Getting ahead in the knowledge society: The role of digital competences in advancing employability outcomes for immigrant women in the EU

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Objectives of the Study

1. Understand the role of digital competences in advancing employment opportunities for immigrant women in 5 EU countries (Italy, Spain, The Netherlands, Hungary, and Romania – as a source country)

2. Assess the extent to which level of digital competency and ICT use can serve as an indicator for broader social and inclusion goals

3. Place digital competences in the context of the other ‘key competences’ as identified by the EU
Theoretical Framework

1. The Capabilities Approach | Amartya Sen
   - Departs from the concept of the role of ‘agency’ of the individuals in the development process.
   - Makes the individual the principal and most important actor in this process and focuses instead on understanding the sources of ‘unfreedom and deprivation’ that constrain the capabilities of this actor to have a fulfilling life.

2. Employability in the Knowledge Society
   - Technological and organizational changes are demanding new set of skills for workers in order to become and/or remain competitive in the labor market.
   - Among the skills required: computer skills, problem-solving skills, critical thinking, teamwork and collaboration skills.
   - Individuals with high barriers to employment face a bigger threat due the obsolescence of their skill set and potentially widen economic and social gaps.
Analytical Framework: 4 linked paths to Employability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PATHS</th>
<th>Capabilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy Path</td>
<td>Self- Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decision-making skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Inclusion Path</td>
<td>Participation in social spaces</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Social and civic skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Diversity of social networks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training and Education Path</td>
<td>Participation in training and educational activities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Perception of importance of ‘key competences’</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Entrepreneurship skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Digital Competences Profile</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural Path</td>
<td>Participation in local cultural activities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cultural sharing process</td>
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<td>Production of cultural artifacts/activities</td>
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</tbody>
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About the Research Design

**Survey design** based on the Four Paths to Employability

- 351 immigrant women surveyed and 159 local women (as a control group) between the April and August 2009
- Surveys were translated into 6 languages (Spanish, Italian, French, English, Romanian, and Hungarian
- Working in partnership with thirty-three social organizations to reach the immigrant women

30 in-depth interviews with staff and trainers of the social organizations in the five countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th># of Immigrant women</th>
<th># of local women</th>
<th>Geographical Scope of sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Regional (7 regions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Regional (5 regions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>20*</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Border regions (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Urban (Amsterdam)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Limited regional (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>351</strong></td>
<td><strong>159</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*20 additional surveys are in process in Hungary (not accounted in the total)

**Table 1: Sample distribution per country**
Getting to know the immigrant women in our study

Differences in geographical region per country:

IT: Africa (31%), America and Non EU Europe
ES: America (46%), Africa (40%) and EU MS (7%)
NL: Africa (71%), Non EU Europe and Asia (10% each)
HU: Africa, Asia, EU MS (1/3 of the sample each)

- The **average age** of the entire sample is 37.5 years old (very young working age population)
- Most of them **migrated** to the EU in the **last ten years** (except for NL where 65% of the women migrated more than ten years ago)
- **Economic migration particularly** for the immigrant women in IT and ES (almost 70%). Compared to 13% of the immigrant women in NL
- Immigrant women in ES have the **highest unemployment rate** with 66% looking for a job followed by HU with 50%. In the NL, 41% are not looking for a job
Getting to know the immigrant women in our study

In terms of employment:

- More than half were working in their country of origin before migrating.
- 44% are currently employed | 40% are unemployed.
- The vast majority work as employees (80%) | only 6% reported working independently or as entrepreneurs.
- Those employed work full time (on average 33 hours a week) but the income they earn is not enough to support the basic needs of their families.

Graph 2: Occupation of immigrant women in country of origin and country of residence.
Emerging Findings
1. Education and Training Path

1.1 Digital Competences and ICT access and use:

- Immigrant women show in general a basic level of computer literacy but there are differences among the countries (Graph 1).

- IT shows the highest percentage of immigrant women with no computer or Internet skills followed by HU and ES.

- The three most common places to access ICT: home (50%), social organization (42%) and home of friends or family (25%).

- There is a strong correlation between year of migration and ICT skills level (the more recent the migration the lowest digital competences).

- Also a strong correlation between ICT skills level and current employment status (Graph 2):
  - Immigrant women with none or basic skills show higher level of unemployment.
1.2. Providing access to education and training is key to advance employability

- Immigrant women clearly identify this access as critical to improve their social and economic status in the EU

- Many have taken advantage of training courses in the country of residency, particularly language courses (54%), basic computer skills (45%), and home care and nurse assistants (12% combined)

- Immigrant women in IT show the lowest participation in training courses (30% have not taken any course). They also show the lowest level of computer and Internet skills.

Participation in training contributes to build human capital but NOT directly to employment:

- Immigrant women in ES are active in training BUT 60% are currently unemployed
- Investment in human capital is key for employability but labor dynamics and current economic crisis override skill set and capabilities of immigrant women to get a job
2. Social Inclusion Path

2.1. Social networks, civic skills:

- Immigrant women in our study seem to be very active in different social spaces. Community centers, ethnic/language/religious groups, and socializing with friends from the country of residence are the three most common.
- They also frequent on a regular basis immigrant, women, and religious associations.
- 88% reported having a health card, and thus, access to health services.
- In relation to access to jobs, the most useful channels are by far recommendations from friends and families (63%), followed by social organizations and public employment offices.
  - Embedded networks (network homophily) for accessing jobs may cluster women within ‘niche’ labor segments and decrease diversity of jobs.

- ICT use, specially Web 2.0 tools, can help diversify and expand social networks but there is limited use of SNS and blogs among our sampled population.
Opportunities and ‘Unfreedoms’

- Reforms to immigration laws that increase regularization and increase efficiency in the application process (Compared Italy with ‘Nueva Ley de Extranjería’ in Spain)

- Availability of social safety nets

- Recognition of educational qualifications (One of the biggest form of *a priori* discrimination)

- Access to Housing (access = affordability, renters rights, etc)