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**WOMEN'S SOCIAL  
INTEGRATION AND  
LANGUAGE PRACTICE  
PROGRAMME  
BY XENIA**



**LOCATION**

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM

**TIMELINE**

2016 - present

**TARGET AUDIENCE**


Migrant, refugee, asylum-seeking and British women

**TYPE OF ACTION**

Social integration and language practice workshops

**KEYWORDS**

Social integration, language learning, civic participation



# ABOUT THE ORGANISATION

Xenia is a women-run non-hierarchical organisation striving to create more inclusive and connected communities. Composed by a dedicated team of volunteers and workshop facilitators, Xenia is a shareable community model that puts hard-to-reach women at the centre of accessible provisions to foster increased social integration, while supporting language learning and reducing social isolation.

Xenia began as an experiment, and is now an ongoing project offering weekly workshops with a range of community partners to increase creative and civic opportunities for participants.

Continual improvement and sharing their learning are core values to Xenia's approach

## IN BRIEF

**Name:** Xenia

**Creation:** 2016

**Location:** United Kingdom



# CASE DESCRIPTION

## BACKGROUND

The UK has an ever-growing migrant population. The number of people seeking asylum increased by 63% between 2011 and 2015. In 2015, the UK received over 30,000 asylum applications from countries where English is not an official language.

Proficiency in English is a vital tool for navigating everyday life in the UK. Research has shown that the barriers in access to English classes faced by migrants are greater for women, thus without a secure knowledge of English simple everyday tasks can become a struggle.

Xenias innovative approach to community social integration and language practice brings together migrant and British women, with childcare provided. Women of all backgrounds create positive intercultural connections by celebrating differences in nationality, life situations or language abilities.

Through taking part in activities together, trust and understanding is nurtured between them and confidence is built while learning English with fluent speakers. Xenia recognises that the informal yet structured language practice and learning offered is crucial to building up migrant women's confidence.



# DESCRIPTION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE

## Women's social integration and language practice programme

Xenia meets four main needs with migrant, refugee, asylum-seeking and British women all benefiting directly, as well as impacting wider community cohesion that inclusive of women's needs.

### **1. Increased opportunities for English language learning.**

Xenia provides vital opportunities for English practice to migrant women, being complementary to formal ESOL\* provisions, enabling women to continue their learning path in addition to classes, or as an alternative where access to formal provision is not possible.

### **2. Reduced social isolation amongst migrant women.**

Xenia creates spaces where women build trust and friendships, developing supportive social networks made up of women outside their community they can rely on. Attending sessions also provides a sense of purpose. In a focus group, one participant described Xenia as a 'medicine' in helping overcome isolation. While developing their language skills, two of the biggest challenges in migrant women everyday life are addressed: isolation and loneliness.

### **3. Increased community cohesion to challenge negative perceptions of other groups.**

The activities promotes two-way cultural understanding allowing migrant and local women gain connections, understanding of other cultures, and identify common interests, experiences and values that help break down stereotypes and foster a greater sense of belonging. Many participants describe Xenia as providing a sense of community that is rare to experience.

### **4. Increased access to civic and democratic processes and local services for migrant women**

By bringing information, advice and guidance topics into the activities provide opportunities for understanding and trust in services to build. Service providers are invited to sessions, including participants in local and national strategy consultations, thus increasing awareness of events and activities such as elections.



## TYPE OF ACTION

- Social integration
- Language practice workshops

## MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS

Xenia has had proven success in helping migrant women develop strong language skills, to the benefit of their daily life, promoting integration, tackling isolation and encouraging shared values and critical thinking\*.

Many factors contribute to the success of the project:

Xenia was created through a participatory and interactive approach, resulting from listening to the needs of English learners and English speaking participants.

The diversity of the participants and the unique atmosphere of trust during the sessions creates a welcoming environment in which all women's voices are valued.

With a proven model and a strong network of local and national partnerships, Xenia is now scaling its impact and offer by sharing the resources required to establish similar activities elsewhere, accompanied by a training and support to enable anyone wanting to adopt elements of Xenia's model to promote local social integration across Europe.

## STAKEHOLDERS AND PARTNERS

The beneficiaries of Xenia's activities are migrant, refugee, asylum-seeking and British women. English-speaking women from any background are valued participants in the programme as equals alongside women learning English.

Xenia's partnerships include:

- Hackney Museum – key delivery partners and source of links to heritage learning resources and local knowledge;
- Hackney ESOL Working Party – regular attendance at meetings of all Hackney ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) providers to ensure good understanding of local provision and hear alternative approaches to learning;
- European Network of Migrant Women and member organisations – ongoing communication with other organisations meeting migrant women's needs in diverse ways, to learn from and support each other.

In addition, an Advisory Board includes members from the following organisations: Hackney Museum, Refugee Action, Hope Not Hate, The Anti-University, Hackney Council, English for Action, Migrants Rights Network





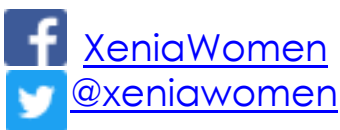
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