

WOMANITYLEAP

Equipping youth workers to cultivate Multiple Intelligence competencies in young women for leadership and career readiness in the AI-dominated era



BRIDGING THE COMPETENCIES AND TALENTS OF YOUNG WOMEN AND THE DEMANDS OF THE JOB MARKET
NATIONAL REPORT: CYPRUS

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WOMANITYLEAP IS BUILT AROUND ONE PRACTICAL MISSION: YOUTH WORKERS GET BETTER TOOLS TO RECOGNISE DIVERSE STRENGTHS, AND YOUNG WOMEN GET CLEARER, MORE CONFIDENT PATHWAYS FROM TALENT TO SKILLS TO OPPORTUNITIES.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

WomanityLEAP is a 24-month Erasmus+ project which supports youth workers to nurture every kind of talent based on an innovative Multiple Intelligence concept, and to help young women (16–29) grow into confident, capable leaders with real opportunities in a changing, AI-shaped world. It is ran by 6 partnering organizations located in Bulgaria, Belgium, Spain, Cyprus, Latvia & Serbia.

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ABOUT THE MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCE (MI) CONCEPT

Why Multiple Intelligences?

- AI and automation are reshaping jobs and skills requirements
- Human strengths become more valuable: creativity, judgment, empathy, collaboration, leadership
- Many young women still face barriers (confidence, stereotypes, access, and limited career exposure)
- Youth workers need a practical framework to recognise strengths fairly and translate them into opportunity

The traditional lens:

- Modern education has been heavily influenced by the IQ scale and narrow measures of “smart”
- This shaped testing, grading, and what society rewards
- Strengths that don’t fit IQ-style measurement often stayed invisible: creative, emotional, leadership and practical capabilities

The MI concept:

- MI reframes intelligence as multiple capacities, not one score
- Everyone has a unique profile of strengths that can be developed
- WomanityLEAP turns this into a youth work tool for guidance, confidence and career direction

THE QUESTION ISN’T IF I’M INTELLIGENT, BUT WHICH INTELLIGENCES I CAN GROW AND APPLY.

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INTRODUCTION OF THE CONDUCTED ACTIVITIES

Structured Interviews

The structured interviews were conducted individually on a one-to-one basis to ensure confidentiality, comfort and in-depth discussion.

Interviews with the young women were carried out online via Zoom. This format was selected to provide a safe and accessible environment, allowing participants to join from a space where they felt comfortable sharing their experiences and perspectives.

The interviews with youth workers were conducted face-to-face. This approach allowed for more direct interaction, facilitated deeper professional dialogue, and enabled a more dynamic exchange of views based on their field experience.

The first session of the workgroup was conducted via Zoom, as this was the most convenient and practical option for all participants. The online format ensured flexibility and accommodated different schedules while still allowing for structured discussion and collaborative exchange. All 10 experts participated in the same workgroup session, which enabled a comprehensive and multi-perspective dialogue on the topics discussed, fostering interaction and collective reflection among participants.

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NATONAL CONTEXT

What is the general unemployment at the given moment in Cyprus?

2025 data show that the overall unemployment rate in Cyprus was 4-5%, part of a downward trend from 4.5% a year earlier. Female unemployment was slightly higher than male (4.2% vs. 3.8%). Youth unemployment (ages 15–24) remains significantly higher, around ~14.7%.

What is the gender pay gap?

Cyprus continues to exhibit a significant gender pay gap. Recent figures show that women on average earn less than men across many sectors, especially at higher salary levels (e.g., finance, ICT, healthcare). Independent metrics also estimate a gender pay gap of around 10–12%, meaning women's average hourly earnings remain below those of men.

The specific barriers young women face in Cyprus?

Young women in Cyprus encounter a combination of structural, cultural, and practical barriers including gender stereotypes that influence career expectations and hiring practices. Employers may discriminate against mothers or women of reproductive age, despite EU protections.

In terms of labour market, limited formal career guidance through schools and vocational training systems and skills mismatches between education output and employer needs (e.g., digital, technical skills).

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Social & Psychological Barriers such as lower confidence reported by young women about career choices and unclear pathways and family pressures that may push young women toward “safe” or traditional careers instead of emerging fields.

Women with caring responsibilities, migrants, and those with fewer educational opportunities are disproportionately affected. Lack of affordable childcare and supportive workplace policies compounds these barriers.

What skills are in general in shortage?

- Digital skills & ICT competency
- Hybrid interdisciplinary skills: combining technical, social, and creative capabilities.
- Communication, problem-solving & adaptability

What other relevant aspects are influential for young women to find jobs

Cyprus produces a relatively high share of tertiary graduates, but many lack practical digital, financial, or workplace-oriented competencies.

Women participate in the labour market at a lower rate than men (e.g., ~60% female participation vs. ~71% male). Part-time employment is more common among women, adding to income and career progression disparities.

Skills mismatch is cited as a key risk for economic competitiveness and overall growth. Reforms aim to better connect education, vocational training, and employer needs.

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How AI influences Cyprus's labor market

1.Positive Influences

- AI is increasing demand for digital literacy, adaptability, and learning agility.
- It can act as a productivity tool and open opportunities for digital entrepreneurship and creative roles.
- AI can support personalised educational and career guidance if integrated properly.

2.Challenges and Risks

- There is a risk that overreliance on AI might reduce critical thinking development if not balanced with human cognitive engagement.
- Routine and administrative roles - many of which have been female-dominated - may be more exposed to automation pressures.
- Structural adaptation to AI requires targeted upskilling policies and better employer-education alignment.

STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS INPUT

Structured Interviews with young women

1st interview: The interviewee is a 25-year-old bisexual woman with a Bachelor's degree from an American university and a Master's degree from the University of Cyprus.

The barriers she addressed:

- **Lack of Recognition:** The participant expressed strong feelings of anxiety and frustration regarding limited employment opportunities. She believes that there is a structural and institutional gap in recognizing artists' professional status

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and that the sector often adopts technical and superficial approaches, undervaluing the broader intellectual and emotional competencies required.

- **Main Career Difficulties:** There is a lack of communication between universities and the labor market, which makes it difficult for students to apply their academic learning effectively in real workplace settings.

- **Impact of AI on the Job Market:** She recognizes that AI is influencing the labour market. AI tools are increasingly used for technical aspects of production and that results in the reduction of some job roles but she finds AI as a source of inspiration and a way to reduce the cost in specific production areas.

Self-Identified Talents: She identifies her talents as emotional, organizational. She identifies as having strong time and communication management skills, curiosity and intellectual interest in the world and strong social intelligence. Her profile reflects both cognitive and emotional competencies, as well as creative and managerial skills.

Talents She Wishes to Be Recognized For in the Workplace:

- Emotional awareness and empathy
- Intellectual curiosity
- Skills that are difficult to measure through conventional performance indicators

She highlights that many of her competencies (e.g., empathy, emotional intelligence, creative synthesis) are not easily quantified, and therefore are often overlooked in formal evaluation systems.

Application of Talents in Work: She believes she can use her talents, but this depends heavily on the work environment. Specifically, she can apply her socio-emotional skills with colleagues and integrate them to enhance artistic outcomes.

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Skills for the Future: She believes that future professionals should know how to use AI and new digital tools and develop their adaptability and cognitive skill set.

Proposed Training for Young Women

1.Gender Awareness and Professional Barriers

- Understanding limitations caused by gender stereotypes
- Recognizing how professionalism and technical skills are often questioned in women
- Developing critical awareness of systemic bias

2.Multi-Modal Presentation Skills

- Teaching how to present the same topic through multiple techniques, sources, and formats
- Allowing individuals to approach content in ways that align with their personal strengths.

2nd interview: The participant is a 29-year-old woman, a contract public-sector employee in education, and mother of a 13-month-old baby. She holds a degree and a Master's in Education and has completed several distance-learning pedagogical seminars.

The barriers she addressed:

- **Recognition and Career Advancement:** She feels that her personal talents - especially communication with parents and children, collaboration, creativity, and arts - are not recognized in terms of career advancement.

In the public system, promotions are based mainly on measurable criteria (degrees, years of service, ranking lists), rather than personal skills or interests. While she feels appreciated in her immediate environment, institutional advancement depends strictly on formal qualifications.

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She also reports:

- Excessive and sometimes unnecessary control.
- Limited responsiveness to her suggestions or initiatives.

- **Main Carrer Difficulties:** She plans to pursue a PhD for both personal fulfillment and career advancement. However, she faces significant challenges due to financial limitations, motherhood responsibilities and childcare demands, physical distance from public universities.

- **Impact of AI on the Job Market:** She sees AI as a supportive tool rather than a threat in her profession. It speeds up routine administrative tasks, provides alternative ideas and solutions, helps her move beyond stereotypical questions or approaches. However, she notes that AI indirectly influences children's stimuli and exposure and parents' expectations.

Self-Identified Talents: communication skills, collaboration and teamwork, creativity and engagement with the arts, organization and time management, positivity and adaptability, assertiveness and self-advocacy.

She would especially like her interpersonal communication skills to be recognized and potentially open pathways into counseling or professional advancement roles.

Proposed Training for Young Women

- Career counseling focused on future-demand professions and personal interests
- Information about legal professional rights
- Guidance on handling interview questions related to motherhood and family plans
- Basic financial literacy and savings programs from a young age
- Awareness of long-term economic planning

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Structured Interviews with Youth Workers

1st interview: Male participant, 28 years old. He designs and facilitates workshops, conducts research activities, and supports young people in developing transversal skills. He works mainly with youth aged 16–30 from diverse social and educational backgrounds.

Challenges Young Women face:

According to him, the most common challenges young women bring to youth work include:

- Low self-confidence
- Uncertainty about career paths
- Limited exposure to opportunities
- Difficulty recognising and articulating their own skills

He also identifies broader national barriers such as gender stereotypes, limited career guidance, and difficulties in transitioning from education to employment. Structural labour-market inequalities and strong social expectations are the hardest barriers to address through youth work alone.

Imact of AI on the job market

He observes that:

- Routine jobs are decreasing.
- New roles are emerging that require creativity, adaptability, and digital skills.

AI and digitalisation are increasing the need for:

- Digital literacy
- Critical thinking
- Adaptability
- Communication skills

Young women most at risk are those with limited digital access, fewer educational opportunities, or language and social barriers.

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Emerging Opportunities:

He identifies new opportunities in:

- Remote work
- Digital entrepreneurship
- Communication-related roles
- Interdisciplinary careers combining social and digital skills

Key Competencies for Employability

Most critical competencies today:

- Communication
- Teamwork
- Problem-solving
- Digital literacy
- Self-management

Competencies currently underdeveloped or overlooked:

- Leadership
- Negotiation
- Self-confidence
- Strategic thinking

He emphasizes that personal competencies (self-awareness, emotional regulation) are essential for resilience and informed career choices. Relational competencies (communication, leadership, cultural awareness) are equally important, as most careers require collaboration.

Increasingly relevant applied competencies include:

- Digital communication
- Basic AI literacy
- Creativity
- Project management

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Youth Work Methods and Gaps:

To help young women identify strengths, he uses:

- Reflection exercises
- Competence-mapping
- Group discussions
- Experiential learning

Debates, simulations, and teamwork activities are particularly effective in developing “invisible” skills.

However, he reports lacking:

- Simple competence-assessment tools
- Structured frameworks linking skills to concrete career pathways

View on a Multiple Intelligence Competence Framework

He finds the idea highly relevant, as it helps recognize diverse talents and motivates young people who may not perform well in traditional academic settings.

To better support young women in an AI-driven labour market, he would need:

- Practical training materials
- Career guidance tools
- Stronger collaboration with employers and mentors

2nd Interview: The participant is a 36 years-old woman who works as a youth worker in Cyprus within NGO and community-based programmes focused on employability, social inclusion, and non-formal education. She supports young people, including women aged 16-29, in identifying their needs and navigating education and employment pathways.

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Challenges Young Women face:

The most common challenges include:

- Low self-confidence and fear of failure
- Lack of career clarity and anxiety about the future
- Limited work experience
- Family and societal pressure to choose “safe” or traditional careers
- Mental health challenges
- Financial insecurity

Structural barriers in Cyprus include gender stereotypes, limited career guidance in schools, a small and conservative labour market, lack of affordable childcare, and strong expectations around family roles.

The hardest barriers to address through youth work alone are low wages, precarious employment, gender pay gaps, and limited childcare infrastructure.

Imact of AI on the job market:

AI and digitalisation are:

- Reducing entry-level and routine jobs
- Increasing demand for hybrid roles combining technical, creative, and social skills

AI is increasing the importance of:

- Digital literacy
- Adaptability
- Critical thinking
- Problem-solving
- Lifelong learning

Employers increasingly value the ability to work with AI tools rather than relying solely on deep technical expertise.

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Young Women Most at Risk include:

- Young women with limited digital access
- Those with lower educational attainment
- Migrant backgrounds
- Learning difficulties
- Caring responsibilities
- Rural residence
- Weak English-language skills

Emerging Opportunities in:

- Digital content creation
- Online entrepreneurship
- Remote work
- Green jobs
- AI-supported creative roles
- Social innovation

Critical Competencies for Employability

Most critical competencies today:

- Self-awareness
- Communication
- Adaptability
- Digital confidence
- Emotional resilience
- Collaboration
- Initiative
- Continuous learning

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Underdeveloped or overlooked competencies:

- Emotional regulation
- Decision-making
- Leadership
- Negotiation skills
- Recognition of one's own strengths
- Creative and naturalistic intelligences (often undervalued in formal education)

Personal competencies are described as foundational for career readiness, particularly for managing rejection, uncertainty, and change. Relational competencies are considered extremely important in Cyprus, where professional opportunities are often influenced by networks and relationships.

Applied competencies becoming increasingly relevant include:

- Creative thinking
- Basic AI literacy
- Digital content creation
- Data awareness
- Environmental awareness

Methods Used in Youth Work

To help young women identify their strengths, she uses:

- Reflective exercises
- Storytelling
- Group discussions
- Peer feedback
- Role-playing
- Mentoring conversations

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Gaps and Needs

She reports lacking:

- Clear competence-assessment tools
- Structured frameworks to translate soft skills into language understandable to employers
- Practical ways to connect competencies with concrete career pathways in an AI-driven labour market

She finds the idea of a Multiple Intelligence Competence Framework highly relevant, as it promotes a holistic and inclusive recognition of diverse talents.

To better support young women, she would need:

- Updated training on AI trends
- Practical tools and accessible career roadmaps
- Stronger links with employers
- Resources tailored to young women with fewer opportunities

3rd Interview: The participant is a 45 year old woman works as a youth worker with young women aged 16–20.

Key Challenges Faced by Young Women vary by age group:

- **Ages 16-18: Strong emotional intensity and sensitivity**
- **Ages 20+: Feeling that they are not taken seriously, especially in male-dominated sectors in Cyprus. Many struggle to establish their professional identity and prove their value.**

Impact of AI and Digitalisation: She sees AI as a useful tool that can facilitate work tasks. However, she expresses concern that there is an overreliance on AI may reduce critical thinking. Young people may stop engaging intellectually if they depend too much on AI tools.

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She notes that both men and women are affected by AI, but women may feel additional pressure to compete with AI while also proving their competence in male-dominated environments.

If used responsibly, AI can support women's professional development, enhance productivity and allow them to benefit from digital tools while still maintaining critical thinking and personal growth

Main Barriers in the National Context include:

- Gender stereotypes
- Employers' reluctance to hire women with children

She emphasizes that family-related expectations and motherhood remain major structural barriers. Youth workers have limited ability to intervene in family-related pressures, especially when young women try to balance career and motherhood.

Critical Competencies for Employability

- Interpersonal skills
- Cognitive skills
- Social-emotional skills

Underdeveloped or overlooked competencies:

- Interpersonal communication
- Persuasion and leadership skills

She stresses that without self-awareness and emotional regulation, young women struggle to improve and grow professionally.

Relational competencies (communication, leadership, cultural awareness) are considered extremely important, as women must navigate diverse personalities and social dynamics.

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Applied competencies increasingly relevant:

- Creativity (across all sectors)
- AI-related skills

Methods Used in Practice

To help young women identify their strengths, she uses:

- Dialogue
- Tailored activities based on individual interests and personalities
- Challenging participants to step outside their comfort zones

Gaps and Needs

She identifies a lack of:

- Psychological knowledge and tools
- Cultural awareness frameworks

She finds a Multiple Intelligence Competence Framework highly relevant, as it would help reach more young women and recognize diverse strengths.

To better support young women in an AI-driven labour market, she would need:

- Education on responsible AI use
- Tools for teaching others how to use AI effectively and critically

NATIONAL WORKGROUP SESSION INPUT

Awareness of multiple intelligence as a concept varied among participants. Some were familiar with emotional and applied intelligence, particularly those working in education, EU projects, or training environments.

IQ testing was mostly associated with school experiences or recruitment processes. In some workplaces, cognitive reasoning tests (verbal, inductive, deductive reasoning) are used during hiring.

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Participants expressed mixed views of IQ Testing:

- IQ tests can be useful for measuring specific cognitive abilities required in certain professions (e.g., police, crisis management, IT, military).
- However, they are seen as limited and not fully representative of human intelligence.
- Concerns were raised about oversimplification and categorisation of candidates.

There was broad agreement that intelligence should include emotional, relational, artistic, and practical dimensions - not only cognitive reasoning.

AI Impact on Employment & Skills

Participants consistently described AI as a “double-edged coin.”

Positive Aspects:

- AI is a useful professional tool.
- It increases productivity.
- It can support entrepreneurship, especially for young women with fewer resources.
- It offers low-cost entry points for business creation (e.g., AI-based services, start-ups).
- In education, AI could provide personalised career guidance.

Concerns:

- Risk of reduced critical thinking.
- Over-automation of problem-solving.
- Replacement of administrative and secretarial roles (traditionally female-dominated).
- Pressure to constantly adapt to technological change.

AI was seen not as a temporary trend, but as a structural transformation similar to the arrival of the internet.

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Sectors & Labour Market Changes

Potential Growth Sectors:

- Environmental sciences
- Health
- Engineering
- Defence-related sectors
- Entrepreneurship and AI-based services
- Higher-level managerial roles requiring reporting and analysis

Positions at Risk:

- Administrative/secretarial roles
- Routine support roles
- Entry-level advisory roles (e.g., chatbot replacing basic legal assistant tasks)

Participants stressed that Cyprus is not yet fully replacing entire professions, but gradual transformation is expected.

Barriers Facing Young Women

Structural Barriers:

- Gender stereotypes (women channelled into “safe” or administrative roles)
- Employer bias against mothers or women of reproductive age
- Questions about family planning during interviews
- Limited childcare infrastructure
- Limited access to entrepreneurship support in Cyprus

Cultural Barriers:

- Family expectations
- Social pressure regarding motherhood and career balance

Labour Market Barriers:

- Experience requirements
- Limited job diversity in a small labour market
- Economic sustainability concerns in arts-related fields

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Barriers to Exploring Talents

Young women often:

- Ignore or internalise barriers.
- Feel channelled into “acceptable” professions.
- Lack structured support to identify and cultivate diverse intelligence domains.
- Face economic constraints that limit risk-taking.

Multiple Intelligence Framework Reflections

Personal Intelligence Undervalued Domains:

- Intrapersonal intelligence (self-awareness under pressure)
- Emotional intelligence

Participants noted that emotional regulation and self-awareness are critical but insufficiently recognised in workplaces.

Relational Intelligence:

While not extensively detailed in all responses, leadership and persuasive competencies were implied as underdeveloped areas, particularly due to gendered socialisation.

Applied Intelligence:

Creativity and AI-interaction skills were highlighted as increasingly important. However, arts and creative professions were seen as less economically sustainable compared to STEM.

Effective approaches for supporting non-traditional intelligence include:

- Context-based adaptation (urban vs rural realities)
- Entrepreneurship seminars
- Early education on multiple intelligences
- Personalised support
- Integrating MI education into school curricula

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Participants emphasized that teaching multiple intelligences in schools would help young people understand that professional success can be achieved through diverse pathways - not only academic performance.

Recommendations for Improving the MI Competence Framework

1. Stronger integration with labour market realities.
2. AI literacy and responsible AI use.
3. Entrepreneurship skills development.
4. Workplace behavioural literacy (understanding power dynamics, boundaries, rights).
5. Guidance on navigating unsafe or discriminatory environments.
6. Financial literacy and sustainability awareness.

SUGGESTED CHANGES OVER THE MI COMPETENCE FRAMEWORK BASED ON THE INPUT

1.Stronger Connection with Labour Market Realities

Participants emphasized that the MI Competence Framework should:

- Be more explicitly linked to employability pathways.
- Translate intelligence domains into concrete career examples.
- Include practical guidance on how each intelligence type can be monetised or applied professionally.

2.Inclusion of Workplace Navigation Skills

Workgroup members recommended adding elements that prepare young women to:

- Recognize unhealthy or discriminatory work environments.
- Understand power dynamics and behavioural patterns in the workplace.
- Know their labour rights and when to leave unsafe environments.

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3.Greater Emphasis on Emotional & Intrapersonal Intelligence

Emotional and intrapersonal intelligence were identified as undervalued but essential.

The framework should:

- Strengthen self-awareness, emotional regulation, and resilience.
- Highlight stress management and confidence-building.
- Recognize these skills as employability assets, not “soft” add-ons.

4.Entrepreneurship & Financial Literacy

The workgroup recommended integrating:

- Entrepreneurial thinking
- Basic financial literacy
- Practical guidance on starting small-scale or AI-supported businesses

5.Early Educational Integration

Participants suggested:

- Introducing multiple intelligences education at school level.
- Helping young people understand early that success can be achieved through diverse intelligence pathways, not only academic performance or IQ scores.

This could reduce self-doubt and broaden career aspirations.

6.Context Sensibility

The framework should:

- Be adaptable to urban and rural realities.
- Consider cultural, gender, and socioeconomic factors.
- Address barriers such as family expectations, childcare, and limited local opportunities.

A “one-size-fits-all” model was seen as insufficient.

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CONCLUSIONS

Intelligence is multidimensional, but current recruitment and education systems remain overly focused on cognitive/IQ-based measurement.

AI is perceived as both an opportunity and a risk:

- It can democratize access to tools and entrepreneurship
- It may reduce critical thinking and automate routine roles, especially female-dominated administrative jobs

Gender stereotypes and motherhood-related discrimination remain central structural barriers for young women in Cyprus.

Emotional, relational, and intrapersonal competencies are critical for employability but under-recognized.

Youth workers need practical tools to:

- Assess diverse intelligence domains.
- Translate competencies into employability language.
- Support young women in navigating structural barriers.

The MI Competence Framework is considered highly relevant and necessary, but it must:

- Be operational, not only conceptual.
- Reflect AI-driven labour market transformations.
- Include empowerment, entrepreneurship, and workplace literacy elements.

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BRIDGING THE COMPETENCIES AND TALENTS OF YOUNG WOMEN AND THE DEMANDS OF THE JOB MARKET

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