



**EMPOWER -
Educational Materials for Practitioners providing Opportunities for
vulnerable Women's Employability and Resilience**

Report on the Training Needs of Vulnerable Women in United Kingdom, Greece, Iceland and
Lithuania

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Introduction

EMPOWER (Educational Materials for Practitioners providing Opportunities for vulnerable Women's Employability and Resilience) is a 32 month project co-funded by the European Commission under the framework of Erasmus plus Programme (Key Action 2: Strategic Partnerships for Vocational Education and Training). EMPOWER is implemented by a transnational consortium of partners, i.e. Inova Consultancy Ltd (UK), KMOP - Family and Childcare Centre (EL), VMST - Directorate of Labour in Iceland (IS) and Social Innovation Fund (LT).

EMPOWER tackles the increasing need to provide high quality support and training to vulnerable women at risk of exclusion from the labour market; these women at risk include women who experience domestic violence, women who are victims of human trafficking, homeless women and women who face immigration issues. This support takes many forms and may be professionally led (e.g. Social Workers, Healthcare professionals) but the sector continues to rely on volunteers working with vulnerable women to provide much needed support in the fields of personal empowerment, confidence and employability or entrepreneurship skills. Therefore, the project aims:

- a) to equip Support Workers and volunteers working with vulnerable women with the soft skills training necessary to pass these skills onto women in order to increase their employability and entrepreneurship opportunities;
- b) to equip vulnerable women with greater confidence, belief and resilience to succeed economically.

This aim will be achieved through the development of innovative blended training programmes, including the EMPOWER Training Programme (training knowledge, skills and abilities in tools and methods for increasing confidence and awareness of strengths for employability) and EMPOWER Circles Programmes (action learning and increased self-reflection for success).

As part of the project's activities, a transnational survey was conducted in all EMPOWER partner countries and aimed to investigate the support and training needs of vulnerable women. Due to limitations on the size of the survey, the main categories of vulnerable women focused on during the present survey were: unemployed, victims of domestic violence, victims of trafficking, homeless and immigrant women.

The present document summarizes the main findings from the research performed in Greece, Iceland, Lithuania and United Kingdom. It comprises three parts: a literature review of the present state of vulnerable women in the aforementioned countries, with an overview of labour market conditions and support and employment counselling services addressed to vulnerable women; the outcomes of focus groups carried out in all involved countries, in which vulnerable women participated regarding the problems and barriers faced in increasing their employability, as well as their training and support needs; and the results of an on-line survey, also carried out in all countries, addressed to vulnerable women regarding the same subjects in order to provide a more comprehensive picture and add to the information obtained through the literature review and



focus groups. The report concludes with the “conclusions and recommendations” section which contains some overall statements on the current situation in participating countries regarding the support in the fields of personal empowerment and the increase of their employability and entrepreneurship opportunities; at the same time, there is a series of recommendations on how the research findings could be used for the development of the EMPOWER Training Programme and the EMPOWER Circles Programmes.



State of Affairs – Findings from the Desk Research

Profile of Vulnerable women in Greece, Iceland, Lithuania and United Kingdom

The adjective “vulnerable” is used to refer to women who have experienced issues which have put them ‘at risk’. This category includes women who are unemployed, immigrants, homeless, victims of domestic abuse, victims of trafficking, single mothers, women with disabilities, members of national and religious minorities, Roma and rural women as well as any other category of women who experience/ have experienced issues which have led to their need for support. Vulnerable women face much discrimination and hardships which are related both to their gender and to the conditions which make them vulnerable. They are at high risk of exclusion and face many problems when trying to (re)enter the labour market. They are also the ones at highest risk of poverty and social exclusion, and are also harshly affected by the budget cuts in public services and social care, as a consequence of the economic crisis at both national and European levels. Besides, women belonging to the above mentioned categories, are more vulnerable at violence in all its forms. For instance, domestic abuse can be both a cause and a consequence of homelessness. Women who suffer domestic violence are at particular risk of becoming homeless and women who are homeless are at particular risk of suffering violent or sexual abuse. In addition, women who are victims of trafficking frequently often suffer from racial discrimination and women from certain racial or ethnic groups may be particularly vulnerable to trafficking or targeted by traffickers. Women refugees and migrants are also more vulnerable to violence, lack of representation and limitations on their freedom of movement (United Nations, 2011)¹.

The above mentioned situations concern also the vulnerable women from the involved in the EMPOWER project countries, i.e. Greece, Iceland, Lithuania and United Kingdom. Indicatively, we can mention that domestic violence remains an exceptionally acute problem in all these countries. In particular, in Lithuania, according to the Police Department (2016), the number of reported complaints grew in 2015 – in excess of 38,000 reports were registered during 2015 (to compare: 29,339 reports were registered in 2014; 21,615 in 2013)². In England especially, 4.5% of women have experienced serious abuse as both a child and an adult (1.2 million of a total female population of 26.943.308)³⁴, and at the same time 2 women are killed every week in England and Wales by a current or former partner (Office of National Statistics, 2015). In Greece, according to a recent European survey on violence against women by the FRA (2012)⁵, the percentage of Greek women that have been subject to physical and/or sexual violence by their current or former companions is almost 19%. In recent years, due to the economic crisis, violence against women

¹ Wwwwunorg. (2016). Wwwwunorg. Retrieved 16 May, 2016, from <http://www.un.org/en/letsfight racism/women.shtml>

² Information compiled by the Lithuanian Police Department (February 2016)

³ Huffingtonpostcuk. (2016). *The Huffington Post UK*. Retrieved 14 May, 2016, from http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/katharine-sacks-jones/vulnerable-women_b_9608326.html

⁴ Wikipediaorg. (2016). *Wikipediaorg*. Retrieved 27 May, 2016, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demography_of_England

⁵ FRA – Οργανισμός Θεμελιωδών Δικαιωμάτων της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης. (2014). *Βία κατά των Γυναίκων: Πανευρωπαϊκή Έρευνα. Τα Αποτελέσματα με μια Ματιά*. Λουξεμβούργο: Υπηρεσία Εκδόσεων της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης. Ανακτήθηκε 18 Μαΐου, 2016 από http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014-vaw-survey-at-a-glance-oct14_el.pdf



has intensified (Report on the Committee of Women's Rights and Gender Equality of the European Parliament, 2013)⁶.

The issue of the domestic violence is also associated to homelessness. For instance, in the UK, interviews with homeless women carried out by some British charities (i.e. Crisis) showed that over 20% of them became homeless to escape violence from someone they knew. Moreover, the majority of these (70%) were fleeing violence from a partner (Crisis, 2006). Besides, it is noteworthy that violence is a problem which affects especially migrant and refugee women. For example, in Iceland, in 2015, 27% of the women who asked for service at the Women's shelter for abused women were foreign most of them coming from Europe (Kvennaathvarf, 2015)⁷. Regarding refugee women living in the UK, a significant proportion of them have experienced violence prior to arrival and they remain vulnerable to violence in the UK, their country of asylum (Refugee Council, 2012).

Besides, the problem of women unemployment is something which affects both native and foreign women. For instance, in February 2016, the unemployment rate of Greek women was at 28,7% (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2016)⁸. In addition, migrant women are more affected from unemployment in comparison to the native women, as for example in Iceland, in 2016, 53% of unemployed women were women of foreign origin (Vinnumálastofun, 2016)⁹.

Problems/obstacles faced by vulnerable women regarding their integration into the society and their access in the labour market in Greece, Iceland, Lithuania and United Kingdom

The desk research carried out in the involved countries has identified a series of problems that vulnerable women face as regards their integration into the society and their access in the labour market.

First of all, vulnerable women face mental health illness and disorders such as anxiety, depression, phobias, panic attacks, post-traumatic stress disorder, eating disorders and they often experience guilt, insecurity, despair, chronic fatigue low self-confidence and low self-esteem. Vulnerable women are more prone to suicidal tendencies. Especially abuse is often a significant trigger for mental health problems, while some vulnerable women end up in contact with the criminal justice system, or in prison (Sacks Jones, 2016)¹⁰.

In addition, one big issue for vulnerable women in order to become integrated into society, and consequently into the labour market, is that they tend to 'fall through gaps': they are not

⁶ Ευρωπαϊκό Κοινοβούλιο - Επιτροπή Δικαιωμάτων των Γυναικών και Ισότητας των Φύλων. (2013). *Έκθεση σχετικά με τον Αντίκτυπο της Οικονομικής Κρίσης στην Ισότητα των Φύλων και τα Δικαιώματα των Γυναικών*. Ανακτήθηκε 13 Μαΐου, 2016 από <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+REPORT+A7-2013-0048+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EL>

⁷ Kvennaathvarf. (2015). *Árskýrsla 2015*. Sótt af <http://www.kvennaathvarf.is/utgafa/Arsskyrslur/> þann 11. maí 2016

⁸ Ελληνική Στατιστική Αρχή. (2016). *Έρευνα Εργατικού Δυναμικού: Φεβρουάριος 2016*. Ανακτήθηκε 11 Μαΐου 2016, από <http://www.statistics.gr/el/statistics/-/publication/SJO02/2016-M02>

⁹ Vinnumálastofun. (2016). *Tölfræði og úttekið efni. Atvinnuleysistöður í excelskjöllum, Greining á atvinnuleysistöðum eftir bakgrunni*. Sótt af <https://www.vinnumalastofnun.is/um-okkur/tolfraedi-og-utgefing-efni/atvinnuleysistotur-i-excelskjolum> þann 12. maí 2016.

¹⁰ Huffingtonpostcouk. (2016). Ibid.



usually included in statistics, not recognised by services designed to help with one specific problem, and not targeted in policies that are not narrowly focused on 'women's issues.

Moreover, migrant women face some additional problems and obstacles which hinder their integration into the labour market, such as the lack of knowledge of the national language as well as the lack of knowledge of the national/local society and of the working culture and conditions.

Gender inequalities in the labour market in Greece, Iceland, Lithuania and United Kingdom

There are many similarities and differences as regards gender inequalities in the labour markets of the countries under investigation. For example, the differences in the rates of female unemployment are noticeable; while in Greece the rate of female unemployment according to recent statistics of February 2016 was 28.7% and the corresponding figures for men was 20.6% (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2016)¹¹, in Lithuania the female unemployment rate stood at 9.2% and the male one at 12.2%¹²

On the other hand, the sharp gender segregation in the labour market is common in all involved countries, both as regards the occupational hierarchies and types of occupation. Women continue to be underrepresented in high levels of hierarchy; at the same time the “feminine” and masculine” areas of employment continue to promote gender inequalities in the labour market. These inequalities are also related to the gender pay gap issue, which is the difference in the average gross hourly earnings of women and men within the economy. Indicatively, we can mention that the pay gap between men and women in Lithuania was one of the lowest among 28 EU Member States in 2013, making 13.3% and 13.6% in 2014 as data from Eurostat shows¹³. Similarly, the pay gap in Greece was at 15% for 2010, compared to 16.3% for the EU (EU Report, 2015). In the UK, according to the Business in the Community factsheet (2012)¹⁴, the median gross annual earnings for male full-time employees for the tax year ending 5 April 2012 was £28,700, while for women the figure was £23,100.

Vulnerable women training, educational and counselling needs in Greece, Iceland, Lithuania and United Kingdom

Taking into account the problems and obstacles faced by vulnerable women in gaining access to the labour market, it becomes clear that they have specific and increased needs for training and counselling support with the aim of overcoming the socio-economic barriers, moving forward and improving their employability. The main needs of vulnerable women at the countries of the EMPOWER project can be summarised as follows:

- Increase of their very low self-esteem and self-confidence
- Human rights awareness

¹¹Ελληνική Στατιστική Αρχή. (2016). Ibid

¹² http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/exchange_of_good_practice_dk/lt_comments_paper_dk_2015_en.pdf

¹³ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/6729998/3-05032015-AP-EN.pdf>

¹⁴ Bitcorguk. (2016). *Gender*. Retrieved 16 May, 2016, from <http://gender.bitc.org.uk/research-insight/WomenWorkFactsheet>



- Development of communication and other personal skills, as well as social integration and intercultural skills
- Development of soft skills, including decision-making and leadership
- Guidance and counselling support and empowerment, both on an individual and on a group level, according to their specific needs, in matters of vocational and career guidance.
- Training in employability issues, such as compiling a CV, filling out job applications, interview techniques etc.
- Vocational training in specific professions

Overview of services provided to support vulnerable women and reinforce their socioeconomic (re)integration in Greece, Iceland, Lithuania and United Kingdom

In all four involved countries, there is a variety of services addressed to vulnerable women, with the aim to support them and reinforce their socioeconomic (re)integration, most of which are tailored to their specific needs and issues. These services are offered both by public authorities, agencies and municipalities and by non-governmental organisations, charities and associations. The main services provided include:

- Psychosocial counselling and support
- Health care and accommodation
- Legal counselling and information on women's rights
- Career counselling, coaching and training in employability
- Education and vocational training
- Information and language services for immigrants



Focus Group Findings

All partner organizations carried out focus groups with vulnerable women with the aim to explore the problems and barriers that they face as regards their employability and to identify their training and support needs. In particular, KMOP organized the focus group in Thessaloniki, Greece, on the 14th of April 2016, with 10 participants, 3 of which were immigrants with tertiary education and in employment, 2 Roma women from Albania, one of which was a victim of domestic violence, 2 victims of trafficking, 2 immigrants of low educational level and 1 victim of domestic violence. In the UK, the focus group was organized by Inova, in Sheffield, on the 26th of April 2016, and was attended by a total of 7 vulnerable women, including domestic abuse and human trafficking victims, with past criminal records, refugees and asylum seekers. In Lithuania, SIF organized the focus group in Kaunas and included 10 women who have experienced the domestic violence in the past and at the moment are unemployed; these women have overcome the crisis situation by being abused by their partners in the past and have successfully recovered after completing the empowerment programme within Kaunas County Women Crisis Centre. In Iceland, VMST organized two focus groups and additional 3 individual meetings, which took place in Reykjavik.

The main findings of the four focus groups are summarized below:

- In all involved countries, the women who attended the focus groups were not aware of any services which aiming at women and could support them in their entry into the labour market; the only services mentioned concerned mainly public services which provide employability related services, for example the UK Jobcentre, the Greek Organisation of Labour Force Employment or the Lithuanian Labour Exchange Office.
- In general, the participants to the focus groups feel that have less opportunities to gain economic independence by either finding a job or starting their own business and this is something which is associated to their particular life situation. For example, immigrant women mentioned issues such as obtaining a resident's permit, the worse conditions they face as regards insurance and pension plans, as well as their education and skills' level and lack of national language. Moreover, the women who have been victims of domestic violence believe that their low self-confidence and feeling a lack of employment-related do not encourage their employability. Besides, many women have emphasised the fact that being a mother frequently affects their employment opportunities.
- As regards any gender, cultural or social inequalities which may determine vulnerable women's access to the labour market, there is a variety of opinions. Most of them find that their gender is an obstacle to their access to the labour market, as they face gender discriminations along with discriminations due to their social status. Moreover, immigrant women face many inequalities, due to their ethnic and cultural status, which inhibits their chances of finding a job or which has as a consequence of finding low-skilled jobs, associated with immigrants, such as cleaning or housework.
- As regards to the educational or psychological resources which could help vulnerable women deal with such inequalities, it is noteworthy that some of the women who participated in the



focus groups did not seem to know what may help them to deal with discrimination felt in their attempts to get employed. Many of them mentioned that they would like to be aware about the legislation regarding this issue as well as to know where to refer to about such incidents if they take place. They also mentioned that they need information on employment and training services of their countries. Similarly, they felt that it was important to be trained in specific professions and to develop their soft skills and other new skills, in parallel with their increase of their self-esteem and self-confidence. Moreover, immigrant women mentioned also the knowledge of the national languages of the countries they are hosted. In addition, some of them stated a preference towards psychosocial support and counselling as the main means of improving their employment prospects.

- The majority of the participants considered the development of soft skills and social competences as very important, especially at the early stages of job-searching and entering society and the labour market. In particular, participants put special emphasis on working on their self-confidence and their self-esteem. The majority of them agreed that peer-mentoring and support, focusing on building their soft skills and strengths would be very useful for them to encourage and prepare them to seek employment or set-up their own business. They stated that their expectations from a course combining the above mentioned issues would be to empower them and to help them search for job opportunities, in applying for jobs, and be prepared during job interviews.
- As regards their particular educational/ training and counselling needs, the majority of the women emphasised counselling guidance that would improve their self-confidence and empower them. Moreover, women's training needs could be summarised as follows:
 - preparation of good CV and cover letter
 - application for a job
 - preparation for a job interview
 - how to behave during the job interviews
 - how to stay calm and behave correctly during the first period at new workplace in case of being accepted by the employer
 - understanding the working culture and conditions as well as the benefits system and other legal issues
 - being aware of job opportunities, relevant to them
 - making business plans
 - marketing issues

In addition, it has to be mentioned immigrant women's increased needs to improve their language skills.

- On the question if the participants have or had in past their own business, only one woman from Greece responded that she owned a small restaurant business in the past, while one



woman from the UK mentioned that she used to help her father in his business in the past, stating that she would really like to start up her own business. The rest of the women had not started businesses, mentioning lack of funds, knowledge or confidence as the main reasons. It is noteworthy, though, that some women mentioned some ideas that they would like to develop into their own business, even though they have never tried to take any steps to do so due to their low confidence.

- As regards the skills that they consider important for an entrepreneur, the respondents provided the following answers:
 - communication skills, including good language skills
 - self-confidence
 - courage
 - self-discipline
 - networking
 - knowledge of the business object
 - social skills
 - office administration
 - financial management
 - ability to establish contacts and maintain them
 - leadership
 - presentation
 - innovation and ability to generate new ideas
 - ability to plan forward actions
 - organisational skills
 - knowledge where to start from and how to carry on own business
 - ability to set goals and make action plan to reach them
 - analytic skills
 - creativity
 - reading/ writing skills
 - management skills
 - assertiveness/determination
 - passion
 - not fearing to take risks
 - managing anxiety



- good time planning skills
- resistant
- knowledge of legislation and tax system.
- Some of the participants have used professional development and counselling services with the aim to improve their skills and confidence in accessing the labour market. In particular, they have used some counselling services provided by public employment organisations with the aim to find a job. Some women also mentioned that they have attended some language courses, provided by similar organisations. However, the majority of them stated that these services contributed little to the improvement of their conditions. These women who did not make any use of such services mentioned as barriers in accessing them the cost, the timing of the course/sessions which were not suitable for them as well as the lack of childcare facilities or the inability to cover these facilities which could support mothers. Most participants stated that they would use such services given the opportunity, while some of them expressed their wish to attend women only courses and especially aimed for those with similar life experiences so that they can feel more comfortable talking about their issues and feeling understood by each other.
- At the end of the focus groups discussions, all participants were asked what could better help them in the development of skills and competences and what they would like to see in the EMPOWER Yourself training programme. The main points are summarised below:
 - language skills-oriented content
 - self-confidence
 - self-esteem
 - self-motivation
 - communication skills
 - conflict management
 - resilience
 - research skills
 - learning how to evaluate own skills
 - goal setting and action planning
 - getting over personal barriers



Online Survey Findings

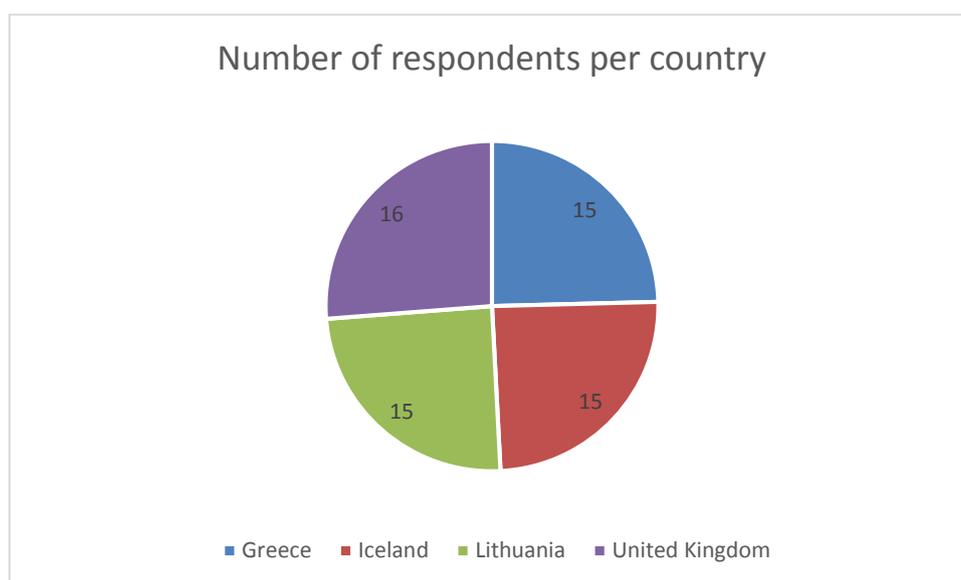
In order to further investigate the training needs of vulnerable women aiming to improve their employability, entrepreneurial prospects and skills and gather additional information about the above mentioned issues, all partners carried out an online survey addressed to vulnerable women. In particular, partners distributed a common online questionnaire to their partner organisations that support vulnerable women. In total, 61 anonymous answers were collected from vulnerable women/, coming from Greece, Iceland, Lithuania and the U.K.

The main findings obtained through the relevant responses were as follows:

- **Background information of the participants:**

- Number of respondents per country

From each of the following countries, Greece, Iceland and Lithuania, 15 vulnerable women responded to the online survey, whereas 16 vulnerable women responded from the United Kingdom.



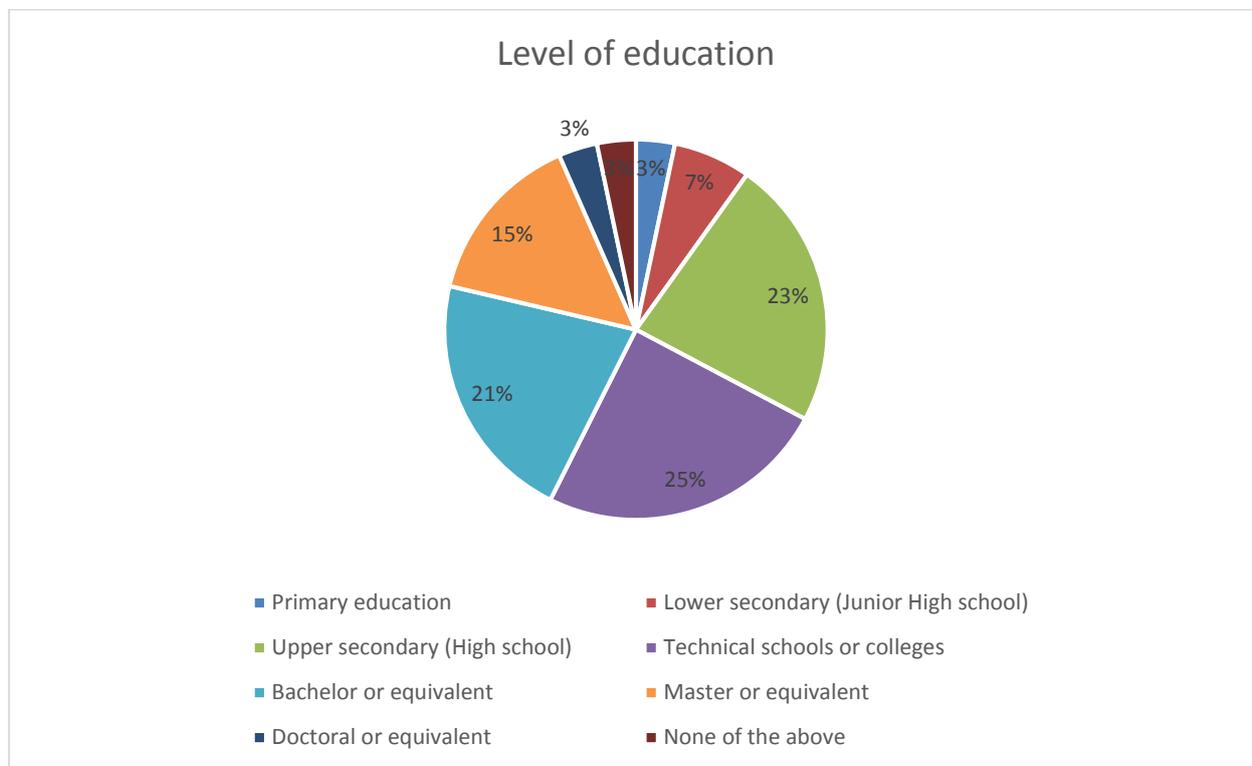
- Age of the participants

As for the age of the respondents, about half of the women from Greece were 35-44 years of age, a quarter was in the range 25-44, while the rest were older. In Iceland, 60% of the women were 30-44 years old. In Lithuania, the majority of the women who responded belongs to the age groups of 35-44 (5 responses) and 45-54 (6 responses), while there were 3 women belonging to the age group of 25-34 and one in that of 55-64. In the UK online survey, the respondents were equally split among nearly all rank ages, while the only group age not present was the '55-64 year-old women'; the majority of respondents were aged between 35-44 (31.3%) and 25-34 years old (25%).

- Educational level



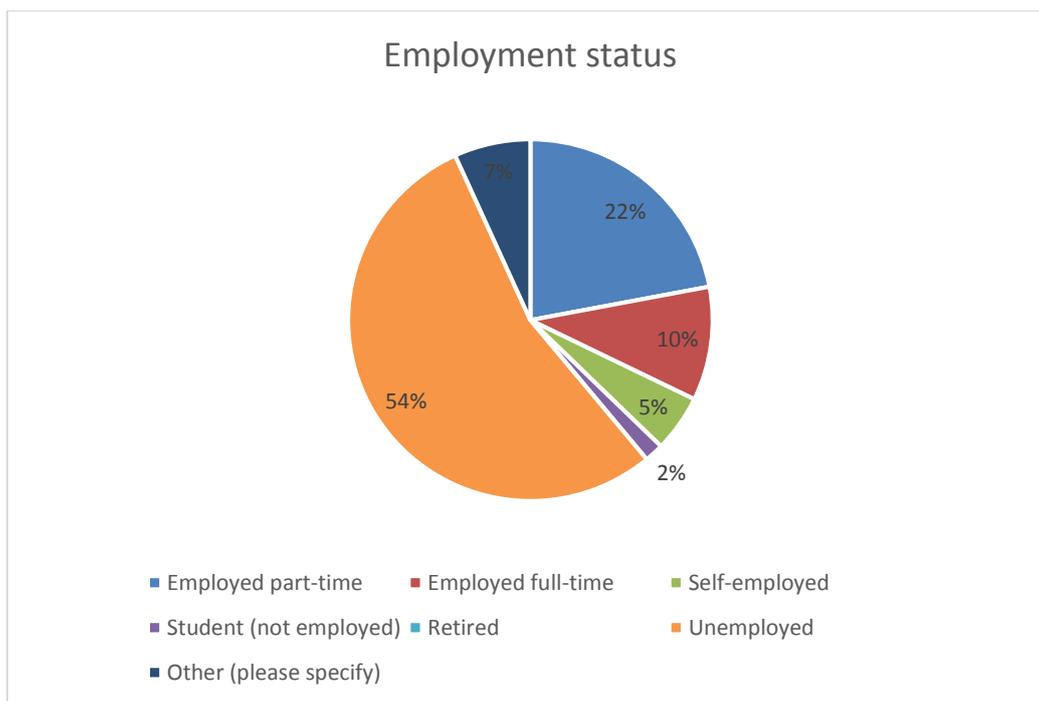
25% of the respondents were Technical schools or colleges graduates, 23% of them attended upper secondary education, 21% of the women were Bachelor or equivalent degree holders; in addition, 15% of the women are Master degree holders and 7% of them attended lower secondary education.



○ Employment status

More than a half of respondents (54%) stated that they were unemployed; 22% of them are employed part-time, while 10% of them are employed full time.



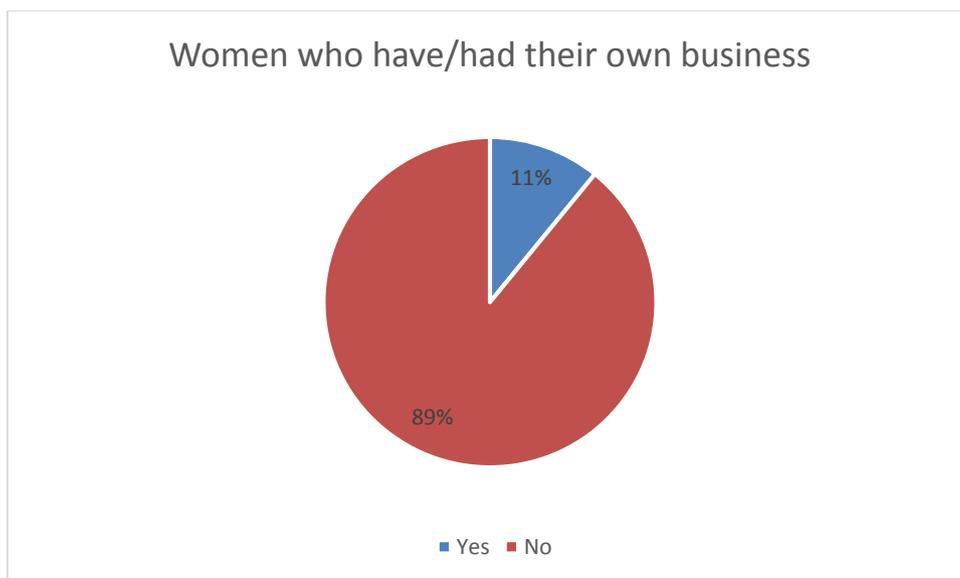


- **Preferences on learning methods:** women were requested to rate their preferences on the following learning methods:
 - Learning by sharing experiences and ideas with other peers (peer-learning)
 - Learning by following online courses (e-learning)
 - Learning by attending face-to-face trainings and workshops (face-to-face learning)
 - Learning by doing (Action learning)
 - Learning from Mentor
 - Learning by combining two or more of the above learning (Blended learning)

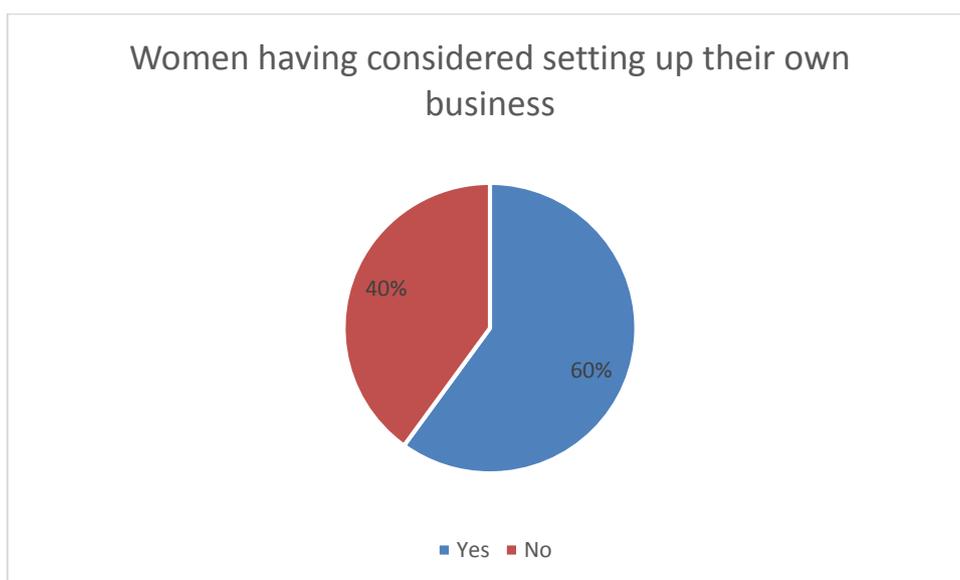
The most preferred learning method for the majority of the participants is the learning by doing. The methods which follow in their preferences are the learning by sharing experiences and ideas with other peers and the learning by attending face-to-face trainings and workshops. Moreover, participants were positive towards learning from a mentor and towards blended learning. The e-learning method was met with skepticism compared to the other methods.

- **Women who have or had in past their own business:** Only 11% of women stated that they have/had in past their own business.





- **Women having considered setting up their own business:** 60% of the women have considered setting up their own business



Those women who replied negatively stated as main reasons for not considering setting up their own business the lack of funds, the lack of skills and competences, the lack of knowledge and information about the processes or support programmes as well as their fear of making mistakes.

- **Skills that are important for an entrepreneur:** women mentioned a variety of skills that they consider important for an entrepreneur. The most identified skills are stated below:
 - Communication
 - Self-confidence



- Leadership
 - Resilience
 - Creativity
 - Perception
 - Organisational skills
 - Problem solving
 - Positive thinking
 - Financial management
- **Ratings that women assigned themselves in particular soft skills and competences:**
Women were asked to rate themselves in the following soft skills and competences:
 - Communication skills
 - Conflict resolution
 - Goal Setting
 - Leadership skills
 - Networking skills
 - Presentation Skills
 - Resilience
 - Self-confidence
 - Self-Motivation
 - Time Management

In general, participants were relatively moderate in the self-evaluation of their personal skills and competences, with most of them rating their abilities as at or close to average, e.g. with communication skills, resilience, self-confidence, goal setting, self-motivation, time management.

- **Good practices/ services in supporting women to (re)enter the labour market of which the respondents are aware of:** most of the women were not aware of any good practices/services which could support them to (re)enter the labour market. Those services which were identified by the women included mainly those provided by public employment agencies, NGOs and some local initiatives.



Conclusions and Recommendations

From the national studies carried out in Greece, Iceland, Lithuania and UK, it is evident that the vulnerable women of our target face barriers as regards their (re)entry into the labour market which are related to both their gender and their vulnerable conditions. Vulnerable women from the above countries have increased needs for training and counselling support with the aim of improving their employability and exploiting any entrepreneurship opportunities. Even though women seem to realise the importance of developing both the soft and hard skills which could improve their position into the labour market, they either are not aware of the counselling and training services that are provided in their countries or they believe that the limited services offered are not tailored to their specific needs and cannot improve their situation.

Based on the above mentioned issues, the following recommendations could be made on the development of the content of a targeted soft skill and employability training programme, such as the EMPOWER Training and Circles Programmes:

- It should include personalised counselling support based on the personal profiles, skills and needs of the vulnerable women, aiming at promoting their empowerment and self-confidence.
- It should include training based on the knowledge, skills and specific needs of the women, taking into account current labour market conditions.
- It should develop soft skills such as self-confidence, goal-setting, organization, communication so as to increase women's employability and allow them to capitalise on entrepreneurship opportunities.



Annexes

Annex 1 – National Report Greece

Annex 2 – National Report Iceland

Annex 3 – National Report Lithuania

Annex 4 – National Report UK

