

BUILDING AND REPLICATING GOOD PRACTICES TO STRENGTHEN THE ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL INCLUSION OF MIGRANTS

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE EMPOWER PROJECT IN ITALY (TURIN)

By:
Anna Ferro
Daniele Frigeri

February 2025



**Funded by
the European Union**

Empower! - Empowering Migrants in Professional Welfare & Economic Rights is a project funded under a broader agreement between the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB) and the European Commission (Directorate-General for Home Affairs) – EC-DG HOME/AMIF fund. Its goal is to enhance migrant inclusion in EU member states by fostering new partnerships and innovative financing models.

The Empower project aims to improve the economic and financial inclusion of non-EU citizens residing in Turin and its province, supporting them in achieving economic independence. It is implemented by a public-private partnership led by Associazione Microlab, with the participation of Associazione A Pieno Titolo, the University of Milano-Bicocca, the Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale (CeSPI ETS), the Municipality of Settimo Torinese, Inventure Aps, and PerMicro, in collaboration with the Municipality of Turin and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

The views expressed herein are the sole responsibility of the authors and may not reflect the views of the Council of Europe Development Bank or of the European Union.



Ente capofila



Partner



info@empowerto.it | www.empowerto.it

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	4
2. Origins and Rationale of the Empower Project	5
3. Changes generated by the Empower project	7
4. Is Empower a good practice?.....	8
5. Elements of strength	9
6. Elements of weakness.....	9
7. Enabling factors	9
8. Replicability of the Empower project.....	10
9. Lessons learned from the Empower project	11

**BUILDING AND REPLICATING GOOD PRACTICES TO
STRENGTHEN THE ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL INCLUSION OF
MIGRANTS
LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE EMPOWER PROJECT IN ITALY
(TURIN)**

1. Introduction

The Empower – *Migrants in Professional Welfare & Economic Rights* project aims to improve the economic and financial inclusion of third-country nationals in Turin and its province, supporting them in achieving economic independence. Empower has been financed by the **Council of Europe Development Bank** (CEB) and implemented by a public-private partnership composed of Associazione Microlab (lead partner), A Pieno Titolo, Università di Milano-Bicocca/Open Impact, Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale (CeSPI ETS), the Municipality of Settimo Torinese, Inventure Aps, and PerMicro, in collaboration with the Municipality of Turin and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

As part of the Empower project, CeSPI and the University of Milan-Bicocca/Open Impact aimed at **systematizing and capitalizing on the project's results and lessons learned**. The purpose of this exercise is to provide insights for those who wish to replicate, adapt, or draw from the project in other contexts. The methodology includes consultations with project partners (interviews, surveys, focus groups), and exchanges with external stakeholders¹. A distinct document from the University of Milano Bicocca /Open Impact addresses the impact assessment².

The overall objective of this capitalization process is to identify the **strengths and weaknesses** of the Empower project, highlight the **enabling factors** for its success (or the obstacles it faced), and develop **recommendations** in the form of lessons learned for **third-sector organizations, institutions, and donors** interested in replicating or adapting a similar initiative. A project is considered a **good practice** if it produces measurable results, is **replicable** (even flexibly), aligns with **principles of justice and equity**, and is **not excessively costly** (OECD, 2010³).

This analytical document presents:

- A **brief introduction** on the origins of the Empower project;
- An **analysis of strengths, weaknesses, and enabling factors** identified by partner organizations;
- A final section that, based on the **successes achieved and challenges faced**, provides **recommendations/lessons learned as the project's legacy**.

¹ Including a public event in Rome (12 February 2025).

² <https://www.empowerto.it/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Impact-Report-Empower.pdf>

³ OECD (2010), *Learning for Jobs*, OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264087460-en.>

The Context of Turin/Piedmont

As highlighted in the territorial analysis conducted for the Empower project in 2024, migrants represent nearly 15% of the population in Turin (2023, ISTAT) and approximately 10% in the Piedmont region. Third country nationals offer a wide diversity of geographical origins (Romania, Morocco, Albania, and Peru are among the largest, along with groups from Asia and Eastern Europe) and migration motivations (labour, family reunification, and international protection). Migrant-led businesses account for 13.4% of all enterprises in the region, with the Metropolitan City of Turin hosting 61% of them (2023, Foreign Business Observatory of Infocamere).

The city has long promoted **initiatives for integration, reception, and international cooperation**, yet challenges persist in **housing access, vocational training, and socio-economic-financial inclusion**.

For further details: *Financial Inclusion in Turin: Territorial Analysis of the Foreign Population and Available Services*, CeSPI (2024)⁴.

2. Origins and Rationale of the Empower Project

The idea behind the Empower project was drafted based on extensive experience and prior knowledge gained from past initiatives supporting the economic and financial inclusion of migrants. The project aimed to create a **structured, accessible, and replicable model** that would enhance financial literacy, professional skills, and entrepreneurship among third-country nationals.

A crucial element in the project's design is its **multi-stakeholder approach**, which involved civil society organisations, public institutions, academia, and private sector financial institutions. This ensured an intervention model, fostering synergies between different actors while responding to specific needs identified within the migrant communities.

Moreover, the project integrated **innovative methodologies**, including tailored financial education programmes, mentorship schemes, and microfinance solutions, which contributed to improving the long-term financial stability of beneficiaries.

The **Empower project** draws its inspiration from a previous FAMI-funded initiative in which Microlab participated, addressing the needs of asylum seekers and refugees in the Lazio region. Through this initiative, **Microlab** gained valuable experience in navigating the complexities of project design and partnerships. Additionally, the organisation further developed its expertise through a **small-scale project** focused on the reintegration of individuals released from prison in Turin, which provided deeper insight into the necessity of **tailored tools and partnerships** to support persons at risk of vulnerability.

The 2022 call for proposals from the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB)⁵ presented an opportunity to consolidate the **lessons learned** from Microlab's previous experiences into a **new project concept**. This concept introduced an **innovative component**—the creation of a highly

⁴ https://www.cespi.it/sites/default/files/documenti/cespi_report_analisi_territoriale_empower.pdf

⁵ Partnerships and financing for migrant inclusion - PAFMI, n. 2022_11/ceb/tam/p/ld.

competent and diversified territorial partnership—and was structured around a comprehensive, integrated and collaborative support framework for third-country nationals.

This **integrated and coordinated approach** adopted by the project allows for a **progressive response to the diverse needs of migrants**, ranging from basic financial literacy to career guidance and dual-career pathways, recognition of qualifications and competencies for labour market access, and ultimately, the development and mentoring of potential micro-enterprise projects, linked to micro-credit provision.

The idea that **third-country nationals' socio-economic and financial needs evolve over time**, requiring the intervention of multiple specialised actors, aligns with findings from previous studies conducted by the *National Observatory on the Financial Inclusion of Migrants in Italy*⁶. Within the framework of past initiatives led by CeSPI, a **Territorial Laboratory on the Financial Inclusion of Migrants** was established in Milan in 2019, involving key local stakeholders⁷. The Laboratory validated the necessity of a coordinated referral system, whereby different organisations provide long-term, complementary support to migrants at various stages of their economic and financial inclusion journey.

While the **integrated and coordinated approach** enables a **comprehensive, step-by-step support system**, not all individuals who engage in **financial education courses** will necessarily **qualify for micro-credit**, as their needs require different timeframes and stages of development. Financial education is a **universal need** for both **migrant and non-migrant populations**, enhancing individuals' ability to make informed financial decisions. In contrast, **entrepreneurship** is relevant only to a **specific subset of individuals**—those who are not in conditions of vulnerability and who already possess a solid foundation and a well-structured business project.

Over a **two-and-a-half-year period**, the **Empower project** sought to **test and refine the collaborative model**, fostering collaboration among highly complementary and synergistic actors.

The **Empower partnership** consists of organisations with extensive direct or indirect experience in the economic and financial inclusion of third-country nationals. With the exception of **A Pieno Titolo**, all partners had previously engaged in **bilateral collaborations**, and **strong formal and informal ties** among them provide a solid foundation of trust, expertise, and reliability.

Each partner represents a **centre of excellence at the local and national level** in its respective field, including micro-credit, qualification recognition, career pathways, socio-economic integration, and financial inclusion.

From a **territorial perspective**, the **Turin/Piedmont-based partnership** includes CeSPI as the only non-Turin-based organisation (despite having a local office in the city). However, **CeSPI's role** is particularly valuable in **analysing local dynamics** and ensuring an objective and independent evaluation of the project's impact.

⁶ <https://www.cespi.it/it/ricerche/osservatori/inclusione-finanziaria-dei-migranti>

⁷ https://www.cespi.it/sites/default/files/documenti/position_paper_cespi_fin_05_07_19_def_milano_0.pdf

3. Changes generated by the Empower project

The project is recognised by its partners for having obtained both **internal** changes (within the partner organisations) and **external** changes (within the broader context in which it operated—raising awareness among local organisations and providing tools and opportunities for beneficiaries). A detailed analysis of the project's impact is presented in the report by Open Impact⁸.

Among the most significant changes generated by the project are the **strengthening and expansion of networks** between local stakeholders, the **strengthening of relationships** among partner organisations, and a **deeper understanding of the local environment**, particularly regarding the **financial needs of migrants**. Additionally, the project has facilitated the **exchange and knowledge sharing** among both partner and external stakeholders.

Not only have the partner organisations themselves become more competent in fostering migrant integration and economic-financial inclusion—gaining increased visibility and credibility in the field—but also, the organisations they collaborated with have developed a better understanding of the diverse needs of migrants and the necessity of adapting services accordingly.

Within the project's scope of action, there has been an increased awareness of "who does what" in Turin, as well as a greater recognition of the importance of financial education, the certification of titles and professional qualifications, microcredit, and professional and personal tutoring. The network of local stakeholders has been launched and will remain active through the Territorial Laboratory on Financial Inclusion, coordinated by CeSPI.

Over **600 professionals** attended training sessions, revealing a **critical need for capacity building**, particularly in financial education. Additionally, over **400 third-country nationals** benefited from the project's activities, including **training, mentoring, guidance, and grants**.

The Empower project has had a significant impact on its beneficiaries by offering access to training and work experience that they might not have otherwise obtained. In this way beneficiaries have expanded their career prospects and enhanced their social and economic inclusion. Some partners observed that those who took advantage of multiple services within Empower were able to develop skills and, in some cases, improve their employment situations. However, individuals in more vulnerable circumstances— primarily focused on immediate needs such as securing housing or employment—may have struggled to fully capitalise on the project's opportunities compared to those with greater socio-economic stability, which allowed them to invest in medium- to long-term empowerment plans.

In terms of **policy changes**, the most visible outcome to date is the expressed interest of the Turin City Council for Social Policies in making financial education programmes mandatory within public tenders for the reception of asylum seekers. Additionally, the Empower project has submitted a proposal to integrate financial education into discussions with the Asylum Committee of Turin in preparation for the reallocation of funds for asylum seekers and refugee reception in March 2026. However, as of January 2025, further developments on this matter have yet to be confirmed.

⁸ <https://www.empowerto.it/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Impact-Report-Empower.pdf>

4. Is Empower a good practice?

A practice is considered **good** if it is able to **produce tangible results**, is **replicable**—with some flexibility—**aligns with principles of justice and equity** in both its actions and outcomes, and is **not excessively costly**.

Empower has demonstrably delivered tangible results, as evidenced by the impact assessment conducted by Open Impact. Furthermore, the project has been deemed replicable—if not in its entirety, then certainly in key components—provided certain conditions are met (as outlined in the "lessons learned" section). These conditions include high levels of expertise among partners, a strong pre-existing local network, prior engagement with financial inclusion, and a clear understanding of the needs of third-country nationals in relation to project actions.

Empower adhered to principles of justice and equity in several ways. It included asylum seekers, individuals with various types of permits, and naturalised Italian citizens among its beneficiaries. The migratory backgrounds of participants were highly diverse, ranging from new arrivals to individuals who had been living in Italy for over 30 years. Everyone had the opportunity to access one or more project activities, with personalised support available—both within and beyond the framework of the project.

The total budget for the Empower project was €546,000, covering two years of activities across six partner organisations. Of this, €50,000 was allocated as grants to support initiatives promoting socio-economic and labour inclusion. While it is challenging to define the exact cost-effectiveness of a project relative to its tangible results and systemic impact, consultations with other donors have confirmed that Empower's budget aligns with similar initiatives funded in Italy. Additionally, the personal and voluntary commitment of the involved individuals and organisations far exceeded the allocated budget.

The **sustainability of actions** undertaken through Empower largely depends on the capacity of its partners. At the conclusion of the project, various expressions of interest emerged from local stakeholders, including requests for training and collaboration opportunities, following the extensive awareness-raising efforts carried out. While a systematic sustainability plan has not been formally established among partners, the Territorial Laboratory on Financial Inclusion for Migrants in Turin—launched through Empower, found continuity through the Observatory on Financial Inclusion in Turin, managed by CeSPI for the 2025-2027 period.

Furthermore, Associazione Microlab has been involved in a component of the Horizon (Innovate) project on migrant entrepreneurship in Turin and intends to invite CeSPI and PerMicro to participate in specific activities. The efforts of Inventure and A Pieno Titolo have been acknowledged and valued, reinforcing their crucial role at the local and national levels in providing essential tools for dignified and meaningful integration into the labour market.

Thus, Empower is **a good practice** that has successfully delivered positive results in labour market inclusion, economic empowerment, and financial inclusion. Its replicability depends on the presence of certain conditions and enabling factors, as well as the capitalisation of key lessons learned.

5. Elements of strength

- **Specialised partners, strong relationships, and the Turin context.** The expertise of the partners and their integrated approach facilitated the development of a coordinated working model across multiple local organisations. A key added value is also the involvement of an organisation specialised in the complexities of qualification recognition, as well as a microcredit institution, which represents the final and most challenging mile of financial inclusion, bridging beneficiaries with microfinance institutions and credit access.
- **Strong coordination efforts** that ensured a continuous focus on objectives and enabled a broad stakeholder engagement in monitoring progress and addressing challenges.
- **Diverse, well-structured, and high-quality activities and services** implemented, offering a range of tools and tailored solutions to meet the varied needs of migrants.
- **Network collaboration and the provision of direct financial resources** were key to supporting beneficiaries.
- The implementation of activities was informed and enriched by research **analysis of financial behaviours** (carried out as part of the project's research activities), leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the financial needs of third-country nationals in Turin/Piedmont.

6. Elements of weakness

- **Limited engagement from local authorities** (despite their role as project partners). Local authorities were envisioned as key actors in the project's proposed service delivery model. However, the Municipality of Turin's Foreigners' Office primarily serves vulnerable individuals within the reception network). This population did not align with the primary target beneficiaries of the project's activities. As a result, Empower had to rely on alternative stakeholders to reach its intended beneficiaries.
- **Challenges in financial education outreach.** The financial education component encountered difficulties in reaching the initial target group, leading to a revision of quantitative and qualitative indicators in agreement with the donor. The scope was expanded to include not only direct beneficiaries but also local operators.
- **Long-term beneficiary tracking proved challenging.**

7. Enabling factors

Internal Factors

- The value of a diverse, well-prepared, and motivated partnership.
- Pre-existing relationships and prior collaborations among many of the partners.

- The quality and coherence of service offerings, designed to meet real needs and based on clearly analysed demands.
- A shared objective of improving work processes to enable more effective interventions.

External Factors

- Local context: Turin/Settimo Torinese is rich in existing initiatives and active organisations, benefiting from a more manageable scale compared to larger, more complex cities (such as Rome). The Turin context has a history of sensitivity towards financial and labour market inclusion for migrants, supported by past integration initiatives and a third sector comprising organisations that engage in occasional informal exchanges.
 - Although the Turin context is relatively less complex than other Italian cities, several partners reported initial difficulties in gaining traction with some outreach events, facing skepticism and limited awareness from certain external stakeholders. This may be explained by the fact that third-sector organisations and public institutions involved in integration processes do not always fully recognise the importance of strengthening financial inclusion pathways.

8. *Replicability of the Empower project*

The project partners believe that **Empower** can be replicated in other contexts, **not necessarily in its entirety**, but rather through the adaptation of certain components, provided that specific conditions are met:

- Pre-existing expertise and professional skills comparable to those employed in the Turin region.
- Prior engagement and commitment from key local actors on the project's themes.
- Investment in maintaining or strengthening an organisational structure and an already established network.
- Presence of a financial partner intermediary to facilitate access to credit, which represents the last mile in financial inclusion.
- A rigorous, up-to-date, and evidence-based assessment of the needs of third-country nationals and the characteristics of the local context (e.g., labour market conditions, informal economy, available third-sector resources, priority needs, and social tensions).
- Establishment or continuity of a dedicated framework—such as a Territorial Laboratory for Financial and Economic Inclusion of Migrants—to promote a shared vocabulary and foster a community of practice on migration and integration policies.
- Broad interest in financial education initiatives, observable through ongoing projects and the engagement of both third-sector organisations and institutions.

9. Lessons learned from the Empower project

TO DESIGN A PROJECT THAT EFFECTIVELY STRENGTHENS THE FINANCIAL INCLUSION OF THIRD-COUNTRY NATIONALS: PRE-EXISTING PARTNERSHIPS AND LOCAL KNOWLEDGE ARE ESSENTIAL, ALONG WITH FLEXIBILITY

Lesson 1: Build project design on prior experience and a favourable local context

The level of **awareness and preparedness** of the local context regarding **migrant integration and financial inclusion** is critical. This means that initiatives aimed at strengthening the **economic and labour inclusion** of migrants are more likely to take root, generate synergies, and achieve sustainability in **well-established and receptive** environments. The **starting conditions** significantly influence the **project's ultimate success**.

A strong project idea is more easily developed **from previous experiences**, which help to **identify local needs** and build a **robust network of capable and competent partners**. While successful projects can certainly emerge **without pre-existing collaborations**, established relationships **can facilitate cooperation and shorten the time required** to achieve mutual understanding among partners.

Additionally, **research activities** should be integrated into the project to **deepen the understanding of the context and needs**, guiding subsequent actions effectively.

Lesson 2: Allow flexibility in actions and expected outcomes

A **pilot or experimental project** should have **greater adaptability and flexibility** in terms of expected outcomes and performance metrics. **Rigid frameworks and fixed indicators** may not align with the **unpredictable nature of a pilot initiative**. The complexities and risks of **experimental project design** must be better acknowledged and tolerated, as there are **no pre-existing models** to serve as strict guidelines.

For example, Empower encountered a **high dropout rate in the mentoring programme**. Many participants initially sought mentoring support but **discontinued** upon facing their first difficulties. While this is an understandable phenomenon, a project designed with **more flexible indicators** could have implemented a **stricter selection process** to ensure greater commitment.

Lesson 3: Consider the potential benefits of a monetary contribution from beneficiaries

A reflection is necessary on the **complete free-of-charge nature** of certain services. **In some cases, free services may be taken less seriously** compared to those requiring a **small financial contribution from beneficiaries**. While this remains an open discussion, it is a factor worth considering **on a case-by-case basis** rather than applying indiscriminately across all services.

TO STRENGTHEN THE FINANCIAL INCLUSION OF THIRD-COUNTRY NATIONALS: FIRST RAISE AWARENESS AMONG OPERATORS AND KEY LOCAL ACTORS, THEN ENGAGE BENEFICIARIES WITH A LONG-TERM PERSPECTIVE (3–5 YEARS)

Lesson 4: Adopt a long-term perspective on results

Realistic timeframe for capitalising on project efforts—including network building, raising awareness, establishing leadership, and providing services tailored to local needs—extends **beyond the duration of a project timeline**. A five-year horizon is more appropriate.

The **economic and financial inclusion process is complex**, involving **multiple dimensions, stages, and skill sets** that do not always progress in a **linear manner**. For example, **many recognition processes** initiated during the project could not be completed within two years, and many business start-up pathways require a **gradual maturation of skills**. A **longer timeframe** would allow for a more structured and sustainable approach to financial inclusion, though this may not always align with donor expectations.

Lesson 5: Adopt a gradual approach—first engage the local ecosystem, then focus on migrants

Before directly targeting **third-country nationals**, it is essential to **activate, engage, and work with local institutions, associations, and stakeholders**. This ensures a shared understanding of project objectives, builds alliances, and anchors project actions within the local context. This process also requires the creation of a common vocabulary around **financial inclusion**.

Evidence of it has been traced in the strong demand for training among professionals and operators. Many expressed a **keen interest in financial education training**, highlighting the need to first equip local actors with knowledge and understanding before extending support to migrants.

Organisations and institutions that provide **economic and labour market integration services** do not always fully **understand the financial needs of foreign nationals** or the **importance of financial education pathways**. Raising awareness among key stakeholders should therefore be a **preliminary step**, preceding direct support to beneficiaries. Once the local ecosystem is engaged, services for migrants can be rolled out **more effectively**, guiding them through the process of understanding and addressing their financial needs.

STRENGTHENING THE FINANCIAL INCLUSION OF THIRD-COUNTRY NATIONALS:
TRANSLATING EDUCATIONAL NEEDS INTO TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED BY
LOCAL ORGANISATIONS AND SERVICES

Lesson Learned 6: Understanding and Addressing Both Perceived and Unperceived Needs While Raising Awareness Among Organisations and Practitioners

The **financial, economic, and employment needs of migrant populations** are highly diverse, as are the **levels of vulnerability and risk** among different segments of this population. **Asylum seekers and refugees** often experience **greater fragility** compared to foreign nationals who have resided in Italy for longer periods. Therefore, **financial inclusion efforts** must employ **targeted tools and interventions** that reflect the **specific characteristics and needs** of the groups involved. Key factors influencing these needs include the length of stay, as well as age, gender, language proficiency, nationality, access to supportive networks, legal status, and employment conditions.

In the process of **empowering migrants**, it is crucial not only to **map and understand the diverse needs of foreign nationals** but also to **offer interventions that address both perceived and**

unperceived needs. Not all individuals are immediately aware of the importance of financial education, the recognition of foreign qualifications, or the value of structured career planning.

It is therefore essential to translate these latent needs into accessible training opportunities and services. Given that financial education is often perceived as unappealing or abstract, **improving communication strategies** on its relevance and benefits is also key.

Additionally, it is vital to establish a **shared strategy among local stakeholders**, not only to enhance the financial literacy of foreign nationals (both within and outside reception networks) but also to increase the visibility and accessibility of key local resources—including **trusted individuals and organisations** that can provide expert guidance on economic and financial decision-making.

Moreover, **cultural factors within migrant communities** must be considered, as **trust and proximity to co-nationals** may lead individuals to seek financial advice from **non-experts**, potentially resulting in **risky or detrimental decisions**. Raising awareness among **community leaders** is therefore essential, ensuring they direct migrants towards competent and reliable financial advice.

Lesson Learned 7: A Key Bottleneck to Strengthening Economic and Financial Inclusion Is the Lack of Publicly Accessible Qualification Recognition Services

There is an **urgent need for accessible services to facilitate the recognition of foreign qualifications**. It is crucial to **integrate expertise in this area into public structures and services** that support the employment integration of third-country nationals. Additionally, the establishment of both institutional and non-institutional working groups is essential to address issues related to bureaucratic inefficiencies, unclear procedures, and the slow processing of qualification recognition requests.

STRENGTHENING THE FINANCIAL INCLUSION OF FOREIGN NATIONALS: THE NEED TO ESTABLISH OR CONSOLIDATE NETWORKS AND COORDINATED REFERRAL MECHANISMS AMONG SERVICE PROVIDERS AND STAKEHOLDERS

Lesson Learned 8: Implementing a Coordinated Approach to Supporting Beneficiaries

The project highlighted the need for an effective and structured approach to addressing the financial and economic needs of third-country nationals in Turin/Settimo Torinese. A **coordinated handover and referral system** that involves **multiple stakeholders at different stages** has proven to be an effective method. The project successfully implemented a **networked service delivery model**, which, however, relies on **established relationships and in-formal partnerships** among local actors.

Lesson Learned 9: The Importance of Coordinating Partners, Stakeholders, and Existing Services, While Maintaining an Open Dialogue with Donors

Once established, **relationships between project partners and public/private entities** should be further strengthened. Similarly, engagement with **donors should go beyond mere monitoring and evaluation requirements**, fostering **open dialogue and continuous collaboration**.

A **coordinating framework** involving public authorities is essential. A **service-based initiative** without **public sector involvement** weakens the project itself. Key requirements shall be a solid **institutional recognition and endorsement**, the **backing of donors interested in integration policies**, and the **reinforcement of strategic partnerships with key local stakeholders**. This could ensure the **continuity of actions implemented and outcomes obtained**.

STRENGTHENING THE FINANCIAL INCLUSION OF FOREIGN NATIONALS: MICRO-CREDIT REQUIRES TIMES AND IS THE PROPER TOOL FOR A SUB-GROUP OF MIGRANTS

Lesson Learned 10: The Need for Targeted Interventions—Employment Support and Micro-Credit Serve Different Beneficiary Groups

Employment integration initiatives **cater to a wider audience with more diverse needs** compared to those who possess **the interest, capability, and resources** to establish micro-enterprises.

For individuals experiencing severe socio-economic vulnerability, the priority tends to be immediate and tangible, such as job search assistance and placement services, rather than training activities or long-term initiatives with no immediate impact. Conversely, migrants with moderate vulnerability and a reasonable level of education may derive greater benefits from capacity-building initiatives with longer-term effects.

Only a **subset of beneficiaries** is truly suited for **micro-credit and micro-enterprise** initiatives. Among there are migrants who have **successfully integrated** and are **ready to launch a business**, already possessing the necessary experience and financial preparedness. Microcredit is often considered by individuals for whom **self-employment represents a last resort**, lacking alternative employment options.

Addressing both **financially vulnerable migrants in need of orientation and support** and **aspiring entrepreneurs seeking micro-financing** means engaging with **distinct target groups** that do not necessarily represent **a linear progression from one to the other**. Assuming that employment integration naturally leads to entrepreneurship reflects a misunderstanding of the economic and financial inclusion process for third-country nationals.

Lesson Learned 11: While Micro-Credit Is Not a Universal Solution, All Those Seeking It Should Receive Guidance

Among those who apply for micro-credit, many are eager to access funds quickly but lack the time or willingness to engage in financial training. A structured mentoring approach should be adopted to **prevent high-risk debt situations**.

Furthermore, **applicants who do not qualify for funding should not be left unsupported**. Instead, the process should foster awareness of their actual capabilities and market opportunities, helping them reassess their business potential.

Similarly, individuals with entrepreneurial aspirations but insufficient knowledge or essential resources should receive **continuous guidance and support**. Many prospective entrepreneurs, once introduced to **regulatory and market frameworks**, become **discouraged or realise they are unprepared** for the challenges ahead.

Although dedicated resources for such follow-up actions are often lacking, the **Empower project partners** implemented a **case management approach**, supporting selected beneficiaries **beyond the project's initial scope**—ranging from **micro-enterprise mentoring to career orientation and business advisory services**. Increased resources should be allocated to such initiatives, even when beneficiaries do not neatly fit within predefined project indicators.