

**Booklet Series
Volume 2**

Migrant Women

Reclaiming Their Voice



ENHANCE
LEARNER VOICE

**The ENHANCE
Mini Booklets**

Publication coordinated by das kollektiv



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Enhancing Learners' Voices

Migrant Women Reclaiming Their Voice

Introduction

The ENHANCE project is grounded in the belief that learners' voices are not only valuable but vital to shaping just, inclusive, and responsive adult education systems. This series of three mini-booklets was created to give space to those voices—voices that are too often ignored, undervalued, or actively silenced.

Each booklet focuses on a different theme related to how adult learners experience exclusion and how they reclaim space, visibility, and influence through education and community involvement:

- Breaking the Silence of Marginalised Groups, by NHE (Hungary),
- Reclaiming the Voice of the Systemically Excluded, by das kollektiv (Austria), and
- Creating Outspoken Learning Spaces for Action in the Community, by ABC Foundation (Netherlands).

Together, these booklets pursue five shared objectives:

- Addressing systemic barriers that prevent learners from being heard,
- Amplifying learner voices in ways that are authentic and accessible,
- Supporting inclusive adult education that adapts to learners' lives, not the other way around,
- Making lived experiences visible and political, and
- Fostering solidarity among learners and between learners and educators.

To achieve these aims, the booklets were co-created with learners through participatory workshops, using a range of creative, reflective, and experiential methods. These included sociodrama and art therapy (NHE) which enabled learners to process their experiences

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symbolically and collectively, and personal narrative and learner-led interviews (ABC Foundation), which captured individual journeys of learning and empowerment. The third booklet (das kollektiv) used the photovoice method, which created space for learners to visually document and share and reflect on their learning experiences through photography and captions.

Each booklet highlights not only what learners experience, but how they make sense of, resist, and reshape their worlds. Through storytelling, creative expression, and critical reflection, these booklets demonstrate the power of participatory adult education as a space of possibility and transformation. They are primarily intended for other learners—to offer inspiration, reflection, and a sense of solidarity, as well as practical insight

into how adult learners can shape their own learning journeys and, in doing so, influence the communities and systems around them. A list of resources and contact points at the end of each booklet provides ideas and tools for getting involved, taking action, or connecting with others on a similar path.

This booklet— **Migrant Women Reclaiming Their Voice**—presents the work of das kollektiv in Austria. With a focus on migrant women, this project centres the voices of those often spoken about, but rarely listened to. Using the photovoice method, participants will use photography and captioned storytelling to document their realities, perspectives, and visions for change. Through this creative process, learners are not only narrators of their lives but also visual authors, reclaiming space in the public conversation.

Reclaiming Voice

To explore the question, **“As a migrant woman, how do you experience being included or excluded in your learning environment, and what helps you feel that your voice matters?”** we used Photovoice, a visual storytelling method. Photovoice is a participatory action research approach developed by Caroline Wang. It creates space for participants to express their perspectives, ideas, and emotions through photographs and to reflect on their experiences in group discussions. In this project, the focus was on “learner voice.” The main purpose of the Photovoice method is to amplify the voices of participants, allowing them to reflect on their own experiences while fostering agency.

The PhotoVoice Method

Participants act as co-researchers—by taking photos, sharing their stories, and analysing themes together. Facilitators act as catalysts by asking open-ended questions to elicit deeper reflections without steering the discussion. This participatory approach can transform learning environments by centering the lived experiences of learners. Photovoice provides opportunities not only to express perspectives of inclusion or exclusion in learning but also to serve as a “wake-up” call to educators and policymakers—reminding them to listen to voices that are often overlooked.

Reclaiming Voice

Participants in our workshop took part in 2–3 group sessions. In Session 1, they were introduced to the method and completed a warm-up activity using everyday objects to tell personal stories. They then received guidance on photo-taking, symbolism, ethics, and storytelling. Each participant was asked to take 3–5 photos showing what supports or hinders learner voice. In Session 2, learners shared and analyzed their photographs together. Through participatory dialogue, they identified emotions, meanings, and recurring themes. The session was audio-recorded, and facilitators used tools like whiteboards and cards.

The PhotoVoice Method

Facilitators avoided leading questions, instead asking "What do you see?" or "What does this photo mean to you?" The focus was on supporting reflection and empowerment, not evaluation or critique. Session 3 (upcoming) will allow participants to continue analysing remaining photos and to jointly reflect on emerging themes. Together, they will choose the most representative images and co-create captions. Follow-up sessions will include reviewing the draft booklet and making final edits together. The final goal is a public photo exhibition and a published booklet that showcases themes, quotes, and authentic learner voices.

Systemic Racism

Waiting...

Fatima S. describes a photo of the clock in her living room. For her, the clock symbolizes the value of time, organization, and goal setting. She uses it daily to plan how long to study. At the same time, the clock represents both internal and external pressure — the urgency to find a vocational training program and the difficulty of waiting for opportunities, which are often blocked by discrimination and racism, especially due to wearing a headscarf.

Fatima uses the clock not only as a time management tool, but as a metaphor for self-responsibility, patience, and frustration. It becomes a silent witness to her learning journey, her aspirations, and the barriers she faces.

While she demonstrates a strong sense of self-reflection and resilience, her story clearly highlights how systemic racism affects her access to education and opportunities.

“The clock reminds me how valuable time is and how important it is to organize it well...But it is difficult because my applications are often overlooked because of my headscarf.

Waiting for an opportunity is hard...”



A Deficit-Oriented Mindset

Leading in....

Fatima shares the story of her sewing machine – a symbol of empowerment, skill, and survival. From a young age, she dreamed of sewing. Despite family restrictions, marriage, having little formal education, and migration, she taught herself to sew, bought her own machine, and became a trusted seamstress in her community.

In Austria, she hopes to continue that

path: to join a formal training program to become a certified seamstress. But instead of support, she's met with institutional roadblocks: the labor office (AMS) focuses solely on her lack of formal German, ignoring her years of proven skill. Fatima's story illustrates a systemic issue—the deficit-oriented mindset that migrant women often face.

Rather than asking what she can do institutions fixate on what she can't do (speak fluent German). Her experience, initiative, and wishes are all dismissed as irrelevant without a certificate or course.

In response to being asked if she needed German to be a good seamstress? She said "No, not before. But in Austria, yes – for the document." That distinction is critical: The skill is there. What's missing is systemic recognition.

"I have many ideas in my head, but I can't... because I need a license..."



Solidarity

Not alone ...

Tamana shares a photo of women that she took in das kollektiv. It reminds her of her time as a university student in Afghanistan, where she studied social work. The photo carries dual meaning for her: it represents a learning community of women, and it also brings sadness about the current reality in Afghanistan, where women are no longer allowed to attend school or university. Here in das kollektiv, seeing other women learning gives her energy and hope. She feels she is not alone.

Tamana's photo becomes a deeply emotional bridge between her past and her present. It connects her former academic identity with her current experience of learning in Austria. The presence of women learning together becomes a symbol of solidarity, resilience, and shared power. This reflection invites a broader discussion on access to education, memory, displacement, and

empowerment. The act of sharing the photo is itself an act of reclaiming visibility — both personal and political.

Women supporting women – Shared learning and solidarity provide strength.

“I am not alone — I am here with other women.”



Systemic Fatigue

Help or No Help?

Rawan presents a photo of two hands shaking — a symbol of mutual support. For her, it represents the power of helping one another. She explains that migrants help each other because they share similar struggles, while institutions often promise help but don't deliver.



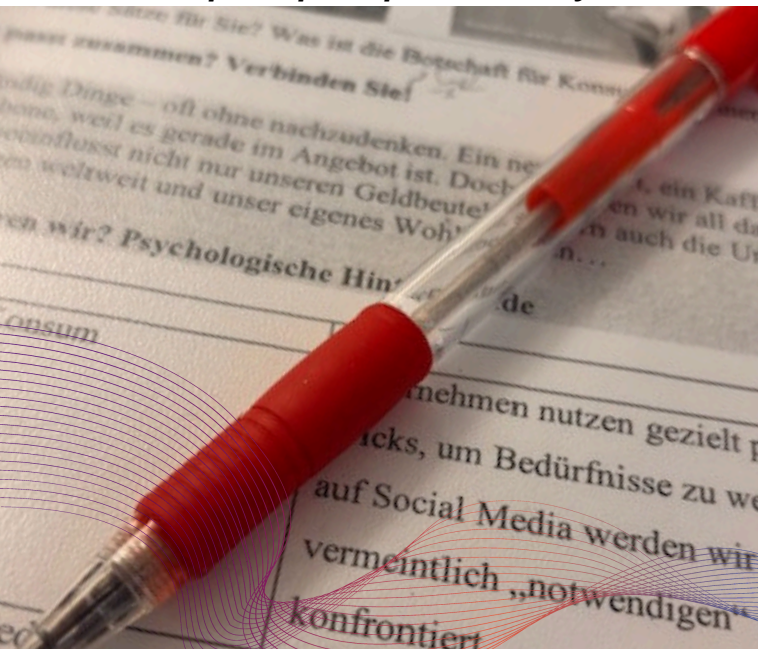
Rawan tried several times to start IT training. Invited to selection rounds but never chosen, she sees her migration background as a barrier. She suspects discrimination, as some interview questions have been unrelated to the training or job. Each application brings new German levels, rules, and unclear criteria, creating systemic fatigue. Her narrative captures the transition from hope to hopelessness — not from lack of motivation, but because Her experiences reveal moving goalposts where Institutions and training programs continuously change criteria and language requirements (B1, B2, etc.), making access conditional and creating invisible barriers. While institutions fail to offer consistent support, solidarity among migrant women becomes her true source of help and belonging. This contrast underscores how state structures often reproduce inequality instead of reducing it.

Spaces of Trust

My Power Pen

Norzia shares the story of her pen — an object she has carried for years. It has traveled with her through different countries and at challenging stages and exams throughout her learning process. For her, the pen has become a symbol of strength, learning, hope, and resistance. Whenever she feels she cannot go on, she holds it and finds new energy.

“I can pick up the pen and carry on.”



She links her story to a broader awareness of women's rights and global inequality. "In a democratic country, everyone has the right to education." While in Afghanistan education for women is forbidden, in Austria she faces discrimination and racism. Yet she insists on learning — not only for herself but also to help other women in the future.

Norzia's reflections reveal both structural challenges and self-empowerment: she faces racism and exclusion but reclaims learning as an act of resistance and solidarity. Education becomes her way to transform struggle into purpose.

She describes her current learning space at das kollektiv as her 'second living room' — a place of warmth and belonging where teachers and counsellors guide learners by showing possibilities, not dictating directions. Norzia stresses how a respectful learning space helps her gain knowledge and rebuild a sense of agency.

Planning

Beyond the Present

Diana A. tells her story through poetic photos which include a suitcase and boxes. They carry her dream of rebuilding life through education and work. When she became pregnant, the labour office (AMS) stopped her training plans, asking her to wait until after the birth. While this decision may seem practical, Diana A is frustrated with the system's lack of long-term vision for the future. Instead of helping her plan how to continue her education after maternity leave, no options or pathways were offered. Once her baby is born, the lack of childcare will make re-entry even harder. Diana's story reveals how institutions fail to support women in setting and sustaining long-term goals. She represents many who want to plan ahead but face systems focused only on the immediate. Her experience calls for structures that enable women to combine care, education, and future planning.

"These suitcases also carry our dreams and hopes."



Class & Access to Education

Beyond Reach

Diana K. speaks about her family and her wish of becoming a kindergarten teacher — a job that aligns with her patience, care, and experience with children. Despite her motivation and her children's emotional support, her repeated attempts to receive support from the Austrian Labour Market Service (AMS) have been unsuccessful. Instead, she's offered low-skilled jobs in cleaning or hospitality. Diana faces major financial barriers to education, as training courses are too expensive for her family of seven who depend on a single income.

Her story exposes how class and migration intersect to restrict access to education. —opportunity depends not on ability or motivation, but on financial means.

Moreover, a deficit focus highlights what she lacks, not what she brings, pushing her into low-paid work and reinforcing existing hierarchies that often confine migrant women to the bottom of the labor market.

Education becomes a privilege for those who can pay, and its promise of mobility fades behind financial barriers.

"I want to work in kindergarten — I have patience and can be with children ... but they told me I have to pay €1,050 for the training, and I can't afford it."



Reflections

Learning to Listen

The seven narratives in this Photovoice project — Waiting, Stitching My Path, Energy and Hope Together, Beyond Reach, My Power Pen, Help or No Help?, and Beyond the Present — offer a deeply textured view into the lives of migrant women navigating education systems that often fail to see them as full participants. Together, they reveal how structural barriers intersect with gender, class, race, and migration status to shape access to learning, belonging, and self-determination.

Across all stories, a recurring theme emerges: it is not that learners lack a voice — it is that their voices are not being listened to. Whether facing systemic racism that blocks access to opportunity, institutions that fixate on deficits rather than strengths, or bureaucracies that dismiss long-term goals, each woman speaks from a place of both frustration and resilience.

Systemic Racism reminds us that discrimination can disguise itself as silence — in applications unanswered, in opportunities that never arrive.

In A Deficit-Oriented Mindset we see how institutions overlook skill and talent when they are not certified, reinforcing hierarchies that privilege paperwork over lived competence.

In Solidarity community is reclaimed through women's learning spaces — reminders that collective energy resists isolation.

Social Class and Access to Education depicts how financial barriers keep education out of reach for many, turning opportunity into a privilege.

Spaces of Trust illustrates how trustful, caring environments allow space for restoring agency — places where learners feel safe enough to express themselves.

Systemic Fatigue captures exhaustion in the face of constantly shifting rules and

Reflections

Learning to Listen

criteria, where support is promised but rarely delivered.

Finally, Planning for Tomorrow points to the lack of systems that help women plan and sustain learning while caring for children — a structural short-sightedness that ignores the long-term realities of women's lives.

These interconnected narratives point to one essential truth: listening is a political act. Listening is not passive; it is a practice of recognition and accountability. To truly “learn to listen,” educators and institutions must listen with intention — to hear not only what is said, but what is being lived. This means moving beyond the rhetoric of inclusion toward equitable structures that adapt to participants' realities: women who care for children, who navigate racism, who rebuild lives across borders. In our group reflections, participants emphasized the need for safe and equitable spaces — not just spaces to

speak, but spaces that work for everyone. They asked: How is the atmosphere in these rooms? Who feels safe to share? Who is left out? One participant reminded us that women need spaces “where we can sit and share our opinions and our information.” Another questioned the myth of individual responsibility: “How can you be responsible for something that's out of your control?” Together, the group identified that equity means adapting structures to learners, not expecting learners to adapt to rigid systems.

As educators and facilitators, we are reminded that our work exists because of the learners. If their needs are unmet, we must ask: who truly benefits? Photovoice has shown that change begins when listening becomes mutual — when those once spoken about become the ones shaping the conversation. These seven stories invite us to do just that: to listen not to respond, but to understand, to reimagine, and to rebuild learning spaces that honour every voice.

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