



ESTER FOUNDATION, SWEDEN

What?

The Ester Foundation provides training to unemployed immigrant women entrepreneurs in the early stages of their projects. The programme is funded by the city of Helsingborg. Its pilot was supported by the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth and the Region of Skåne.

Why?

It is estimated that about 75 000 to 100 000 new migrants come to Sweden every year. In 2018, 19% of the Swedish overall population were born in another country. Furthermore, migrant entrepreneurship is considered as an important investment that creates work opportunities for both migrants and natives. It also holds potential for labour market integration. One of the objectives behind the creation of the Ester Foundation in 2012 was to support immigrant women, especially from non-European countries, as a group that was marginalised in the labour market. It also aimed to address wider social and economic marginalisation of this group. The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth's 2015-20 national strategy on equality and entrepreneurship aimed to extend support to women and people from a migrant background to a greater extent.

Key activities

The programme is structured around three six-month long modules. The first module is an introduction to life, culture and the business environment in Sweden, the second module supports participants in registering their businesses, and the third phase offers lighter support (advice provided on an ad-hoc basis) in the early stages of the company's operations. The programme includes entrepreneurship modules along with other complementary subjects such as Economics, Swedish culture, communication and leadership. In addition to classes, participants receive individual support: they receive help for the development of a business plan and feasibility study and they are assigned a business advisor that can assist them in various areas including communication, regulation and networks. They can also receive support in applying for public grants. A mentoring service is also provided in later stages, whereby entrepreneurs are matched with volunteer mentors.

Aside from the training, participants receive financial support for the duration of the programme, to ensure that

their living expenses are covered and they can focus on developing their project. The foundation has also developed a microcredit programme in partnership with a Swedish financial institution (Swedbank) available for programme beneficiaries in the Stockholm region. The Ester Foundation guarantees 80% of each loan. Loans range from SEK 20 000 to SEK 300 000 (approximately EUR 2 140 to EUR 32 120) and have a repayment period of three years or under. Participants can also receive start-up support from the Swedish Employment Agency and traditional loans from Swedbank provided their business plans have been approved by the agency

Impact

Over the 2012-16 period, the programme has supported 21 immigrant women, leading to the creation of 11 companies, out of which 10 were still in operation in 2016. Four had part-time or full-time employees. The programme is also believed to contribute to skills acquisition and increased self-confidence among participants. Replication of the project in other cities in Sweden is being discussed.

This case study was adapted from material published in: European Commission (2016), Evaluation and Analysis of Good Practices in Promoting and Supporting Migrant Entrepreneurship Guide book, European Commission, Brussels.

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