

**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 Marginalisation, 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
- 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

Enhancing Learners' Voices

Migrant Women Reclaiming Their Voice

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

Visual Storytelling

To explore questions about what supports or hinders learner voice, we used a visual storytelling method called photovoice. The photovoice method is a participatory action research approach developed by Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris (1997) that 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 learners, and create space for them to collectively reflect on their own experiences while fostering agency.

The learners act as co-researchers by taking photos, sharing their stories, and analysing themes collectively. 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 processes, but also to serve as a wake-up call to educators and policymakers reminding them to listen to voices that are often overlooked.

To begin the photovoice process, we first met individually with two learners, to introduce them to the aims of the ENHANCE project and to the photovoice method. This was followed by three full workshop sessions with an additional 5 learners/co-researchers.

In the first group meeting, the focus was on explaining the photovoice method and establishing a comfortable atmosphere in the group. Participants engaged in various

Reclaiming Voice

Visual Storytelling

warm-up activities including using everyday objects as metaphors to tell personal stories. They then received guidance on photo-taking, symbolism, storytelling and privacy issues. Finally, The co-researchers received their task - to each take 3-5 photos that respond to the following research questions:

- 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?
- When do you feel heard or seen in your learning environment?

In the 2nd & 3rd workshop sessions, the co-researchers returned with their photos, shared the stories behind them, and engaged in discussion and reflection. Through dialogue co-researchers identified meanings and reflected on

recurring and emerging themes. Facilitators avoided leading questions, instead asking "What do you see?" or "What does this photo mean to you?" The focus was on supporting reflection not evaluation or critique.

After the group sessions, short individual meetings were held to ensure that each person's ideas, interpretations, and experiences were accurately represented in a summarised narrative accompanied by an analysis.

These texts were revised, refined, and then returned to the co-researchers so they could read them, make corrections, or request changes.

The stories presented here are the final result of this collaborative photovoice process.

Systemic Racism

Waiting...

Fatima S. describes a photo of the clock in her living room. For her, the clock symbolizes the value of time, organisation, 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 programme 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 organise 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

Stitching my Path

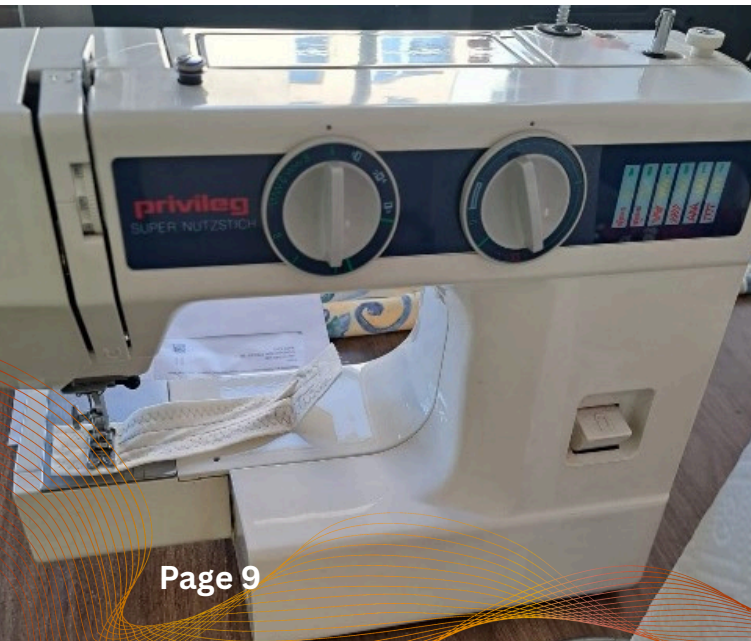
Fatima shares the story of her sewing machine – a symbol of empowerment, skill, and survival. From a young age, she dreamed of sewing. Despite family restrictions, marriage, being denied access to formal education, and migration, she taught herself to sew, bought her own machine, and became a trusted 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 been met with institutional roadblocks: the labour 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

Motivation and Hope Together

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 motivates her and provides her with 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."



Class and Unequal 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 labour office (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 where 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 without prospects

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 a 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."



Spaces of Trust

My Power Pen

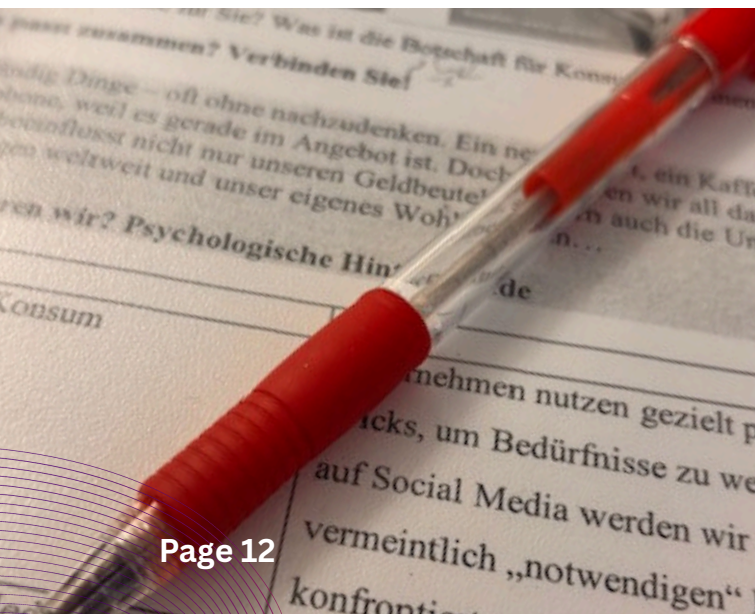
Norzia shares the story of her pen — an object she has carried for years and which has travelled with her through different countries and at challenging stages and exams throughout her learning process. For her, the pen has become a symbol of strength, learning, hope, and resistance. Whenever she feels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

“I can pick up my 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 presenting possibilities, not dictating directions. Norzia stresses how a respectful learning space helps her gain knowledge and rebuild a sense of agency.



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.

"They say, yes, we help you, but it's not true."

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 like the labour office (AMS) 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.



Planning for Tomorrow

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 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."



Reflections

Learning to Listen

The stories reveal overlapping issues that shape the women's experiences: the persistence of discrimination that often hides in silence, when applications go unanswered or opportunities quietly disappear; the institutional focus on deficits that overlooks skill and talent when they are not formally certified, privileging documents over lived competence; and the power of solidarity, where women's learning communities become spaces of mutual support and shared energy against isolation.

They also uncover how financial barriers turn education into a privilege rather than a right, keeping those who are eager to learn at the margins. At the same time, the stories show the transformative impact of trust and safety in learning spaces — environments where women can speak, reflect, and imagine new

futures. Alongside this hope, there is deep systemic fatigue, born from navigating ever-changing rules and promises of support that never materialize.

Finally, the narratives point to a lack of structures that support women as caregivers, where no systems exist to help them plan or sustain education alongside family responsibilities. Together, these realities expose a broader truth: learning systems are still not designed for the lives migrant women actually lead.

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

Reflections

Learning to Listen

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.”

Referring to structural barriers, another participant 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? This photovoice process has highlighted the fact 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. To not only respond superficially, but to take the time to understand, to re-imagine, and to create or rebuild learning spaces that honour every voice.

Critical Pedagogy and Photovoice

A Freirean Approach

Critical pedagogy is an approach to education that challenges the perception that educators are the sole sources of knowledge and promotes both critical thinking about, and transformation of oppressive conditions.

The Brazilian educator and activist Paulo Freire, was a leading proponent of critical pedagogy and contended that the concept of a problem-posing education could create a learning setting that encourages learner voice where learners are actively involved in their own education and learning processes.

As opposed to the banking concept of education where educators “deposit” their knowledge into passive learners, the problem-posing concept of education is a process of developing critical consciousness (*conscientização*) where learners are active agents of change. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2003),

Freire argues that education is transformative only when it begins with the learner’s reality. He emphasizes listening carefully to the themes embedded in learners’ stories, which must arise organically rather than be imposed.

Freire’s questioning strategy moves the discussion from the concrete to the analytic level and then to transformation or working to change an oppressive or undesirable situation. Through inquiry, dialogue, reflection and action, both educators and learners collaborate to learn together and to learn from each other.

The collaborative investigation between educators and learners serves as a valuable educational approach to elicit generative themes on which to base an adult education curriculum.

Photovoice, a participatory action research method developed by Caroline Wang and

Critical Pedagogy and Photovoice

A Freirean Approach

Mary Ann Burris in the 1990s, offers a concrete way to practice this: when the learners / co-creators explain their photos, dialogue reveals what truly matters to them—the barriers they encounter, the dreams they hold, and the contradictions they live with. These insights guide learning toward relevance and meaning.

This stands in sharp contrast to the traditional “banking model” of education that Freire critiques, where educators deposit information into passive learners. Such an approach is oppressive because it denies agency and disconnects knowledge from lived experience. Photovoice disrupts this by creating dialogical spaces built on exchange, reflection, and shared meaning. Learners choose what to capture, how to interpret it, and what stories to tell. The educator’s role shifts from authority to facilitator and co-learner, making learning co-constructed rather than delivered. The

visual dimension also opens participation for those who struggle with verbal expression or who have had difficult experiences in traditional learning settings.

Photovoice is a powerful, creative method in critical adult education that invites learners to explore and express their interests through photos. Instead of beginning with predefined topics, the photovoice method starts from learners’ own perspectives. Learners or co-creators photograph meaningful aspects of their everyday lives, and these images become prompts for storytelling, reflection, and dialogue.

Through this process, lived experiences surface—revealing concerns, aspirations, and tensions. Paulo Freire describes these emerging issues as generative themes: real-life topics that ignite critical thinking and collective learning.

Resources

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Photovoice - In Bildern erzählt

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