. Women’s status at the midpoint of the project will also be examined in order to capture early dropout rates. Findings from the evaluation, even early descriptive findings, are intended to guide the conceptual development of the project, as well as to address gaps in the literature about the profiles of migrant women in labor market integration projects.

Background and Previous Research

The Labor Market Situation in Germany

Due to sociodemographic shifts in Germany, an increased demand for skilled workers in healthcare and social-services sectors has emerged over the last decade (Grünheid & Sulak, 2016; Radtke, 2020). The decreasing number of skilled workers had, for instance, contributed to a shortage of around 307,000 nurses by 2013 (Flake et al., 2018). According to the German Federal Government (2020), individuals with migrant background are underrepresented in this occupational group. However, the increasing number of patients as well as caregivers with migrant background point to an urgent need for a skilled and culturally trained workforce. Labor market integration projects play a crucial role in this context, and, as already stated in the introduction, a number of projects and programs have been initiated in recent years to improve the access of individuals with migrant background to the skilled labor market (German Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration, 2019). Evaluative data about the success of these various efforts is, however, largely missing to date.

A similar development is taking place in childcare facilities. While the number of children with migrant background has been increasing in daycare centers, kindergartens, and schools, a concomitant development in the childcare workforce cannot be observed (Gereke et al., n.d.). Instead, a shortage of skilled workers is prevalent and staff turnover is frequent (Klusemann et al., 2020). Gereke et al. (n.d.) criticized the lack of diversity in daycare facilities and emphasized that “adequate representation could, for example, help to lower access thresholds faced by immigrant families and increase the care rates of children from immigrant backgrounds in preschools and kindergartens” (p.13; own translation).

The Federal Government’s 2018 initiative, referred to in the introduction, is a response to this situation. It aims to attract, foster, and maintain a skilled work force, outlining various goals, funding mechanisms and changes in legislation to be implemented successively (The Federal Government, 2020). The goal is to “establish a new culture of continuing education and training in Germany” as well as “support all those in employment in maintaining their qualifications and skills in the changing world of work (...)” (Federal Ministry of Education and Research, 2018, n.d.). Among other objectives and steps, it also involves the simplification of procedures for the recognition of foreign qualifications, the promotion of job-related language acquisition and focused efforts to coach and support migrants toward greater labor market integration. Furthermore, administrative procedures toward this goal are to be made more efficient and transparent (The Federal Government, n.d.). In line with the integration policies of the federal government and the state of Hesse, the city of Kassel has implemented several model projects in recent years to assist different target groups with migrant background (e.g., James et al., 2020; www.kassel.de/integration). The project that is the focus of this paper is one of them.

Challenges for Women with a Migrant Background

In 2018, around 20.8 million people with migrant background were living in Germany (Federal Statistical Office, 2020). These include individuals who migrated to Germany or have "at least one parent [who] was not born with German citizenship" (Federal Statistical Office, 2019). Approximately half of them (52%) hold German citizenship or are women (Federal Statistical Office, 2019, 2020). Women with migrant background were either born in Germany as children of immigrants or have themselves undergone the migration process as labor migrants, refugees, or in the context of family reunification. As such, they do not represent a homogenous group.

Various studies stress that women with migrant background are confronted with a range of challenges and different forms of discrimination that require targeted support services (e.g., Castellà, 2017; Koopmanns et al., 2019; Steinmann, 2018). Barriers addressed in the literature include stereotypes, attributions of low qualifications, and discriminatory practices, which hinder access to the labor market and prevent integration in professional life (e.g., Farrokhzad, 2018; OECD/EU, 2018; Salikutluk et al., 2020; Weichselbaumer, 2020). On average, women with migrant background earn less than their German counterparts or men with backgrounds of migration (Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency, 2020). They have an occupational status that often does not correspond with their actual qualifications (Ferenschild, 2019) and experience great difficulties in accessing employment opportunities (Koopmanns et al., 2019; Sansonetti, 2016). This lack of access is further undermined by insufficient childcare options (Farrokhzad, 2018; SVR, 2019). Language difficulties, bureaucratic obstacles, and problems with recognition procedures for vocational or educational qualifications acquired in the home country along with other forms of discrimination (e.g., discrimination on the housing market, gender discrimination within the family) further amplify this dire situation (e.g., Beigang et al., 2017; Brell et al., 2020; Salikutluk et al., 2020; Sansonetti, 2016). Lastly, the loss of family and social networks in their home countries along with traumatic experiences are believed to be primary causes for the elevated rates of stress and related mental health problems reported among individuals with migrant background, particularly women (Abbott, 2016; Aichberger et al., 2015; Tibubos & Kröger, 2020).

Yet, the depiction of women with migrant background as a group, singularly at risk for adverse outcomes, does not do this group justice. It needs to be balanced by findings that emphasize the resources and resilience of this group. Several studies have shown that women with migrant background exhibit considerable resilience and coping skills that can moderate psychological stress and mediate the process of integration and acculturation (e.g., Babatunde-Sowole et al., 2020; Gericke et al., 2018; Hombrados-Mendieta et al., 2019). As pointed out by these studies, however, this does not change the fact that, as a group, women with migrant background are structurally disadvantaged and may therefore need specific supports and services.

The Model Project – Concept and Features

The 4-year project to be evaluated – “New Opportunities in the Social Economy - Qualification Perspective for Migrant Women” (abbreviated *SoWi* for its German title) was initiated in 2018 with the overall goal of recruiting skilled workers in social economy professions and promoting women with migrant background (Hessian Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration, n.d.). Funded by the Hessian Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration, it is implemented by the city of Kassel's municipal employment promotion agency. Kassel is a midsize city (population of 201,585 in 2019), located in the geographic center of Germany and the northern part of the state of Hesse. The project builds on concepts and elements that have been identified in the professional and scientific literature as being essential for the success of labor market integration projects with migrant groups, such as focusing on building language competencies, implementing diagnostic procedures to ascertain qualifications and aspirations, supporting the transition into the labor market through structured internships and vocational training, and using coaches for support (e.g. Aumüller, 2016; James et al., 2020).

SoWi's target group are women with migrant background between 18 and 45 years of age who are seeking a (re)entry into working life. For the purposes of the project, “migrant background” captures the existing heterogeneity of this group: women who have had flight experiences, who themselves or their families have immigrated to Germany and EU citizens in general. Mothers, single parents, and

private caregivers with no or no recognized professional qualifications are particularly sought out for this project. The project's openness to recruiting a range of participants reflects consideration of individual biographies and thus differs from comparable projects that often have inclusion criteria that are narrower or more specific (e.g., mothers, refugees, young people). The interdisciplinary *SoWi* project team (consisting primarily of female social workers) is responsible for the overall coordination between different organizational entities and social institutions and, additionally, fulfills important support and consulting functions.

In order to guide project participants toward the goal of obtaining necessary vocational qualifications (especially in the areas of early childhood education and elderly care), women may first enroll in schools to receive their secondary school certificate, take language courses, and receive financial and technical support in the recognition process of previous school or training qualifications of their home countries. By participating in the *SoWi* project and actively fostering women's self-efficacy and self-confidence, their social integration and overall resilience are expected to improve.

Interested women either register for *SoWi* on their own or are referred by cooperating agencies or the job center. They enter the project consecutively in cohorts of about 20 women. Women who drop out shortly after signing up may be replaced with new participants. Participation is based on a diagnostic interview and begins for most women with an introductory three-month orientation and activation course. During this phase, previous knowledge, general education, cognitive abilities, professional motivation, behavioral strengths as well as social skills are assessed to optimally position women for an apprenticeship, further education... etc. and to fit their interests with available training sites. An internship is part of the orientation phase and involves further test procedures in areas of vocational aptitude, key qualifications and language level. During this time, women also receive information on relevant occupational fields and topics (e.g. on cultural differences in the field of education, elderly and sick care).

Following the orientation and activation phase, participants are assigned to female coaches from different partner agencies. Modeled after the growing number of other labor market integration projects, coaching constitutes a core element of *SoWi*. It is conceptualized as a resource-oriented method, which is meant to guide and support the successful qualification process of the participant (Hessian Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration, n.d.). However, the specific features of coaching and its implementation at the case level are quite dynamic and may be adapted to the individual needs of the participating women.

Overall Purpose of Evaluation and Aim of Current Analysis

The scientific evaluation of the project commenced shortly after the project began in 2018 and will be ongoing over the course of its duration. Questions of interest for the evaluation were formulated in a cooperative process involving the evaluation team and the leadership of the *SoWi* project team. Beyond the specific aims and outcomes pursued by the project, research questions and the choice of variables were further guided by the conceptual and empirical literature, which points to factors that may affect, moderate, or mediate integration outcomes for individuals with migrant background.² Thus, the overall purpose of the evaluation is to collect data to answer the following questions: (1) What are the women's expectations when entering *SoWi* and how do expectations change over time? (2) What are the profiles of the women? What psychosocial stressors and resources can be identified? (3) How many women complete/dropout of the project? (4) What is the role of the coaches? (5) How is the coaching relationship experienced (by women and coaches) and how does it influence project outcomes? (6) What demographic and psychosocial factors predict project success or failure?

As stated in the introduction, the current paper is written at the midpoint of the evaluation and is the first in a series of analyses to be conducted. It uses baseline survey data to address the first four research questions. Thus, participating women's demographic and psychosocial profiles as well as their status in the project will be described and the role of coaches examined. The latter two questions (5, 6) cannot yet be answered as reliable outcome data will only be available once data collection has been completed.

Evaluation Methods

Evaluation Design and Data Sources

Within the framework of a prospective design, the formative evaluation triangulates data from multiple data sources gathered over a three-to-four-year period to answer the questions of interest. Data sources include quantitative survey data with participating women and coaches, data from qualitative interviews and focus groups (with women and key stakeholders) as well as case file and administrative data. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, participating women will be surveyed twice instead of three times as initially planned; coaches will also be surveyed twice (at baseline and after about two years). The evaluation study was approved by the research ethics committee (Ethics Committee FB01) of the University Kassel.

Recruitment and Sample

All women with migrant background entering *SoWi* are eligible to participate in the evaluation and are invited during the orientation phase. To date, women from the first seven cohorts were recruited. Additional cohorts are expected to begin the project, yet data collection has been delayed due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Of the 132 women who had participated in the orientation phase, 98 (74.2%) took part in the baseline survey.³

Similarly, all coaches are eligible to participate. Approximately forty-six coaches were active in the program during summer/fall 2019, of which 33 emails were forwarded to the evaluation team. Twenty-seven coaches filled out the survey.

Instruments and Data Collection

As stated earlier, variables and instruments were chosen carefully based on conceptual and empirical relevance for the questions of interest and the target population (see Table 1 for an overview of the instruments). Questions aimed to capture the women's family situation and migration background, psychosocial stressors and resources, acculturation experiences as well as expectations for participation in the project. The baseline survey instrument for participating women was translated into multiple languages (Easy German, Arabic, English, Farsi, Somali and Tigrinya) and piloted. The final instrument consisted of 97 items and took about 30 to 90 minutes to complete.

A web-based survey of coaches took place during summer 2019. Coaches were recruited into the study at coaching meetings and through newsletters. Questions aimed to profile the coaches background, their expectations about their role in the program, available support and resources,... etc. The *Helping Relationship Inventory* (Poulin & Young, 1997) was used to capture data on the coaching relationship.

Table 1. Instruments for Baseline Survey of Women with Migrant Background

Construct & Instrument	Items
Demographics	Based on categories in Germany's federal statistical database (DESTATIS)
(Job) Expectations for Program: self-constructed	Open questions
Stress: Inventory of Daily Stressors and Life Satisfaction of Migrant (Turkish) Women in Germany (Jäkel & Leyendecker, 2008)	19 items on a Likert scale of 1-4; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.86$ 3 self-created items to address care of children, worry about permanency status in Germany and general concern about the future
Resilience: Resilience Scale (Leppert et al., 2008)	Short-version with 13 items (dimensions 'personal competency' and 'acceptance of self and life'); Likert scale of 1-7; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.90$; test-retest reliability =0.61
Coping: Job-related Coping and Intention to Return (Muschalla et al., 2016)	14 select items in dimensions job coping, self-efficacy, external locus of control and meaning of work; Likert scale of 1-5; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.69-0.89$
Migration Experiences: Essener Migration Inventory (Tagay et al., 2013)	12 select items on life in Germany and cultural identification; Likert scale of 1-4

Construct & Instrument	Items
Social Support: ENRICH Social Support Inventory (Mitchell et al., 2003) and Self-constructed Items	Adaptation of 5 items from SSI and 5 self-constructed items; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$
Cultural Identification and Experiences with Racism: Self-constructed	5 items; constructed according to similar questions used in other research on racism and cultural experiences
Religion: Self-constructed	3 items; constructed according to similar questions used to capture the domain religion.

Data Analysis

Data was entered into SPSS 26.0, cleaned and screened for missing data. To construct an initial profile of participating women as well as coaches, extensive descriptive analyses were conducted at this point. Subsequently, more complex analyses are planned to answer the questions guiding the evaluation (e.g., factor analysis, multivariate analysis, repeated measures analysis).

Results

Demographic Characteristics of Participating Women

Table 2 provides an overview of the participating women's demographic characteristics. The 98 women in our sample have a mean age of 34.9 (SD=7.5), ranging from 20 to 53 years old. Women were born in about 31 different countries spanning four continents (Europe, Asia, Africa and North America), with Syria (17.3%) and Afghanistan (9.2%) being the most common places of birth. Seven women were born in Germany. The age at arrival in Germany was on average 27.3 (SD=9.5; range 47[3;50]), and women (not born in Germany) have lived in Germany for 7.4 years (SD=7.4; range 36[2;38]). The residency status includes women with German citizenship (27.5%), citizenship in another EU country (8.8%), unrestricted status (18.7%), and 45.1% with a restricted and time-limited residency status.

Regarding family status, more than a half report being married and living with their spouse. Another 11.3% are married but live separately and 9% are divorced. An additional 11.3% cohabit with a partner and 13.4% are single. Eighty-two women (83.7%) have children – on average 2.3 (SD=1.0) children – and 90% of mothers have children who are aged 12 years or younger.

In terms of educational and occupational background, a heterogeneous picture emerges. Altogether 45.3% have completed a university/college degree or a vocational training. Close to one-quarter (23.9%) have completed university/college, one-fifth have a high school diploma that would qualify them for postsecondary education. About 17% did not graduate from any formal schooling. On average, women have been in the labor market for 7.3 years (SD=6.0; range 23[0;23]). German language competency is equally diverse (from beginning level to native speaker). It deserves noting in this context that the formal recognition of obtained degrees remains a critical point that frequently slows down women's progression in the program.

Closed and open-ended items show that women are primarily hoping to enter vocational training (25.2%), find work (19.1%) and further their own personal development (13.9%). Women highly endorse the value of work to them and their own development.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Participating Women (n=98)

	N (valid %)	M (SD)
Age (n=95)		34.9 (7.5)
Age at arrival in Germany (n=85)		27.3 (9.5)
Years in Germany (n=92)		9.7 (9.7)
Residency status (n=91)		
German citizenship	25 (27.5)	
Citizenship EU	8 (8.8)	
Unrestricted	17 (18.7)	
Time-limited	41 (45.1)	

	N (valid %)	M (SD)
Family status (n=97)		
Married, living together	53 (54.6)	
Married, living separately	11 (11.3)	
Single, living with partner	11 (11.3)	
Single	13 (13.4)	
Divorced	9 (9.3)	
Women with Children (n=98)	82 (83.7)	
Women with children under 12 years old (n=79)	71 (89.9)	
Number of children per woman (n=81)		2.3 (1.0)
Highest educational level (n=92)		
University degree	22 (23.9)	
High school (post-secondary qualification)	19 (20.7)	
'Realschule' (10-yr equivalency)	20 (21.7)	
'Hauptschule' (9-yr equivalency)	15 (16.3)	
No diploma / didn't complete school	16 (17.4)	
Completed vocational training or university/college? (n=95)	43 (45.3)	
Years in the labor market (n=54)		7.3 (6.0)

Psychosocial Stressors and Resources⁴

The *Inventory of Daily Stressors* was used to capture experiences of stress. To facilitate comparison with results from Jäkel and Leyendecker's study (2008), which included Turkish mothers, the stress score was calculated based on the same items ($M=31.7$; $SD=8.0$; $\alpha=0.78$). Mothers experience significantly higher stress levels than women without children ($t(88)=2.005$; $p=0.048$); however, reported stress is overall lower than in Jäkel and Leyendecker's sample. Following, a new stress score was calculated that included the three self-created items on the care of children, concerns about permanency status and general worries about the future. The total score lies at 38.4 ($SD=10.0$) and an improved Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha=0.84$). Particularly high stress was noted in the areas of "distance to friends and family" ($M=2.8$; $SD=1.3$), "worry about the future" ($M=2.7$; $SD=1.2$) and "problems with work or not having work" ($M=2.5$; $SD=1.3$). Differences between high- and low-stress women deserve to be further examined.

Resilience is quite high, both in terms of the total score as well as the two subscale scores (total score: $M=74.7$, $SD=9.2$; competence subscale score: $M=52.0$, $SD=7.3$; acceptance of self and one's life subscale score: $M=22.7$, $SD=3.9$). This implies that 60% of the women can be classified as having high resilience, 24.4% exhibit medium resilience and 15.6% fall into the low range (see Figure 1). Both total score and the two subscale scores have wide ranges and further inquiry differences between women with different resilience levels are indicated. Similarly, items from the job-related coping inventory also suggested comparably high levels of self-efficacy and a locus of control that is not primarily externally oriented.

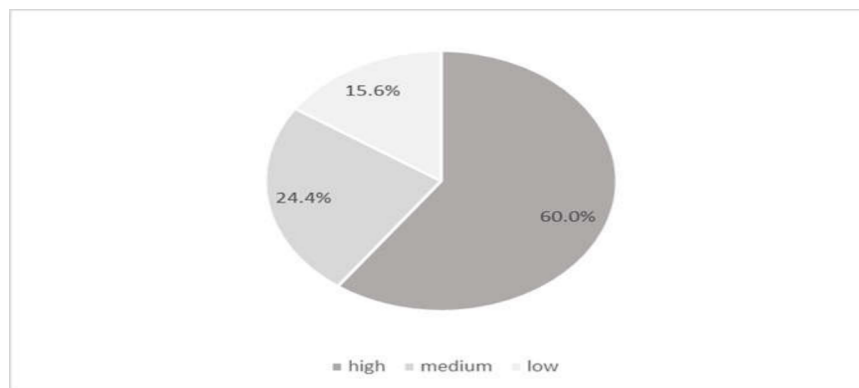


Figure 1. Resilience Classification

The sample also scored quite high in terms of social support. Women reported feeling supported and having someone they could trust and consult in difficult situations. They also indicated feeling supported by *SoWi* team members.⁵

In terms of cultural identification, women expressed being generally happy to live in Germany and seeing their future there. However, they also reported considerable cultural ambivalence in terms of their sense of belonging. Questions about experiences with racism were answered negatively, raising questions about potential social desirability responses. These sensitive topics will further be pursued in qualitative interviews. A final set of questions asked women about the significance of religion in their lives. In this sample, 56% of the women are Muslims and 30% are Christians. About 60% report practicing their religion “much” to “very much,” 31% practice it “little” and 9% “not at all.” A question about the centrality of religion for the identity of the women was answered with a mean score of 5.5 (SD=2.1) on a scale from 1 to 7.

Case Status of Women at the Evaluation Midpoint

At this stage, outcome data needs to be considered with great caution given that *SoWi* is only at its midpoint. However, initial outcome data provides a snapshot of where women are in the program and generate hypotheses that can be pursued during the second half of the evaluation (see Table 3).

Table 3. Case Status of Participating Women at the Evaluation Midpoint (n=98)

Case Status	N (%)
In Coaching	65 (66.3)
Dropped out	33 (33.7)
Total	98 (100.0)

According to available administrative data on the 98 women, 65 (66.3%) receive coaching, which indicates an active status in the program. One-third (33.7%) have dropped out of *SoWi*. Women who receive coaching can be in different stages of the program. Some have begun vocational training, thus meeting an initial objective of *SoWi*. A few women have finished a one-year vocational training and have found employment that makes them eligible for federal benefits. Entry into vocational training is counted as success; however, this does not imply that the training will be completed. In several instances, disruptions and breakdowns of vocational training as well as employment have already occurred due to a range of reasons. About fifteen percent of women are in schooling that will prepare and qualify them to enter vocational training; others are in language classes. Further notable is that about one-fifth of women are in transition. This includes women who only receive coaching and do not attend preparatory or qualifying classes. At this point, it remains unclear how long a participant can linger in this transition phase. Reasons for dropping out are also varied and do not necessarily imply “program failure.” A few women moved into a different region, some became pregnant and others found work outside of *SoWi*. How to classify program success and failure will be a matter of further discussion but it is apparent from this first round of analyses that a nuanced understanding of either is indicated.

Descriptive Findings – Coaches

The conceptual centrality of the coaches in the project warrants further understanding of their background. All coaches are female. They are on average 44 years old (SD=13.6) and 40% have a migration background themselves. Fifteen have a degree in social work, the remaining obtained degrees in related disciplines. Over half received additional training and certificates in areas of counseling, coaching, therapy, etc. More than half (55.6%) have had coaching experiences, on average three years (SD=1.5).

Although coaches generally feel well prepared for their role in the project, their role expectations have shifted while being part of the project. At the beginning of the project, they saw their tasks as being primarily of a supporting and mentoring nature. This has changed by one point on a scale from one to seven toward a greater administrative emphasis (from M=3.2, SD=1.3 to M=4.2, SD=1.3). This shift is statistically significant ($p<0.05$) and is the cause of some frustration as coaches’ express lack of time as one of the primary irritations in the project. Nonetheless, open-ended questions support that

coaches value the centrality of their role and feel well embedded in the project. Further analysis is necessary to better understand the relationship between coaches and the women they coach and support.

Discussion

Findings reported in this paper need to be understood as a first attempt to create profiles about the demographic characteristics and psychosocial stressors and resources of women participating in the *SoWi* program. As a practice-research collaboration, an explicit aim is to use data to shape the conceptual development of the project. The insights gained from this descriptive analysis contribute to this objective. Findings further address a gap in the labor market integration literature where little is known about the women participating in labor market integration projects.

The paper addressed several research questions, and findings and their implications will be summarized below.

Women's Expectations. An exploration of women's expectations showed that these were in line with the project's main objectives: Women primarily hoped to enter vocational training and/or find a job. They expressed the value of work to them, not only in terms of making a living but also in terms of their own personal growth. Whether women's expectations and personal goals will change over the course of the project remains to be seen.

Women's Demographic Profiles. Evaluation results show that the project serves a group of women who are highly heterogeneous in terms of age, (German) language level, migration experience, family status and particularly educational background. This heterogeneity presents a challenge for a project such as *SoWi* as it has to cater to women with very different backgrounds. This increases the risk of some women dropping out prematurely. *SoWi* embraces an individualized rather than a standardized approach, which seems sensible given the diverse needs of the women. From an evaluative standpoint, however, the high degree of individualization contributes to a lack of clarity and transparency about processes, timelines, inclusion criteria, ... etc. A key question to be analyzed at the end of the evaluation will be for which women the program is most likely to work.

Psychosocial Stressors and Resources. Little information exists to date about the psychosocial stressors and resources of women with migrant background who participate in labor market integration projects. Participating women report high stress levels in select areas but also present with considerable resilience, self-efficacy and social support that position them well as a group to succeed in this project. However, the big standard deviations across most psychosocial dimensions underscore the need to explore in much greater depth factors related to the observed variability. Religion was an important dimension in terms of women's identity and more than half the women reported practicing their religion much or very much. Questions related to acculturation experiences and instances of racism generated responses that need to be clarified and examined in greater depth in qualitative follow-up interviews. A paper that examined the impact of stress, resilience and social support on dropout rates was recently published by the authors (James et al., 2021). It demonstrated that psychosocial factors are in fact associated with project outcomes. Upon completion of data collection, it will be possible to analyze definitively whether psychosocial stressors and resources predict project success or failure. At that time, it may also be possible to determine whether changes in stressors and resources occurred between baseline survey and the second data collection timepoint.

Dropout Rate. Initial findings about the women's status at the midpoint of the evaluation indicate that about one-third of the women in the evaluation sample had dropped out. Rates were higher in the first two cohorts. It is likely that longer stays in the project are associated with an increased risk of dropping out but it is also possible that subsequent cohorts have simply benefited from the experiences and insights gained as the concepts and methods of *SoWi* have evolved. Understanding the timing and the reasons for dropout will be essential in taking measures to reduce the dropout rate and to begin approximating the effectiveness of the project. This will be a focus of further analyses. Analysis at this cross-section underscored that the current status of the women in the project is simply a snapshot. Seeming successes, such as the entry of a woman into

a vocational training program, were in several cases followed by a disruption due to difficulties experienced. Further data collection and analysis will need to focus on understanding the trajectories of women throughout the project and examine reasons and predictors for observed patterns.

Role of the Coaches. Coaching is conceptualized as a central element in the project, yet the implementation of this element remains largely up to the discretion of the coaches. While data show that coaches generally view the coaching relationship as positive and describe the collaboration with the *SoWi* team and other project partners as supportive, there is also critique about the little time given to coaching and the heavy administrative burden. Data also show a discrepancy between the role expectation of the coaches and the actual work done, and salient elements (such as the duration of the coaching) remain unclear. Some efforts have been made to streamline coaching through three-hour coaching meetings every other month. From an evaluative standpoint the coaching element (like other program elements in the project) would benefit from greater specification in the form of practice guidelines or even a manual. In final analyses, it may be possible to examine the effect of coaching on project outcomes.

Limitations and Strengths

A limitation of the evaluation is the lack of a comparison group, i.e., a similar group of women that is not receiving the *SoWi* project or is receiving different services. However, it is anticipated that some comparative data can be obtained *via* available labor market statistics. Additionally, data on women dropping out of the project may indicate for whom *SoWi* is most likely to work. Other limitations include challenges in the data collection process (e.g., varying language levels of the women, gaining access to women) and dynamic developments in the project concept and its implementation processes. Many of these obstacles are typical for real-world research and are carefully addressed in collaboration with the *SoWi* project team. These efforts have succeeded in obtaining a comparatively high participation rate in the survey of the women. Another strength is the availability of multiple sources of data, which will be used for triangulation and a deepened understanding of the findings.

Conclusion

SoWi constitutes an important and growing project in the spectrum of services offered by the city of Kassel that has the potential to serve as a model for programs with similar objectives. While the project is comparatively young, concepts and methods have notably evolved since its inception. However, there is much room for greater specification of processes, which will be necessary if the project is to develop into a “model” for similar efforts. Yet, even at this early stage, the evaluation of the project provides valuable insights into factors that shape developments and generate hypotheses that will be tested in the second half of this practice-research collaboration. An improved understanding of the characteristics, resources, and challenges of women with migrant background will, no doubt, inform the development of more targeted, and ultimately effective, programs.

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دمج النساء من أصول مهاجرة في سوق العمل: النتائج الأساسية من مشروع نموذجي في ألمانيا

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ملخص

لتعزيز اندماج النساء من أصول مهاجرة في سوق العمل، تم إطلاق مشروع مبتكر في مدينة متوسطة الحجم في ألمانيا في عام 2018. ويتم تنفيذ المشروع لمدة 4 سنوات من قبل فريق من العاملات الاجتماعيات بمساعدة مدربين لدعم دخول النساء المهاجرات إلى سوق العمل، وتعزيز صمودهن واندماجهن الاجتماعي. بعد مرحلة التوجيه، تبدأ النساء، اللاتي يدخلن البرنامج بالتسلسل في مجموعات من حوالي 20، التدريب المهني، أو إنهاء المتطلبات التعليمية، أو المشاركة في دورات اللغة. يهدف التقييم المختلط المصاحب إلى وصف الملفات الشخصية للمرأة، وفحص المخاطر النفسية والاجتماعية والعوامل الوقائية المرتبطة بنجاح المشروع واستكشاف دور المدربين. باستخدام تصميم التحكم في الحالات المرتقب، يقوم التقييم بتثليث البيانات من مصادر البيانات المتعددة التي تم جمعها خلال مدة المشروع للإجابة عن الأسئلة ذات الأهمية. تشمل مصادر البيانات بيانات المسح مع النساء المشاركات ومدربيهن، وبيانات من المقابلات النوعية ومجموعات التركيز مع النساء وأصحاب المصلحة الرئيسيين، بالإضافة إلى ملف الحالة والبيانات الإدارية. تقدم هذه الورقة نتائج من بيانات المسح الأساسي التي تم جمعها من النساء المشاركات (وعددهن 98) ومدربيهن (وعددهم 27)، لإنشاء ملفات تعريف أولية وتحديد العوائق المبكرة. تمت مناقشة الآثار المترتبة على تطوير المشروع والتحليل المستقبلي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاندماج في سوق العمل، النساء من أصول مهاجرة، الهجرة واللجوء، برامج الدمج.

Notes

- ¹ The German name of the project is “*Neue Chancen in der Sozialwirtschaft – Qualifizierungsperspektive für Migrantinnen.*”
- ² A detailed review of the (labor market) integration literature is beyond the scope of this paper, but salient information is synthesized in the literature review above. Variables found to have conceptual or empirical importance for integration outcomes are (among others) educational background, language competency, acculturation level, years in the host country, stress, social support, resilience,... etc.
- ³ Almost all women who had been approached to participate in the evaluation agreed to do so. However, some women were not present during the day of data collection and efforts to collect the data afterwards were only partially successful. Nonetheless, the participation rate is very respectable.
- ⁴ Results for this section are not captured in a table, as each instrument uses a different scaling and some measures cannot be reported as a sum score.
- ⁵ A more detailed analysis of women’s psychosocial resources and stressors and the predictive value of variables such as experience of stress, resilience and social support has been presented in a German handbook (James et al., 2021). Main findings included: Stress, resilience, and degree of social support were moderately correlated with women with less social support exhibiting higher stress scores ($r=-0.46$; $p<0.01$) and less resilience ($r=0.35$; $p<0.01$), and women with higher stress levels scoring lower on resilience ($r=-0.38$; $p<0.01$). Stress, resilience levels, number of children under the age of twelve and exposure to the project (time) were statistically significant predictors of early dropout in a bivariate context. Multivariate logistic regression analysis found that the odds of early dropout increased for women with higher resilience levels by about eight percent ($OR=1.08$; $p<0.05$) and was cut in half for women with a higher number of younger children ($OR=0.52$; $p<0.01$). The chances of leaving the project decreased by eleven percent for every additional month the woman stayed in the project ($OR=0.89$; $p<0.01$). Findings suggested that women with more psychosocial resources (e.g., more resilience) were more likely to make use of alternative opportunities that opened up for them (e.g., a new job). Conversely, women with higher psychosocial burdens (e.g., more children) were more reliant on the project for support and structure. Similarly, the more time women had invested in the project, the more likely they were to stay. The interpretation of the findings deserve further examination in follow-up analyses.

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