Bridge4Mothers
Training of Trainers (ToT) Digital Literacy & Gender-Informed Digital Upskilling

MODULE 1 — Understanding Vulnerable Mothers in VET

BRIDGE 4 MOTHERS

Co-funded by the European Union

Topics Covered

This module helps facilitators recognise barriers faced by vulnerable mothers in VET and respond with empathy, flexibility and practical support.

1 — **Vulnerable mothers in VET**

2 — **Structural barriers**

3 — **Caregiving & participation**

4 — **Digital exclusion**

5 — **Emotional wellbeing**

6 — **Social inclusion and participation**

7 — **Flexible learning support**

8 — **Inclusive facilitation**

Empathy, flexibility and accessibility help more learners take part, stay engaged and progress.

Introduction to Vulnerable Learners in VET

Vulnerable mothers may face overlapping social, economic, emotional and practical barriers that affect their access to vocational education and training.

Vulnerability may include

- Low income or unstable work
- Limited family or social support
- Caregiving responsibilities
- Interrupted learning pathways

Facilitators can support participation by

Recognising context:
avoid assumptions and listen first.

Building trust:
create a safe and respectful atmosphere.

Offering flexibility:
adapt activities where possible.

Encouraging progress:
celebrate small steps and persistence.

Vulnerability is not a lack of ability; it often reflects barriers around the learner.

Understanding Structural Barriers

Structural barriers are obstacles created by systems, resources or circumstances rather than by the learner's motivation or potential.

Common structural barriers

- Transport or distance to training
- Childcare costs or availability
- Financial pressure and time poverty
- Complex paperwork or service access

Helpful educational responses

Map barriers:
ask what makes attendance difficult.

Reduce friction:
simplify instructions and access routes.

Connect services:
signpost childcare, support or guidance.

Plan alternatives:
provide catch-up tasks or flexible options.

Removing barriers improves inclusion and makes participation more realistic.

Caregiving Responsibilities & Educational Participation

Mothers often balance learning with childcare, household tasks, appointments and emotional labour, which can make regular participation challenging.

Caregiving can affect

- Attendance and punctuality
- Energy and concentration
- Homework or study time
- Capacity to join longer sessions

Facilitators can help by

Normalising complexity:
recognise real-life responsibilities.

Using micro-tasks:
break learning into manageable steps.

Planning predictably:
share schedules and expectations early.

Providing recap routes:
offer summaries or reflection prompts.

Flexible structures help learners stay connected even when life is unpredictable.

Digital Exclusion & Access Challenges

Digital exclusion can limit access to learning, services and opportunities, especially when learners lack devices, internet, confidence or safe spaces to participate.

Digital exclusion may involve

- No reliable device or connection
- Low digital confidence
- Limited privacy or study space
- Fear of mistakes or online risks

Inclusive digital support includes

Start simply:
explain tools step by step.

Offer practice:
allow time to try, repeat and ask questions.

Provide alternatives:
combine online and offline access.

Protect safety:
discuss passwords, privacy and respectful communication.

Digital inclusion grows through access, practice, patience and support.

Emotional Wellbeing & Confidence

Emotional wellbeing influences learning. Stress, fatigue, low confidence or fear of judgement can affect participation, memory and motivation.

Learners may experience

- Stress or emotional overload
- Low confidence after setbacks
- Anxiety about learning again
- Difficulty asking for help

Confidence-building approaches

Use strengths:
identify what the learner already does well.

Create safety:
make questions and mistakes acceptable.

Celebrate progress:
notice effort, not only outcomes.

Encourage self-belief:
use positive and realistic language.

Confidence grows when learners feel seen, respected and capable.

Social Isolation, Inclusion & Flexible Learning

Some mothers may feel disconnected from education, employment networks or community life. Inclusive and flexible learning can reduce isolation and build belonging.

Risks of isolation

- Limited peer support
- Reduced access to information
- Lower motivation or confidence
- Feeling unseen or excluded

Flexible and inclusive learning can

Build belonging:
use warm introductions and group trust.

Offer choice:
vary participation methods and activities.

Encourage peer support:
pair learners and share experiences.

Respect pace:
allow learners to progress step by step.

Belonging strengthens participation, confidence and persistence.

Learner-Centred Support Strategies

Learner-centred support begins with the learner's context, goals, strengths and needs. It focuses on practical progress rather than one-size-fits-all solutions.

A learner-centred approach asks

- What does this learner need now?
- What strengths can we build on?
- What barriers can be reduced?
- What support is realistic and respectful?

Practical support strategies

Set small goals:
agree achievable next steps.

Check understanding:
use simple language and examples.

Use varied methods:
visual, verbal and practical tasks.

Follow up:
review progress and adjust support.

Support is most effective when it is practical, respectful and responsive.

Creating Accessible Learning Environments

Accessible learning environments help vulnerable mothers participate with dignity, confidence and realistic support.

Key facilitator practices

1 **Listen first**

Understand the learner's situation before suggesting solutions.

2 **Be flexible**

Offer options for participation, pacing and follow-up.

3 **Use inclusive language**

Speak with respect, clarity and encouragement.

4 **Connect support**

Signpost services, resources and peer networks when useful.

Inclusive VET support helps learners overcome barriers, build confidence and move towards participation, learning and future opportunities.

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