



# BADGE

Empowering Female Entrepreneurship

## First Diversity in Business Workshop Pilot

Summary Report of the training programme in Poland, the UK, Greece, Cyprus,  
Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Lithuania



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# Introduction

## ***Project aims***

BADGE is a training programme aiming to help women from disadvantaged backgrounds to develop soft skills (such as self-confidence and communication) for business performance and personal improvement. Even prior to the current crisis in Europe, it was challenging for aspiring female entrepreneurs from disadvantaged backgrounds to set up and run successful businesses.

With the financial crisis now in full swing across most of the continent, opportunities for support and training to improve one's prospects are even fewer. The purpose of BADGE is to transfer and adapt an innovative support programme - Diversity in Business Workshops - developed in the UK, aiming to enable female start-up entrepreneurs experiencing an extra disadvantage to gain valuable soft skills and competences which are particularly useful when setting up a new business.

BADGE has two main target groups; aspiring female entrepreneurs from disadvantaged backgrounds and specialists in VET-oriented organisations who offer support for these women. BADGE has had a significant short-term impact on both groups, (in terms of immediate benefits), and is expected to yield long-term results (through the empowerment of learners, project dissemination and networks created).

Workshops for aspiring female entrepreneurs were held across all 8 partner countries, namely Poland, the UK, Greece, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Lithuania. The workshops involved guidance from business advisors combined with innovative Learners' Kits. In addition, an online community was created on social media to enable participants to network with one another. VET trainers also have access to innovative European approaches and the opportunity to share knowledge with peers across Europe.

It is anticipated that BADGE will result in the economic empowerment of women in the target group, fostering entrepreneurship across Europe.

## ***Outline of the 1<sup>st</sup> pilot across Europe***

The sessions across the 8 countries of the partnership focused on enabling participants to overcome the barriers preventing them from entering the world of entrepreneurship. The training was designed to help participants reflect on the way they see themselves and its impact with regards to setting up a business. In addition, participants were provided with advice to increase their self-confidence, learn to juggle a busy home-life and work-life, as well as understand the services available for setting up a new enterprise. In the UK, immigrant women



## Recruitment

Participants were recruited using a variety of channels across the partnership.

In Poland, participants were recruited using Danmar's network of contacts. Some of the Polish participants had already been recruited to Danmar's "Helping Hand" project for people out of employment and, as their profile was suitable for BADGE, they were recruited to the workshops. Several participants were recruited through word-of-mouth. In the UK, Inova's team planned a comprehensive recruitment campaign which involved a strong presence on social media platforms, promotional emails to contacts and liaison with local organisations and institutions who agreed to advertise our workshops to their target audience. The organisations Inova contacted included universities, local newspapers and magazines, chambers of commerce, business federations, equality networks and international student societies at local universities. In addition, Inova staff attended a number of events in the South Yorkshire area, where they spread the word about the project and distributed promotional material. The recruitment campaign culminated with Inova's participation in the Rotherham European Business Festival on 6th and 7th October 2014. Inova had its own stand at the exhibition on both days as a representative of the BADGE programme and Inova's director Marina Larios gave an inspiring speech on *"How to make the most of being international in the UK"* on the 2nd day of the event.

In Greece, KMOP began the recruitment process early (in June 2013) in order to ensure that enough participants could be recruited for the 1st Pilot. Following the results of the Needs' Analysis in Greece, KMOP's recruitment plan targeted two groups in particular; women over 45 years old and/or single parents. The recruitment methods used by KMOP included contacting important stakeholders- e.g. public services with a gender equality profile- via e-mail or phone, utilising KMOP's existing network (e.g. VET centres, trainers, other relevant stakeholders), advertising the workshops on KMOP's website and social media, as well as putting up posters in employment offices. In Cyprus, CARDET also used emails, social media, websites and press releases. In addition, over 30 members of the target group were contacted directly via email and over the phone.

The Bulgarian partner sent information about the pilot to employment offices across the region it operates in the form of flyers and posters. Employment offices were in turn asked to provide information to women willing to start their own business. Promotion was also carried out on the Internet and through social media platforms. The programme was also advertised at several events organised by BICC, as well as through direct contact with women experiencing disadvantages and partner organisations. In Croatia, CESI took advantage of their contacts with the Croatian Employment Service and sent info about their projects and workshops. The Croatian Employment Service gave direct information to women on its database. Recruitment was also carried out through the website of CESI, as well as on the organisation's Facebook pages (CESI and Radnica.org). Local media (radio and TV stations) were also asked to advertise the workshops two weeks before the starting dates.

The Romanian partner CNIPMMR Arad used a number of recruitment channels for the 1st Pilot, namely partner organisations, local media, their own website and social media. In Lithuania, Social Innovation Fund cooperated closely with the local labour exchange office in Kaunas. Participants in the workshops were therefore recruited in two ways; firstly by approaching the participants (long-term unemployed women) of “Social Incubator”, one of SIF’s projects and, secondly, by contacting the local employment office in Kaunas, which resulted in the recruitment of a significant number of women.

### ***Recruited participants***

Campaigns were highly successful in all countries of the partnership, as they resulted in the recruitment of 117 disadvantaged women in total. The cohort was very diverse and consisted of women from all walks of life, all having one thing in common – their aspiration to start a new business. Participants experienced various disadvantages keeping them from becoming self-employed, including age, disability, low income, migrant background, and long-term unemployment. Their business ideas included restaurants, shops, cultural event management, agriculture and nurseries. For more information, please see Annex 1, Table of participants and Annex 2, Attendance lists.

### **The Format and Process of the Diversity in Business Workshops**

The Diversity in Business Workshops had a similar format across the 8 countries of the partnership. On average, Workshops lasted between 3 and 6 hours. They involved a PowerPoint presentation by the facilitator, outlining a number of tips and exercises which can help aspiring entrepreneurs to overcome any barriers keeping them from setting up and running a successful business.



**BADGE Participants in the UK**

Participants were acquainted with concepts such as soft skills and hard skills and were introduced to a number of helpful tools designed to help them organise their time efficiently

and manage conflicting priorities. In addition, workshops involved a number of exercises which required the participants to work in pairs, enabling them therefore to develop their group work skills and grow rapport with other members.



**BADGE Participants in Greece**

One such exercise was the hot air balloon exercise, which requires each individual to write down 5 things they want to get out of running a business – one thing per note. Each pair has a picture of a hot air balloon. Taking turns, one person says to the other that all the things they want out of running a business are weights and are weighing down the hot air balloon. The balloon has a hole in it and in order to keep flying high, they need to start losing some of the weights. The other person then needs to choose which weight they are going to let go of first.

At the end of the workshop, participants were given a number of exercises for home, namely completing the resilience questionnaire, creating their own mind-map and identifying their personal strengths.



**BADGE Participants in Bulgaria**

Participants were also introduced to useful concepts and tools such as GANTT charts and SWOT analyses.

It is noteworthy that the Croatian and Romanian partners chose to deliver the workshop in a number of different locations, while the rest of the partners delivered the training in the city/town they are based.

### ***Learning Set Session***

Workshops could be accompanied by an optional Learning Set Session, during which participants had the opportunity to go through the exercises they had done at home, reflect on the results and ask the facilitator any questions. The partners who decided to deliver learning set sessions in their countries were Poland, the UK, Greece, Bulgaria and Romania.

## **Impact of the Diversity in Business Workshops**

### ***Tools used***

In order to assess the impact of the Diversity in Business Workshops on the personal development and career progression of participants, partners used a variety of tools, both formal (e.g. evaluation forms) and informal (e.g. group discussions). Most partners asked participants to complete an evaluation questionnaire at the end of each Workshop and Action Learning Set, with the exception of the Polish partner Danmar, who asked participants to complete an additional evaluation at the end of the programme.

The evaluation questionnaires were particularly valuable for facilitators, as they constitute an excellent tool to assess the quality of the workshop and ensure that participants found the training session useful. The feedback received will also be particularly useful when planning new workshops in the future.

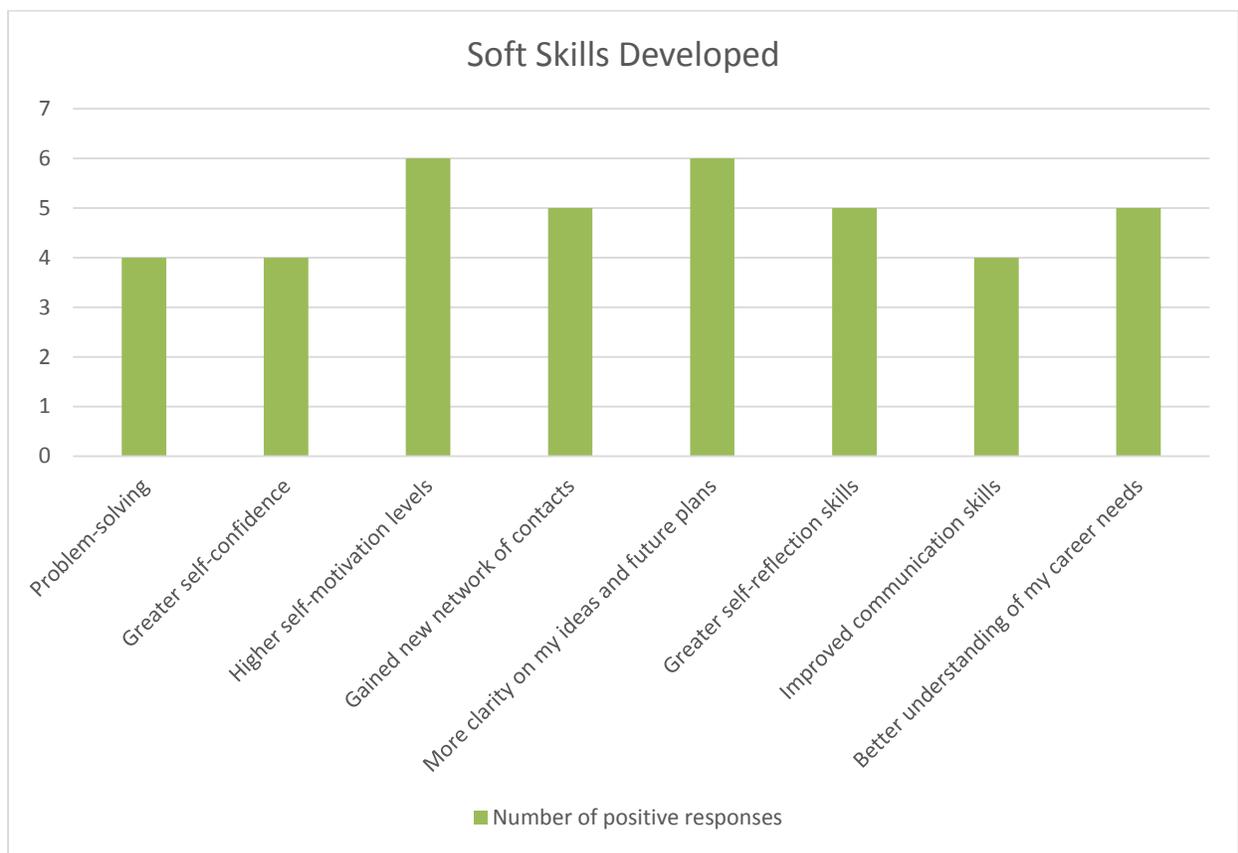
Questions featured in the various questionnaires included:

1. What were your expectations from today's session and how have they been fulfilled?
2. What are the three things you have learnt about your business start-up issues today?
3. What was the most worthwhile thing about your group session today?
4. Please add any further comments in the space below.
5. What kind of help do you feel you need at this stage in order to help you realise your business idea?

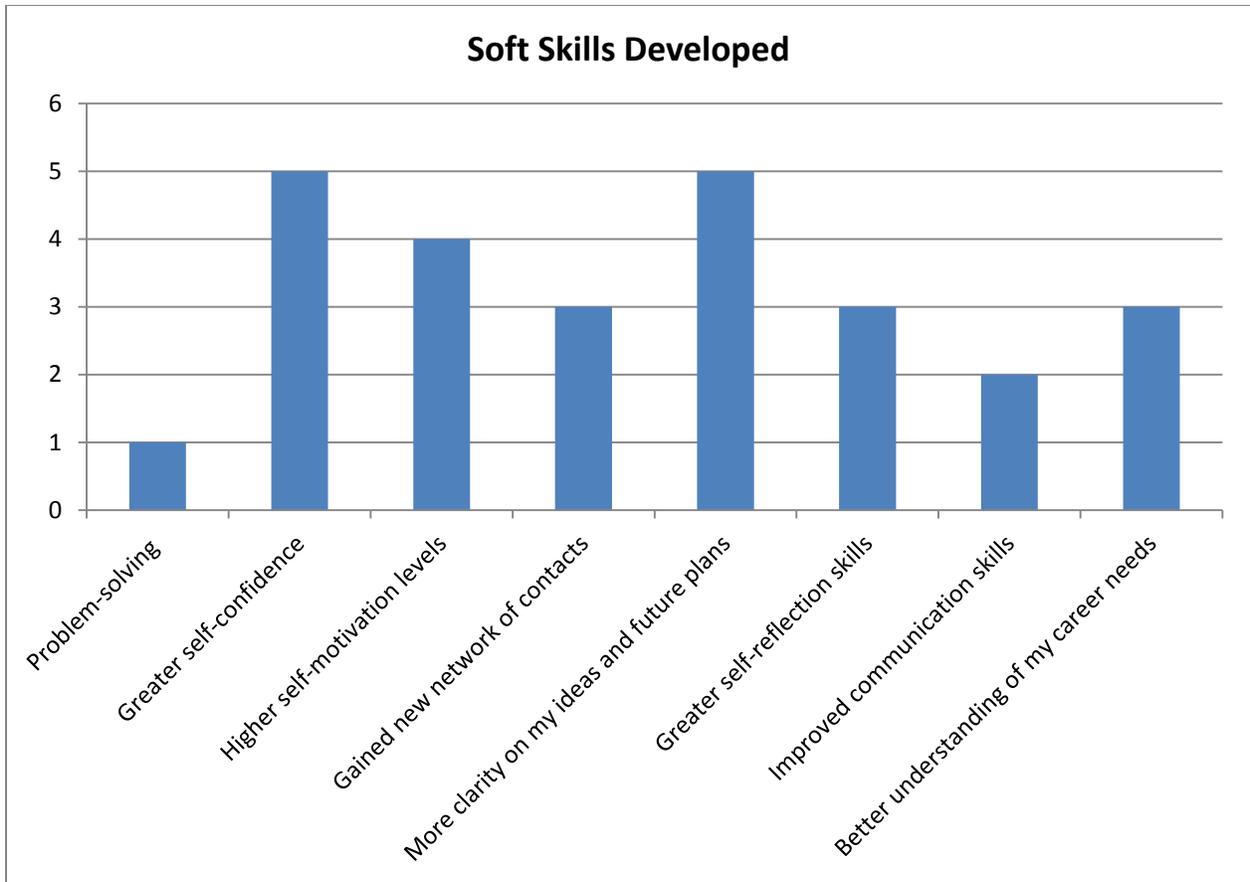
## ***Soft skills development***

The feedback facilitators received illustrates that all training sessions had a profound impact on participants, as they enabled them to develop their soft skills significantly.

A few examples of how participants were able to develop their soft skills as a result of the BADGE programme can be found in the tables below.

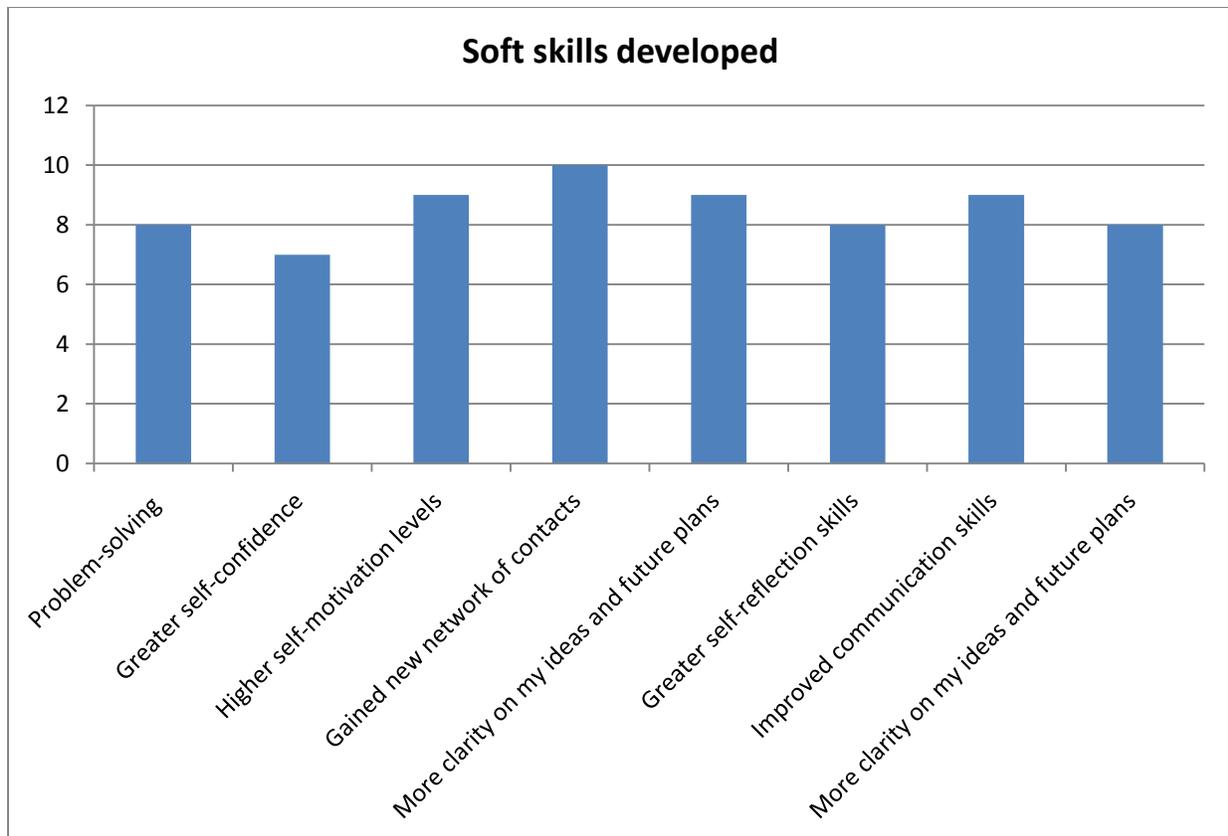


**Greece**



### Bulgaria

The majority of participants noticed a great increase in their confidence, as they now felt much better prepared to pursue their aspirations and establish successful businesses. Identifying their own strengths was also a common theme which emerged from participants' answers. Being able to change their self-perception and, as a result, see themselves in a more positive light is another important soft skill which participants developed according to their evaluation forms. Finally, goal setting and prioritising conflicting values were two soft skills many of the participants improved, while some learners expressed that the training helped them develop a number of useful time management techniques.



### Romania

### Quotations

Here is a selection of some of the most inspiring quotes by participants across the different countries of the partnership:

*I can overcome the issues I'm facing by focusing on my strengths (UK participant)*

*My problems are a result of my own thinking. I can change that (UK participant)*

*I have learnt how to be less risk-averse (UK participant)*

*It is very important to be able to recognise the positive and negative aspects of one's self and be able to make a conscious effort to turn the negative ones into positive ones. (Greek participant)*

*I learned that I need to have: self-confidence, a clear vision of what I want and what I should do, as well as to improve my skills for time management (Bulgarian participant)*

*I would like to participate in more of these workshops (Croatian participant)*

*I came to this workshop to find how I can open a business, the first steps. I found more than this - the road to success (Romanian participant)*

## ***Expectations and fulfilment***

The training has by far exceeded participants' expectations as illustrated by the overwhelmingly fantastic feedback facilitators received. Participants found the workshops and learning sets a very good investment of their time, as they helped them develop their soft skills and at the same time expand their network by meeting other aspiring entrepreneurs who are facing similar challenges. The contacts formed at the workshops can be the start of many meaningful friendships and business partnerships.

See Annex 3: 1<sup>st</sup> Country Pilot Reports

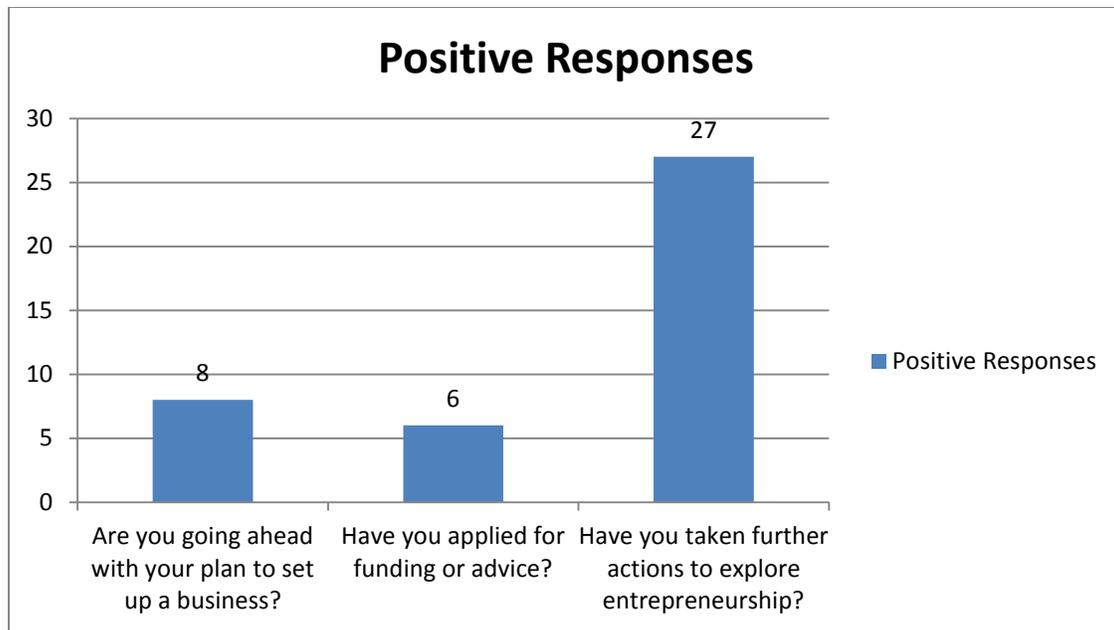
## **Final Outcomes**

As we have already established, the training sessions have had a profound effect on participants' soft skills development, as they have inspired them to believe in themselves and therefore not let their negative thoughts hold them back from achieving what they want.

The graph below illustrates that numerous participants have made significant progress in their career by setting up a business, applying for funding or advice, or taking other actions to explore entrepreneurship.

Several participants are now going ahead with their plan to set up a new business, while some have now applied for funding and other entrepreneurship programmes as a result of the programme. Finally, many participants have taken other actions to explore the world of entrepreneurship, or develop their businesses further, including joining social networks and eBay, developing their support network, or enrolling in business courses at college.

It is also noteworthy that some participants found jobs shortly after the workshops, which, to some extent, can also be attributed to the soft skills they developed as part of the training. The work experience they will acquire will be particularly useful when they decide to make the transition into entrepreneurship in the future.



This graph is based on data about participants in Poland, the UK, Greece and Bulgaria

## Recommending Diversity in Business Workshops to Other Women

As the vast majority of participants found the sessions highly useful, they provided many inspiring quotes to motivate other women to take part in the programme. Here is a selection of them:

*I'd recommend the workshops to my family and friends, as apart from practical information they can get some psychological insight (Polish participant)*

*Enjoyed it all and was all useful. It was good to network with other women exploring self-employment (UK participant)*

*Really useful workshop, I really enjoyed it. It made me explore my ideas and reflect on them. An excellent facilitator (UK participant)*

*I will recommend it to some of my friends that could benefit from the information received and especially from the practical exercises." (Bulgarian participant)*

*"I would definitely recommend the workshops; they are very useful especially if you don't have a clear vision for your business idea. (Croatian participant)*

## Facilitator's Comments

*"The end of learning is action, not knowledge"*

Peter Honey

Facilitator impressions from this programme were positive across all countries. All facilitators agreed that practical tools are helpful for visualising one's shortcomings in the context of running a business. The workshops helped participants to broaden their horizons and understand others due to differences in individual life situations, level of education and knowledge of the labour market. Even though delivering these workshops was hard work, facilitators felt they had learned a lot from the participants about challenges they are facing.

According to the facilitator in the UK, the BADGE programme highlighted once again the importance of a blended methodology using action learning, mentoring and coaching. The methodology enabled participants to have their own space to reflect on their learning while receiving support from their group peers. The group developed a strong bond and the facilitator was pleased to find out that some of the learners agreed to meet outside the training to keep supporting one another. As the facilitator said, "At the end of the day, it is all about empowerment and it was a great surprise to hear that the group was meeting independently and achieving so much with each other's support, empathy and encouragement."

In Cyprus, facilitators highlighted that these workshops were particularly beneficial for target groups who find it difficult to begin a new career or are just entering the job market. The focus on communication skills, collaboration skills and adaptation to multicultural environments through interaction and collaboration with peers was a very successful approach and it seems that participants gained a lot from these activities. It appears that one of the major shortfalls or fears of women is how to start and how to manage their business endeavour at the early stages. It was suggested that a bit of more emphasis there would help, however as the focus of the workshops was on soft skills this could potentially dilute the methodology.

The Bulgarian facilitator highlighted that the content of the training is designed in a very pleasant and easy to work the way the facilitator. All exercises are interesting and exciting for the participants and they were happy to participate. They also observed that, although most participants expected concrete practical information on business financing, company registration etc., they still appreciated the benefits of sharing problems, ideas and expectations with other women in the same situation. After the meeting all they declared that they were more motivated and confident and had expanded their network of contacts.

The Croatian partner suggested that the facilitator of BADGE does not necessarily have to be a female entrepreneur; however it would be a good idea to have one as a mentor who can participate in Action Planning and who can be contacted by participants at a later stage. It is also important that facilitators are aware of trends and examples in entrepreneurship. In

addition, it would be useful to provide hand-outs featuring all different types of companies and cooperatives, as well as institutions which can help them in the process of establishing their businesses.

## Recommendations

The evaluation questionnaires were an opportunity for participants in the BADGE programme to provide a number of suggestions on how to improve the scheme further.

### Poland

1. The participants would like to learn more and take part in more self-motivational exercises.
2. They would like to see more practical examples of how the contents of a workshop could influence their approach to running a business
3. A few participants wanted to learn about procedures for starting up a business and expected some guidance regarding the paperwork in a functioning start-up business.

### UK

Participants were highly satisfied with the training; therefore not a lot of recommendations were made. The only recommendation came from one participant who thought it would be more appropriate to allow more time for each session, or even deliver the session over several days. It should be noted however that this opinion was not shared by the rest of the group.

### Greece

Based on evaluation forms, the need of many participants for more detailed information regarding enterprise setting-up procedures was evident. Some of the issues in which participants were particularly interested were:

1. How does one go about creating a home-based business – i.e. what is the current legal framework, how is it applied, what are the differences between legal forms of businesses, insurance, work permits, taxation etc.
2. What are the steps involved in creating a sustainable business, such as:
  - Market and competition analysis
  - Product or service characteristics' determination
  - Business plan formation
  - Sources of funding

Finally, participants expressed the opinion that the evaluation and form-filling process should be more streamlined, so as not to distract their focus from the tasks set out in the Workshop's learning material.

## **Cyprus**

1. It is important to suggest specific sources of funding for starting a new business (EU or national funds)
2. Insecurity of participants to be involved in entrepreneurship initiatives derives from the lack of knowledge on issues such as registering a business, initial costs, identifying partners and support.
3. Participants enjoyed the activities, the interaction and the indirect peer counselling but they would expect some more concrete information on the actual process of starting a business

## **Bulgaria**

As an answer to the last question **“What kind of help do you feel you need at this stage in order to help you realise your business ideas?”** some of the participants gave the following comments:

- “Mainly financial support.”
- “At this stage, I think that I should expand my contact network and connect with more people doing the same as me.”
- “I mostly need financial support.”
- “I need contacts and skills to develop my business.”

## **Croatia**

In final evaluation we can read that most of the women would be keen to participate in more of these workshops. No special recommendations were given from participants.

## **Romania**

It is also noteworthy that in Romania, some of the participants expressed their intention to meet with the women from other countries involved in the project

## **Lithuania**

1. It is advisable to invite an expert to the workshop, who could provide an overview of the main actions to be taken when planning to start a new business (e.g. How to make a business plan) and discuss the legal aspects regarding the different types of businesses.

2. The paperwork should be reduced. Most of the participants were not willing to complete all evaluation forms.

## Conclusions

Overall, the organisation and delivery of the BADGE pilot across Europe was highly successful. The training did not only meet, but in fact exceeded participants' expectations, as suggested by the feedback we received.

It is evident that participants enjoyed the sessions and found them a good investment of their time, as they helped them develop a number of useful skills to succeed in today's competitive enterprise world. In addition, these sessions were particularly beneficial for the facilitators, as they gave them a valuable insight into managing and motivating a diverse cohort of participants. In short, we believe that these workshops have achieved their aim of teaching women facing double-disadvantage that establishing a successful business is feasible. The lessons learnt from this workshop will be particularly useful when developing similar training programmes in the future and when carrying out the second series of workshops.

## Annexes

- Annex 1: Table of Participants
- Annex 2: Attendance lists
- Annex 3: 1<sup>st</sup> Country Pilot Reports