

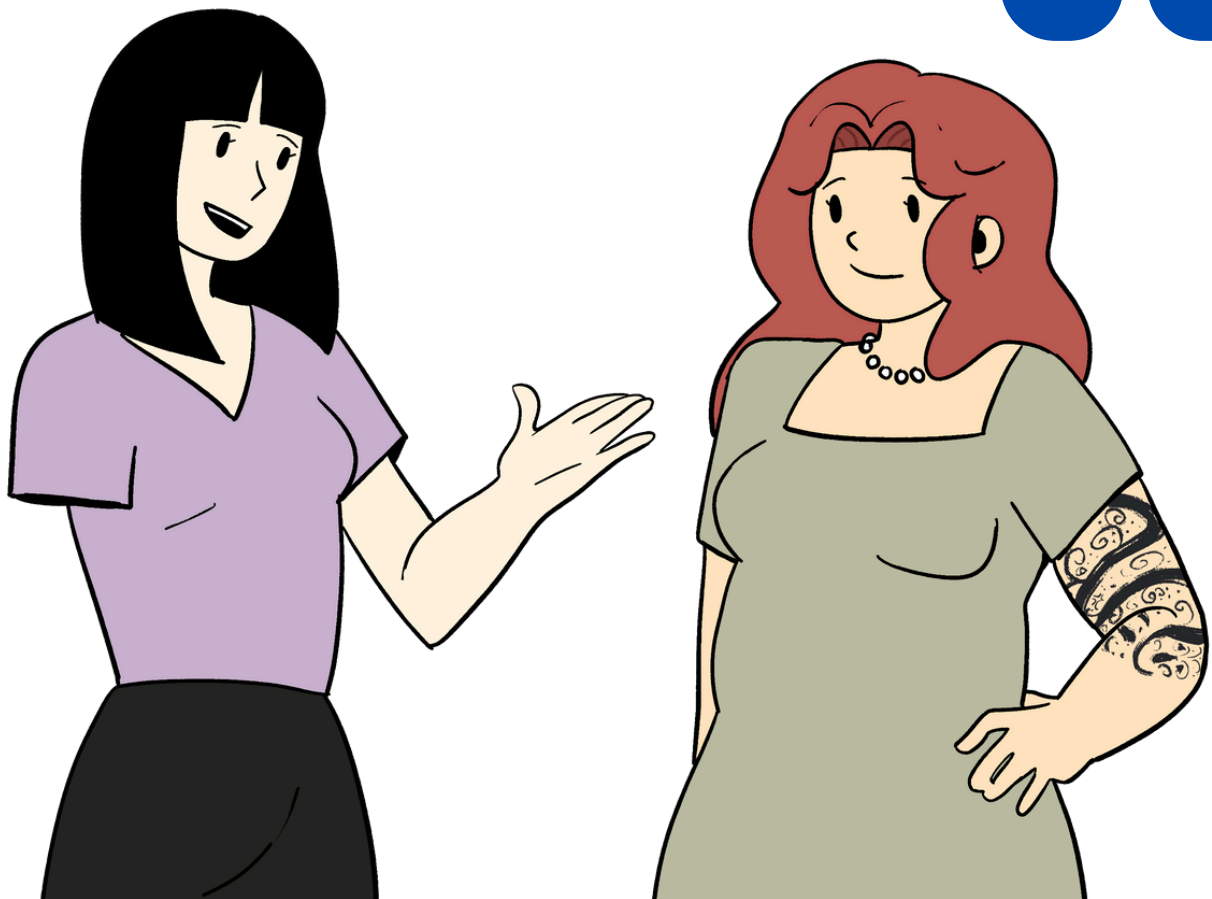
Recognizing Skills & Qualifications

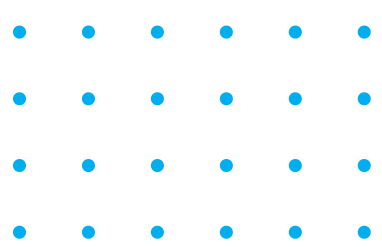


Supporting Skilled Migrant and Refugee Women

This guide provides concrete action points for job counsellors working with mid- to highly skilled women with migrant and refugee backgrounds. Its aim is to support successful labor market integration by enabling the target group to access jobs that align with their qualifications. The guide acknowledges the legislative framework within which counsellors must operate, and some action points may therefore need to be adapted to fit the local context.

The guide is the result of a collaboration between four Nordic civil society organizations, The Association Equal Access (Foreningen Lige Adgang, Denmark), Startup Refugees (Finland), W.O.M.E.N. (Iceland) and Diversify (Norway), each bringing extensive expertise in supporting the labor market integration of highly skilled immigrant and refugee women. It has been developed as part of the project Advancing Migrant and Refugee Women's Access to the Nordic Labor Market Focusing on Entry-Level Jobs (AMARA), financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers.





Training in Intercultural Competency and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

- **Build intercultural competence** – Acknowledge that both Nordic nationals and internationals are cultural carriers, each bringing their own perspectives and “cultural rucksack” into interactions.
- **Train for cultural understanding** – Equip migrant and refugee women to navigate Nordic workplace culture while also valuing their own cultural perspectives and recognizing blind spots on both sides.
- **Clarify misunderstandings** – Avoid assumptions; ask directly when cultural misunderstandings may be shaping communication or behavior.
- **Provide bias-awareness training** – Ensure counselors receive mandatory training to recognize how unconscious bias can limit women’s access to mid- and high-level positions.
- **Integrate intersectionality training** – Help counselors understand how overlapping social identity markers (e.g., gender, ethnicity, migration status, caretaker responsibilities) can lead to multiple forms of discrimination and create barriers to labor market entry.



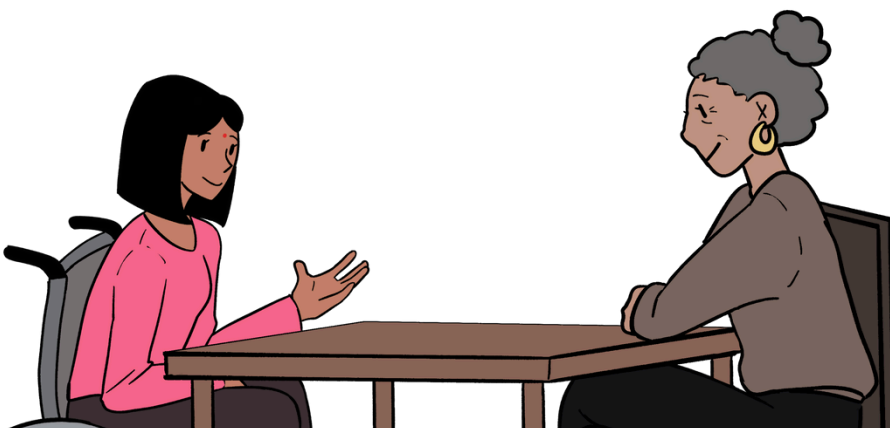
Acknowledging Loss of Status and identity linked to education



- **Recognize unacknowledged qualifications** – Understand that when educational backgrounds are not recognized in the host country, it can result in a loss of status and professional identity.
- **Support identity and status** – Recognize and validate prior education and professional experience, highlight transferable skills, and guide women toward industry-specific roles that strengthen their professional identity in the host country.
- **Acknowledge the impact on motivation and capacity** – Loss of professional identity can lower confidence, motivation, and engagement in the job search. It can also manifest physically in ways that limit performance. Recovery requires more than encouragement or mindset shifts and should include space for both mental and physical restoration.
- **Consider the impact on family dynamics** – Loss of status can influence roles within the family, including feelings of being a less effective provider or role model. This can affect confidence, identity, and overall wellbeing.
- **Acknowledge the increased load of family responsibilities** – Women going through resettlement often take on expanded roles as household coordinators and emotional caretakers. Bridging language and knowledge gaps, navigating new systems, and supporting their family's social and emotional adjustment can place an additional strain on this target group.

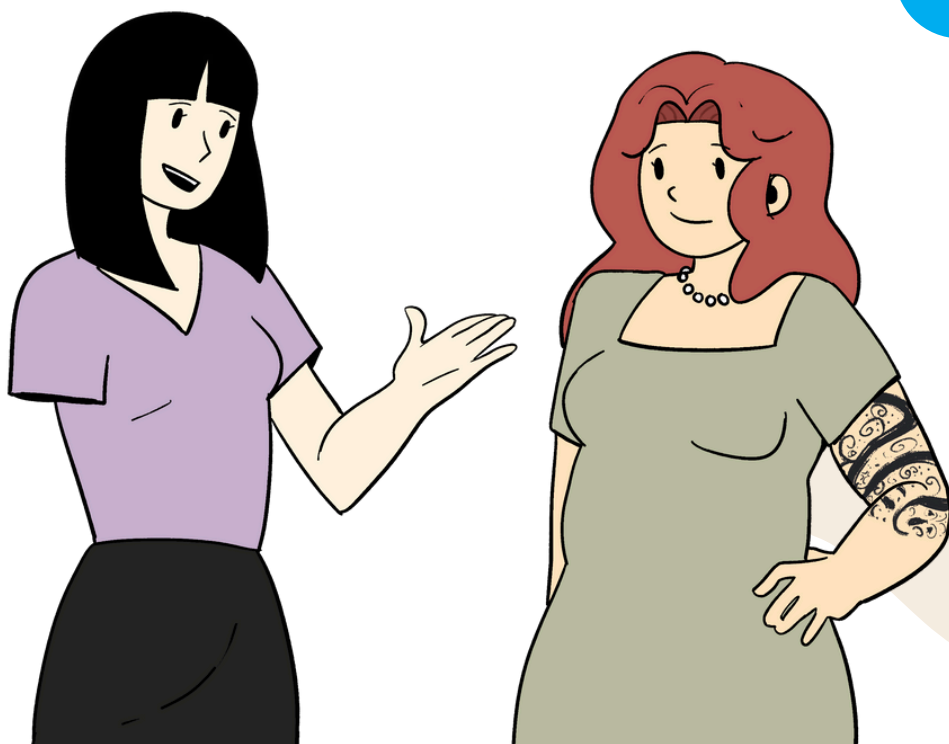
Cultural Mediation and Orientation

- **Build cultural understanding and act as mediators** – Provide training for both employers and employees to increase awareness of cultural differences and take an active role in explaining workplace norms and expectations to bridge understanding between jobseekers and employers.
- **Clarify the counsellor's dual role** – Be transparent about balancing authority with guidance to build trust in the counselling process.
- **Acknowledge trust dynamics** – Recognize that some women may come from contexts with weak trust in authorities and be mindful of how your position influences collaboration.
- **Recognize cultural dynamics around hierarchy and communication** – Some individuals are used to receiving direct instructions from authority figures rather than engaging in peer-based or collaborative dialogue where expectations are not explicit. This often reflects norms of respect, not a lack of initiative, and should be taken into account when structuring communication and collaboration.



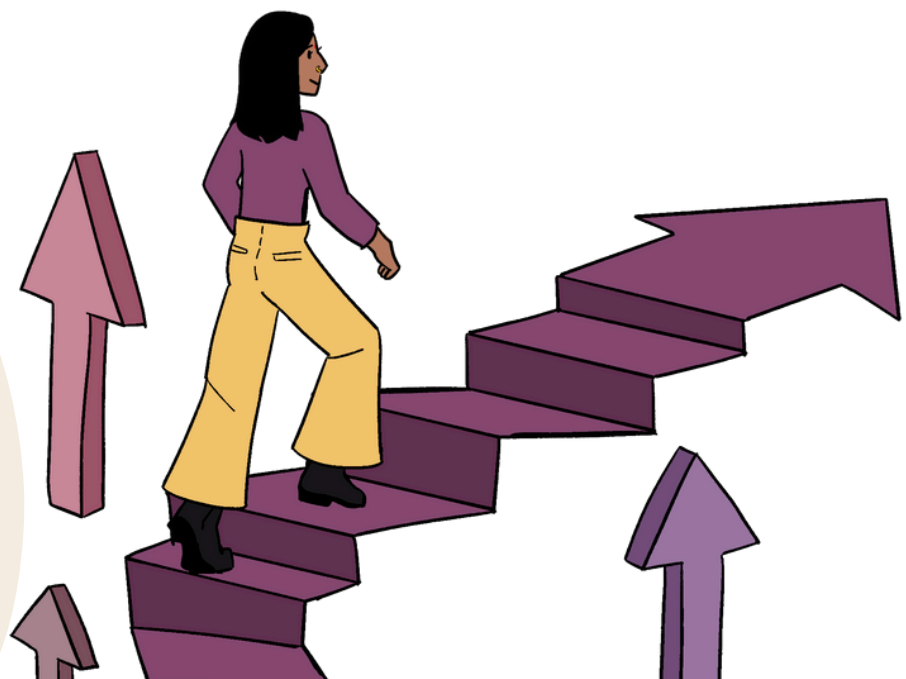
Cultural Mediation and Orientation

- **Provide cultural knowledge** – Train both employees and employers to understand cultural differences.
- **Explain key systems and practices** – Clarify how municipalities function and provide sessions on Nordic workplace culture, role model presentations, and company-oriented workshops.
- **Adapt learning formats to target group needs** – Offer tailored frames such as women-only courses to create safe and supportive spaces for learning and engagement.
- **Collaborate with language schools** – Integrate labor market knowledge and cultural orientation into language education to strengthen preparedness.



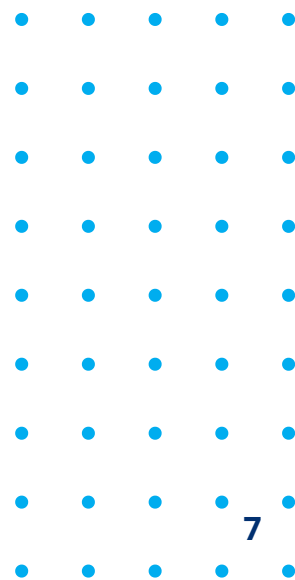
Career Guidance and Job Search Support

- **Develop targeted job search networks and workshops** – Create tailored initiatives for the target group that strengthen applications, CVs, and interview preparation.
- **Leverage integration departments** – Build on existing municipal programs that specifically support women from ethnic minority backgrounds to enhance impact.
- **Provide culturally responsive career guidance** – Adapt counseling to women’s cultural backgrounds, workplace challenges, and career aspirations, offering industry-specific advice where relevant.
- **Plan with a long-term perspective** – Support women in building sustainable career pathways that encourage language learning, community participation, and cultural integration, even when they hold short-term or temporary residency.



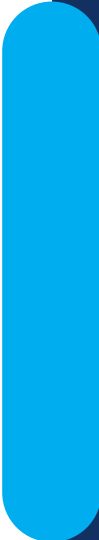

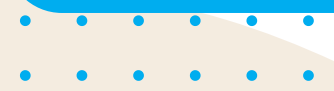

Skills Recognition and Mapping

- **Assess skills holistically** – Recognize formal, informal, and non-formal experience, including transferable skills, multilingualism, caregiving, and community work.
- **Validate qualifications** – Support recognition of international education and professional experience through equivalency tools and local adaptation.
- **Clarify career pathways** – Highlight progression opportunities by showing how initial roles below education level can strengthen language skills and local experience, ultimately leading to jobs that match formal qualifications.





Support and Systemic Understanding

- **Shift perspective** – Recognize the structural barriers that may hinder migrant women from realizing their professional potential and focus on removing these rather than placing responsibility solely on individuals.
 - **Understand stress responses** – Acknowledge that hesitation, fatigue, withdrawal, physical pains, impaired cognitive functions or low confidence are normal reactions to chronic stressors such as exclusion, and loss of identity and status, rather than signs of personal deficiency.
 - **Avoid misconceptions** – Do not misinterpret burnout or disillusionment as laziness or lack of motivation.
 - **Acknowledge that experiences of struggle may be normalized** – For many women of foreign origin, especially those from difficult backgrounds, discrimination and heavy workloads may feel like a “normal” part of life. As a result, they may not recognize burnout, invisible pressures, or the structural factors that shape their experiences, and instead internalize feelings of not being capable.
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Support and Systemic Understanding

- **Build capacity on bias and inclusion** – Provide insight on how to recognize common challenges faced by migrant and refugee women, supporting them in unpacking experiences, and understanding how stress impacts well-being.
- **Validate lived experiences** – Show empathy by acknowledging experiences of exclusion and discrimination, even if they cannot be fully understood.



Collaboration for Career Pathways

- **Collaborate with businesses of all sizes** – Partner with both large companies and SMEs to create professional networks that expand opportunities and provide insight into the local labor market and industries.
- **Work with civil society organizations** – Develop structured, industry-specific mentoring programs to strengthen professional networks and accelerate re-entry into relevant careers, for example through corporate volunteering.
- **Strengthen integration initiatives** – Support spouse programs, community-based projects, and partnerships with universities and other educational institutions to fill gaps in career services and help the target group build networks and skills.
- **Promote coordinated efforts** – Partner with municipalities, civil society, and employers to move beyond project-based initiatives and scale effective practices.
- **Deliver comprehensive career counseling** – Collaborate with NGOs and migrant communities to provide guidance focused on long-term growth rather than only immediate employment.
- **Invest in targeted upskilling** – Offer sector-bridging and certification programs that close skill gaps and create pathways into higher-level roles aligned with the target group's education and experience.

Developed By



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