



GENDER & MIGRATION

The collaboration between researchers and
civil society organisations



Recommendations for improving future cooperation:
the Austrian case



This document has been elaborated under the European funded project GEMMA (www.gemmaproject.eu) which aims to improve the flow of communication between researchers, policy-makers and civil society organisations in the field of Gender and Migration research.

In May 2009, the Centre for Social Innovation (ZSI) (the Austrian GEMMA partner) organised a workshop where academic researchers and Civil society organizations discussed how to improve their future collaboration and drafted together this guidelines that should be intended as a plan to be implemented at national level. The electronic version of this document is available on GEMMA website:

<http://www.gemmaproject.eu/evento.aspx?id=67>

(GEMMA is a project funded by the European Commission, Directorate General Research - Unit L Science, Economy and Society - Contract Number 217194)

Index

1. Introduction.....	2
2. Methodology	2
3. Swot analysis	1
3.1 Strenghts	1
3.2 Weaknesses.....	1
3.3 Opportunities	1
3.4 Threats	2
4. Recommendations for improving future cooperation between researchers and civil society organisations	3

1. Introduction

The objective of this SWOT analysis is to develop synthesis papers on Civil Society Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT).

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) can be both users and producers of research results. A growing number of CSOs across the European Union have a working focus on encouraging the integration of migrant populations into European societies. In recent years a number of European CSO umbrella organisations and networks have sprung up all over Europe in order to stimulate well-informed debate on migration and migration policies.

SWOT aims at exploring the issues concerning collaboration between researchers and civil society organisations and developing a set of priorities arising from national and European level research on gender and migration. In part, the problems stem from a general lack of dissemination of research findings produced at the European level to the national level.

There is often also a lack of clarity as regards the different priorities of researchers and civil society organisations.

A national workshop was organised in order to analyse the specific weaknesses and strengths of the dialogue between researchers and CSOs in Austria. The Austrian system does not provide structured opportunities for a dialogue between those groups. On an individual level, researchers and members of CSOs do communicate, but on an institutional level, they do not meet and exchange their viewpoints and competences regularly. There is no regular forum or discussion platform. Therefore, it was necessary to assess the current status and to analyse strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats, in order to develop recommendations for a better cooperation between both groups. GEMMA was the first project that took the initiative to deal with these questions.

2. Methodology

The workshop used the discussion method “world café”, where people are divided into equally sized table groups, at tables or in chair circles. Each group deals with one or several particular topics and presents the outcome on a pin board. After a rotation of participants, the new group discusses the same topic(s) or the initial group’s results. All group members were pre-assigned to three tables, giving attention to a balanced representation of CSOs and research. Each of the three tables was headed by a moderator (researcher involved in one of the GEMMA related projects) coordinating the discussion process; a note taker ensured that everything was captured and safely stored. The overall guiding questions were:

- How relevant are existing research results generated within the framework of EU research projects for the Austrian context?
- What do researchers need from CSOs and the other way around (data, monitoring systems, materials made anonymous, access to target groups, etc.)?

- Which strengths, weaknesses, chances and dangers does the dialogue between researchers and CSOs possess?

Each table dealt with these questions by focusing on different topic clusters, which were:

- Group 1: Immigration Policy, Family Reunification, Asylum & Refugee Policies, CSO Activities, Integration, Citizenship, Discrimination
- Group 2: Labour, Employment, Education, Training, Qualification, Recognition of Academic Degrees, Informal Sector, Domestic Work, Care Sector
- Group 3: Family, Partnership, Health & Sexual Politics, Politics of Identity, Religion, Homosexuality, Violence, Domestic Violence

Discussion process – the agenda of the workshop

Duration: 09.00 to 16 :30

The presentation of GEMMA’s aims and outcomes (by Maria Schwarz-Woelzl/ZSI) was followed by an overview of EU-funded projects on gender and migration (by Rossalina Latcheva/IHS). Next, the workshop’s chairperson (Kerstin Witt-Löw) explained the discussion method “world café” including its discussion rules.

At the tables

First discussion round, duration: 40 minutes

- The SWOT matrix had been drawn on one of each table’s two pin boards.
- Short round of introductions

- Central question: How do I perceive the relationship between research and CSOs as regards the topics of migration and gender? How relevant are the research results presented for the national context?
- The discussion outcomes were taken down on small cards and classified as belonging to one of the four fields in the SWOT matrix, and then attached to the pin board by the facilitator.

Second discussion round - Rotation 1, duration: 40 minutes

- The participants of each table split to join the two other tables.
- After a round of introductions, the facilitator outlined the results of the previous group.
- Central question: How should the relationship between research and CSOs on the topics of migration and gender develop?
- The results of the discussion were recorded on cards attached to a separate pin board.

Third discussion round - Rotation 2, duration: 40 minutes

- After a round of introductions, the facilitator outlined the results of the previous group.

- Central question: How can we put into practice the ideas generated in round 2?
- The results of the discussion were recorded on cards attached to a separate pin board.

Forth discussion round - Rotation 3, duration: 60 minutes

- Objectives: summary and guidelines
- Central question regarding the summary: What impressions do you take from these three rounds of discussion? (How did I perceive things? What became evident?)
- Central question regarding the guidelines: What do we want to do?

- Each table recorded about five guidelines on flip chart.

Presentation of summary and guidelines to the plenum – Round 5

- Presentation of summary and guidelines
- Guiding question for the plenum's discussion: What can we agree on?

3. SWOT Analysis

The following table wanted to summarise the strengths and weaknesses of the collaboration between academic researchers and NGOs along with the opportunities and threats they have to face.

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researchers and CSOs can exchange their specialized (expert) knowledge. • They can offer their different means of access and communication to each other. • The different levels of knowledge production are mutually inspirational. • Researchers form a strong community of interest whose power can be used by CSOs. 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem of centre and periphery between Vienna and the other federal states • Lack of a common networking platform for communicating interests and arranging cooperation • CSOs' lack of resources (time, financing); CSOs and research are dependent on financial resources and sponsors. • An exchange that might widen the range of topics covered by CSOs and researchers is missing. • Lack of a "common language" for the communication of research findings
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closer cooperation between research and practice could give more political clout. • The communication of research interests promotes research on topics with practical relevance, and provides for a mutually beneficial combination of different perspectives. • Wider focus of research by contextualization of results. • Reciprocal access to specialized knowledge. 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence of partisan interests, appropriation of findings • Feedback of research findings is sometimes impeded by sponsors. • Research findings are not used or irritating due to a lack of contextualization.

3.1 Strengths

- Researchers and CSOs can exchange their specialised knowledge and specific approaches, even more so as research findings and practical experience often coincide.
- CSOs give researchers an important access to their practical work, and act as an intermediary to the field of study. Especially when it comes to topics surrounded by taboo, information and intermediation by practitioners is of great importance.
- The knowledge generated by researchers on a structural level is useful in counseling, as scientific concepts and approaches identify and explain the patterns behind individual cases (e.g., regarding violence).
- Researchers form a powerful community of interest, which may in turn be useful for CSOs.
- Young academics can be integrated into the field of practice by way of internships.

3.2 Weaknesses

- There is a problem of centre and periphery: networking between CSOs and researchers does work much better in Vienna than in the other federal states of Austria.
- Networking between researchers and CSOs generally suffers from the lack of a common platform. Therefore, research topics as well as personal contacts and networks are accessible only with difficulty. The search for adequate cooperation partners remains limited to a pool of existing contacts. Additionally, cooperations usually end with their specific projects.
- The shortness of resources is one of CSOs' most pressing problems. Due to the constant lack of time, CSOs cannot cope with the many requests by researchers. Accordingly, there is too little contact with research institutions, or such contact is limited to already known institutions; recent research findings are hardly known at all. Secondly, shortness of resources also means a lack of funding, which in turn again limits the capacity of small counseling centres for cooperation with research institutions.
- CSOs criticize researchers for working on a limited range of topics; other problems are not considered, despite their practical relevance. On the other hand, CSOs rarely approach researchers with their questions or research interests, especially when it comes to actively initiating Ph.D. theses.
- Researchers should integrate the immigrants' perspective into their work more often.
- Researchers often do not appreciate the expert knowledge of CSO workers, especially if they have little formal education.
- Another problem is the lack of a "common language". On the one hand, research findings are not communicated in an accessible way; on the other, the definition and reflection of terminology is found wanting. CSOs should be more open-minded, and researchers more informative in this context.
- Research tenders rarely combine the fields of research and practice.
- Researchers should reflect their methods and approaches in view of practical experience, and adjust them accordingly.
- The transfer of knowledge and research interests is insufficient. Due to a lack of communication on both sides, practitioners have difficulties in accessing basic research, research findings and data. Additionally, research findings are hardly taken up by practitioners, or they have to demand them in the first place.
- Both sides depend on financial resources, giving sponsors the opportunity to set the topics, or to support those topics that are in line with current trends.



3.3 Opportunities

- Closer contact between research and practice would give more political clout. Scientific knowledge could be put into political practice. Research findings should be used to improve the social and economic situation of migrants.
- By communicating their research interests more effectively, CSOs could boost research on topics of practical relevance. This way, the different perspectives could be combined in a mutually beneficial way.
- If practitioners were more aware of their responsibility for supporting research, they would respond more productively to requests by researchers.

- Researchers should contextualize their work beyond the obvious focus of study, and communicate this contextualization more clearly.

3.4 Threats

- There is a danger of research being taken in by partisan interests. The sponsors' proximity to certain political institutions might impede cooperation with CSOs.
- Sponsors sometimes prevent the feedback of research findings as long as they themselves have not published them.
- There is a danger of research findings not being used.
- Research findings can be irritating at times if they are not contextualized properly.
- There is a danger of making premature generalizations as CSOs do not represent all migrants.

How should the relationship between research and CSOs on the topics of migration and gender develop?

- CSOs should become an integral partner of research, especially when it comes to the communication of results and access to data sets. This could be realized in workshops, for example. A culture of exchange should be promoted.
- CSOs should reserve some time for a detailed study of research findings.
- The boundaries between research and practice should be fluid, which could be fostered by mutual integration.
- CSOs could develop their projects in line with researchers' prognoses, and might provide some ideas for future research.
- Dialogue and critical exchange between CSOs and researchers would be desirable.
- Researchers and CSOs should develop a joint strategy for advancing political demands.
- Cooperation between researchers and CSOs should make audible the voices of marginalized individuals and groups.

4. Recommendations for improving future cooperation between Researchers and Civil Society Organisations

- The use of research findings should be more transparent and sustainable.
- The wider public as well as young academics should have better access to research findings. The results of research should be disseminated systematically, in order to generate an overview over existing knowledge.
- Training courses could increase familiarity in dealing with research findings.
- Research findings should be communicated in an easily understandable language. Additionally, the feedback of research findings should be adjusted to the target group.
- By improving networking between professors and institutes, interested students might be reached.
- Institutional cooperations (p.ex. with universities) should be established as a sustainable partnership of equals. For feedback, reflection, and interpretation, for example, such cooperation might occur sporadically.
- Developing projects together needs regular exchange, resources, and confidence.
- The transfer of information should become a natural course of action.
- CSOs and researchers should get a better understanding of their respective counterpart's methods.
- Networking should attempt to overcome the problem of centre and periphery.
- A forum or platform would promote regular exchange and give CSOs the opportunity to bring their research proposals into the discussion. Such a forum, however, should not replace face-to-face communication. Workshop participants referred to the Graz-based "Wissenschaftsladen" ("science shop", also with a Vienna branch) as a Best Practice example. The Wissenschaftsladen's idea is to combine research and practice, and to convey scientific findings to groups and persons who themselves have no direct access. The Wissenschaftsladen team works on requests by doing research themselves, by arranging for and accompanying diploma and dissertation theses, or by initiating funded research projects. This way, research questions, topics and approaches can be developed in cooperation with CSOs, and then taken up by larger institutions.
- Championing of more transparency by CSOs and researchers.
- Diversity among researchers should be taken more into consideration.

Website	www.gemmaproject.eu
Coordinator	Agency for the Promotion of European Research – APRE (Italy) No profit research organisation: www.apre.it
Partners	Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales – EHESS (France) Graduate school for social sciences: www.ehess.fr Social Policy Research Centre, Middlesex University – SPRC (United Kingdom) University recognized Centre in the Institute for Social and Health Research (ISHR) http://www.mdx.ac.uk/schools/hssc/research/centres/sprc/index.asp The Hungarian Science and Technology Foundation – Tetalap (Hungary) No profit public foundation: www.tetalap.hu Center for Social Innovation – ZSI (Austria) Independent scientific institution - www.zsi.at