



Deaconess
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Mentor's Handbook

Mentors for Young Roma Women's
Empowerment

Renato Vuk, Marjaana Toiviainen, Maria Dorofte, Anca
Enache, Saška Jovanović, Miglena Mihaylova

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Main author:

Sportsko učilište PESG - **Renato Vuk**

Other authors and experts:

Deaconess Foundation - **Marjaana Toiviainen, Maria Dorofte, Anca Enache**

Romni APS - **Saška Jovanović**

L.I.D.E.R. - Lichnosti Idei I Deystvia Za Efektivini Reshenia Sdruzhenie - **Miglena Mihaylova**

Copy-edited by **Alisa Manninen**

Layout: **Aron Madon**

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Foreword

The RomniME Mentor Handbook was created to celebrate and support the vital role mentors play in the lives of young Roma women. Mentorship opens space for learning, growth, and connection. It is about sharing knowledge, building trust, and encouraging confidence so that mentees can recognize and develop their own strengths.

This handbook grew out of the Mentors for Young Roma Women's Empowerment (RomniME) project, co-funded by the European Union through CERV-2023-EQUAL programme which builds on the resilience, creativity, and aspirations of Roma women. It brings together practical tools, suggestions, and reflections shaped by real experiences. The aim is to give mentors a resource that is both useful and inspiring, grounded in everyday realities yet open to different contexts.

We offer this handbook as a positive companion on your mentoring journey. Inside you will find guidance, methods, and ideas, but also opportunities to reflect and adapt. While each mentoring relationship will look different, they all carry the potential to create meaningful change, both for the mentee and the mentor.

Our hope is that this handbook supports you, encourages you, and reminds you of the impact mentoring can have. Each step you take with a mentee adds to a wider movement of empowerment, equality, and inclusion. Together, these efforts can grow into lasting change for individuals, communities, and society as a whole.

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PART 1: FOUNDATIONS & CONTEXT (Orientation units)

1. Introduction

1.1. What is the RomniME Project?

RomniME (Mentors for Young Roma Women's Empowerment) is a transnational project co-funded by the EU CERV-2023-EQUAL programme, aiming to empower young Roma women by increasing their access to rights, services, education, and opportunities through mentorship.

The project responds to deeply rooted inequalities and systemic barriers faced by Roma women across Europe, particularly at the intersection of ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic exclusion. RomniME builds a structured approach to mentorship, using tested methods, capacity-building, and research to enhance the self-determination, resilience, and visibility of Roma women.

Through mentor-mentee relationships, the project helps create personalised support paths, builds trust with institutions, and fosters a network of Roma and non-Roma allies working toward gender and ethnic equality. This is exactly how this Handbook is developed - based on the research, testing of the chosen approach and combining all findings, from three different perspectives, those of young Roma women, those of experts and mentors, and those of the staff working on the project itself.

This built a strong foundation for the development of a quality learning material that covers different perspectives and broad spectrum of topics and approaches to building strong relationships between mentors and mentees, as well as other people involved.

1.2. Purpose of this Handbook

This Handbook is a central outcome of the RomniME project. It is designed as a self-directed learning resource for mentors working with young Roma women – and a future training tool for broader replication.

Its purpose is to:

- Equip mentors with the knowledge, methods, and tools needed to support Roma women in diverse areas of life
- Promote culturally responsive, ethical, and sustainable mentoring practices
- Support long-term systemic change by building competent, confident, and reflective mentors

It reflects the findings from project research, piloting, and evaluation, combining theoretical insight with practical application.

1.3. Target groups and how to use it

The Handbook is intended for:

- Current and future mentors (Roma and non-Roma) supporting young Roma women, working in grassroots, NGO, community, education settings or similar Mentorship trainers and facilitators
- Civil society (and other) organisations seeking to launch or improve mentoring initiatives

This Handbook offers a structured yet flexible learning journey designed to guide mentors through approximately 20 hours of independent learning. It includes real-world mentoring methods that were developed and tested throughout the RomniME project, ensuring that every approach derives from practical experience. The content is organized into clear, competency-based modules that help mentors build the specific skills needed to support young Roma women effectively.

Alongside the theory, the Handbook provides practical tools, templates, and real-life case examples that mentors can apply directly to their work. Each module is enriched with self-assessment prompts and reflection activities, encouraging mentors to evaluate their own growth, adapt their approach, and deepen their awareness over time.

Whether used independently or within a structured training program, the Handbook is designed to support mentors not only in what they do, but in how they grow – for the benefit of both themselves and the mentees they accompany.

HOW TO USE IT

You can use this Handbook in several ways, depending on your needs:

As an individual mentor

- Follow the modules in order or focus on areas where you want to grow, it's up to you.
- Use the activities and reflection tools to deepen your self-awareness and readiness.
- As a part of the mentor training program
- Trainers or coordinators can use the handbook as a foundation for designing workshops or blended learning programs. Each module provides clear outcomes and activities that can be adapted for group delivery.
- As an organisational tool
- NGOs, community centres, and institutions can use this resource to set up, strengthen, or evaluate mentorship programs targeting Roma women.

1.4. Overview of handbook content

The next section focuses on the tips for navigating through the Mentor handbook.

Part 1 gives you the context - it's essential to understand why mentoring matters and what kind of challenges mentees and mentors face, and this part provides background and ethical landscape of mentoring in the RomniME context.

Part 2 of this handbook offers five competency-based modules, each with activities, outcomes, and self-assessment tools to help you track your learning. These modules are designed to strengthen the skills and awareness needed for impactful and ethical mentoring.

The first section introduces three core mentoring methods that were used, tested, and analyzed during the RomniME project. Each method is explained in depth, with practical tools as well as guidance on the competencies, attitudes, and behaviors that support effective mentoring.

The second section turns to intersectional practices, presenting them as central elements of mentoring relationships. Finally, the handbook concludes with a focus on monitoring and adaptation - a process that helps mentors and mentees learn from the current situation to continue improving together.

**You don't need to complete everything at once.
This is your learning space - come back to
different sections as your experience grows.**

1.5. About mentorship

In the RomniME project, mentorship is more than guidance, it is a mutual, human relationship based on trust, solidarity, and growth. It is a process of accompaniment, not authority. A mentor is not there to "fix" a mentee's life or replace family or professional support. Instead, the mentor walks alongside the mentee, offering encouragement, tools, and perspective while respecting her autonomy, culture, and lived reality.

RomniME's approach to mentorship is grounded in a belief of equity, not charity. Many Roma girls and young women experience deep structural inequalities, in education, employment, healthcare, housing, and/or civic life. Mentorship offers a way to open access to these spaces, but not by doing things for someone, rather by helping her feel confident and capable of doing these things independently, herself.

Mentors, whether Roma or non-Roma, come from different backgrounds and levels of experience. What unites them in RomniME is a shared commitment to listening, learning, and standing beside young Roma women in their personal journeys. This requires a high level of humility, patience, and sometimes discomfort, especially when confronting our own biases or systemic injustice. It also requires consistency, care, and emotional awareness.

Mentorship in RomniME is considered a two-way process as mentors grow too. As they support others, they also develop crucial skills, like communication skills, cultural awareness, and confidence in navigating complex systems. Many mentors report that the experience changes their own perspectives and deepens their connection to the communities they serve.

This makes mentorship what was always meant to be - a tool for social justice backed with a strong opportunity for personal development. It is a combination of the two elements, not solely focusing on the one. It is a quiet form of resistance, a long-term investment in visibility, equity, and hope.

2.Challenges & barriers

Mentoring young Roma women requires a clear-eyed understanding of the environment in which these relationships take place. Both mentees and mentors navigate complex, often unequal realities shaped by a mix of cultural expectations, systemic discrimination, limited institutional support, etc.

This section outlines some of the most pressing challenges and barriers that affect the success, sustainability, and emotional depth of mentoring relationships. By identifying these factors early, mentors can better prepare themselves not to avoid these difficulties, but to engage with them responsibly, empathetically, and realistically.

Understanding these challenges is not about focusing on deficits but rather about developing informed, resilient, and supportive approaches that meet mentees where they are, while also acknowledging the emotional and structural pressures mentors themselves may face.

2.1. Systemic barriers faced by young Roma women (education, discrimination, poverty, gender roles)

Young Roma women face complex and interconnected barriers across education, employment, health, housing, and civic life. RomniME's country-level research (conducted in Finland, Italy, and Bulgaria) uncovers the lived realities beneath these systems, while recent EU and Council of Europe reports confirm these barriers are widespread, persistent, and deeply systemic.

INSIGHTS FROM ROMNIME PROJECT IMPLEMENTED RESEARCH

Education

- The majority of participating Roma women had completed only 4 to 8 years of formal schooling, with very few continuing beyond lower secondary education. Less than 10% were engaged in any kind of vocational or adult education program at the time of the research. Country-level interviews revealed that early withdrawal from education was commonly linked to family expectations, early marriage, economic necessity, and negative school experiences. In some cases, women reported that school environments were not supportive or inclusive, particularly where discrimination or bullying occurred. Language barriers were also mentioned by participants in Finland and Italy, especially among those from migrant or stateless backgrounds.
- Mentors across all three countries noted that many mentees lacked basic digital skills and study habits, having been disconnected from formal education systems for years. This gap made it difficult to engage with traditional learning environments and limited access to upskilling programs or further training.

Widespread discrimination

- Discrimination was a recurring theme in all three RomniME research countries. Between 80% and 95% of participants reported experiencing some form of discrimination, either based on ethnicity, gender, or economic status and in at least one setting, including healthcare, education, employment, and public institutions. In Bulgaria and Italy in particular, women described being stereotyped, ignored, or spoken to disrespectfully in service settings. Some participants reported avoiding institutions entirely due to fear of mistreatment or prior negative experiences.
- A significant number of women also indicated they were unaware of anti-discrimination laws or complaint mechanisms available to them. This lack of information left many feeling powerless and contributed to low institutional trust. Mentors highlighted that in order to build confidence and advocacy capacity, mentees first needed safe spaces to process their experiences and access accurate information about their rights.

Economic exclusion

- According to the RomniME survey, employment rates among participating Roma women were 31% in Finland, 35% in Italy, and 55% in Bulgaria. The report notes that even when Roma women were employed, this work was often informal or undeclared, and typically lacked formal employment protections such as written contracts or access to health and social insurance.
- The research also highlights practical obstacles to participation in the labour market. Across all three countries, women identified childcare responsibilities, limited transportation options, and digital exclusion as significant barriers to accessing work or job training. Mentors involved in the project observed that these limitations affected not only employment but also self-confidence and long-term career planning.

Cultural & gender roles:

- The RomniME research found that many Roma women participating in the study had married or become mothers in their late teens. These early transitions into family life were often cited as reasons for leaving school or not pursuing employment. In all three country contexts, caregiving responsibilities were described as being primarily placed on women, with little institutional or familial support.
- The report also documented that traditional gender expectations continued to shape women's roles within the household and community. These roles significantly limited Roma women's time, autonomy, and perceived ability to engage in education, work, or public life. Mentors reported that for many mentees, such expectations were internalized from a young age, and rarely questioned in their immediate environment.

COMPLEMENTARY EVIDENCE FROM VERIFIED EU SOURCES

- According to the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, Roma women across Europe experience intersectional discrimination, rooted in both anti-Gypsyism and gender bias. This leads to systemic barriers in healthcare, education, employment, and housing, and contributes to lower life expectancy and political underrepresentation (FRA, 2019).
- The EU-MIDIS II survey reports that 50% of Roma youth aged 6-24 were not attending school. It also reveals that around 80% of Roma live below the poverty threshold and face systemic segregation in education and housing (FRA, 2019).
- Segregated schooling of Roma children remains a serious concern across the EU, as confirmed by the European Parliament's 2023 resolution. It notes that despite legal protections, structural practices like placing Roma children in separate schools or classes, sometimes justified by language or learning needs, continue widely. This systemic exclusion significantly reduces educational quality and increases the risk of early school leaving European Parliament resolution (European Parliament, 2023).
- In the labour market, recruitment discrimination is routine: Roma applicants are often excluded outright due to their ethnicity, leading many to rely on informal, seasonal employment (The Brussels Times, 2024).

This synthesis of RomniME findings and broader EU research paints a multidimensional picture of systemic exclusion that affects every aspect of Roma women's lives. For mentors, this means:

1. Recognizing the severity and interconnected nature of the barriers mentees face.
2. Equipping oneself with knowledge on systemic inequalities and legal rights.
3. Developing culturally aware and trauma-sensitive approaches.
4. Advocating for structural change through awareness, navigation support, and collaboration.



80%

of Roma
live below
the poverty
threshold

50 %

of Roma youth
(aged 6–24) are
not attending
school.

STRENGTHS AND RESILIENCE OF YOUNG ROMA WOMEN

While the barriers outlined above are real and deeply systemic, they do not capture the full picture of young Roma women's lives. Alongside exclusion, many demonstrate resilience, creativity, and aspirations that serve as powerful entry points for mentorship. Recognizing these strengths helps ensure that mentoring is not only about addressing disadvantages, but also about building on existing capacities and opportunities, which is, to say the least, equally important.

Commitment to family and community: While caregiving responsibilities are often a barrier, they also demonstrate young Roma women's strong sense of responsibility, solidarity, and organizational skills. Many show remarkable ability to manage multiple roles in challenging conditions, which can be a powerful foundation for leadership and long-term goal-setting when supported.

Cultural knowledge and identity: Even in the face of prejudice, Roma women often draw pride and strength from cultural traditions, music, language, and community values. These assets provide belonging, resilience, and creativity that mentors can affirm and integrate into learning and empowerment processes.

Aspirations for change and education: Despite high dropout rates, many Roma women express determination to re-engage in learning and to create better opportunities for their children. This drive toward education and self-improvement demonstrates resilience but also a strong readiness to seize opportunities when they are made accessible and supportive.

Understanding these realities is essential for designing mentorship that not only addresses barriers but also recognizes existing strengths. By acknowledging both the challenges and the resilience of young Roma women, mentors can create approaches that are relevant, empowering, and sustainable. Such mentorship builds on aspirations and cultural assets while helping to dismantle systemic exclusion, thus fostering change that is both personal and structural.

2.2. Expectations and lived experiences of mentors

This section provides insights collected through the RomniME research, focused on the experts and mentors and their lived experiences, but also their idea and general opinion on the crucial segments of mentoring and working with young Roma women.

These experts work with Roma communities in roles such as mentoring, education, social support, and advocacy.

1. Social complexity of mentees' lives

Experts reported that many young Roma women face overlapping forms of exclusion, including early school leaving, early marriage, economic dependence, and limited access to healthcare or digital services. Mentors must often navigate these realities while trying to support mentees' goals, which can be emotionally and logistically demanding.

2. Time and trust

Establishing trust was a recurring theme. Experts stated that Roma women may initially be hesitant to engage due to past experiences of discrimination or broken institutional promises. As a result, mentorship cannot be short-term or superficial, rather it requires commitment and continuity.

3. Ambiguity of the mentor's role

Mentors are often placed in positions that exceed traditional expectations, demanding of them to start acting as informal advisors, counselors, translators of institutional systems, and advocates. The lack of clear role definition, combined with emotional labor, was identified as a significant strain.

4. Inadequate support for mentors

Several experts expressed that mentors were not provided with structured support such as peer supervision, feedback mechanisms, or training. This leads to emotional exhaustion and limits long-term program sustainability - this segment is further analyzed in the next section of this Handbook, section 2.3. Challenges in mentor recruitment and retention.

5. Recruitment and representation

Interviewees highlighted the lack of Roma mentors as a key limitation. While Roma-led mentorship can foster authenticity and relatability, few systems are in place to recruit, train, and retain Roma women in mentorship roles.

The following are more general insights gathered from desk research and from various online sources related to Roma people in general, as well as Roma women as a key target group.

A foundational source is the Council of Europe's Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveler inclusion (2020-2025), which highlights the imperative for culturally safe environments in social inclusion work (Council of Europe, 2020). The plan acknowledges the ongoing effects of anti-Gypsyism, manifested through hate speech, poverty, and systemic prejudice which mentors must be equipped to understand and navigate. It calls for culturally aware and inclusive approaches, ensuring that mentors can engage effectively without sustaining harm.

Complementing this, the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERAC) operates mentoring initiatives like the 2024-2025 Media Mentoring Program in Serbia, which pairs Roma media professionals with experienced mentors. This initiative highlights the importance of cultural credibility and shared identity, as mentors support mentees in amplifying Roma voices and navigating mainstream media contexts (ERAC, 2025).

The insights from mentors and experts highlight that successful mentorship with young Roma women demands much more than goodwill - role clarity, emotional readiness, trust-building skills, and ongoing institutional support. Without these, mentors often find themselves overwhelmed, isolated, or unsure of their impact. These realities must shape how future mentoring programs are designed, structured, and supported, not only focusing on mentees, but also acknowledging the needs of mentors themselves.

2.3. Challenges in mentor recruitment and retention

Securing the involvement of committed prepared mentors remains one of the most persistent challenges in mentoring initiatives focused on Roma women. Both the practical experience of RomniME project staff and the expert interviews confirm that identifying and retaining mentors is often more difficult than initially anticipated.

INSIGHTS FROM THE ROMNIME EXPERT INTERVIEWS

According to experts and staff involved in the RomniME project, several recurring issues affect mentor engagement across all three participating countries:

- **Lack of time and compensation:** Project staff observed that even individuals who were highly motivated to mentor were unable to commit due to competing professional and personal responsibilities. Without financial compensation or institutional flexibility, mentorship has become an unrealistic burden, particularly for professionals already working in overloaded education or social service sectors.
- **Emotional demands and inadequate support:** Experts noted that mentoring Roma women (many of whom have experienced trauma, exclusion, and complex social barriers) requires emotional resilience and long-term dedication. However, mentors often lacked access to supportive structures such as supervision, debriefing, or peer exchange. The emotional weight of the role, coupled with insufficient guidance or follow-up, was a major obstacle.

- Role ambiguity and lack of preparation: Mentors were sometimes hesitant to engage because the expectations were not clearly defined. Without adequate onboarding, training, or tools, potential mentors were unsure of what was expected of them, or whether they were equipped to provide meaningful support.
- Limited representation: Finding Roma women mentors was especially difficult in areas where few held visible or leadership roles. Experts stressed that although representation is essential, the infrastructure to recruit, train, and retain Roma mentors is weak in many communities, limiting long-term sustainability.
- These observations, made consistently by staff and national experts in Finland, Bulgaria, and Italy, highlight the systemic nature of the problem. Mentors were often willing, but unable to participate under the current conditions.

BROADER CONTEXT FROM ROMA-SPECIFIC RESEARCH

This European Parliament-initiated monitoring initiative emphasizes the importance of capacity-building within Roma civil society, including mentorship roles within grassroots organizations. The report identifies that while mentorship has empowering potential, most national inclusion strategies lack stable systems for training, recruitment, and retention of Roma mentors (Roma Civil Monitor, 2021–2025). This reinforces the RomniME finding on limited representation and inadequate support structures.

Similarly, the Council of Europe Strategic Action Plan (2020–2025) calls for greater institutional investment in mentoring frameworks, especially those aimed at Roma youth and women. It warns that without policy-level recognition and support, mentoring efforts remain short-term, under-resourced, and disconnected from national inclusion strategies (Council of Europe, 2024).

Efforts to engage mentors cannot rely on motivation alone. They must include structured support, clear expectations, financial and institutional incentives, and mechanisms for emotional and professional guidance. Without these, mentors – particularly those from Roma backgrounds – face unsustainable demands, making meaningful participation unlikely and short-lived.

2.4. Emotional demands, burnout risk, and institutional gaps

Mentorship, particularly in contexts of marginalization and structural exclusion, requires more than interpersonal goodwill. The emotional weight of mentoring young Roma women, many of whom have experienced discrimination, trauma, or generational disadvantage, can place significant strain on those offering guidance. The RomniME research revealed that without appropriate institutional frameworks, mentors often operate in emotionally taxing conditions that put them at risk of burnout and disengagement.

INSIGHTS FROM THE ROMNIME EXPERT INTERVIEWS

Across interviews with staff and experts in Finland, Italy, and Bulgaria, several consistent themes emerged:

- Emotional burden of the role: Mentors reported needing to manage not just logistical tasks or guidance but the complex emotions and vulnerabilities of mentees such as grief, exclusion, and self-doubt. These dynamics required not only empathy, but emotional resilience, and many mentors felt unprepared to carry that weight without support.
- Lack of structured support: A recurring issue across countries was the absence of regular supervision, debriefing opportunities, or professional check-ins. Mentors often worked in isolation, without clear systems for emotional support or peer exchange, leading to a sense of being “left alone” with difficult situations.
- Institutional under-recognition: Experts noted that mentors, even those working voluntarily or informally, frequently received little recognition or validation from the institutions involved. This lack of visibility not only affected motivation but signaled that their emotional investment was undervalued.

- No safety net: When facing emotionally intense scenarios, eg. stories of domestic violence, racism, or deep personal hardship, mentors often had no clear protocol for how to respond or where to refer mentees. The absence of formal channels and backup left mentors vulnerable to emotional overload.

These reflections reveal a deeper systemic problem: the emotional demands placed on mentors are rarely matched by institutional, or any sort of preparedness or care, for that matter.

BROADER CONTEXT FROM ROMA-SPECIFIC RESEARCH

The emotional burden placed on community-based mentors, particularly Roma women, has been recognized in multiple European-level initiatives. The Council of Europe's Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion (2020-2025) emphasizes that community empowerment roles often fall disproportionately on Roma women, and without structured support, these roles become emotionally unsustainable. It recommends that states establish support systems such as regular supervision, peer support, and formal recognition to prevent overload and burnout (Council of Europe, 2020).

Similarly, the Roma Civil Monitor (2021-2025) highlights in its 2022 synthesis report that Roma civil society actors frequently face structural challenges - such as fragmented national strategy implementation, limited coordination with public institutions, and restricted access to capacity-building opportunities-which undermine the sustainability of their grassroots initiatives (Roma Civil Monitor, 2025).

Mentors cannot be expected to absorb emotional strain without formal support. The demands of working with vulnerable Roma women are real, often intense, and currently underserved by most institutional frameworks. Preventing burnout and safeguarding the well-being of mentors requires clear protocols, recognition, and emotional infrastructure, not as an aftermath, but as a core element of any mentorship model.

3. Roles and responsibilities

Mentorship is most effective when roles, responsibilities, and expectations are clear and mutually understood. In RomniME, the mentoring relationship is not hierarchical but grounded in mutual respect, cultural awareness, and a shared commitment to growth. This section explores the key dimensions of the mentor-mentee relationship, offering clarity on each person's role, setting ethical boundaries, and defining the scope of responsibility. It also emphasizes the importance of consent, confidentiality, and professional limits, especially critical when working with mentees who may have experienced breaches of trust in the past. Understanding these roles isn't just administrative; it's foundational to creating safe, empowering, and sustainable mentorships.

3.1. Roles of mentors and mentees

In the mentor-mentee relationship, clarity around roles is essential. Both mentors and mentees bring expectations and responsibilities into the relationship. When these are openly discussed and respected, the mentoring process becomes more effective, equitable, and empowering for all involved.

ROLE OF THE MENTOR

Mentors are not experts who provide answers or direction from a place of authority. Instead, they act as facilitators and allies, individuals who walk alongside mentees and support them in identifying goals and navigating challenges. The following are some of the most important tasks of a mentor before and during the mentoring process.

Creating a safe, culturally responsive environment

Mentors are expected to cultivate spaces where young Roma women feel respected, emotionally secure, and culturally understood. This begins with cultural humility, defined as the practice of ongoing self-reflection on how one's identity, power, and privilege influence mentoring relationships.

MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership emphasizes that culturally responsive mentors recognize how systems of oppression shape lived experiences, and that ignoring these dynamics can weaken trust and cause relationships to end prematurely (Mentor, 2022).

Supporting mentee-led goal setting

Mentors support mentees in defining their own objectives, whether educational, personal, or professional, and in developing practical steps to reach them. This empowerment-based model respects the mentee's autonomy and decision-making power. The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) highlights the value of such learner-driven approaches, which enhance self-confidence and engagement.

Maintaining ethical boundaries and referral awareness

It's important that mentors remain within the limits of their competence and refer mentees to appropriate services when more specialized support is needed. This professional boundary-setting is a core principle in mentoring ethics (European Mentoring and Coaching Council & Association for Coaching, 2016).

Engaging in reflective practice

Mentoring can involve emotional labor, particularly when working with individuals who have experienced discrimination, exclusion, or trauma. To maintain their wellbeing and ethical grounding, mentors are encouraged to engage in regular self-reflection, and, where possible, seek peer supervision. This is aligned with international mentoring standards, which emphasize reflective practice as a core ethical responsibility (International Coaching Federation, 2024).

ROLE OF THE MENTEE

Mentees are not passive recipients of advice, they are active participants who help shape the mentoring relationship and take ownership of their own development, on any level. The following are some of the most important tasks of the mentees in the mentoring process.

Defining and pursuing their own objectives

Mentees are encouraged to set their own goals, identify their needs, and drive their own progress. The mentor's role is to support this process through attentive listening, encouragement, and accountability, but not direction. Effective mentoring begins when mentees feel empowered to take the initiative and define success in their own terms (Mentor, 2022).

Engaging transparently and respectfully

Mutual respect and open communication are essential to mentoring. Mentees are encouraged to express their expectations, ask questions, share concerns, and give feedback. The International Coaching Federation emphasizes the importance of honesty, open dialogue, and co-created goals to maintain trust and ethical alignment in mentoring relationships (International Coaching Federation, 2024).

Trusting gradually

Trust is not automatic, particularly for young Roma women who may have experienced exclusion, discrimination, or institutional failure. Mentees are not expected to open up immediately, but instead, mentors must demonstrate reliability and respect, allowing trust to build naturally over time. Portal Mentor recommends that mentors working with marginalized youth approach relationships with patience, consistency, and empathy (Mentor, 2022).

This is not the Handbook for the mentee and as such does not provide guidelines for mentees themselves. That exactly is one of the reasons why mentee roles here point again back to the mentors themselves and their actions which draw specific consequences, in this case, positive consequences such as building trust, getting the mentee to open up, etc.

Shared responsibilities

Mentoring is a collaborative relationship built on reciprocity, care, and shared commitment. Both mentors and mentees contribute to the success of the partnership by:

- Establishing clear expectations and boundaries
- Practicing honesty and respect in communication
- Addressing misunderstandings early and constructively
- Valuing the process as one of mutual learning and growth

It is a mentor's role to enhance understanding, immediately at the beginning of this relationship, that mentorship is a shared journey toward empowerment and solidarity.

3.2. Building respectful, reciprocal relationships

A successful mentoring relationship is grounded in more than good intentions, it depends on the quality of the connection between mentor and mentee. At the heart of that connection are two key principles: respect and reciprocity.

Respect in mentoring means seeing the other person as a whole, capable, and deserving of care. It involves listening without judgment, honoring boundaries, and recognizing that each person brings knowledge, experience, and insight into the relationship. Respect allows for difference in identity, background, or perspective, without trying to override or “fix” it.

Reciprocity on the other hand builds respect. It means that the relationship is not one-sided. While mentors offer guidance and support, mentees also shape the experience, i.e. through reflection, feedback, curiosity, and their own lived knowledge. When both sides feel valued and heard, the relationship becomes a space for shared learning and mutual growth. Reciprocal mentoring allows pairing different levels of identities, cultures, seniority or similar, and in this way it opens up space for everything previously stated (Pursell, 2024).

Building a respectful, reciprocal relationship doesn't happen automatically. It requires intentional communication, clarity of roles, and a willingness to check in and adjust as the relationship evolves. When this foundation is in place, mentoring can move beyond advice-giving and become a truly collaborative process.

As described before, it's a two-way street - if you give something, be ready to take something out of it as well. You're expecting the mentee to learn something from you, but you have to be ready to learn from them - about their experience, about their perspective, about and from their lived experiences which may give you much more clarity and necessary adjustments in your approach. It gives you more depth and supports generating unique solutions and approach to various challenges (Holmes, 2023).

In mentoring relationships with young Roma women, these principles require particular care. Respect must include an awareness of historical injustice, marginalization, and lived experiences of exclusion. Reciprocity may not emerge immediately and expecting it too soon can unintentionally mirror the very power dynamics these young women have learned to protect themselves against. For mentors, this means being willing to give more at first, to listen without requiring openness, to show up consistently even when trust is slow to develop, and to recognize that mutuality grows over time, not by default.

PLD, a company offering online mentoring platform/software, proposed a great, practical methodology for achieving reciprocal mentoring process. First of all, the ground rules are set, which provides a strong starting point and helps establish a relationship based on clarity and trust. The set of ground rules are the following:

- Offer structure and direction for how the relationship will develop
- Clarify what each person is hoping to get from the experience, identify expectations from each side
- Define roles and responsibilities clearly from the start
- Open up discussion around personal boundaries or limitations
- Address how confidentiality will be handled and what it means in practice
- Reinforce the idea that both mentor and mentee have a role in maintaining the relationship's integrity (PLD, Reciprocal mentoring)

With mutual respect and care as the foundation, the next step is to begin shaping the relationship through clear, intentional practices. Establishing a mentoring process that supports reciprocity means going beyond good intentions, it involves structure, dialogue, and shared responsibility from the beginning. Adding to the ground rules mentioned above, the following elements can help set that in motion:

- Be willing to engage with discomfort

Some conversations may feel awkward or challenging, especially when addressing sensitive topics. Avoiding them can limit growth and on the other side, leaning into them carefully can build trust.

- Acknowledge and repair mistakes

Missteps may happen, especially when navigating cultural differences or bias. It's important to recognize when something causes harm and respond with accountability rather than defensiveness.

- Stay open to feedback

Giving and receiving feedback is essential, even when it feels uncomfortable. For mentors, this may mean accepting insights from someone with less experience and, of course, with completely different realities and background. For mentees, it may mean reflecting honestly on areas for growth.

- Follow through on commitments

When actions or goals are agreed upon, both parties should be prepared to be held accountable. This builds trust and shows respect for each other's time and investment, and it also ensures showing up with care, honoring boundaries, and being willing to let down some internal walls as trust deepens. Of course, this leads to authenticity, as mentoring relationships grow stronger when both people are honest, not just about successes, but also about mistakes, doubts, and setbacks.

- Practice active listening

Give full attention during conversations. Avoid jumping in with a response before the other person has finished speaking (PLD, n.d.).

Together, these steps support a mentoring relationship that's responsive, respectful, and genuinely shared, even if reciprocity takes time to build. It's not about perfection, but about honesty and care in how the relationship is shaped and sustained.

3.3. Ethical expectations: consent, confidentiality, boundaries

Mentoring relationships rely on more than good intentions – they require ethical clarity. Before trust can be built, both mentors and mentees need to understand the ethical expectations that shape their work together. In mentoring contexts involving marginalized or vulnerable participants, like young Roma women, these expectations are especially important. Key areas include informed consent, clarity around confidentiality, and maintaining healthy personal and professional boundaries. These are not one-time conversations but ongoing points of reflection that help sustain a respectful and accountable relationship. This has been emphasized throughout this Handbook so far, but we're looking at the matter from different perspectives in each different section, as in such sensitive environments, it's easy to overlook the boundaries one should not cross.

CONSENT

If not already a legal requirement, the (signed) consent is a sign of mutual respect and trust by a mentor and a mentee. Seeking informed consent shows that you respect the other person's autonomy, dignity, and right to privacy. It also demonstrates transparency about your role, the boundaries of the relationship, and what both of you can expect. By providing this clarity from the beginning, you give your mentee the ability to make an informed choice about whether they want to engage in the process and how they wish to participate (LinkedIn, n.d.).

To be clear, unless required by law or institutional policy, obtaining a signed consent form may not be necessary. However, what is always essential (regardless of the format) is that clear, informed consent is given. Whether written, verbal, or implied through agreement, consent must always be present and understood by both parties.

If you choose to proceed with the written consent, you can do so through, for example, Mentoring agreement. Art of mentoring website provides a short agreement that you can also use as an example. If and when necessary and appropriate, you should adjust it to your specific mentoring relationship. It can be found and accessed here - <https://artofmentoring.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Mentoring-Agreement.pdf>.

In mentoring, there will often come situations without clear-cut answers, where no obvious “right” or “wrong” response exists. This ambiguity is normal, especially when navigating personal, emotional, or cultural dynamics. While you can’t predict or control every challenge, you can take thoughtful steps to reduce confusion and prevent harm. Being proactive, especially through clear communication, ethical reflection, and transparent boundaries, helps create a stable foundation, even when the situation itself feels complex.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Continuing from the previous point, confidentiality forms the next essential pillar of mentoring, especially when working in culturally sensitive contexts. Respecting what is shared in confidence builds trust and helps create a safe environment where mentees feel comfortable expressing themselves. In communities that have experienced discrimination or institutional mistrust, protecting confidentiality isn’t just a best practice but rather a fundamental part of showing respect and care.

In the Ethical Guidelines for Mentoring pairs, a document published by University of Southampton (<https://www.southampton.ac.uk/professional-development/mentoring/mentoring-guidelines-in-a-nutshell.page>), the two levels of confidentiality are observed:

- Confidentiality of the identity of the person being mentored
- Confidentiality of the mentoring conversation

The first level is pretty much self-explanatory, and it means respecting any personal information the mentee chooses to share. In one-to-one mentoring, this involves being especially careful not to disclose details that could identify the mentee without their clear permission. This applies not only to their name but also to background, experiences, or other personal data they may reveal in the course of your work together. In group mentoring, this becomes even more important, as participants may be sharing personal information within a shared space. Mentors should take special care to foster a respectful and safe group dynamic. While confidentiality remains a core principle, it’s important to acknowledge that in group settings, complete privacy cannot always be guaranteed. Information shared within the group should not be disclosed outside it, unless the mentee(s) explicitly agree otherwise, or the mentoring format was clearly communicated in advance and participants gave informed consent to those conditions. Being transparent about the limits of confidentiality before the process begins helps ensure that everyone understands the context and can choose how and what they share.

The second level of confidentiality concerns the content of mentoring conversations. Both mentor and mentee share responsibility for protecting what is discussed during their sessions, particularly when it involves sensitive or personal topics. This applies across all formats, whether individual or group-based, formal or informal. Information shared in confidence should not be repeated or disclosed outside the mentoring relationship without the mentee’s clear and explicit consent.

In group mentoring contexts, such as workshops or discussion-based activities, participants may share a mix of general insights and personal experiences. While general knowledge or ideas intended for learning can often be discussed more openly and, even preferably, shared with others, personal or sensitive disclosures should always be treated as confidential. It is essential that mentors communicate clearly at the start of the process which kinds of information may be shared more widely, and which must remain private. Setting those expectations early helps create a respectful and safe environment for all participants.

There are, however, limits to confidentiality. If a mentor becomes aware of information that suggests someone is at risk of harm, or that involves illegal activity, it may be necessary to take appropriate steps. In these cases, mentors should first encourage the mentee to seek help or take action themselves. Only in exceptional circumstances should confidentiality be breached, and even then, this must be handled with care, transparency, and sensitivity to the legal or safeguarding responsibilities within the local context (University of Southampton, n.d.).

BOUNDARIES

Often talked about, but easily forgotten or neglected, healthy boundaries are a cornerstone of ethical mentoring. They define the edges of the relationship, what belongs within it and what does not. Clear boundaries protect both mentor and mentee, helping to maintain trust, respect, and emotional safety throughout the process.

Boundaries are especially important in mentoring relationships that involve vulnerability, power differences, or cultural complexity, as is often the case when working with young Roma women. Without clear boundaries, the relationship can easily shift into something it was never meant to be, e.g. too personal, too directive, or even unintentionally harmful.

National Institutes of Health (NIH) USA, in their publication titled *Setting Boundaries in Mentoring Relationships* NIH-HHS Mentoring Program, distincts clear roles of mentors and mentees, but also their mutual roles in the mentorship process, that affect the respect of boundaries throughout the process, thus leading to significant impact.

Mentors

- What kind of access will your mentee have to you? Will you be available between sessions? If so, how and when?
- Does mentoring imply open availability at any time, or are there boundaries around how and when communication happens?
- Are meetings or check-ins by appointment only? How do you prefer to be contacted -by email, phone, or text and during what hours?
- What kind of phone or online communication is appropriate? Setting these expectations early helps prevent misunderstandings.

Mentees

- Avoid relying too heavily on your mentor. Mentors are here to support and guide you, not to solve everything or be available at all hours.
- Think about your own limits. Ask yourself: "What would feel too close, too fast, or too much?"
- Make the most of your mentor's time. Prepare for meetings, reflect on your goals, and bring focus to the relationship.
- Remember that your mentor isn't your only support. There are other resources and professionals you can turn to when needed.

Both

- Have a conversation about roles and responsibilities. Be clear about what you can offer and what falls outside your role.
- Agree on how often you'll meet, how long sessions will be, and the best way to communicate between meetings.
- Go beyond a basic confidentiality agreement and discuss what confidentiality actually means in real situations. What will you both do if sensitive information comes up, or if someone else is involved? (National Institutes of Health, n.d.)

3.4. What mentors are not responsible for (e.g. therapy, case management)

While mentoring can be a powerful source of encouragement, clarity, and support, it's essential to understand the limits of the role. Mentors are not therapists, social workers, legal advisors, or crisis responders. Their purpose is to guide, not to intervene. Knowing where mentoring ends helps protect both the mentor and the mentee, and ensures that the relationship stays ethical, focused, and safe. In the following section we explore, in-depth, some common myths and misconceptions about mentoring.

Mentoring is the same as coaching or training

While coaching and training often focus on performance, targets, or specific skills, mentoring is more about long-term personal and professional development. It's relationship-based, less structured, and shaped by the mentee's goals and context, not by a curriculum or checklist.

The mentor should have all the answers

A mentor is not expected to be a problem-solver or expert in everything. Their role is to listen, support reflection, share relevant experience, and guide decision-making - not direct every step.

Mentoring replaces therapy or professional support

Mentoring is not a substitute for mental health counselling, case management, or legal advice. While mentors can offer empathy and encouragement, they should always stay within their role and refer to professionals when needed. If a mentor is a specialist, then there's time and place for a different engagement. The above presented picture connects the two previously mentioned myths and clearly differentiates between three different roles that are often drawn together (Mentorloop, 2025).

Mentoring is a one-way street

Mentoring isn't about one person teaching and the other simply absorbing. It's a two-way relationship, where both mentor and mentee bring valuable insights, experiences, and perspectives. While the mentor may have more experience in a particular area, that doesn't mean they hold all the knowledge or always lead the conversation. Formats like peer mentoring, reverse mentoring, and group mentoring recognize that learning can flow in multiple directions. The most meaningful mentoring relationships are built on mutual curiosity, shared growth, and respect for different kinds of knowledge.

MENTOR, COACH, THERAPIST: HOW DIFFERENT ARE THEY?			
	Mentor	Coach	Therapist
Accreditation	No accreditation required. Training recommended	Formal accreditation and training is common (although it is an unregulated industry)	Formal accreditation and training required
Approach	Has different mentoring styles for different situations. Tends to be directive than a coach	Reflective questioning and believes the mentee "has the answers"	May use different psychology or therapy techniques, heals past trauma
Topics	Professional topics (personal only to build rapport).	Personal & professional topics	Personal & historical topics

Mentor, Coach, Therapist: How different are they? (Brancher, What does a mentor do: expectations vs reality)

Mentoring can fix every problem

Mentoring is powerful, but it's not a catch-all solution. It can support growth, confidence, and connection, but it can't fix systemic issues, change culture alone, or replace organizational responsibility. It should be seen as one, important piece but of a broader support system (Winstanely, 2025).

Mentors are responsible for their mentee's growth and decisions

Mentors play an important role in supporting a mentee's growth, but that support has limits. They can share knowledge, ask helpful questions, and offer honest perspective, but they can't (and shouldn't) make decisions on the mentee's behalf. Growth isn't about following advice perfectly, it's about the mentee developing confidence in their own judgment. Even if a mentee chooses a different path than the one the mentor suggests, the mentoring relationship still holds value (Brailsford, 2024).

Mentoring takes too much time

Mentoring doesn't have to be a major time commitment. With flexible formats like remote or virtual sessions, mentoring can fit more easily into busy schedules. Many effective relationships require just a few hours per month, typically one hour for the meeting itself, and another for preparation or follow-up. When mentors and mentees agree on a regular rhythm and make use of simple tools to stay organized, mentoring can be both manageable and impactful (Brailsford, 2024).

However, it's important to acknowledge that for some, this flexibility isn't always accessible. Economic barriers, limited digital access, or unfamiliarity with technology can complicate remote communication, especially in contexts involving Roma women or others from under-served communities. In such cases, in-person sessions or tailored support may be needed to make mentoring truly inclusive and equitable. Time should be seen not just as a matter of scheduling, but as a question of access, necessity, and fairness too.

PART 2: MENTORING

(Learning units)

3 deep-dive method guides with activities, tools, reflection & practical instruction and 2 competency-based learning modules.

In this section, 5 different modules are covered focusing on the mentor's ability to engage mentees in their everyday work. The first three modules explore three distinct methods of mentor

- mentee engagement, extended with competencies that both fit the specifics of each method and remain relevant across mentoring practice in general. The 5 key competencies you're expected to acquire in the upcoming modules are the following:

1. Fosters ethical, trust-based, and empathetic mentoring relationships
2. Mentors build safe, respectful, and confidential spaces through ethical conduct, active listening, and consistency, especially important for mentees who may have experienced marginalization or broken trust in the past.
3. Engages through culturally responsive and intersectional practices
4. Mentors recognize the complex identities and social realities of young Roma women, and apply inclusive, sensitive approaches that challenge stereotypes and create space for all voices.
5. Applies flexible mentoring methods tailored to group and individual needs
6. Mentors adapt their style across the three engagement methods (e.g. one-to-one, small group, large group) while maintaining clarity, structure, and responsiveness to the group's dynamics and evolving needs.
7. Supports mentees in goal setting, action planning, and navigating systems
8. Mentors empower mentees to identify aspirations, co-create goals, and take concrete steps while also guiding them in accessing education, employment, health, and legal systems with confidence.
9. Practices reflective, sustainable mentoring with attention to impact
10. Mentors evaluate progress, reflect on their approach, and seek feedback for continuous improvement. They actively manage emotional boundaries and engage in supervision or peer support to avoid burnout and ensure long-term effectiveness.

4. Mentoring methods: introduction

The success of mentoring doesn't rely solely on goodwill or personal connection - it depends significantly on how the process is structured. The methods we choose shape how trust is built, how goals are set and pursued, and how challenges are addressed. Without thoughtful methodology, even the most committed mentors may struggle to engage meaningfully. For Roma women, especially those facing systemic exclusion, the method must be not only effective but also safe, responsive, and empowering.

When choosing the appropriate method, 3 key phases stand out:

- identifying the mentee (but also mentor to a point) profile, setting, and goals
- recruitment (of both mentors and mentees)
- matching process

Identifying the mentee (but also mentor to a point) profile, setting, and goals

Before choosing a mentoring method, it's essential to understand who the mentees are, the environment they're in, and what they hope to achieve. In working with young Roma women, this step carries particular weight. Due to a wide range of factors like social exclusion, discrimination, gender inequality, varied personal development, family dynamics, and inconsistent access to education or services, the mentoring process must begin with sensitivity, curiosity, and a strong commitment to meeting individuals where they are. No two mentees will bring the same experience, readiness, or needs, which is why understanding their unique context is not just helpful but rather essential.

Who identifies the need and context?

There's no single path. Identification can be:

- Coordinator-led: through schools, community centres, or NGOs that engage with Roma communities and actively map out mentee needs and mentoring opportunities. Take an example of the research that took place as a part of the RomniME project and resulted in comprehensive, consolidated report publicly available for access.
- Mentor-initiated: where a potential mentor, often already embedded in the community, recognizes the need for support, steps forward and takes action to respond to it.
- Mentee-driven: where a young Roma woman herself expresses interest or recognizes a role model or trusted adult as a potential mentor.

Informal recognition is just as valid, perhaps even more meaningful, than formal program enrolment. Trust, rapport, and shared experience often emerge before structure (e.g. through spontaneous support during a community workshop or a similar activity, regular chats at a local centre or youth hub, shared experience of discrimination discussed in a safe space, or informal encouragement offered by a peer, teacher, etc.). In this context, the role of the coordinator may shift to one of facilitator, helping to translate that organic connection into a more sustainable, goal-oriented mentoring process.

How is the mentee profile and context understood?

- Whether formal or informal, understanding the mentee’s situation might involve:
- observing or listening within community settings
- conducting light-touch interviews or group conversations
- reviewing insights from existing research or needs assessments which already highlight clear, persistent gaps and needs in support

What gets identified?

- Mentee profile: age, aspirations, fears, cultural expectations, and communication preferences
- Setting: formal or informal, public or private, in-person or remote, what exactly feels safe and accessible?
- Goals: short and long-term, personal or collective - do they need emotional support, academic help, professional guidance, or simply someone who listens?

The need is already there. The task is not to invent it, but to meet it with the right structure, tone, and tools, tailored to the individuals or groups involved. Often, it’s simply a matter of listening, as everyday moments like casual chats, shared activities, or small acts of support can also offer valuable insight into a person’s needs and readiness.

Recruitment (of both mentors and mentees)

Once the needs and context of potential mentees are better understood, the next step is to identify who might participate, and how they can be engaged in a way that feels respectful, inclusive, and relevant. Recruitment does more than just filling roles, it builds the foundation for trust and compatibility. In the context of mentoring Roma women, this often requires extra care to avoid reinforcing hierarchies, assumptions, or past experiences of exclusion.

How recruitment happens

Recruitment can take many forms, and it doesn’t always begin in formal ways. Depending on the context, mentors and mentees might be:

- directly recruited by a coordinating/intermediary actor such as an NGO, school, local service provider, or Roma-led organization
- identified through trusted community connections, such as peer mediators, youth workers, or educators already active in Roma communities
- self-referred or organically connected, where a mentor or mentee initiates the process based on recognition of a need or opportunity

This flexibility is important. Sometimes mentors and mentees are already informally engaged - perhaps through shared experience or existing support, and only later does that relationship become more structured.

What matters in recruitment

- It’s not just about who is available, but who is suited to the method, goals, and mentee profile:
- For one-to-one mentoring, personal commitment, relational skills, and cultural sensitivity are key
- For group mentoring, the ability to facilitate discussions, manage dynamics, and hold space for diverse voices becomes more important
- Regardless of the method, mentors should have the capacity to support without overstepping, and mentees should be invited (not pressured), to participate

Paying attention to barriers

In Roma communities, barriers to recruitment may include distrust towards formal institutions, limited access to digital platforms, structural racism, or logistical challenges like transport or caregiving responsibilities. These need to be actively considered and addressed in the recruitment process, not treated as afterthoughts. Using familiar spaces, face-to-face conversations, and involvement of community members can help lower those barriers.

Successful recruitment is not entirely about scale, this process needs quality of connection and clarity of expectations from the very beginning.

Matching process

Once mentors and mentees are identified, the focus shifts to how they will be paired and what mentoring format will support them best. Matching doesn't necessarily focus solely on similarity or availability - it's necessary to foster conditions where trust, communication, and learning can grow. The method selected (one-to-one or group mentoring) should align with both the mentee's needs and the mentor's capacity, while also taking the setting into account.

How matching can work

There is no single formula for a perfect match. In some programs, mentors and mentees are assigned by a coordinator who has insight into their profiles. In others, matches may form more organically, especially when people already know or trust one another. When formal matching is used, it helps to consider:

- Communication preferences
- Comfort level and availability
- Shared interests or life experiences
- Language or cultural proximity, if relevant

In more flexible settings, mentees may choose from a pool of mentors, or mentors might be paired with a small group instead of one individual. This adaptability is particularly important for marginalized groups, where mentees may want to be matched with someone they feel will truly understand their position or with someone outside their community to preserve privacy and boundaries.

Method selection: what fits best?

The mentoring method should reflect what has been learned about the mentee's profile and the mentoring environment:

- One-to-one mentoring is often best for building trust, addressing sensitive topics, or tailoring support closely to the individual.
- Small group mentoring (up to 6 mentees) may work well when participants benefit from sharing experiences with peers while still maintaining a more intimate, supportive dynamic.
- Large group mentoring (more than 6 mentees) can be effective for structured sessions, workshops, or awareness-raising activities, especially when the goal is exposure to knowledge, role models, or collective reflection.

Especially with Roma women, it's important to recognize that the right method may change over time. Some may begin in small groups and later request more personal guidance or vice versa. We don't want to force or impose the structure, we need to support progression and self-determination.

Be clear, but flexible

At the point of matching, everyone involved should be clear on what's expected: how often they will meet, in what setting, for what general purpose, and how long the relationship might last. On the other hand, mentors and mentees should also feel that the relationship can evolve, and that the structure serves the people involved, not the other way around.

4.1. Module 1: One-to-one mentoring

One-to-one mentoring is the most personal and direct form of mentoring. It involves a single mentor working closely with a single mentee to build a trusting, supportive relationship over time. This format creates space for meaningful dialogue, tailored guidance, and emotional safety, especially important when working with individuals who may have experienced exclusion or marginalization.

In the context of mentoring Roma women, one-to-one settings often serve as an entry point for building trust and exploring sensitive topics in a private, confidential way. Because of its flexibility and depth, this method can be especially effective when mentees are not yet comfortable in group settings or when their needs require more individual attention.

Learning outcomes for this module are the following:

- Differentiate one-to-one mentoring from group formats
- Identify key strengths and risks of one-to-one mentoring
- Demonstrate the ability to establish a mentoring relationship
- Support mentee autonomy and goal-setting

4.2. Definition, strengths, and risks

As a definition of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Long Island portal suggests:

“One-to-one mentoring is a structured relationship where a mentor provides individualized support, encouragement, and guidance to a mentee. Unlike group mentorship, this approach focuses on building a deep, personal connection that caters to the unique needs and aspirations of each mentee.” (Big Brothers Big Sisters of Long Island, 2025)

This type of mentoring is particularly valuable in non-formal or community-based settings, where individual attention, trust-building, and cultural sensitivity are essential, especially when working with underrepresented groups such as young Roma women.

STRENGTHS

One-to-one mentoring offers unique advantages that stem from its focused, personal nature. When well-matched and supported, this method can lead to meaningful change in a mentee's personal, educational, or professional life. Key strengths include:

Personalization

The mentor can adapt their approach to the mentee's individual needs, goals, and pace providing support that feels relevant and affirming.

Deeper focus

Without the distractions of a group setting, there's space to go deeper into specific challenges, reflections, or aspirations.

Higher trust

A private, consistent relationship helps foster psychological safety. This is especially important for mentees who may be navigating stigma, discrimination, or low self-confidence.

Better communication

With fewer people involved and a greater chance for building trust in such relationships, there's more opportunity to build clarity, openness, and a shared language for growth.

Greater accountability

A one-to-one structure often leads to clearer expectations and follow-through. Mentees may feel more motivated to act on goals and commitments when they know their mentor is invested and attentive (Reeves, 2022/2025).

RISKS

While one-to-one mentoring offers significant benefits, it also comes with challenges that need careful attention. Many of these risks, such as emotional strain, dependency, or mismatched expectations, can arise across different mentoring methods. However, because one-to-one mentoring is so personalized and often involves deeper emotional engagement, these risks tend to be more pronounced.

Acknowledging these challenges early helps mentors and program coordinators prepare strategies to manage them effectively, ensuring the mentoring relationship remains healthy, supportive, and sustainable.

Difficulty scheduling regular meetings

Finding consistent times that fit both mentor and mentee schedules can be challenging, especially when balancing other commitments or dealing with transportation or digital access barriers.

Overcommitting time and energy

Mentors may feel pressured to be available beyond their capacity, risking burnout or reduced quality of support. To prevent this, mentors should set clear boundaries around their availability from the start, communicate openly about their limits, and prioritize self-care. It's important to

remember that sustainable mentoring depends on balanced commitment, not constant availability.

Unrealistic expectations

Both mentors and mentees might expect rapid progress or solutions that mentoring alone cannot deliver, leading to disappointment or frustration.

Over-dependence or role confusion

Mentees might rely too heavily on their mentor for decisions or emotional support, blurring boundaries and potentially undermining the mentee's autonomy. This can be avoided by setting clear expectations about the mentor's role and the limits of support from the very beginning,

helping the mentee build confidence in making their own choices.

Unfair use of power or blame

Power imbalances may cause mentors to unintentionally dominate conversations or lead mentees to feel responsible for challenges or setbacks. To prevent this, mentors should practice self-awareness, actively listen, and create space for the mentee's voice. Emphasizing partnership rather than authority helps maintain a respectful, balanced relationship.

Resentment or jealousy from others

One-to-one mentoring relationships can sometimes lead to feelings of exclusion or jealousy among peers or within the community. To minimize this, programs should promote transparency about how mentors and mentees are selected, encourage group activities alongside individual mentoring, and foster an inclusive culture where everyone feels valued.

Poor mentor-mentee matching

Differences in communication styles, values, or expectations can hinder connection, trust, and progress if not carefully addressed during matching (Mentoring Complete, 2025).

When it works best

One-to-one mentoring can be a powerful tool, especially when implemented under the right conditions and for the right profiles. In the context of Roma women and non-formal mentoring environments, its effectiveness is closely tied to a few key prerequisites and is particularly suitable for specific types of needs and situations.

For one-to-one mentoring to function well, several foundational conditions are recommended:

Clear mentor-mentee boundaries and expectations: Defined roles help prevent over-dependence and maintain a healthy dynamic.

Mentor training and sensitivity: Especially important when working with marginalized populations, mentors need to be culturally aware, non-judgmental, and reflective in their approach. The lack of training for mentors (but also mentees) is one of the most common „pitfalls“ when it comes to unsuccessful mentoring relationships, as per the Art of Mentoring (Art of Mentoring, n.d.).

Consistency and commitment: Even when flexible, the relationship requires continuity and mutual engagement to develop trust.

Safe and private setting: Confidentiality must be respected, and the mentee must feel safe to share openly.

Support from a program coordinator or structure: Even informal mentoring benefits from oversight to manage logistics, risks, and appropriate referrals when needed.

On the other hand, once the prerequisites are satisfied and you can engage in 1v1 mentoring situations, this method is particularly appropriate when:

Personal or emotional safety is a concern

Roma women may face hesitation in group spaces due to stigma, discrimination, or prior negative experiences. One-to-one mentoring provides a private space for trust-building.

Barriers are highly individual

When challenges are linked to mental health, gender-based violence, lack of confidence, or undocumented status, individualized mentoring allows these to be addressed discreetly and respectfully.

Mentees are not yet ready for group-based interaction

Some women may lack the self-confidence or communication skills to benefit from a group setting immediately. One-to-one mentoring offers a first step toward wider social participation. But don't forget it could also work vice versa, as a one-to-one mentoring can serve like a jumping board into the group settings where mentees can connect with their peers or people with similar challenges, with same or similar expectations or even diverse contexts from which they can engage in peer learning.

Life conditions are unstable or irregular

Women juggling caregiving, informal work, or precarious living conditions may not have the flexibility to attend regular group sessions. Individual mentoring allows for more adaptable scheduling.

Mentoring is as much emotional as it is developmental

Where relational support is just as important as practical guidance, particularly for mentees who may not have strong support systems, this method creates space for recognition, encouragement, and emotional connection.

4.3. Step-by-step approach and tools

In this step by step approach, we explore the steps how they were used throughout the project and one-to-one, first of all matchmaking and then mentoring process, adapted with the insights gathered further enhanced with the experience and knowledge from the field work.

The following stages are strongly recommended to initiate and maintain a quality one-to-one mentoring relationship.

Stage 1 Building and maintaining a relationship

Building a relationship is a process and it doesn't happen overnight, however establishing contact and leaving an impression is already a beginning and insight into the relationship as it could potentially unravel to become.

Interesting approach to building a relationship is provided by AAHA, The standard of veterinary excellence, which analyses key action steps for building a mentoring relationship. As announced, this is a process, this is a stage within a stage, a one to look and maintain/take care of for the whole timeline of a mentoring process, and beyond.

Self-reflection and determining readiness

Before entering into a mentoring relationship, it's crucial that mentors engage in honest self-reflection. Mentoring, especially in non-formal, community-based contexts with individuals from marginalized backgrounds, requires more than just good intentions - it demands awareness, sensitivity, and a clear sense of one's own limitations.

Ask yourself:

- What strengths and life experience do I bring to this role?
- What are my areas for growth, particularly in understanding the lived realities of Roma women or others with experiences different from mine?
- Do I have biases or assumptions that might affect the relationship?
- Am I emotionally ready and practically available to take on this responsibility?
- Are there any boundaries or limitations I must clarify from the start (e.g. time, type of support, areas outside my expertise)?
- Can I support someone without making them responsible for educating me about their experience?

These reflections help ensure that your mentoring will be rooted in respect, not assumptions. If you feel unprepared in certain areas, seek learning opportunities through independent reading, training, or peer exchange, rather than placing the burden (only) on your future mentee, even though you will be dealing with a spectrum of realities and specific situations.

Initiating the relationship

Once you've determined your readiness, but you have also assessed the one of the mentee, the relationship begins with a mutual agreement. Whether the mentoring arrangement is coordinated formally or arises informally, the first few interactions are key to establishing a safe and productive space.

Tips for a good start:

- Prepare for the first meeting by outlining the themes you'd like to cover.
- Get to know the mentee as a person. Listen openly to their needs, values, and aspirations.
- Collaboratively define the purpose of the mentoring relationship what both of you hope to gain from it.
- Clarify communication styles, boundaries, expectations for confidentiality, and how to handle sensitive topics.
- Be clear about your role: you are not there to solve problems for the mentee, but to support them in navigating their path.

This beginning stage is not just logistical or developmental (even though it influences it to a great extent), it's relational. Investing in trust and safety from the start makes it easier to navigate difficult conversations or challenges later.

4.4.Maintaining and evaluating the relationship

As the mentoring progresses, it's important to remain responsive, present, and open to change. Mentees should be encouraged to take initiative, bring forward discussion points, and set the pace of learning and reflection. As a mentor, your role is to support them in their process.

Keep in mind:

- Revisit goals regularly and adjust as needed.
- Share resources, contacts, and tools where appropriate, but never push your own agenda.
- Set realistic expectations on both sides to avoid burnout or disappointment.
- Follow up on commitments and show accountability and it models the same for the mentee.
- Invite feedback about how the relationship is going, and share your own respectfully.

You can use informal check-ins to evaluate progress. Focus not just on outcomes but on the relationship: Is the mentee feeling heard? Is the space still safe and useful? Have any unspoken tensions surfaced?

4.5.Concluding the relationship

At some point, every mentoring relationship moves toward closure. Whether it's a planned end point or a mutual decision that it's time to wrap up, it's important to bring the process to a respectful and intentional close.

Before ending:

- Review the goals you worked on together and what was achieved.
- Reflect on what you each learned and how the relationship has grown.
- Offer encouragement for the mentee’s next steps and, if appropriate, remain available for occasional check-ins or referrals.

Even if challenges occurred along the way, ending the mentoring on a note of gratitude and clarity helps both parties move forward positively and may leave the door open for future collaboration or connection.

These mentoring relationship building phases are extracted from AAHA, The Standard Of Veterinary Excellence’s article Action Steps for the Mentoring Relationship from 2023 (American Animal Hospital Association, 2023), adjusted to the particular context of the RomniME mentor handbook.

Now delving into the next steps, it will be hard not to repeat some of these steps because each of the stages shares similarities in its core, however, each step individually and collectively shares the same, high-level importance.

Stage 2 Identify expectations, set goals and boundaries

Identifying expectations and boundaries

Establishing clear expectations, goals, and boundaries is a foundational step in building a respectful and effective mentoring relationship. This stage allows both mentor and mentee to articulate what they hope to achieve, how they want to work together, and what limitations or concerns may need to be addressed early on. This step especially helps create a space of mutual understanding and psychological safety. By defining responsibilities, setting communication norms, and agreeing on shared values, mentoring pairs lay the groundwork for a relationship built on trust, clarity, and shared purpose.

One of the first steps in building a strong mentoring relationship is having an honest conversation about expectations. This dialogue should take place early, ideally before formal mentoring activities begin and be led by the mentor. The goal is to surface what each person hopes for in the relationship and ensure that both parties start with a shared understanding of what is realistic, acceptable, and helpful.

Here are four practical steps to guide this conversation:

1. Open the conversation by inviting each person to share their expectations. The mentor should facilitate but also be prepared to listen carefully and respond with curiosity.
2. Clarify what each expectation means. Don’t assume that shared words imply shared definitions, take time to explore what each person really envisions or requires.
3. Agree on the expectations or negotiate a shared version. If a proposed expectation feels unclear, too ambitious, or not appropriate in the current context, flag it respectfully and either revise it together or put it aside for future discussion.
4. Reach mutual understanding before proceeding. Mentoring relationships work best when there’s alignment from the beginning. It’s not enough to “agree to disagree” because a clear and shared set of expectations should guide how you’ll work together.

To support this, consider reflective questions like:

- What do I expect from my mentoring partner?
- Maybe even more importantly, what might they expect from me, how do they see me as a mentor and what do they think I could offer them?
- Are there external figures like a manager or coordinator whose involvement I should also factor in?

This reflection works in a couple of ways - both as a self-reflection before entering the mentoring relationship as well as foundation for the paired reflection with the mentee.

Many expectations go unspoken or even unnoticed. But when both partners can express their hopes, name their boundaries, and jointly define what success looks like, the mentoring experience becomes more grounded, respectful, and effective (Mentoring Complete, 2013).

Recognizing strengths and challenges

One of the steps that is necessary prior to goal setting, and which comes exactly in between expectations and goals and serves like a unique bridge connecting the two, is identifying and recognizing strengths and challenges. This often applies to both the mentee and the mentor, but we will focus more on the mentees themselves, as the main focal point of this process.

One of the first things that come to mind when we think of analyzing strengths and challenges might be a SWOT analysis, a simple yet effective tool that shows us our own characteristics ever so important in the mentoring process. As per Sarsby (2016), SWOT analysis is a popular 4-box strategy analysis and strategy development framework (Sarsby, 2016). Sounds familiar? If yes, we're on the right track, because after we lay the foundation, we will proceed with setting the goals and developing and realizing our mentoring plans/strategy.

SWOT is actually an acronym for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

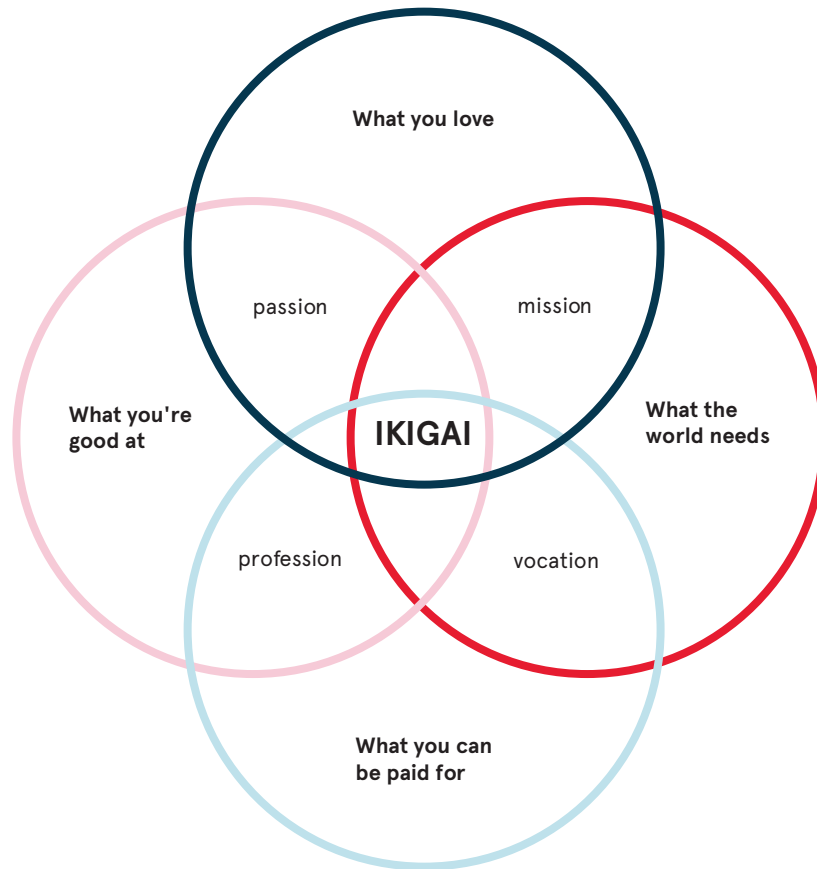
SWOT ANALYSIS			
STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<p>What skills or talents do you feel most confident using?</p> <p>What personal qualities have helped you succeed in difficult situations?</p> <p>What do other people often compliment you on or seek your help with?</p> <p>Which past achievements are you most proud of, and why?</p>	<p>What tasks or situations do you often avoid, and what makes them challenging for you?</p> <p>Where do you think you need the most improvement or support right now?</p> <p>Have you received feedback in the past that pointed out areas you struggle with?</p> <p>What habits or patterns sometimes get in the way of your progress?</p>	<p>Are there any programs, people, or resources available to you that you haven't yet used?</p> <p>What skills would you like to learn that could open new doors for you?</p> <p>Are there changes in your community or environment that could help you grow?</p> <p>Who in your network could support you or connect you to something valuable?</p>	<p>What external factors (e.g., family, discrimination, lack of access) make it harder for you to reach your goals?</p> <p>Are there any situations or people that make you feel discouraged or unsafe in pursuing your goals?</p> <p>What risks do you face if things don't go as planned?</p> <p>Are there responsibilities or pressures in your life that compete with your goals or time?</p>

Questions for mentees as per the SWOT analysis

The questions you can see in the picture above are just proposed questions to get the conversation and the analysis going. Of course, you're free to introduce sub-questions or a different set of questions, depending on each specific situation.

Now when these are answered, you can start with the partial mentoring, and you can ask the mentee how they could utilize their strengths and opportunities to limit weaknesses and overcome challenges/threats. In this way, they can already start thinking strategically and boost self-confidence for the upcoming stages.

If we're talking about career progression, there's an interesting approach coming from Japan called "ikigai". It shows an interconnecting world of one's values, strengths, passion, mission - what one is good at, and what the world might need.



Ikigai (Pascoe, G., 2023)

On the other hand, the situation is pretty similar when talking about mentors. It's strongly suggested to assess oneself before entering the mentoring relationship trying to assess the mentee. In the case of the mentor, the focus shifts on the strengths and what can be offered to the mentee from our perspective, and portal Mentorloop offers in-depth questions to analyze our strong sides as mentors:

What are some examples of times when I've achieved success, and what strengths did I

- use to accomplish those goals?
- What are some positive attributes that others have commented on about me, and how can I leverage these strengths to achieve my goals?
- What do others come to you for help with?
- What are some challenges that I have faced in the past, and how have I overcome them using my strengths and resilience?
- What values are most important to me, and how do my strengths align with them?
- What are some opportunities in my life right now that I can take advantage of, based on my strengths and interests?

- How can I use my strengths to build strong and supportive relationships with others?
- What are some ways I can continue to learn and grow in areas where I already have strengths, and how can I apply this new knowledge to achieve even greater success?
- What activities or tasks come naturally and easily to you? What do you find yourself doing effortlessly, without much effort or thought?
- When do you feel most energized and engaged? What tasks or activities give you a sense of flow and focus? (Mentorloop, 2023)

To go beyond, what you might want to do is visit one of the character strengths survey - <https://www.viacharacter.org/survey/account/register> (last accessed and tested on 10. 7. 2025.), but you can also look up other options and see what you prefer. You might need to register/create an account and after that, all you need to do is take a 10-minute survey and wait for the results! Once both your mentee's and your own strengths are identified, you can use them to shape and support the mentoring process. This includes setting goals and creating action plans that reflect your mentee's talents and interests, while also leveraging your own areas of strength as a mentor (LinkedIn Community, n.d.). And this is exactly what we will do in these next couple of sections. You can also seek opportunities and resources that allow the mentee to apply their abilities in meaningful ways and continue developing them.

Goal setting

The way mentoring goals are chosen, and who gets to decide, can strongly influence how effective and satisfying the relationship becomes. If the mentee alone determines the direction or activities, mentors may feel disengaged or unproductive. If mentors take full control, mentees might feel overlooked or lose interest, and when goals are imposed by external program staff, both parties may struggle with commitment. However, when mentors and mentees work together to define meaningful and realistic goals, they are more likely to develop a stronger, more collaborative bond and feel a shared sense of progress and success (Dubois, Karcher, 2014).

Garate-Serafini, Balcazar, Keys, and Weitlauf (2001) proposed a mentoring framework tailored to marginalized youth, outlining key areas where mentoring can serve as a powerful tool for personal development. The model identifies four central domains:

- a. goal attainment
- b. specific competency skills
- c. changes in the composition of the youth's social networks
- d. motivation and self-efficacy.

Originally applied in contexts involving low-income youth with learning disabilities, particularly within African American and Latino communities, this approach emphasized the importance of supporting mentees in setting realistic goals, building the skills to reach them, expanding their support networks, and strengthening their belief in their own agency (Dubois, Karcher, 2014).

While the original application differs in demographic focus, the underlying dynamics are strikingly similar to those observed in the context of working with Roma people. Young Roma women often navigate layered and systemic barriers, including poverty, discrimination, limited access to education and employment, and restrictive gender norms. These factors may lead to diminished self-belief, constrained social networks, and fewer opportunities to explore aspirations safely.

Like the youth in the original study, Roma women may benefit most from mentoring when it not only offers emotional support but actively builds their ability to envision, articulate, and pursue personal and professional goals. This includes helping them identify the competencies they want to develop, reshaping their sense of what is socially or professionally possible, and feeling empowered to advocate for themselves.

At the same time, the aforementioned framework recognizes that goal setting must be handled with care. If introduced too rigidly, mentoring can start to feel more like tutoring or coaching,

potentially undermining trust and openness (Dubois, Karcher, 2014). This is particularly relevant in work with Roma women, where past experiences with institutional settings may have shaped how structure and authority are perceived.

Thus, the timing and approach to goal setting are key. Mentors should encourage mentees to take the lead, introducing goals gradually and collaboratively. When done thoughtfully, this strengthens trust, empowers the mentee, and helps build a mentoring relationship grounded in shared purpose and autonomy (Dubois, Karcher, 2014).

A useful strategy that can support both goal setting and ongoing evaluation in mentoring is Goal Attainment Scaling (GAS), originally developed by Kiresuk and Sherman in 1968. While it was initially introduced in the context of mental health services, GAS has since been successfully adapted to mentoring, particularly when working with young people in flexible, non-formal settings.

Rather than measuring success as simply achieving or not achieving a goal, GAS provides a structured way to track progress across a range of possible outcomes. It acknowledges that sometimes goals are exceeded, sometimes progress is partial, and at times no progress or even regression may occur. This approach makes GAS especially useful in mentoring relationships where mentee goals evolve or where progress may be non-linear due to personal, social, or contextual factors (Dubois, Karcher, 2014).

We will rewind back to this segment, but let's first explore what would be the steps for implementing GAS in the context, as it's given in the Dubois, Karcher handbook, of youth mentoring programs.

Step 1: Set goals

You have started building a relationship and you are there with the foundation, you identified each other's expectations and based on all of these, you are more than ready to proceed with setting the goals. However, as you will find out in just a moment, setting goals is just one of the steps on your way to painting the complete picture and determining the goals of both mentor and mentee in this mentoring process.

Mentors and mentees should collaboratively define goals using the SMART framework - specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound. Even though this method is widely used and popular, if a mentor believes and has a valid different method, they're free to use it. This method particularly ensures the goals are clear, attainable, and trackable within a short timeframe. Mentors are also encouraged to guide mentees in learning how to formulate SMART goals themselves (or use any other method, if different). These goals, along with the strategies and outcomes, are typically documented and may be officially reviewed or signed off by a program coordinator.

Step 2: Assign a level of difficulty for each goal

Each goal is evaluated for difficulty based on how complex it is, how many steps are needed or how challenging the actions are. Together, mentor and mentee assign a score from 1 (easy) to 3 (very difficult), considering the mentee's own sense of what feels challenging or manageable. This rating helps frame realistic expectations and tailor support appropriately.

Step 3: Determine the level of functioning

The mentee's ability to pursue goals independently is assessed, with a score of 1 for high functioning and 2 for low functioning. This rating is based on personal capacity, life circumstances, and the presence of additional needs, such as disabilities or lack of support systems. Mentors can make this assessment after spending time with the mentee and, if needed, speaking with family members or program staff, as talked about in some of the previous sections, in the scope of assessing the needs, gaps, expectations, etc. The rating can be used to weight goal outcomes, recognizing that mentees with fewer resources often require more support.

Step 4: Assess progress toward each goal

Mentors and mentees regularly review progress by discussing what actions have been taken toward each goal. Through guided conversation, asking about steps completed, timing, and future plans, they assign a value from -1 to 5 to indicate how much of the goal has been achieved. If a goal isn't met, they reflect on possible reasons, such as unrealistic scope, lack of engagement, or absence of mentee input, and adjust accordingly (Dubois, Karcher, 2014).

The following is a simple table referenced from Dubois, Karcher (2014) handbook, where they referenced it from the National Standards of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada, adjusted slightly to the context of mentoring for young Roma women.

YOUNG ROMA WOMAN'S NAME	
Goals	
1.	
2.	
3.	
Strategies to accomplish goals	
Goal 1:	
Goal 2:	
Goal 3:	
Goal outcomes	
Goal 1:	Outcome:
Description of results	
Goal 2:	Outcome:
Description of results	
Goal 3:	Outcome:
Description of results	
Mentor/mentee signature	Date:

Template for goal setting (Dubois, Karcher, 2014)

Now looking back to the future, to assessing and evaluating the extent to which the goals have been reached/accomplished, there are a few steps to follow in that regard. It's strongly encouraged that these steps are used simultaneously to the ones setting the goals, as you will see, they're strongly intertwined on all possible levels, and when they travel back to back throughout the process, the process becomes the most efficient.

First, the mentor and mentee collaboratively identify key concerns that align with the mentee's goals. It's important to keep the process flexible, allowing the goals or expectations to shift as the relationship develops or as circumstances change.

Secondly, each goal is then given a weight according to how challenging it is, based on the mentor's perception. The more complex or demanding the goal, the higher the weight assigned to it.

In the third step, the mentor and mentee jointly determine what outcome is expected for each goal, using a five-point scale introduced by Kiresuk and Sherman:

- -2 (much less than expected)
- -1 (less than expected),
- 0 (expected),
- +1 (more than expected),
- +2 (much more than expected).

They also describe what each of these outcomes would look like in practice.

Next, after some time of working toward the goal, the mentor reviews what the mentee has done and assigns a score reflecting the actual outcome. This score can be combined with others into a composite score for the overall goal. This assessment can be done multiple times and may include input from the mentee or be facilitated by program staff, depending on the context.

Mentors begin by reviewing past interactions and asking clarifying questions such as, "What steps have you taken to reach this goal since the last time we met?", "When did you take these steps?", or "Are you going to continue with pursuing this goal?" Based on this discussion, the mentor and mentee assign a goal attainment score using a scale from -1 to 5 (see Table 2).

If a goal is not achieved, consider the following factors:

- too difficult to achieve (try breaking it down into the smaller pieces)
- it might have been developed without active involvement from young Roma women (ask them about it, try introducing together the appropriate measures for improvement)
- young Roma women might fear achieving self-enhancing goal or maybe lack or have low self-esteem, or simply be afraid of being successful - you can talk to them to identify if any of these factors are present and persist to be able to work on addressing them before continuing to pursue set goals)

Lastly, all previously outlined steps should be applied to any new goals introduced during the mentoring process. Even the goals that were eventually dropped should be included and scored. Mentees should review their goals and progress with their mentors to ensure accuracy and reflect on their efforts. Once each goal's weighted score is finalized, these are combined to produce a total score, referred to as the Total Goal Accomplishment Score, for each mentee (Dubois, Karcher, 2014).

Participant (mentee): _____ Mentor: _____
 Goal: _____
 Level of difficulty: _____ Date the goal was set: _____
 Date the goal was reviewed: _____

GOAL ATTAINMENT SCORE	ACTIONS/STEPS
(-1) Deterioration	
(0) Goal dropped	
(1) Active pursuit of goal, little progress	
(2) Active pursuit of goal, some progress	
(3) Accomplished less than desired goal	
(4) Accomplished goal as expected	
(5) Accomplished more than expected success	

Goal Attainment Scale (Dubois, Karcher, 2014)

Stage 3 Develop personalized action plan and provide support and guidance

Once goals have been clearly identified and agreed upon, the next step is turning them into actionable steps. An action plan can take many forms - it might follow a formal written template with clear timelines and milestones, or it can be more flexible, conversational, and informal, especially in settings where written plans may not be practical or even appropriate. In some cases, it may exist primarily as a shared understanding or oral agreement between mentor and mentee. Regardless of the format, the key is that the plan reflects the mentee's unique context, needs, and strengths. Mentors support this process by helping break down goals into manageable actions and by offering encouragement, resources, and ongoing guidance. The plan should remain adaptable and responsive to changes, shaped by continuous dialogue and mutual trust.

Action plan derives from all the previous phases as you will now have a clear picture of what you want your relationship to become in short and/or long-term, you identified expectations from both sides, thus you have set the boundaries and effectively set the goals you will work towards in this mentoring relationship.

Regardless of the format, below are the suggested steps and/or actions to take in order to develop a satisfactory action plan for you and your mentee.

Define(d) objectives

- As you can see, the first step is already done - you went through an extensive but comprehensive process of establishing clear goals and you are now ready to move on. Why you're seeing this here is to emphasize the importance of each previous step which is leading you to this exact moment. Now, it's time to put everything so far on one meaningful pile and identify next steps - how you're going to achieve what you planned.

Action steps

- In earlier stages, mentors and mentees may have identified general strategies for achieving goals. At this point, it's time to take those strategies and turn them into concrete action steps - specific, realistic activities that the mentee (and mentor) can engage in to move closer to their goals. These steps should be simple, time-bound where possible, and clearly connected to the overarching goals of the mentoring relationship. They will also be closely connected to the milestones defined in the next step, which will help track progress and recognize achievements along the way.

Set milestones

- After outlining specific action steps, the next essential phase is identifying milestones as key markers that indicate progress toward the overall goals of the mentoring relationship. These milestones help break the journey into manageable stages, giving both the mentor and mentee a sense of direction, structure, and motivation.
- Milestones can take many forms, such as completing a particular task, attending an event, gaining a new skill, or even reaching a point of increased confidence, regularly attending mentoring sessions, etc. What matters most is that they are meaningful to the mentee and reflect movement toward their broader goals.
- Ideally, milestones should be closely linked to the action steps previously defined. Each milestone should represent a clear, observable achievement that can be used to celebrate progress, encourage reflection, and, if necessary, adjust the path forward. In mentoring relationships where supporting diverse groups like young Roma women is the goal, celebrating even small milestones can be vital in building confidence, maintaining engagement, and fostering a sense of accomplishment.

Establish(ed) evaluation criteria

- If you use GAS as previously mentioned, you already have partially defined, or let's say pre-set evaluation criteria. However, even outside the GAS framework, it's important to agree on how success will be assessed, as GAS mainly focuses on the goals, and here you will have broader picture - you will assess the mentoring relationship. Evaluation criteria should be clear, measurable, and tailored to the specific objectives of the mentoring relationship. Evaluation criteria can range from simple indicators to more complex, transformative outcomes. On a basic level, they may include consistent attendance at mentoring sessions, timely follow-up on agreed tasks, or increased willingness to communicate openly. As the relationship develops, more nuanced indicators can be introduced, such as enhanced confidence in expressing opinions, taking initiative, or navigating institutional systems. For young Roma women as mentees in particular, these markers of progress might also include stronger goal orientation, setting personal boundaries, or engaging more actively in group activities, all of which point to growing self-efficacy and empowerment.
- Setting these criteria in advance ensures that both mentor and mentee are aligned on what progress looks like and enables regular, honest discussions about what is working and what may need to be adjusted.

Communication plan

- Since communication was initially addressed when setting expectations and boundaries, this stage serves to reiterate its practical application and reinforce its importance throughout the mentoring relationship.
- At this point, mentors and mentees should confirm and formalize how they will stay in contact in
 - a way that supports the relationship's growth and consistency over time. This includes:
- Monitoring communication to ensure regularity and responsiveness. Both parties should reflect occasionally on how well communication is flowing and make adjustments when needed.
- Maintaining consistency in communication frequency and style. Even if informal, reliability builds trust, especially in mentoring relationships involving marginalized groups, where unpredictability in other areas of life may already be high.
- Allowing flexibility to accommodate changing circumstances (e.g., family obligations, work shifts, digital limitations). The communication plan should not be rigid but should evolve alongside the mentoring relationship.
- This part of the action plan helps to add to and translate the initial intentions around communication into practice.

Review and adjust

- Mentoring relationships are like a living organism, dynamic and often influenced by changes in personal, social, or contextual circumstances. That's why it is crucial to periodically review the action plan, assess what's working, and make adjustments when needed.
- Additional tip: mentors and mentees should agree on regular check-in points either monthly or at agreed milestones to reflect on progress, revisit goals, and adapt any steps that no longer align with the mentee's evolving needs or situation. These conversations are also an opportunity to identify new goals, revise timelines, or shift strategies based on what has been learned so far (Wilson, 2025).

Mentor	Mentee
Goal:	
Objective 1:	Objective 2:
Action steps:	Action steps:
1)	1)
2)	2)
3)	2)
Evaluation criteria	

Template for mentoring action plan

When talking about support and guidance, the best you can do is to simply follow the 5Cs of mentoring, a series of conversational prompts structured around five phases: Challenges, Choices, Consequences, Creative Solutions, and Conclusions. The 5Cs method offers flexibility and promotes reflective dialogue while maintaining structure and progress. It's not about giving answers, but about asking the right questions at the right time.

The following table shows the 5C elements with appropriate questions you can ask the mentee. The table is referenced from the Mentoring Handbook (2019) by University College London, adjusted to the specific realities of young Roma women and RomniME project, under which this Mentor Handbook is developed.

5CS	MENTOR CONVERSATION PROMPTS
Challenges	<p>Let's take a moment to reflect on where you currently are in your life, learning, or work journey:</p> <p>What are some of the main challenges or difficulties you're facing right now?</p> <p>Which of these challenges feels the most urgent or important (or pressing) to you at the moment?</p> <p>If things were to go well, what would a positive outcome or success look like for you?</p>
Choices	<p>Let's focus on the challenge you feel is most important right now:</p> <p>What are some ways you think you could approach or respond to this challenge?</p> <p>Have you already tried something in the past? If yes, how did that go? If not, what do you think your options might be?</p> <p>Can you think of any other possible paths or actions you could take?</p> <p>Is there anything else that comes to mind?</p> <p>(Encourage exploring multiple options to open up new possibilities.)</p>
	<p>Let's take a closer look at the first option you mentioned:</p> <p>What do you think might happen if you choose this path?</p> <p>What are the potential benefits? And what could be some drawbacks?</p> <p>Now let's consider another option—what outcomes might that lead to?</p> <p>Again, what would be the positives and what might be the challenges?</p> <p>(Repeat this process for each option, helping the mentee weigh their decisions thoughtfully.)</p>
Creative solutions	<p>Let's pause for a moment and think about any possibilities we might have missed:</p> <p>Have you ever faced a similar situation before? If yes, what did you do and how did it turn out? Can you think of someone else, maybe in your community, family, or network, who's been through something similar? What can you learn from their experience?</p> <p>I'd like to share something from my own experience that could be useful here.</p> <p>Now, looking at all the options we've explored, what do you feel might be the best way forward?</p>
Conclusions	<p>Let's explore the option you feel most confident about moving forward with:</p> <p>What action(s) are you ready to take now?</p> <p>What will be your first step toward making this happen?</p> <p>When and how will you begin?</p> <p>What small wins or early successes could help build your confidence and momentum?</p> <p>How can I, as your mentor, support you in taking these steps?</p> <p>We'll keep track of your actions and revisit your progress together in our upcoming meetings.</p>

The 5Cs of mentoring (UCL, 2019)

Stage 4 Encourage reflection and learning and foster independence and future planning

While reflection is often seen as a personal, internal process, it can be greatly enriched through the support of others. In a mentoring relationship, the mentor plays a crucial role in creating a safe and open space where the mentee can explore their thoughts, concerns, and ideas out loud. As Felten et al. (2013) suggest, mentors can foster this kind of reflective dialogue by asking thoughtful questions, prompting deeper consideration, and helping mentees think through their experiences with greater clarity. This not only helps the mentee dedicate time to regular reflection but also introduces new perspectives they might not have arrived at alone (The University of Edinburgh, 2024).

But, to take it further from the mentee itself, reflective practice helps the mentor as well. As a mentor, you bring your own experiences, values, perspectives, and habits into the mentoring relationship. While these can be valuable, it's equally important to reflect on them critically. Ongoing self-reflection helps you recognize how your assumptions and personal style may shape the mentoring process. A reflective mentor understands they don't have all the answers and is open to learning how to better support their mentee. As Zachery (2000) reminds us, "All mentoring relationships are embedded in context", and that context shapes how we see possibilities, challenges, and success (The University of Edinburgh, 2024).

There are a number of models that you could use for reflecting on the mentoring experience, both from your side and supporting the mentee in this process to enhance their mentoring experience.

We will look to a couple of them, but we encourage you to explore further, and you can do so by following this link: <https://reflection.ed.ac.uk/reflectors-toolkit/reflecting-on-experience>, where you can find 6 successful models/tools for reflection.

One of the two is intended for an in-depth analysis of different factors that affect the mentoring relationship, and it's called the Gibbs' Reflective Cycle.

The Six Stages of Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (Gibbs, 1988, as described in The University of Edinburgh, 2020c)

Description	Feelings	Evaluation	Analysis	Conclusion
Describe the situation in detail from an objective point of view.	Reflect on the subjective point of view by describing your feelings and opinions.	The whole situation is evaluated by determining what worked well and what did not work. It is important to evaluate both the positive and the negative and be honest with yourself.	Analyse why something went well or why it did not work out. Can also include academic literature and compare the situation with similar situations described in the literature.	Summarize the other stages by highlighting what you have learnt from this situation.

Six stages of Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (Schoch, L. 2021)

To start the analysis, we're using the picture from Leanna Schoch's thesis titled "Reflections on the Parkinson's Project: Learning Experiences with the Gibbs' Reflective Cycle" from 2021, which she further referenced from the source mentioned in the picture itself.

The Gibbs Reflective Cycle includes six stages: description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action plan. In the context of mentoring marginalized groups, we can consider the

following interpretation/implementation of the mentioned model.

STAGE	PROMPTS
Description	<p>Help the mentee recount the situation clearly.</p> <p>Can you describe what happened during that experience?</p> <p>What was the setting or context?</p> <p>Who else was involved?</p> <p>What was your role or what actions did you take?</p>
Feelings	<p>Support the mentee in exploring their emotions and thoughts.</p> <p>How did you feel at the time?</p> <p>What were you thinking before, during, and after the situation?</p> <p>Did anything about it surprise or unsettle you?</p> <p>How do you feel about it now?</p>
Evaluation	<p>Encourage balanced thinking - what worked, what didn't.</p> <p>What do you think went well in that experience?</p> <p>Was there anything that didn't go as you expected or hoped?</p> <p>What did others (if anyone) do that helped or hindered?</p> <p>Would you approach anything different next time?</p>
Analysis	<p>Help the mentee make sense of the situation and learn from it.</p> <p>Why do you think things unfolded the way they did?</p> <p>What factors (internal or external) influenced the outcome?</p> <p>What did this situation reveal about your strengths or growth areas?</p> <p>How does this connect to past experiences or goals you've set?</p>
Conclusion	<p>Draw insights and lessons learned.</p> <p>What would you like to take away from this experience?</p> <p>Are there new things you've learned about yourself?</p> <p>Is there anything you would avoid or do again?</p> <p>Has your perspective on this situation changed now that we've talked about it?</p>
Action plan	<p>Focus on moving forward with intention.</p> <p>What are the next steps you could take in response to this?</p> <p>Are there skills or knowledge you'd like to build?</p> <p>How can I support you in applying what you've learned?</p> <p>What might you do differently if a similar situation comes up again?</p>

This model brings with it a dose of structure and formality, but the questions can, of course, be adapted to each specific situation. What's important and what's guiding you is the stages that you're passing when reflecting about previous experiences with your mentee.

On the other hand, even though still structured, we have a much simpler model developed by Terry Borton in 1970s. Its name already suggests what you need to do, so we're going to picture

it first.



What, so what, now what model (Life Design Log, 2021)

So, in the first step, you're analyzing what happened, in the second step you will analyze why it happened and why it's important for your particular situation and then, as always, you will think about what you want to do to either enhance what happened or limit it.

Let's simplify it for you:

WHAT?

- What happened during this situation or experience?
- What was your role, and what actions did you take?
- What were the key moments or turning points?

SO WHAT?

- Why was this experience significant to you?
- What did you learn about yourself or others?
- How did this situation affect your thoughts, feelings, or goals?

NOW WHAT?

- What could you do differently next time?
- What support or resources might help you move forward?
- What action can you take now to build on what you've learned?

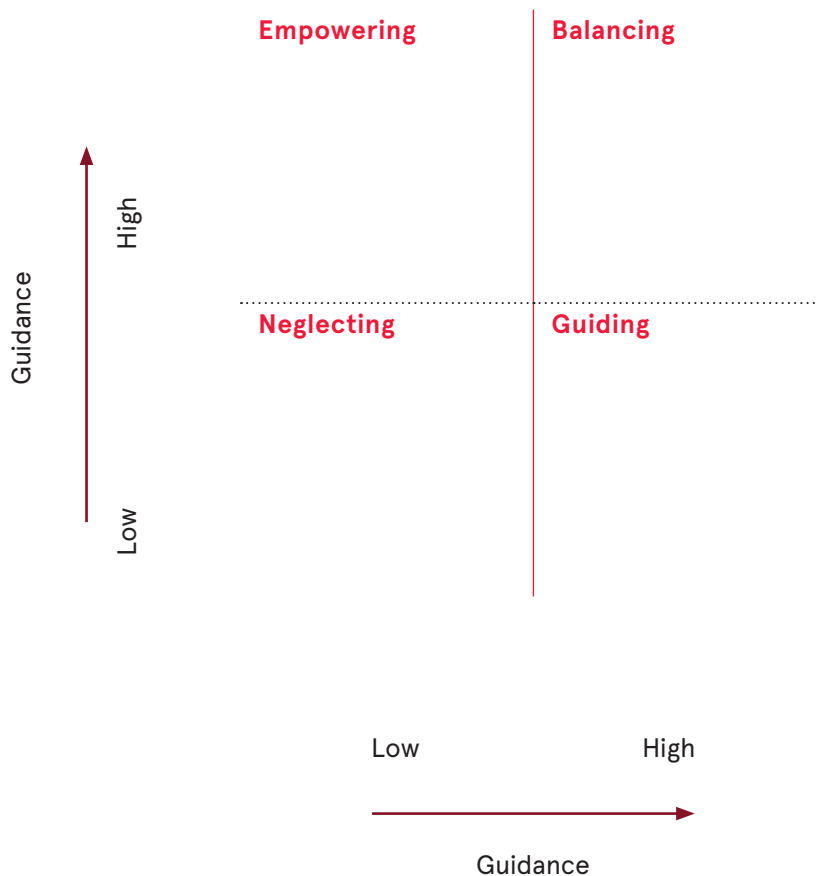
As you see, there are great similarities, and you will find this in any model that you use - the situation might often be the only thing dictating the way you would like to proceed. This brings you to the last piece of the puzzle and that is trying to foster and facilitate independence.

Supporting the mentee in becoming more independent is a key aim of any mentoring relationship. However, what that independence looks like, what the mentee should know, feel confident doing, or decide on their own, is rarely made explicit by either side. In our context, clearly defining steps toward autonomy and setting concrete, realistic goals can play a vital role in gradually building a mentee’s sense of agency and self-direction (Wright, 2015).

Remember when we first talked about defining expectations? It’s of vast importance to insert a segment about guidance and independence, which might often become intertwined and thus, you might lose the independence you’re trying to build throughout the whole process.

There’s a simple matrix provided by a Vallabh Chitnis in the article titled “The Mentorship Matrix: Balancing Guidance & Independence”, which already in itself includes the explanation, or rather should we say a dose of common sense, of how and why things work.

The Mentorship Matrix: Balancing Guidance and Independence



The mentorship matrix: balancing guidance and independence (Vallabh Chitnis, 2024)

Let's explain further.

Guiding

In the guiding approach, the mentor takes a highly active role, offering specific instructions and close oversight. This can be especially helpful at the beginning of the mentoring relationship or when working with mentees who face significant structural or personal barriers. However, if maintained too long, it may unintentionally limit the mentee's growth and autonomy.

Neglecting

The neglecting approach arises when there is little support and limited encouragement for independence. In such cases, the mentee may feel abandoned or unmotivated, particularly in vulnerable contexts where trust and reassurance are essential. This lack of engagement can slow progress and weaken the relationship.

Empowering

The empowering style minimizes hands-on guidance and places emphasis on the mentee's self-direction. This may work well with confident or more experienced individuals who are ready to take the lead. However, for mentees navigating social exclusion or unfamiliar systems, it can feel disorienting or isolating if not balanced with appropriate support.

Balancing

A balanced mentoring style provides the mentee with steady support while gradually fostering independence and self-confidence. This approach encourages meaningful learning, empowerment, and resilience, crucial when mentoring Roma women, whose experiences may require both structured guidance and space to assert their voice and choices (Chitnis, 2024).

This matrix highlights that the most effective mentoring occurs in the Balancing quadrant where mentors offer strong guidance while also encouraging independence. We explored 4 approaches here and they all come in handy at some point in the mentoring relationship, but this balanced approach helps mentees build confidence, develop autonomy, and feel supported, particularly important when working with individuals facing systemic barriers or limited opportunities for self-directed growth.

4.6. Reflection

This self-reflection section is designed to help you engage more deeply with the one-to-one mentoring method outlined in this handbook. The goal is to support your understanding of key concepts such as personalization, boundaries, trust-building, and risk management, and to encourage you to begin translating those insights into your own mentoring practice.

Take time to respond in writing or through personal reflection, depending on what works best for you.

Reflect on the definition and purpose of one-to-one mentoring.

In what ways does this mentoring method align with the kinds of support you believe Roma women (or similar mentees) most need?

Task: Identify the risks most relevant to your context.

From the risks outlined (e.g., scheduling challenges, over-dependence, role confusion), choose two that you think are most likely to arise in your mentoring relationships. Write down or think about one or two strategies you might use to prevent or manage each.

Reflect on the emphasis on trust, respect, and confidentiality.

What specific actions will you take to foster these values in the early stages of the mentoring relationship?

Task: Consider how boundaries will be communicated.

Based on the section on setting boundaries, draft two key points you would want to clarify with

your mentee about how your communication will work and what your role includes and doesn't include. Are you satisfied with your approach or do you feel the need to investigate it further or even ask for help?

Reflect on goal setting and shared decision-making.

How will you ensure that goals are developed collaboratively and that both your perspective and the mentee's experience are respected equally?

Task: Apply insights about context and sensitivity.

Revisit the specific challenges faced by Roma women (e.g., discrimination, family responsibilities, digital exclusion). How will these influence the way you structure your mentoring, and what will you need to remain sensitive to?

Effective mentoring begins with honest self-assessment. Use these reflections and tasks not only to prepare for your first one-to-one mentoring experience but also as tools to revisit as the relationship progresses. The more intentional you are with your preparation, the more likely you are to build a mentoring space that is safe, empowering, and tailored to the real needs of your mentee.

4.7. Self-assessment

Before moving forward, take a moment to assess your understanding and confidence in applying the key principles covered in this chapter. For each of the statements below, rate yourself on a scale from 1 to 5, whereas:

1 - Strongly disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - Neutral, 4 - Agree, 5 - Strongly agree.

This self-assessment is for your own reflection and learning. It is not scored externally, but it can help you identify areas where you feel strong and those where you might want to revisit the content or seek additional support.

#	STATEMENT	1	2	3	4	5
1	I understand the unique characteristics and value of one-to-one mentoring compared to group formats.					
2	I can name key strengths of one-to-one mentoring and explain why it is particularly suited to Roma women.					
3	I am familiar with typical risks or challenges in one-to-one mentoring (e.g. dependency, scheduling) and ways to reduce them.					
4	I can identify situations or profiles where one-to-one mentoring works best and where it may fall short.					
5	I understand how one-to-one mentoring can be used to promote mentee autonomy and long-term independence.					
6	I can recognize the role of the mentor in supporting mentee-led goal setting and adapting plans over time.					
7	I understand how to initiate a one-to-one mentoring relationship by identifying expectations, setting boundaries, and establishing trust with my mentee					

Now it's time to sum your points and reflect on where you are at the moment.

Emerging understanding: Revisit key parts of Section 4.1. Pay close attention to when and why one-to-one mentoring is appropriate and how to handle common risks.

18 - 27 points

Developing confidence: You grasp the core ideas but may want to spend more time thinking about practical applications or mentoring adaptations for specific mentee contexts.

28 - 35 points

Confident and informed: You show a strong understanding of one-to-one mentoring and are well-equipped to use it thoughtfully and responsively in your everyday work.

4.8. Module 2: Small group mentoring (up to 6 mentees)

Small group mentoring offers a unique opportunity to foster shared learning and support among a group of mentees, typically up to six. In this format, one or more mentors guide participants through collaborative discussions, reflections, and activities. This method is particularly effective when common goals or experiences unite the group, allowing participants to learn not only from the mentor but also from each other. For young Roma women, small group mentoring can provide a space of solidarity, mutual encouragement, and collective empowerment, mostly noticed when trust and safety are established early in the process. Group dynamics often add complexity to mentoring process, but on the other hand, they also bring richness and diversity to this experience.

The learning outcomes you are expected to achieve upon the completion of this module are the following:

- Recognize when and why to use small group mentoring
- Form groups based on compatibility, trust, and the needs of young people
- Ensure sense of belonging and psychological safety within group settings
- Apply tools and methods to design and facilitate effective group sessions

4.9. When and why to use small group format

This type of mentoring often combines the strengths of both one-to-one and group mentoring. While it isn't a perfect approach unless carefully planned and implemented, it can offer a strong foundation for effective mentoring by balancing individual attention with shared learning. With the right setup, it can significantly support the success of the mentoring process.

The small group setting works best for:

Diverse settings and shared learning opportunities

It allows mentees to benefit from the shared insights and life experiences of others in the group, fostering a supportive and dynamic space for learning and mutual growth (Techademy, 2024). This can be especially valuable for Roma women and other diverse participants, as it creates opportunities to recognize common challenges, build solidarity, build on shared or each other's strengths, and explore diverse strategies for overcoming barriers together.

Think of a time when you were part of a diverse group (whether as a mentor, facilitator, or participant) where individuals had different backgrounds, perspectives, or experiences.

- What did you notice about that setting, anything in particular? Did people, at any point, start learning from one another?
- Were there moments when peer exchange enriched the discussion or led to new insights? Did the mentors/educators/trainers/facilitators also acknowledge learning something themselves?
- How was the environment set up to support that exchange, or better yet how could it have been better?

You were thinking back just now, but if you stop for a minute and think ahead, how might you intentionally create or enhance these kinds of peer learning opportunities in your own mentoring practice?

Networking opportunities

Small group mentoring provides a natural environment for mentees to connect with one another, fostering mutual support and shared learning. These peer relationships can lead to the exchange of resources, encouragement, and collective problem-solving. For Roma women, in particular, this setting can help reduce feelings of isolation and promote a strong sense of solidarity, belonging, and empowerment within the group.

Sense of community and sense of belonging

Group mentoring can cultivate a strong sense of community and connection, as mentees form meaningful relationships with both peers and mentors. This strengthened bond can enhance their engagement and deepen their commitment to the group, initiative, or broader community they are part of Mentoloop (2024).

Confidence building

Small group settings offer a safer, less intimidating environment than larger groups. For mentees who may lack confidence – particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, this format allows them to gradually find their voice, learn from peers, and take part in conversations without necessarily feeling exposed or overwhelmed.

Skill-building

Small group mentoring is particularly effective for developing soft and practical skills such as communication, conflict resolution, problem-solving, and leadership. Mentees not only learn directly from the mentor but also by observing and interacting with their peers. This peer learning reinforces understanding, encourages collaboration, and makes it easier to apply new skills in real-life contexts. Whatever one can think of can fold under this category, not only soft skills, e.g. sewing, knitting, cooking, basic digital literacy/skills, etc., whatever your group activity is aiming for.

Overall, the small group mentoring format is used because it balances personalized support with the strengths of peer interaction. Mentees typically gather around a shared interest, need, or opportunity, which becomes the foundation for collective growth. In this setting, they not only receive guidance from the mentor but also learn from one another thus building confidence, developing practical and social skills, and forming meaningful connections. Especially for Roma women, this format helps reduce isolation, fosters belonging, and creates space for mutual support and problem-solving, making it a valuable and empowering mentoring approach.

To enhance the point further, we look at the comparison of one-to-one method and small group method, to see what differentiates the two but also how often they can complement each other.

ASPECT	SMALL GROUP MENTORING	ONE-TO-ONE MENTORING
Participants	Involves one mentor working with a small group of mentees (up to six), often brought together by shared needs or goals.	Involves a mentor and a single mentee, focusing on a personalized mentoring experience.
Interaction dynamics	Encourages peer interaction, exchange of experiences, and collaborative support among mentees.	Enables focused and personalized dialogue, allowing for deeper trust and understanding.
Learning setting	Creates a participatory space where mentees can learn from both the mentor and each other.	Offers a private, dedicated space for mentoring tailored to the mentee's specific journey and personal challenges.
Scope	Addresses themes relevant to the group such as shared barriers, empowerment, or skills, while allowing for individual input.	Targets individual goals and specific situations, often shaped by the mentee's lived experience.
Networking	Naturally fosters peer networking, mutual support, and possible collaboration beyond the sessions.	May offer fewer peer connections, but mentors might link mentees to useful contacts or opportunities.
Time and resources	More time-efficient per mentee; one mentor can support several mentees at once.	More intensive in terms of time and effort per mentee; tailored support demands greater mentor availability.
Feedback & evaluation	Feedback often addresses group-level themes, progress, and shared reflections.	Feedback is highly personalized, focused on individual development, and can be tracked more precisely.

One-to-one mentoring and small group mentoring comparison (Techademy, 2024)

While small group and one-to-one mentoring have distinct approaches, they can work powerfully in tandem. A mentor leading a small group may recognize that certain mentees need more personalized guidance and thus suggest occasional one-to-one sessions to address specific concerns or vulnerabilities. Conversely, during an individual mentoring process, a mentor might identify shared interests or challenges across several mentees and see value in forming a group where peer exchange and solidarity can flourish. This flexibility allows the mentoring relationship to remain responsive to evolving needs, creating space for both deep personal development and collective empowerment. Using both formats intentionally can strengthen learning, boost engagement, and support the unique journeys of each mentee within a broader, shared context.

4.10. Group formation (compatibility, trust)

Although there is no universally agreed-upon ideal group size, many researchers and practitioners suggest that a group of around four to five mentees per mentor strikes a practical balance. This smaller ratio has several advantages, particularly in community-based or non-formal mentoring settings.

- It allows mentors to better manage group dynamics and maintain focus during activities.
- It also creates space for more meaningful interactions (still, even if in the group setting contrary to one-to-one mentoring), reducing the chances of participants disengaging or becoming overlooked.
- A smaller group can foster a stronger sense of belonging and support among mentees, something especially important for marginalized women who may lack such spaces elsewhere.
- Additionally, smaller groups make it easier to organize and carry out diverse activities, especially when resources, time, and space are limited.
- This setup also supports more effective project work and hands-on learning without overwhelming either the mentor or the group (Mentor, 2020).

In accordance with everything stated so far, you might be getting the idea already about what kind of groups there are. Let's break it down together.

Special interest group

In our context, special interest groups serve as dedicated spaces where mentees can connect around common experiences, needs, or aspirations. These groups encourage ongoing exchange, learning, and mutual support based on shared realities. Even though they may, in theory, also function as peer-led communities and they are a result of shared identities, interests, needs or goals, we strongly suggest they be, at the very least, facilitated by a designated mentor who helps guide discussions and activities in line with the group's focus.

Groups led by mentor(s)

Many mentors work with multiple mentees simultaneously, and creating opportunities for these mentees to come together in a group setting can greatly enrich their learning experience. In such environments, mentees benefit not only from the mentor's guidance but also from the shared insights and experiences of their peers. Additionally, this approach allows mentors to use their time more effectively by addressing common themes collectively.

While special interest groups often focus on handy everyday skills, knowledge and experiences, groups led by mentors would focus more on capacity building, addressing shared challenges, confidence, etc.

Peer to peer mentoring

Even though not covered in depth nor positioned as a central focus of this Mentor Handbook, peer mentoring must still be acknowledged as a valuable and viable format within the broader mentoring ecosystem. It is something that mentors themselves can gently encourage, especially if the opportunity, or even the need, emerges organically among mentees.

Peer mentoring refers to a model where individuals with similar lived experiences, challenges, or stages in life come together to offer each other mutual support, guidance, and learning. Unlike structured formats that rely on a designated mentor, peer mentoring operates on reciprocity and shared leadership. In the context of Roma women, this model can be particularly empowering, creating a safe, non-hierarchical space where participants support one another, exchange strategies, and reflect on shared realities from equal footing.

This kind of group may develop naturally within mentoring programs or be intentionally formed when mentors or coordinators notice strong mutual connections or shared challenges between participants. While it functions independently, it can still be lightly monitored or supported by a mentor, program facilitator, or another designated person from a coordinating organization, with the special focus being on the early phases, to ensure the group remains

inclusive, respectful, and focused on mutual growth.

These groups were pulled from the Mastering group mentoring - a guide for program coordinators by Mentorloop, adjusted to the context of working with specific target groups as the likes of young Roma women.

In most cases, if not all, group formation will begin by identifying shared interests, which serve as a key input for matching mentees and initiating the mentoring process. As previously disclosed, your focus should be on understanding the specific needs of young Roma women and aligning those with their goals, expectations, and your own areas of expertise and experience. This process can be supported by existing research, your personal observations, guidance from coordinating organizations, and similar sources. Additionally, a helpful framework to guide your thinking is the 7 Universal needs of youth, as outlined by Mentor Maryland in their 2021 webinar on How to Build an Effective Community-Based Youth Mentoring Program with Best Practices (adapted from Youth Development Institute, NYC).

Safety and structure

Young Roma women need to feel physically and emotionally safe in their environments. They benefit from having a sense of stability and routines that help make daily life more predictable and manageable.

Belonging and connection

It's essential that they feel accepted, included, and valued, i.e. within their families, communities, and mentoring relationships. A sense of belonging fosters trust and engagement in the mentoring process.

Self-worth and contribution

Feeling like they matter and that they have something meaningful to offer to themselves, their peers, families, or communities, strengthens confidence and purpose.

Self-awareness and cultural identity

Supporting young women in understanding their individuality, including cultural identity, spiritual beliefs, or community connections, helps them navigate their paths with pride and clarity. Independence and control over one's life

Being able to make choices and take responsibility for those choices is empowering. It helps mentees feel more in control of their own lives and futures.

A stable relationship with a trusted adult

A consistent, caring relationship with a mentor or adult figure is crucial. This bond offers guidance, emotional support, and a safe space for growth.

Competence and confidence in the future

Through learning new skills and gaining knowledge, mentees develop a sense of progress and the belief that they are capable of succeeding in the future.

When forming your groups, you should keep three things in mind: group size, group access and, of course, participant experience.

Group access

First, consider who should be allowed to participate in each group. Depending on the group's purpose, it may be important to limit or broaden access. For instance, a group formed around a single mentor and their mentees such as a small group mentoring setting should remain private to protect the trust and intimacy of that space. In contrast, a special interest group focused on shared needs or goals (like employment readiness or cultural exchange) may be more open. In such cases, it might still be useful for a facilitator or coordinating organization to review and approve group participation, ensuring the group stays relevant and inclusive. You can use this example/approach for both small group mentoring as well as large group settings.

You will, in the case of group access, have the opportunity to:

- Create a private (hidden) group intended only for mentees who are specifically invited by you, a coordinating organization, or another designated party.
- Keep the group open to applications but implement a selection process to ensure participants meet specific criteria relevant to the mentoring goals.
- Make the group fully open to all interested individuals, allowing anyone who identifies with the group’s purpose to join freely (Mentorloop).

Group size

You already know that this section focuses on small group mentoring, but as you begin forming your group, you’ll need to consider how your intended outcomes might influence the structure. Group size can play a critical role in the overall success of the mentoring process, so take time to carefully assess what setup will best support your goals.

Mentorloop, in its guide titled “Mastering Group Mentoring – a guide for program coordinators”, provides a brief table of pros and cons of smaller and larger groups, which can serve as a basis for you to go through the process of deciding on your group size.

SMALLER	PROS	CONS
	<p>Greater individual focus and stronger relationships</p> <p>In smaller groups, mentors can give more focused attention to each mentee, allowing for more meaningful conversations and tailored guidance. This often leads to deeper connections, trust, and a stronger sense of mutual understanding among group members.</p>	<p>Limited diversity of input</p> <p>With fewer participants, there may be a narrower range of perspectives, lived experiences, and ideas shared within the group. This can reduce opportunities for mentees to be exposed to different viewpoints and approaches to problem-solving.</p>
LARGER	<p>Broader range of perspectives and stronger networking potential</p> <p>Larger groups often bring together mentees with varied backgrounds, experiences, and viewpoints, enriching discussions and peer learning. This setting also provides more opportunities for networking and forming meaningful connections within a wider community.</p>	<p>Personality dynamics may affect participation</p> <p>In larger groups, more dominant or extroverted individuals may naturally take the lead in discussions, while those who are quieter or less confident may struggle to engage fully or feel overshadowed.</p> <p>Greater potential for misunderstandings or conflict</p> <p>With more participants involved, differences in communication styles, opinions, or expectations may arise more easily, requiring careful facilitation to maintain a respectful and inclusive group atmosphere.</p>

Pros and cons of smaller and larger mentoring groups (Mentorloop, 2025)

Participants experience

Arguably the most crucial element of all is the focus on participants' experiences - before, during, and after the mentoring process, as it encompasses their anticipated, expected, and actual lived experiences. This is also one of the ways to show you how each and every step is important in the mentoring process - what we learned through one-to-one mentoring might also apply, and even be crucial here. Expectations are a huge part of the whole mentoring experience, and once you're sure expectations are clear, you will guide the experience.

Looking on the more practical side of things, if participants are relatively new to a particular topic or area, a more structured mentoring format with clear objectives and guidance provided by a designated group mentor may be more effective. Conversely, if the group includes more experienced individuals, a flexible, mentee-driven approach that allows for open discussion and peer exchange may be more suitable.

4.11. Group session design

The group session design segment of the group mentoring, we will open up with a picture that shows possibly all the important elements that a group mentoring requires. Once all these elements are in place, it's hard to lead an unsuccessful group mentoring process.



*Key components of an effective mentoring relationship
(Eller, Lucille Sanzero, Lev, L. Elise, Feurer, Amy, 2014)*

This image clearly depicts not only the essential building blocks of a strong group mentoring process, but also what a mentor must consider before stepping into the role. Each element represents a dimension of the relationship that a mentor should intentionally cultivate - from creating open channels of communication to fostering trust, encouraging independence, and modeling behavior. Together, they form a roadmap for shaping the mentoring experience, but also a reminder that mentors must lead by example. By building on these foundations, the mentor not only guides the process but gradually becomes a trusted figure and a role model in the eyes of the mentee.

First of all, it's extremely important to note that group activities, in terms of structure and approach, often mirror those in a one-to-one setting, as the broader stages of mentoring apply across both formats. This is only logical because the core principles of building trust, setting goals, fostering development, and reflecting on progress remain central to effective mentoring - regardless of the number of participants involved.

So, to start designing your group mentoring process and group sessions, keep in mind the following phases.

1. Set the program goals

Sounds familiar? That's because, just like in the one-to-one setting, defining goals at the start of a group mentoring process is a critical foundation. The goal-setting principles explored earlier can be easily applied here as well, thus ensuring that both the mentor and mentees share a clear understanding of what they're working toward together. In the context of small group mentoring, this might include practical or soft skills to be developed collectively, shared challenges to address (such as navigating discrimination or accessing education and employment), or areas of mutual interest and cultural identity. For young Roma women, goals might also center around empowerment, self-expression, building confidence, strengthening community ties, or exploring future opportunities in safe, supportive environments. These goals should reflect the lived experiences of the group and aim to create a meaningful path forward for each participant.

2. Design the program/curriculum

Once your group goals are established, the next step is to begin shaping the program or curriculum that will support those objectives. It's important to emphasize that your program doesn't need to be rigid or overly structured as group mentoring thrives on adaptability. Depending on the group's needs, it can take many forms: a series of structured workshops, flexible discussion-based sessions, or even informal, activity-based gatherings.

What matters most is that the mentor takes time to plan in advance. This includes thinking through the flow of sessions, preparing materials or resources as needed, and clearly introducing the topics that will be covered. Be transparent with mentees about what to expect and remain open to adjusting the approach based on how the group responds.

You may also want to involve colleagues, co-facilitators, or experts when addressing sensitive or complex themes. The mentoring program should be rooted in the goals and needs identified earlier as it becomes a roadmap that helps both the mentor and mentees prepare, stay engaged, and track their growth over time.

3. Matching process

Building strong mentoring relationships often begins with thoughtful and intentional matching. When mentors share similar life experiences, cultural background, socioeconomic status, or personal challenges with their mentees, they may be perceived as more relatable and trustworthy making it easier to form authentic, meaningful connections.

Successful matches are frequently rooted in shared values, interests, or lived experiences. Including the mentees in this process, by asking for their input or preferences, can significantly increase the likelihood of a successful, respectful partnership.

However, matches across differences, such as race, gender, or life experience, can also be highly effective when properly supported. This involves preparing mentors through ongoing training in cultural awareness, relationship-building, and empowering practices. Mentors should be encouraged to reflect on their own biases, actively listen, celebrate the mentee's identity and heritage, and learn to give feedback in a way that builds trust and confidence.

Ultimately, the match should be guided not only by surface similarities but by the mentor's commitment to understanding, adapting, and centering the mentee's voice in the journey (Chase & Bania, 2016).

4. Meeting consistency

With your program or curriculum outlined and matching process in the books, the next step is to set up the practical details of how your mentoring group will meet. Decide on the frequency and duration of your sessions, whether they'll happen weekly, bi-weekly, whether it is a one-time activity or another schedule that suits the group's rhythm. Choose the format that works best for your participants: will you gather in person, online, or perhaps combine both? If you're meeting online, make sure all group members have access to the tools and devices they'll need to participate fully. Your choices here should prioritize accessibility, consistency, and the comfort of your mentees (Ryan, 2024).

5. Involving parents/caregivers or families

This is a sensitive and situation-dependent phase of the mentoring process. In the case of young Roma women, family dynamics can significantly influence their participation, progress, and even access to mentoring opportunities. Therefore, careful and thoughtful consideration should be given to if and how families are involved.

In some situations, the family environment may be a source of limitation due to restrictive cultural expectations, lack of understanding of the mentoring process, or socio-economic challenges. In other cases, families can be a valuable source of encouragement and stability. Engaging them, when appropriate, can help reduce resistance, build trust, and even contribute positively to the mentee's development.

Mentors and program staff should aim to maintain open and respectful communication with families, ensuring that all materials are accessible (translated if necessary) and using visuals where literacy may be a concern. Inclusion efforts might involve inviting family members to orientation sessions, asking them to sign consent forms when required, or simply informing them regularly about the process and its benefits (Chase & Bania, 2016).

Moreover, involving families can offer mutual benefits. When caregivers better understand the goals and methods of the mentoring process, they may feel more empowered and included. This could help reshape family perspectives, especially regarding gender roles, education, employment, and the independence of young Roma women. In turn, this broader impact can create more supportive environments at home and strengthen the ripple effects of the mentoring relationship.

Finally, families may also be linked to broader community networks. Through them, mentors or coordinating organizations might gain valuable insights into additional resources, risks, or opportunities that affect not just the mentee, but the family and community as a whole.

6. Monitoring and evaluation

As a mentor, it's important to regularly reflect on how the mentoring relationship is developing and whether it's meeting the goals you've set together with your mentee. Stay attentive to how your mentee is progressing, not just in terms of skills or tasks completed, but also in their confidence, engagement, and general well-being. If you notice a shift (positive or negative), take time to talk about it and adjust your approach if needed (Chase & Bania, 2016).

You should check in with your mentee regularly about how they feel the mentoring is going. Invite open and honest conversations: What's working well? What's been challenging? What do they need more or less of? These questions can help avoid misunderstandings and strengthen your connection. If a coordinating organization is involved, they may offer you tools or guidance for these conversations or help troubleshoot if challenges arise.

In many cases, your mentee's family situation may also influence how they engage in the mentoring process. It's helpful to be aware of this and show empathy and flexibility where needed. Sometimes, families may benefit from being informed about the mentoring (with the mentee's consent), especially if it helps create a more supportive environment.

Finally, keep in mind that evaluation doesn't always mean formal assessment. It's about learning, for you and your mentee. Revisit the goals you've set together, track small wins, and talk about what might need to change. This ongoing reflection ensures that your mentoring stays relevant, motivating, and meaningful.

7. Closure and re-matching

Mentoring relationships don't always unfold as planned, so it's important that clear procedures and expectations are in place to manage any disruptions or premature endings. Mentors and mentees should both be informed, from the beginning, about how the relationship might come to a close, whether due to external reasons, rematching needs, or natural program completion, and how to reflect positively on what was accomplished together.

When working with marginalized youth, including young Roma women, particular care must be taken during closure. Many may have experienced abandonment or inconsistent support in the past, so ending a mentoring relationship needs to be done with sensitivity and thoughtfulness to avoid reinforcing feelings of rejection or loss.

Mentors should be supported and trained to guide a healthy and respectful closure process. When done well, it can model positive endings and transitions, which assures continuous support.

You should remember that you can start small - test things out to see if it all works how you intended it or you need further adjustments, but most important of all, gather feedback (Ryan, 2024).

The previous section offered a general overview of small group mentoring, how to structure your program and monitor its progress. In the following additional steps, we shift from the broader perspective to more targeted, practical guidance. These phases are designed to support you in planning and delivering each key activity within your mentoring program with greater depth and clarity.

In the table on the next page, you will find a short summary of each of the elaborated phases, along with some key considerations to take from each!

PHASE	FOCUS	KEY CONSIDERATIONS
Set Goals	Shared understanding	Empowerment, confidence, cultural identity
Design Curriculum	Planning & adaptability	Structured workshops, flexible discussions
Matching	Building trust	Shared experiences, cultural awareness
Meeting Consistency	Practical logistics	Frequency, format, accessibility
Involving Families	Context & support	Respectful communication, cultural sensitivity
Monitoring & Evaluation	Reflection	Progress, confidence, ongoing feedback
Closure & Rematching	Healthy transitions	Sensitivity, feedback, continuous support

Plan for access to space, materials, and resources

Since small group mentoring often centers around structured activities, careful logistical planning is essential, especially when sessions are hosted in shared community spaces such as schools, cultural centers, or local organizations. One of the common challenges mentors face is securing appropriate and private meeting spaces, as well as gaining access to the necessary tools and materials to carry out planned activities. When mentoring takes place at a host location, it can be helpful to establish a formal agreement (like a Memorandum of Understanding - you can find some useful templates here - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/setting-up-school-partnerships> (accessed last on 16. 7. 2025). with the institution to ensure clarity around the use of space and resources (Mentor, 2020). Please note that there's no single template for the Memorandum of understanding as it varies depending on the situation and the need.

Ultimately, mentors need to ensure that everything from the physical environment to equipment and supplies is available and appropriate to support effective, engaging group sessions.

Encouraging groups to create their own norms and rituals

Fostering a strong sense of belonging and ownership is a key aim of small group mentoring, and one effective way to do this is by empowering mentees to co-create their group's identity. Mentors are encouraged to support their groups in developing their own customs, routines, and shared expectations, whether that means establishing a recurring opening activity or greeting, agreeing on rules around respect, confidentiality, and conflict resolution, or deciding how the group will mark milestones and celebrate achievements.

Especially important is involving everyone in how group decisions will be made (e.g., by consensus, rotation, or majority vote), and what should happen if the group's agreements aren't respected. By developing these elements together early on, participants are more likely to feel connected, respected, and engaged. These shared norms and rituals help build trust, add consistency to group dynamics, and often spark the kind of joyful, memorable experiences that make group mentoring special (Mentor, 2020). Preparing for common challenges in group mentoring

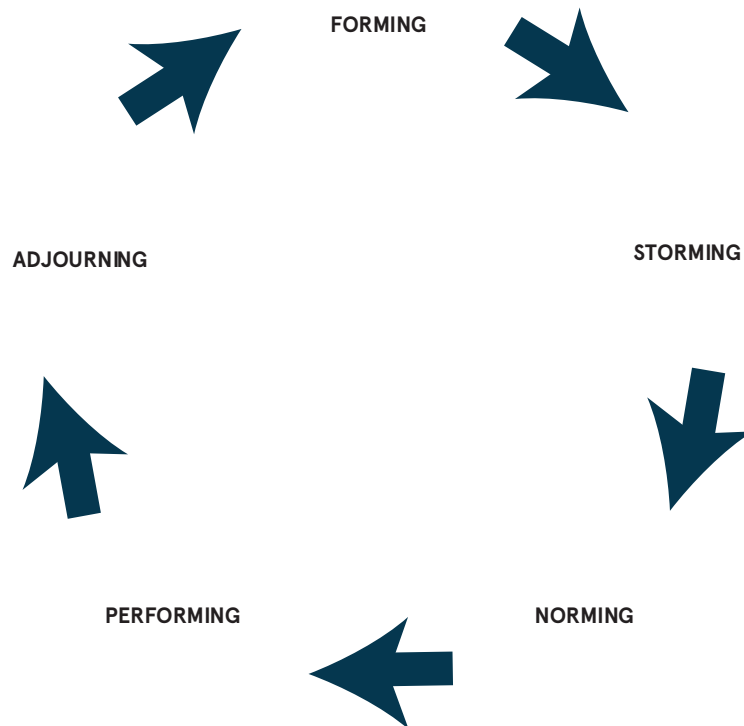
As you prepare to lead a small group mentoring initiative, it's important to anticipate and plan for some typical challenges that may arise in this setting. Although every group will naturally develop its own rhythm and character, mentors should aim to ensure that each group receives a broadly comparable mentoring experience. If there are significant discrepancies between group experiences, it may become difficult to meet the overarching goals of your program.

One key issue to watch for is uneven participation. Some mentees, especially those who are more introverted or uncertain in group settings, may be overshadowed by more vocal or confident peers. Mentors should be especially attentive to these dynamics, encouraging quieter mentees without pressuring them to participate in ways that feel uncomfortable or unsafe. Instead, consider alternative ways to involve them in group activities or check in individually to offer support. What matters most is that every participant feels seen, heard, and included at a level that's appropriate for them.

Another challenge is addressing individual needs within a group format. Not every mentee will thrive in a group setting and some may require more personal attention or support. In such cases, it might be worth supplementing group sessions with brief one-to-one conversations before or after meetings. When needed, mentors can also coordinate with program staff or external support services to ensure each mentee gets the care they need, especially if deeper social or emotional support is required.

Lastly, managing group dynamics is a crucial skill for any mentor. Facilitators must be prepared to guide the group through the natural phases of development, such as early bonding, navigating conflicts, establishing group norms, and eventually working well together. Models like Tuckman's stages of group development (forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning) can help mentors understand these phases and respond effectively to group challenges (Mentor, 2020). With active observation and thoughtful guidance, you can create a group environment that is safe, balanced, and supportive for all involved.

Let's take a quick closer look into Tuckman's stages of group development.



Forming

In this initial stage, group members get to know one another and begin establishing relationships. There's a strong need for guidance and structure as people are often cautious, polite, and unsure of their roles within the group.

Storming

Here, differences begin to surface as individuals express opinions, test boundaries, and possibly challenge the group structure or leadership. Conflicts may arise, making communication and conflict resolution essential.

Norming

The group begins to find its rhythm, establish shared norms, and foster a sense of trust and cohesion. Roles become clearer, collaboration increases, and members start to work more effectively together.

Performing

At this mature stage, the group functions with a high level of autonomy and efficiency. Members are committed, communication flows well, and the group focuses on achieving its goals with minimal conflict.

Adjourning

As the group's work concludes, this phase involves reflecting on achievements, processing emotions related to closure, and formally ending the mentoring relationship. It's important to provide space for celebration and transition planning (Vaida & Serban, 2021).

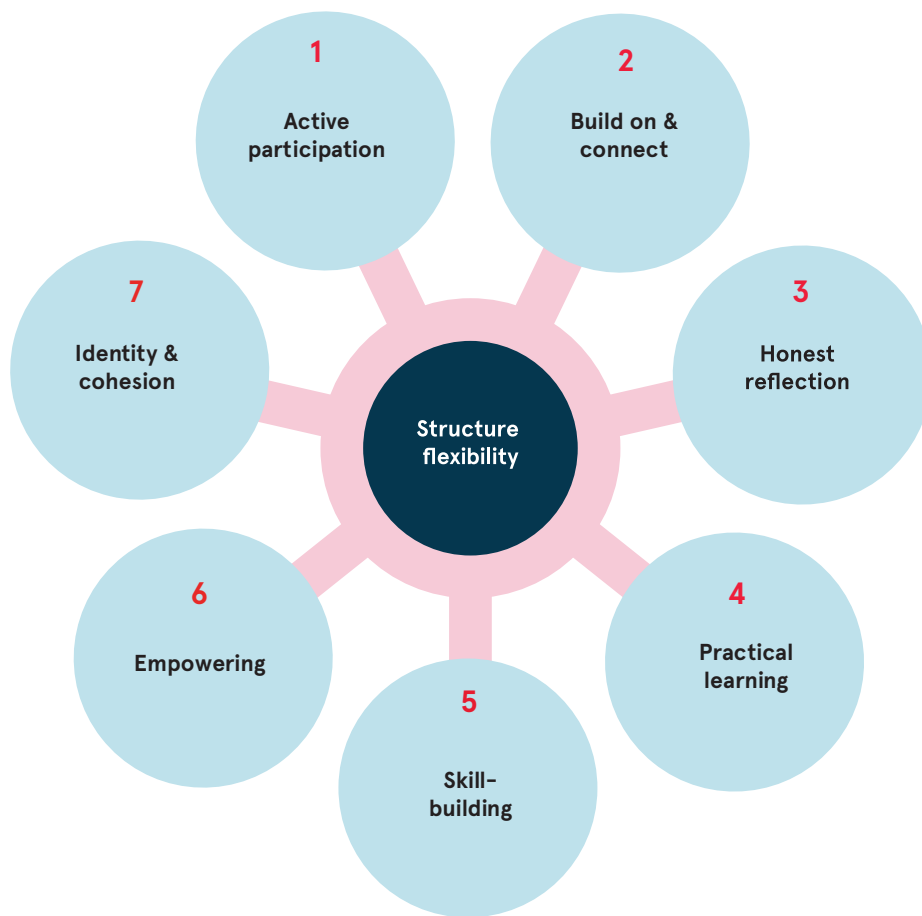
You can read and learn more about this model following the link in the footnote, last accessed on 16. 7. 2025.

Examples of the activities you that fold under the scope of small group mentoring are as follows. Of course, these are just examples and there are many more types of activities you can carry out.

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
Skill-building workshops	Activities that focus on developing practical or soft skills, often hands-on and collaborative.	digital literacy sessions, CV writing, job interview simulations, cooking or sewing classes, financial literacy, language exchange
Story circles / personal sharing	Structured storytelling where participants share their experiences on a particular theme.	"A time I overcame a challenge," "What education means to me"
Role-plays and scenario-based learning	Practicing real-life situations in a safe environment.	practicing boundary-setting, negotiating, or responding to discrimination
Problem-solving challenges	Mentees work together to find solutions to a shared issue.	brainstorming how to support school attendance in their community; designing a project they could do together
Reflection and goal-setting sessions	Facilitated conversations to check in, reflect on progress, and set future intentions.	guided reflection using tools like "Gibbs' Reflective Cycle" or "What? So what? Now what?", revisiting personal or group goals
Community engagement projects	The group works on something that gives back to their community.	organizing a neighborhood cleanup, preparing a cultural presentation, creating care packages
Peer mentoring activities	Creating space for mentees to mentor each other within the group.	a mentee leads a session on something she knows well (e.g. hair styling, cooking, or navigating local services)
Creative expression and art-based activities	Using creative outlets to explore identity, emotions, and goals.	vision boards, collective mural, storytelling through drawing or collage

While mentoring activities should remain adaptable to the group's evolving needs, a clear structure is essential for ensuring consistency, progress, and a sense of purpose. Activities don't need to be rigid, but they should be thoughtfully planned and aligned with the group's goals. Structure helps create predictability and direction, which many mentees, especially in diverse groups, benefit from. Within this framework, mentors can still make space for feedback, celebrate small wins, and adjust as needed, allowing the group's voice to shape the experience.

Let's together have a look at how structure, with a sufficient amount of flexibility, bears benefits for the small group mentoring process.



Structure and flexibility in small group mentoring

1. Ensure active participation from all mentees

Encouraging everyone to take part equally ensures that all mentees benefit from the process. This creates a balanced environment where each young Roma woman has the space to grow, share, and contribute.

2. Build on previous activities and connect to broader goals

Activities should be linked in a logical sequence so that learning and development deepen over time. Connecting each session to earlier discussions or skills helps mentees strengthen their understanding and take on more complex challenges.

3. Provide space for honest reflection and safe sharing

Group mentoring becomes meaningful when mentees feel safe enough to open up. Facilitating moments of personal reflection and mutual listening helps build trust and authenticity within the group.

4. Use role plays or scenarios for practical learning

Interactive methods like role-playing give mentees a safe space to try out new behaviors or responses. This helps them build confidence, rehearse real-life situations, and receive feedback from both peers and mentors.

5. Focus on learning and skill-building

Mentors can guide structured sessions aimed at teaching relevant topics, like coping strategies, or communication skills. These moments balance support with direct knowledge-sharing and practical application.

6. Empower mentees to lead when possible

Giving mentees opportunities to shape or lead parts of the session fosters a sense of ownership and agency. It helps them grow as individuals while strengthening their confidence and leadership skills.

7. Strengthen group identity and cohesion

The true power of small group mentoring lies in creating a sense of belonging. Activities should reinforce shared purpose and togetherness, encouraging mentees to form strong, lasting bonds with one another and with their mentors (Mentor, 2020).

Feel free to regularly incorporate energizers, ice-breakers, and team-building activities into your sessions. These can serve as effective openers for upcoming topics, while also strengthening group cohesion, fostering a shared identity, and laying the groundwork for active and meaningful engagement. If you wish to explore this option further or if you're simply out of ideas, check this page out and you will be equipped with ideas for quite some time - https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/toolbox_tool_download-file-3267/TOOLKIT%20-%20all%20the%20tools%20CEJ.pdf.

4.12. Belonging and safety for mentees

Creating a sense of belonging and ensuring emotional and physical safety are foundational to any successful mentoring experience, and this holds especially true in group settings. This environment should be intentionally shaped to promote trust, encourage open participation, and affirm each mentee's identity and voice. In this section, we explore how mentors can foster a group atmosphere where every participant feels safe, valued, and connected - a place where true growth and learning can take root.

The need to feel a sense of belonging is as essential to human wellbeing as basic physical needs like food and shelter. Belongingness theory suggests that people are inherently driven to seek out meaningful social connections and to feel accepted by others. When these needs go unmet, individuals may experience loneliness, disconnection, and emotional distress. On the other hand, when people feel they belong, they tend to show greater wellbeing, confidence, and life satisfaction. This fundamental need influences many aspects of human behavior - from how we interact socially and regulate emotions to how we build self-esteem. Mentees, especially those from unsupportive backgrounds like young Roma women, may naturally seek spaces where they feel seen, heard, and supported, making it vital for mentors to create environments that actively promote connection and inclusion (Chakraborty T. et al., 2024).

To build on the work of Chakraborty et al. (2024), who examined how a sense of belonging can be fostered in the workplace, we will now explore a series of key steps tailored to our own mentoring context. While these originate from organizational settings, they have been thoughtfully adapted to reflect the values and goals of our small group mentoring approach, thus aligning closely with the vision we share for supporting young Roma women through connection, inclusion, and empowerment.

OPEN COMMUNICATION AS THE FOUNDATION OF BELONGING IN GROUP MENTORING

Open and honest communication is the cornerstone of creating a sense of belonging within a mentoring group. When mentors foster an atmosphere where mentees feel safe to express themselves without fear of judgment, trust naturally develops. This trust becomes the foundation for meaningful relationships within the group. Encouraging active listening, validating mentees' thoughts and emotions, and making space for everyone's voice helps mentees feel seen and heard. In turn, this reduces isolation and increases their willingness to engage, learn, and support one another (Chakraborty T. et al., 2024).

BUILDING TRUST TO FOSTER GROWTH AND AUTONOMY IN MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

Trust forms the foundation of any strong mentoring relationship. In small group mentoring, mentors play a vital role in creating a safe space where mentees feel valued, respected, and heard. When mentees trust their mentor and their peers, they are more likely to express themselves freely, take initiative, and engage more fully in the learning process.

Fostering autonomy means gradually encouraging mentees to take ownership of their growth. This can be done by offering choices in activities, involving them in goal-setting, and validating their decisions. As trust grows within the group, so does confidence (Chakraborty T. et al., 2024).

CREATING FAMILIARITY: BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS AND “STRANGENESS” IN THE GROUP

One of the early challenges in group mentoring can be the initial sense of unfamiliarity, a feeling of “otherness” that may prevent mentees from fully participating. This can be particularly relevant for young Roma women, who might carry past experiences of exclusion or hesitation to open up in new settings.

Mentors can help dissolve this “strangeness” by intentionally creating a welcoming and warm group atmosphere. This includes using ice-breakers, personal storytelling, and informal conversations to encourage connection. Consistency in how sessions begin and end, rituals of checking in can help start the process of removing the “strangeness”.

Over time, as mentees become more comfortable with each other and with the group dynamic, these feelings of unfamiliarity are replaced by trust and mutual understanding. The group then becomes a space where they feel seen, safe, and ready to engage authentically (Chakraborty T. et al., 2024).

SHOWING CARE: DEMONSTRATING SUPPORT THROUGH THOUGHTFUL ACTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

In small group mentoring, care is not just expressed through words but embedded in the way mentors design and lead the sessions. Demonstrating care means creating a space that is responsive to the lived realities of mentees.

This can involve adapting the pace of activities based on participants’ comfort, checking in individually when someone seems withdrawn, or simply acknowledging personal milestones. Care can also be shown by inviting mentees to co-create group norms, providing resources or opportunities relevant to their needs, or even by celebrating their achievements, whether those are big or small (Chakraborty T. et al., 2024).

ENSURING FAIR ACCESS TO INFORMATION: BUILDING TRUST THROUGH TRANSPARENCY

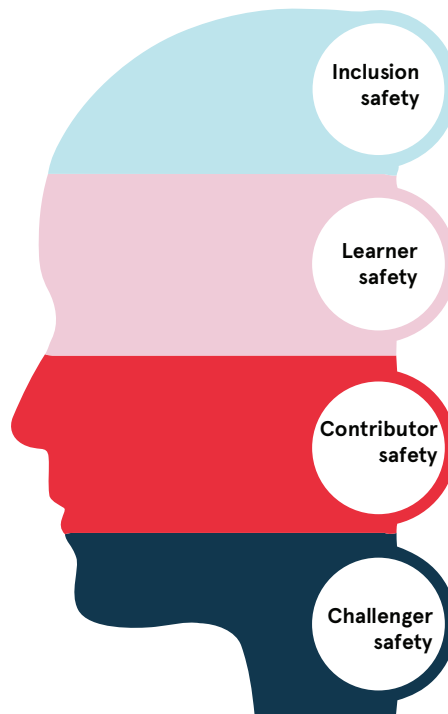
Mentees should never feel left out, confused, or uncertain because they weren’t given the same information as others.

This means being clear and consistent in how information is shared, whether it’s about group activities, opportunities, changes in schedules, or expectations. Mentors should avoid using complex or overly formal language and ensure that communication is accessible to all, including those with varying literacy levels or language backgrounds.

Being transparent also includes explaining why decisions are made, actively involving mentees in those decisions where appropriate, and making space for questions or clarification. This approach promotes fairness, reduces power imbalances, and helps mentees feel included and respected in the mentoring process (Chakraborty T. et al., 2024).

Fostering sense of belonging is also possible through interesting, interactive activities like aforementioned energizers, team-building activities or ice breakers. Following this link (last accessed on 25. 7. 2025.), you will find some of the common such activities that you can use within your groups - <https://actforyouth.org/resources/ipe/inclusive-3-activities-belonging.pdf>.

Now that we've covered a sense of belonging, all we're left with is the sense of safety, equally important in mentoring relationship. Let's start things off by looking at the 4 stages of psychological safety, as given by Timothy R. Clark (2020), in his book titled "The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety".



4 stages of psychological safety as per Clark (2020)

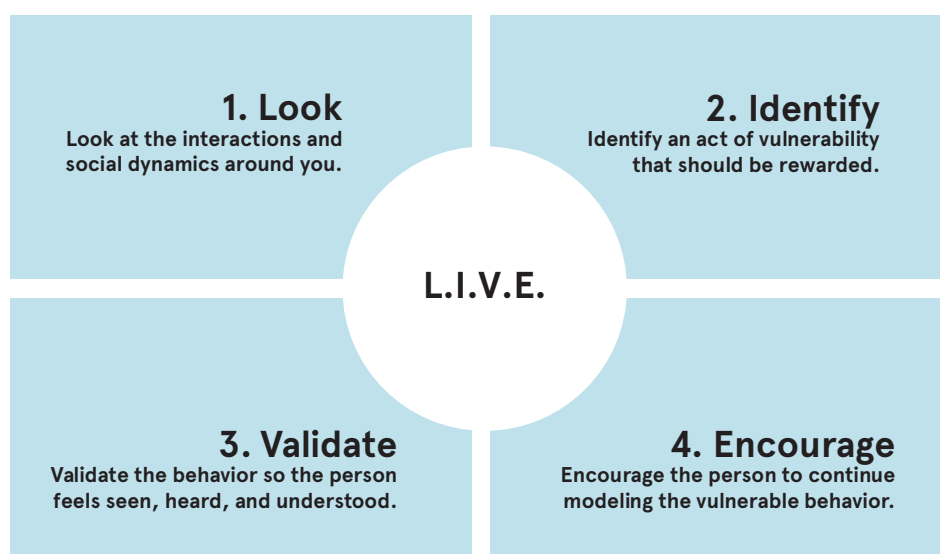
Psychological safety within mentoring groups also develops in stages, reflecting core human needs that transcend background or identity. Before mentees can truly grow, engage, or take meaningful risks in the group, they first need to feel accepted, supported, and safe. These foundational conditions mirror basic needs, just as people require food and shelter to survive, mentees must feel included, empowered to learn, encouraged to contribute, and free to challenge ideas without fear (Leader Factor, 2025).

By intentionally creating an atmosphere where all voices are valued and vulnerability is met with respect, mentors help guide the group through these natural phases of safety.

STAGE	WHAT IT MEANS FOR RESPECT	WHAT IT MEANS FOR PERMISSION	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE
Inclusion safety	Acknowledging every mentee's basic need to feel seen, valued, and accepted within the group.	Creating a space where mentees can show up as they are and feel welcome to participate.	Everyone is invited in without judgment. Belonging is nurtured and exclusion is actively prevented.
Learner safety	Valuing the mentee's need to grow, try new things, and not be punished for mistakes.	Giving mentees space to learn, ask questions, and experiment without fear of failure.	Learning is supported through curiosity, patience, and celebrating effort not just outcomes.
Contributor safety	Respecting mentees' right to take initiative and offer their own input, skills, or solutions.	Allowing mentees to contribute in their own way and supporting their autonomy.	Mentees can lead, organize, or shape parts of the group process while being supported in doing so.
Challenger safety	Respecting the mentee's courage to question, critique, or propose change in the group.	Encouraging mentees to challenge group norms or assumptions in a constructive, respectful way.	Honest dialogue is protected. Feedback and new ideas are welcomed—even if they push boundaries.

4 stages of psychological safety explained, adapted to the context of mentorship (Leader Factor, 2025)

How can you improve that safety feeling within your group? One of the models you can use is LIVE model, which helps you model and reward acts of vulnerability (Leader Factor, 2025).



L.I.V.E. model, as presented by the Leader Factor (2025) in their Behavioral guide

Look

As a mentor, observe carefully how mentees interact within the group. Pay attention to who speaks up, who withdraws, and how members respond to one another. Be sensitive to unspoken dynamic because signs of discomfort, exclusion, or hesitation may not be verbalized but are just as important.

Why it matters: Many mentees may come from experiences where their voices haven't been heard. Observing quietly and attentively helps you create space where every individual feels seen and safe.

Identify

Notice moments when a mentee shows vulnerability, such as sharing a personal story, admitting uncertainty, or asking for support. These acts require courage and should be acknowledged.

Why it matters: Vulnerability is often rare in environments where trust has been broken or never developed. Spotting these moments is crucial for building psychological safety.

Validate

Respond to acts of vulnerability with empathy. Let the mentee know that what they've shared is valid, meaningful, and appreciated. Use body language, words of affirmation, or even a simple "thank you for sharing that."

Why it matters: For young Roma women, especially those who have experienced marginalization, validation helps rebuild a sense of worth, inclusion, and belonging.

Encourage

Encourage the mentee, as well as others in the group, to continue sharing, asking, and participating. Reinforce that it's okay to express feelings, try new things, or even make mistakes within this space.

Why it matters: Your encouragement helps shape the group into a space where everyone feels empowered to be active participants, not passive attendees.

Some common group traits found by the Mentor (2020) through the research on group mentoring are the following:

- The group serves as a space where members receive consistent, nonjudgmental support.
- It provides an opportunity for participants to understand their own experiences by seeing similarities and differences with others.
- It fosters both personal growth and independence, while also encouraging connection, acceptance, and shared understanding.
- The group environment promotes learning and development.
- It can feel like a supportive, family-like community.

Group settings in mentoring creates an environment of trust, mutual support, and shared growth. Participants are able to reflect on their own experiences in relation to others, build confidence and self-awareness, and form meaningful connections. Over time, the group can evolve into a strong, supportive community that encourages both personal development and a sense of belonging, often feeling as natural and connected as a family.

Reflection

Small group mentoring offers a unique environment where peer interaction becomes a valuable part of the mentoring process. It encourages shared learning, mutual support, and the development of trust within a structured yet flexible space. As a mentor, it's important to reflect on how you would approach this format in a way that respects both the collective dynamic and each individual's journey.

Here are some guiding questions to help you think through your approach to small group mentoring:

- How would I encourage peer support to develop naturally within the group, without forcing connections?
- How would I create a space where mentees feel comfortable comparing experiences without feeling pressured to share personal details?
- How would I support both group identity and individual autonomy during our sessions?
- How would I monitor and respond to group dynamics to ensure inclusive participation and mutual respect?
- How would I balance guiding the group's learning process while allowing mentees to shape the direction themselves?

Take a moment to consider these questions in relation to your mentoring style and to what you have just read and analyzed in this section. They are not meant to be answered all at once, but to support your ongoing development and sensitivity as a group facilitator. Every group will be different and the key is to remain attentive, adaptable, and grounded in the values of trust and mutual learning. If it feels difficult for you to reflect on some points, feel free to revisit this section and even try to connect it with the previous, because, as you see, there are a lot of repetitions, interconnections and similarities shared in the approach.

4.13. Self-assessment checklist

Tick the boxes for the statements you feel confident about:

I can assess when small group mentoring is the most appropriate format and explain what outcomes it best supports.

- I can prepare effectively for group mentoring by selecting mentees, defining goals, and setting up a safe and purposeful environment.
- I can recognize the stages of group formation and adjust my mentoring approach to support the group's development at each stage.
- I can identify and respond to emerging group dynamics, including disengagement, dominance, or silence, in ways that support inclusion and participation.
- I know how to build psychological safety over time and create conditions for a sense of belonging without pressuring disclosure.
- I can design and adapt group sessions using activities that support shared reflection, personal growth, and group cohesion.
- I can investigate and identify the needs of young people in my group – including the 7 universal needs – and respond to them through my facilitation.
- I can maintain awareness of each mentee's individual journey within the group and ensure
- their voice and autonomy are not lost in the collective process.

How did you do?

- 7-8 boxes ticked - You have a strong and well-rounded understanding of small group mentoring. You're ready to apply this in practice.
- 5-6 boxes ticked - You have a solid foundation. Review any unchecked items and consider where you might want more clarity or support.
- 4 or fewer boxes ticked - Consider revisiting Section 4.2 and discussing key points with a peer, trainer, or supervisor to deepen your understanding and confidence.

4.14. Module 3: Large group mentoring (over 6 mentees)

Expected learning outcomes for this module are the following:

- Understand the purpose and theory of change behind large group mentoring
- Be able to ensure emotional safety and readiness for mentees in large group settings
- Design meaningful events and select appropriate tools for large groups
- Facilitate large group mentoring sessions that are engaging and impactful

4.15. Purpose of the method

Large group mentoring refers to a format where, in our case, one or more mentors work with more than six mentees at a time, often in structured, facilitated settings such as workshops, discussion forums, community events, or thematic sessions. This approach does not replace the depth of one-to-one or small group mentoring but instead complements it by creating space for shared learning, inspiration, and collective reflection.

In our context, large group mentoring can provide valuable opportunities for young Roma women to:

- connect with peers beyond their immediate circles
- learn from guest speakers or role models with relevant lived experiences
- participate in sessions that focus on empowerment, rights awareness, cultural expression, or practical skills
- experience solidarity and recognition within a broader community setting

This method works especially well when the aim is to increase exposure to ideas, build shared knowledge, or foster visibility. It can be a powerful way to show young women that their challenges are not isolated – and that collective strength and mutual support are both real and reachable.

Working with larger groups requires thoughtful preparation whereas mentors need to design sessions that encourage participation without pressure, create emotionally safe spaces, and support different communication styles. Diversity within the group (in age, background, confidence levels, or language), in this case, is considered as a resource that needs to be navigated with care.

When done well, large group mentoring can extend the impact of the mentoring process by strengthening community connection, increasing self-efficacy, and planting seeds for future engagement, both individually and collectively.

Young people face the challenge of simultaneously establishing their independence from parents and building positive peer networks. Group mentoring programs may offer a “one-stop shop” for addressing both sides of that challenge, as youth form relationships with nonparental adults who can foster and mediate positive peer interactions (Kuperminc & Deutsch, 2021).

It’s important to note that working with large groups more than six mentees at a time is not simply a scaled-up version of one-to-one mentoring. It involves a different kind of relationship-building and a distinct set of facilitation skills. When done with care and structure, large group mentoring can create valuable opportunities for shared learning, collective empowerment, and visibility. But without a clear foundation and without a clear theory of change, it risks becoming disconnected, overwhelming, or ineffective and thus ultimately delivering less of what makes mentoring meaningful in the first place. Without this, the group mentoring may lose focus or fail to engage participants in a lasting way.

To avoid this, large group mentoring should be designed with several key elements in mind:

- Purposeful grouping
- Groups should not be random. When mentees share experiences, goals, or background such as being young Roma women navigating similar experiences, the group dynamic

becomes more relatable, respectful, and supportive.

- Stability and continuity
- Consistency builds trust. A stable group of participants meeting regularly helps reduce anxiety and promotes a sense of community and shared growth over time.
- Skilled facilitation and structured sessions
- Large groups require direction, which builds on only presence. Facilitators must be able to manage participation, guide discussion, and hold space for different levels of comfort and communication. A structured plan supports this and makes sure everyone is included.
- Clearly defined roles within each session

In a group setting, roles must be clear - for mentors, facilitators, co-mentors, or guests. Clarity supports both safety and effectiveness, especially when mentoring emotionally complex or diverse groups (Rhodes, n.d.).

Large group mentoring must be deliberate, well-structured, and purpose-led.

THEORY OF CHANGE

Let's take a moment to introduce a principle known as the theory of change. Since one of the core aims of the RomniME project is to ensure that mentoring is timely, high-quality, and impactful, the project team developed a theory of change early in the process, as part of the Evaluation Plan.

This framework outlines the expected pathway from mentoring activities to long-term outcomes, identifying the key conditions, strategies, and indicators needed to achieve meaningful change. It also provides a clear structure for evaluating progress throughout the project, helping the team understand not just what is working, but why it works, and even for whom.

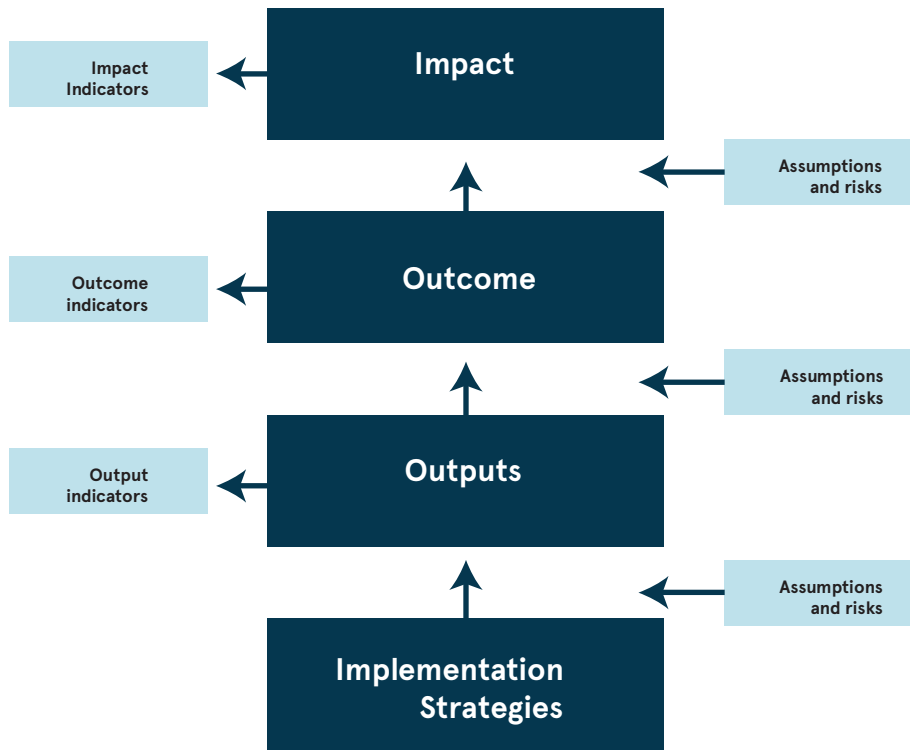
Regardless of what it's called, a theory of change provides a clear picture of where you're trying to go and helps you identify the key signs along the way that show whether you're moving in the right direction (Organizational Research Services, 2004).

As greatly and very simply observed by Organizational research services in their manual Theory of Change: A Practical Tool For Action, Results and Learning: "As Alice observed in Wonderland, If you don't know where you are going, any road will take you there." This means that if you don't have a direction, you might end up going nowhere in the end.

Core element	Guiding questions
Desired impact	What long-term change do we hope to see for young Roma women? What key barriers or issues is the mentoring meant to address?
Intermediate outcomes	What short- or medium-term changes should mentees experience through mentoring that move them toward desired impact?
Activities	What mentoring approaches and methods are we using to support this change? How do these activities connect to our desired impact?
Evidence	What research, data, or lived experiences support this approach to mentoring Roma women? What shows that this model can work?
Enablers	What external conditions (e.g. community trust, mentor training, safe spaces) are needed to make mentoring meaningful and sustainable?
Assumptions	What beliefs or contextual factors are we taking for granted? What needs to already be in place (e.g. motivation, basic access) for mentoring to have its intended effect?

Core elements and guiding questions for establishing an effective theory of change

This is, of course, not the only approach, but it summarizes quite effectively what you will need to think about, or rather should we say, what you will need to invest into that will lead you to your desired outcomes. The schematic can also be simpler - let's look at another example



Schematic description of a theory of change (Rogers, n.d.)

The diagram shows a step-by-step structure of a theory of change, illustrating how a project moves from implementation strategies (the planned activities) through to outputs (immediate results), then to outcomes (short to medium-term changes), and finally toward the desired impact (long-term change). On the left side, it highlights the need for specific indicators at each level to measure progress - output, outcome, and impact indicators. On the right side, it shows that each step relies on certain assumptions and carries certain risks, factors that may influence whether the next level is achieved as expected. Overall, the image emphasizes that meaningful impact is only possible when all parts of the process are clearly planned, measured, and continuously reflected upon.

What was done as a part of the RomniME project was that target groups in which we want to generate/see changes throughout and after the completion of the project were identified, and then connected with the set short term (end of the project), medium term (2030), and long term (idea of future) changes that are desired.

Preparing mentees for method settings (emotional safety)

We've mentioned emotional safety at several points in this Handbook already, but in this section it becomes especially important because, when working with larger groups, the way participants feel seen, respected, and emotionally secure can deeply influence how the group connects, learns, and grows. Earlier, we introduced the concept of psychological safety, which offers a useful foundation here: it speaks to our need to feel safe when expressing ideas, making mistakes, or taking social risks. Emotional safety builds on this, focusing more specifically on our inner emotional world, the feeling that we are safe to be vulnerable, to

share personal experiences, or to express difficult emotions without fear of judgment or harm. In group mentoring, both are essential. Psychological safety helps mentees participate and engage while emotional safety helps them open up and feel understood.

We have found a concise resource through the website <http://www.elementsuk.com>, which offers a great insight into the difference between psychological and emotional safety. We're quoting the following from the source directly:

"Emotional safety" - security; willingness to reveal how one really feels, ...

From: Psychological Sense of Community: Theory of McMillan & Chavis (1986). The literature review chapter of Dr. Stephen Wright's doctoral dissertation, "Exploring Sense of Community in Living-Learning Program~ and in the University as a Whole". <http://www.wam.umd.edu/~stwright/psych/sense-of-community.html>

Psychological safety is defined as 'feeling able to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career'.

Kahn, W. A. (1990). Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. *Academy of Management Journal*, 33,692-724, P 708 (ElementsUK, n.d.).

What is emotional safety?

Contrary to what some might assume, emotional safety isn't about wrapping ourselves or others in protective layers to avoid any hurt or discomfort. It's actually something quite different, and at its core, quite simple. Emotional safety is a feeling that you feel physically, in your body - that with this person or these people or in this place, you don't have to feel scared to be really you (Psychology Today, 2023).

Simple enough in theory, right? We all must know it, but in practice it often, as most things we do in our everyday lives, requires effort, requires practice.

How emotional safety supports lasting change

- Connection and care: Real, lasting change is rooted in care and not fear. When mentees feel emotionally safe, they're more open to forming supportive relationships. Fear might push someone to behave differently for a while, but only genuine care and trust lead to deep, sustainable transformation.
- Sense of purpose and meaning: Healing often happens through connection to something greater, whether that's culture, community, spirituality, or shared goals. When emotional safety is missing, it becomes harder to trust in those bigger connections or believe that positive change is possible.
- Family and close relationships: Many of the most powerful changes in a young person's life happen in the context of family or close personal relationships. But trust, vulnerability, and authentic connection can only grow when emotional safety is present, both in mentoring spaces and at home.
- Core values: Mentoring can help mentees reconnect with values that guide their choices and shape their identity. When these values are practiced consistently in a safe, supportive environment, they reinforce emotional security and personal growth.
- Sense of agency: When young people feel in control of their own actions and choices, they begin to regulate themselves more confidently. This internal stability helps them become a source of emotional safety for others, and reinforces their own resilience.
- Self-worth: As mentees learn to live in alignment with their values and develop trust in themselves, they begin to feel more emotionally balanced and confident in relationships. Self-respect, emotional stability, and a sense of belonging all grow from this foundation (New Haven, n.d.).

Now what we'll do next is introduce a set of tools designed to support both you as a mentor and the mentees you work with. Think of this as a two-step process: first, you'll assess your current level of emotional safety, and then you'll move on to creating your own emotional safety plan. Did you spot anything? Yes, these two steps are designed to form a continuous loop because once you've created your plan and spent some time applying it, you can return to the first step to reflect on your progress, then revisit and adjust your plan as needed. It's a practical and ongoing way to strengthen emotional safety over time both for yourself and in your mentoring relationships, thus providing mentees with the valuable tools that can be beneficial for their own personal use.

EMOTIONAL SAFETY SELF-ASSESSMENT

Read the statements below and then rate yourself according to the following scale:

1. Never me 2. Rarely me 3. Sometimes me 4. Often me 5. Always me

COMMUNICATION

	Circle 1-5
I speak with kindness, consideration and sensitivity.	1 2 3 4 5
I listen attentively and sincerely, allowing others to speak without rejecting or interrupting.	1 2 3 4 5
I give feedback and advice and ask questions in the spirit of love and caring without judging and condemning the individual.	1 2 3 4 5
Honesty and truthfulness prevail in my relationships.	1 2 3 4 5

EMOTIONS

Circle 1-5

I am responsible and accountable for my own feelings and actions.	1	2	3	4	5
I recognize and validate the feelings of others without judgment.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not use feelings to punish, harass, coerce, manipulate, intimidate, or control others.	1	2	3	4	5
I am able and willing to be vulnerable in relationships when appropriate.	1	2	3	4	5

TOLERANCE

Circle 1-5

I am able to recognize differences and conflicts in my relationships, and seek understanding, accommodation, and cooperation.	1	2	3	4	5
I acknowledge and respect the uniqueness of other individuals.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not attempt to dominate others as a means of handling differences.	1	2	3	4	5
I realize that my knowledge, experience and abilities are limited, and pursue learning and growth in my interaction with others.	1	2	3	4	5

CLOSENESS

	Circle 1-5
I freely and easily communicate closeness and connection in meaningful relationships.	1 2 3 4 5
I am aware of the importance of healthy boundaries and implement them in my relationships.	1 2 3 4 5
I allow others to support me when appropriate.	1 2 3 4 5
I am supportive of others and do not use antagonistic coalitions or scapegoating.	1 2 3 4 5

POWER & CONTROL

	Circle 1-5
I am responsible for myself to the degree that is appropriate.	1 2 3 4 5
I allow influence from others to the degree that is appropriate.	1 2 3 4 5
I do not use my power for manipulative purposes, or to dominate others in a demeaning way.	1 2 3 4 5
I allow others to make their own decisions to the extent that is appropriate and that fits the circumstances.	1 2 3 4 5

Total Score:

Safety score:

0-29 Hostile / 30-49 Poor / 50-69 Moderate / 70-81 Good / 82-100 Excellent

The emotional safety assessment was completely extracted from Emotional Safety module by New Haven, last accessed 14. 7. 2025. and available here - <https://newhavenrtc.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/2.5-Emotional-Safety-Module.pdf>.

This self-assessment is not aiming at perfection but to be a starting point for reflection. Take a moment to review your total score and consider which areas feel strong and which may need more attention. Use this insight to guide your emotional safety plan and your ongoing personal growth, both as a mentor and as a person. Remember, emotional safety is something we build over time, with care, intention, and support.

EMOTIONAL SAFETY PLAN TEMPLATE

An emotional safety plan is a simple, personal tool designed to help you stay grounded and supported during moments of emotional stress, overwhelm, or crisis. It helps you identify your own early warning signs, those subtle (or not-so-subtle) cues that things are becoming too much, and gives you a clear, step-by-step guide to take care of yourself when that happens.

This plan is not about avoiding difficult emotions or trying to feel “good” all the time. It’s about building emotional resilience, learning what helps you feel safe and supported, and knowing where to turn when things get hard.

The goal is to strengthen your sense of safety and control, while also making it easier to reach out for help when you need it, whether that means using calming strategies, practicing self-care, or connecting with trusted people.

You can use this plan for yourself, or adapt it to support a mentee. It’s especially helpful in mentoring relationships, where emotional safety supports trust, learning, and personal growth. And remember: this plan isn’t fixed. You can revisit it, update it, and adjust it as you grow.

WORKSHEET

1. IDENTIFY YOUR WARNING SIGNS

- a. What situations tend to make you feel overwhelmed? (e.g., being around specific people, certain social situations, or particular environments)

- b. When you begin to feel overwhelmed or emotionally unsafe, how does it show up? (Think about physical sensations, thoughts, or behaviors you notice.)

2. BUILD YOUR TOOLBOX

- a. Coping Strategies: What can help you calm down or feel more grounded in the moment?

- b. Self-Care: What helps you feel nourished, safe, and valued?

- c. Support System: Who can you turn to for support? (Include loved ones, professionals, or helplines)

3. PUT YOUR PLAN TOGETHER

When I notice (warning signs or triggering situation):

I will cope in the moment by trying (Coping Strategy #1):

If that doesn't work, I will try (Coping Strategy #2):

If I need extra support, I will contact (Support Option #1):

If they are unavailable, I will contact (Support Option #2):

After I've used my plan, I will take care of myself by (Self-Care Action):

This emotional safety plan template was developed based on the template by California State University, East Bay, last accessed 18.7.2025., available here - <https://www.csueastbay.edu/shcs/files/docs/counseling-group-handouts/building-an-emotional-safety-plan.pdf>.

Your emotional safety plan is a living document, just as the assessment, not something you complete once and forget. As you grow, change, and learn more about yourself, your needs may shift too. Revisit this plan regularly, especially after challenging experiences or moments

of progress. Use it as a tool for reflection, support, and empowerment, something that reminds you that you are not alone, and that you have both the inner resources and external support to care for yourself with intention and compassion.

4.16. Designing meaningful events and tools

Now that you've explored why large group mentoring matters, and how emotional safety plays a key role in making it meaningful - it's time to shift into the practical side of things. In this section, we'll look at how to design events, sessions, and tools that don't just fill time, but truly support connection, learning, and growth. Whether you're leading a one-time group activity or planning a recurring mentoring session, the goal is to make each experience intentional, relevant, and impactful for the young women you're working with.

When designing or improving a group mentoring program, it's important to focus on what truly makes the experience meaningful for young people. The following key points offer practical guidance for tailoring group activities and tools to the needs of local youth.

1. Understand the key relationship dynamics

Group mentoring creates several layers of connection:

- Mentor-to-mentee: Offers support and encouragement.
- Peer-to-peer: Builds belonging and shared learning.
- Mentor-to-mentor: Strengthens the program through collaboration and consistency. Each relationship contributes differently to outcomes, and all are worth nurturing.

2. Borrow thoughtfully from other fields

Don't hesitate to adopt proven practices from youth development, mental health, or education. Concepts like growth mindset or activities from group therapy can add value. The goal isn't to turn mentors into therapists, but to integrate helpful tools that support your program's goals.

3. Balance structure and flexibility

Use a clear structure or curriculum to guide sessions, but allow room for connection, fun, and responding to what's happening in the group or wider community. Relationships take time to build so early sessions might focus more on trust, with deeper or goal-oriented work coming later.

4. Be intentional about group size and timing

Group size affects group dynamics. Too small and energy may drop; too large and connection may suffer. A ratio of around 6-10 youth per mentor is often effective. Meeting weekly or biweekly for a school or calendar year helps create consistency without overwhelming participants.

Designing strong group mentoring experiences means creating the right balance of people, purpose, and process, always with flexibility and emotional safety at the core (Kuperminc, Deutsch, 2021).

Some of the important tricks mentioned in the work done by Kuperminc & Deutsch (2021) and also mentioned earlier here, but always worthy of being reminded about, are the following:

- Use group activities to build relationships, both group and individual
- Never, ever underestimate the power of safe space and sense of belonging

FACILITATING GROUP MENTORING

Remember - more often than not you are the facilitator, sometimes even when there's peer mentoring in progress.

Group facilitation is the skill of helping a group work together smoothly toward a common

goal. A facilitator focuses on how the group interacts, not just what they're doing, but how they're doing it. Rather than directing or controlling the group, a good facilitator acts more like a coach: offering guidance, sharing insights, and encouraging participation, while allowing the group to lead its own process.

Good group facilitation in mentoring matters because it opens up two powerful pathways for growth. According to Kuperminc from Georgia State University, in "Becoming a Better Mentor: Strategies to Be There for Young People, these pathways are:

- First, there's the skills pathway - group settings give young people the chance to practice social and emotional skills like communication, problem-solving, and helping others, in a safe and supportive environment.
- Second, there's the mattering pathway - being part of a group helps youth feel like they belong, that their presence and contributions matter, and that they're part of something meaningful.

Listed below are stages, or we can look at them as examples, of what to take care of when conducting large group mentoring.

1. Make sure expectations for the group are clear

Set shared expectations early by creating ground rules, routines, and a sense of group ownership. This helps build trust and encourages active, respectful participation.

2. Recognize the predictable stages groups go through

Groups typically move through stages like Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing, and Adjourning (you can revisit section 4.2.3. Group session design where we talked about exactly this). Knowing these helps mentors respond effectively as group dynamics evolve.

3. Recognize when it's working

A group is working well when members engage with one another, take initiative, follow group norms, and start leading parts of the process without mentor direction.

4. A note about one-time or short-term groups

Even in short-term gatherings, strong facilitation creates structure, fairness, and shared participation. Success means smooth cooperation and space for youth voice.

5. Tailor group activities to the age of group members

Younger youth benefit from structured choices, while older youth thrive with more autonomy and leadership. Adapt your approach to match their developmental stage.

6. Realize that size does matter

Smaller, manageable groups (e.g., 6-10 youth per mentor) help ensure everyone is seen and heard. Larger groups risk disengagement or cliques forming.

7. Bring it together: watch how the group and the youth are developing

As the group matures, mentors should gradually step back and allow members to take more responsibility and leadership within the group.

8. Keep your eyes on the prize: program goals

Stay flexible in your approach but always grounded in the group's purpose. Be ready to adjust plans when real-life issues arise, while still moving toward your overall goals.

Additional important elements would be:

- Balancing control and facilitation
- Striking the right balance means guiding the group while still giving youth space to lead, speak up, and bring in their real-life concerns, even if that means adjusting your plan in the moment.

- Be prepared with the tools and materials needed for a successful group meeting
- Whether you're following a structured curriculum or going session by session, always come with a plan, materials, and simple structures in place because even the most flexible facilitation works best when grounded in thoughtful preparation.

And one last thought to end this chapter, as per Gabriel Kuperminc in the mentioned work (Becoming a Better Mentor):

for all ages, it's important that the youth feel a sense of "we."

If you would like to further explore how to facilitate programs for youth, in general, not only as part of mentoring process, you can visit the following website - <https://actforyouth.org/docs/fpy/facilitating-programs-for-youth-manual.pdf> (last accessed on 11. 8. 2025.). It is a training manual by Act For Youth from 2023, about facilitating programs for youth. It provides you with a training program on a specific topic, which is actually closely connected on how to manage youth programs of any kind, so you can both use it on yourself or use it as a template to deliver large group mentoring to your mentees.

4.17. Reflection

Before moving on, take a moment to reflect on some of the key ideas in this section. These questions are here to help you think more deeply about your own role, mindset, and approach when mentoring in large group settings. There are no right or wrong answers - just space for thoughtful learning.

- Why do you think large group mentoring requires a different approach than one-to-one or small group mentoring? (Reflect on the relational and facilitation shifts needed when working with more than six mentees.)
- How does having a clear theory of change help you stay focused and intentional in a group setting? (Think about how purpose and outcomes shape your planning and delivery.)
- What does emotional safety mean to you, and how can you help create it in a group where many different personalities and experiences are present? (Consider your own behaviors, language, and the space you create for others.)
- What are some signals that a group is functioning well (or struggling) and how might you respond in each case as a facilitator? (Reflect on how group energy, participation, or tension might guide your actions.)
- What is one thing you would do to make a group session feel both structured and youth-driven at the same time? (Balance between guidance and flexibility.)

4.18. Self-assessment checklist

For each statement below, check the box that best represents your current level of confidence or preparedness.

✓ Yes = I feel confident and ready

~ Somewhat = I'm aware, but I need to work on it

✗ Not Yet = I haven't developed this skill or understanding yet

What do your responses show? How many of each do you have?

✓ Yes: _ ~ Somewhat: _ ✗ Not Yet: ____

CATEGORY / STATEMENT	✓ Yes	~ Somewhat	✗ Not Yet
Understanding the foundations			
I understand how large group mentoring differs from 1:1 mentoring.			
I can explain the importance of having a clear theory of change in group mentoring.			
I understand how peer interactions and group dynamics contribute to mentoring outcomes.			
Emotional & psychological safety			
I can explain the difference between emotional and psychological safety.			
I understand how emotional safety influences connection and learning in large groups.			
I feel confident identifying what supports or threatens emotional safety in mentoring spaces.			
Planning & structure			
I know how structured routines and rituals support group cohesion.			
I understand why flexibility is important when group needs shift unexpectedly.			
I can describe what makes a group session feel “prepared” versus improvised or disorganized.			
Group facilitation & responsiveness			
I understand the importance of setting clear expectations and routines in group sessions.			
I know how to adapt when group members bring up unexpected or important topics.			
I can explain the balance between following a plan and adapting to what’s needed in the moment.			

If you checked mostly ✓ Yes:

You’re well-prepared and confident – great job! Keep reflecting and adjusting your approach as you continue practicing.

If you checked mostly ~ Somewhat:

You’re on the right track. You understand the ideas, but a few areas may need more practice or reflection. Revisit the sections where you feel less certain.

If you checked several ✗ Not Yet:

That’s okay, it just means you’ve identified key areas for growth. Go back to those specific sections in the handbook to deepen your understanding and confidence before facilitating large group sessions

5. Module 4: Applying culturally responsive and intersectional approaches

Mentoring young Roma women is an opportunity to celebrate diversity, resilience, and strength. Each young woman lives a unique story, shaped by culture, family, and lived experience. Culturally responsive and intersectional mentoring means creating space where these identities are recognized as sources of pride and power, as strengths. It ensures that mentoring becomes a place of safety, respect, and growth, where mentees feel valued for who they are.

Recognizing the diversity within Roma communities allows mentors to see, apart from different needs, the richness of traditions, creativity, and collective bonds that support young women in their journeys. By drawing on these assets, mentors can help mentees connect their personal goals with the strengths of their culture and community.

Intersectionality further deepens this approach by acknowledging that no two mentees experience life in the same way. Their paths are shaped by many factors – gender, age, family roles, or personal aspirations – which intersect in unique and powerful ways. When mentors respond with openness and cultural humility, they build relationships that honor individuality and encourage self-determination.

Learning outcomes:

- Recognize diversity within Roma communities
- Apply intersectionality in mentoring
- Avoid stereotyping or romanticizing
- Adapt communication to cultural context

5.1. Culturally responsive mentoring

Culturally responsive mentoring celebrates the richness of culture, identity, and lived experience as powerful foundations for growth. For young Roma women, traditions, values, creativity, and community bonds are not only part of who they are, they are strengths that can inspire confidence, motivation, and pride.

In mentoring, cultural responsiveness means listening with curiosity, learning from the mentee's perspective, and weaving cultural knowledge into the process of skill-building and goal-setting. It is a way of making sure that every mentoring relationship reflects the mentee's world and supports her aspirations in ways that feel relevant and affirming.

When mentors embrace this approach, they open pathways for mentees to connect their goals with their cultural assets, develop new skills and awareness, and step into opportunities with greater confidence. At the same time, mentors expand their own understanding and grow their ability to build meaningful, authentic relationships across cultures.

5.2. What is culturally responsive mentoring?

First of all, let's define the term "cultural orientation". A cultural orientation can be understood as a tendency to think, feel, or behave in ways shaped by one's cultural background. It is often measured along a continuum, reflecting different patterns of values and behaviours. Examples of these orientations include whether people lean more toward individualism or collectivism, competition or cooperation, emotional expressiveness or restraint, a focus on tasks or on relationships, and equality or hierarchy. Cultural responsiveness is a concept often applied in education, where the aim is to support the success of mentees from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Han et al., 2018).

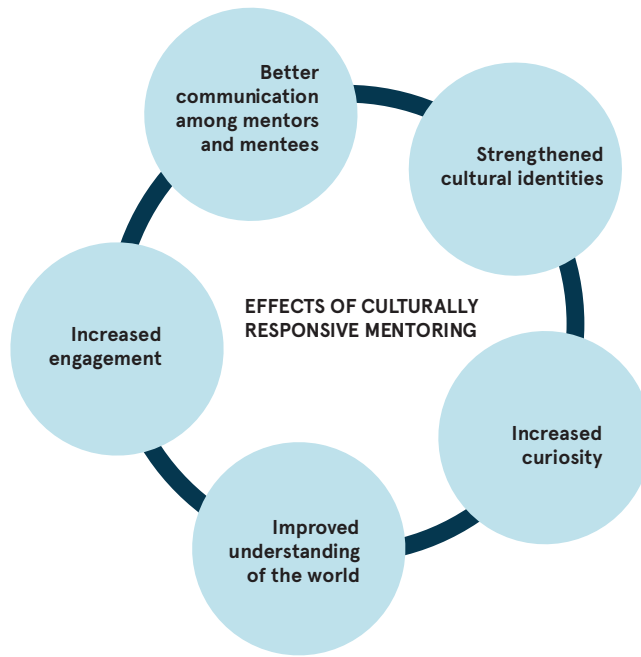
In mentoring, the same principle applies - understanding cultural orientations helps mentors adapt their approach, build trust, and create relationships that feel relevant and supportive to each mentee. By being attentive to these differences, mentors use cultural diversity as a strength that it is within the mentoring process.

A term that captures the essence of culturally responsive education – across teaching, training, and even mentoring - is culturally responsive pedagogy.

It views culture as an asset in the teaching and learning process, but also, most importantly for our context, mentoring. It builds on learners' cultural knowledge, life experiences, and ways of expression to make learning more relevant and accessible. This approach moves on from purely increasing engagement to affirming and preserving learners' cultural identities. Therefore, for a mentoring program to be culturally responsive, it should actively incorporate the cultural orientations and experiences of its members, using them as a resource to enrich the growth of everyone involved (Han et al., 2018).

Culturally responsive pedagogy is an educational approach that values the diverse backgrounds and experiences of learners, aiming to build inclusive and engaging environments. It goes beyond general notions of "good teaching" by intentionally integrating learners' cultural identities and perspectives into the learning process (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In doing so, it supports academic achievement, strengthens positive self-identity, and encourages critical thinking (Gay, 2018; Villegas & Lucas, 2007) (Caingcoy, 2023).

Taken together, these definitions give us a clear direction for moving forward. We now understand what culturally responsive practice means, and the next step is to explore what is needed to put it into action. Culturally responsive mentoring builds on the principles of culturally responsive pedagogy, and throughout this module we will often reference one in relation to the other, since the settings, skills, and environments they require are closely aligned.



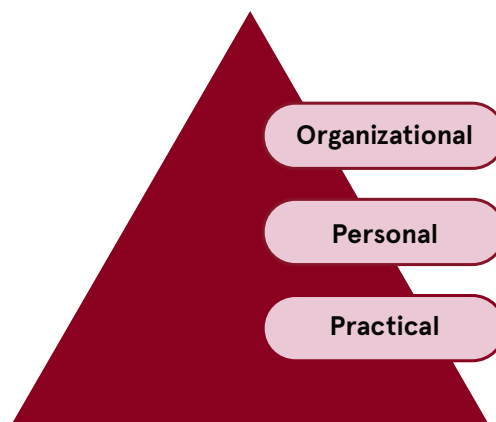
Effects of culturally responsive mentoring (Main, P. 2024)

This diagram highlights the transformative effects of culturally responsive mentoring. At its core, such mentoring recognizes culture as a strength and uses it as a foundation for growth. The outcomes are not isolated but interconnected, each one reinforcing the others.

Better communication between mentors and mentees emerges when cultural perspectives are acknowledged and respected, creating space for open dialogue. This, in turn, strengthens cultural identities, as mentees feel seen, valued, and encouraged to take pride in who they are. A mentoring relationship built on this foundation naturally sparks curiosity, as mentees gain confidence to ask questions, explore opportunities, and engage in new experiences.

Through this process, both mentors and mentees develop a broader understanding of the world, enriched by diverse perspectives and shared learning. The result is increased engagement and thus mentoring becomes a dynamic and motivating experience that fosters growth, connection, and resilience.

Theorists describe three key dimensions of culturally responsive practice:



Three key dimensions of CRP (York Region District School Board, n.d.)

1. Organizational

In mentoring, this refers to how programs and activities are designed and guided. It includes the values and principles that shape mentoring structures, ensuring they reflect inclusivity and equity. Mentoring programs should regularly reflect on whether their approaches unintentionally exclude or disadvantage certain groups and make intentional changes to create fair and welcoming spaces.

2. Personal

This dimension relates to the mindset and self-awareness of mentors themselves. Culturally responsive mentors actively reflect on their own values, assumptions, and communication styles, while also seeking to understand the unique backgrounds and ways of learning of each mentee. By doing so, they create relationships rooted in respect and trust.

3. Practical

The practical dimension involves the day-to-day methods used in mentoring sessions. It means adapting tools, activities, and communication so they resonate with the cultural

identities of mentees. A culturally responsive mentoring practice considers how best to engage young people, affirm their identities, and support their growth (York Region District School Board, n.d.).

5.3. Recognizing diversity within Roma communities

Cultural background strongly influences how learners understand the world and engage in educational settings. Each mentee brings distinct perspectives and insights shaped by their culture, which can greatly enrich the learning. At the same time, cultural differences may affect communication styles, learning preferences, and approaches to problem-solving.

To create inclusive environments, it is essential that diverse cultures are reflected in the program, ensuring multiple perspectives and histories are represented. Mentors can further support this process by encouraging learners to draw on their cultural capital, treating their backgrounds and experiences as valuable resources that strengthen the learning community (Main, P. 2024).

To go deeper into this, we first need to recognize some of the key principles of inclusive mentoring (and we will identify more of them or go in-depth on some of those mentioned here, later on):

- Diversity and representation: Diversity brings richness to mentoring, as people contribute different traditions, perspectives, and experiences. Inclusive mentoring values this variety and sees it as a strength that enriches relationships and broadens understanding.
- Equity: Equity means ensuring that everyone has fair access to mentoring opportunities. It recognizes that some individuals may face barriers to participation and calls for intentional practices that make opportunities available and meaningful for all.
- Cultural competence: Cultural competence encourages mentors to be aware of and sensitive to the cultural backgrounds of their mentees, adapting their approach with curiosity, respect, and openness (Ryan, 2023).

PAUSE FOR REFLECTION

How can we start? Let's pause for a moment and think about the people closest to us - our parents, siblings, relatives, friends, loved ones.

- In what ways are you similar?
- In what ways are you different?
- How do these differences shape your relationships and the way you learn from one another?

Within our families, we often notice similarities, and it's natural that we surround ourselves with people who share certain traits or aspirations. Yet, ask yourself: are we ever truly the

same? The answer is always no. Even twins, who may look identical, can be completely different in their thoughts, feelings, and inner worlds. If we look beyond our own family to that of a friend, we will again encounter an entirely different set of people – with their own perspectives, opinions, goals, and dreams. This simple reflection reminds us of a fundamental truth: every person is unique.

- DIVERSITY IS THE ONE TRUE THING WE ALL HAVE IN COMMON... CELEBRATE IT EVERY DAY -

- *often attributed to Winston Churchill, however without concrete proof of it*

Whether attributed to Churchill or not, this saying carries a powerful message, it reminds us of the fundamental values that should guide us as human beings.

DIVERSITY WITHIN ROMA COMMUNITIES

Just as no two individuals are the same, the Roma community is not a single, uniform group, as it might often be perceived. Across regions and families, there are many Roma groups, each with its own traditions, languages, and ways of life – which brings diversity among each group and communities themselves. These differences can be seen in how families organize themselves, how communities celebrate, and how values are passed on from one generation to the next.

Some groups may place a strong emphasis on collective decision-making, while others encourage more individual autonomy. In some families, education or work outside the community may be prioritized, while in others, traditions and community roles take center stage. Within all of this diversity lies a shared identity, but also a wide range of perspectives, practices, and aspirations.

Recognizing this diversity is essential for mentoring. It prevents us from seeing “the Roma” as one single experience and instead helps us meet each young woman as a unique person shaped by her family, group, and community.

The Roma are the largest ethnic minority in Europe, with an estimated population of 10 to 12 million. Around half of them, roughly 6 million, live within the European Union as citizens or residents. The term Roma serves as an umbrella for a wide range of groups, including Roma, Sinti, Kale, Romanichels, Boyash/Rudari, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom, and Abdal, as well as various Traveller populations such as gens du voyage, Gypsies, and Camminanti (European Commission, 2020).

The term Roma was first adopted at the World Roma Congress in London in 1971 as an umbrella term meant to encompass the many different subgroups within Roma communities. It is important to emphasize, however, that these communities are far from homogeneous. As noted in the Council of Europe’s Factsheet on Romani Culture, Roma represents a wide range of social and cultural diversity, with numerous groups and subgroups shaped by distinct historical, social, and cultural developments in the countries where they live. Similarly, a report by Phiren Amenca highlights the variety of linguistic and cultural characteristics among Roma, pointing to groups such as Roma, Sinti, Kale, and Travellers as examples of this internal diversity (Ferkovics, 2024).

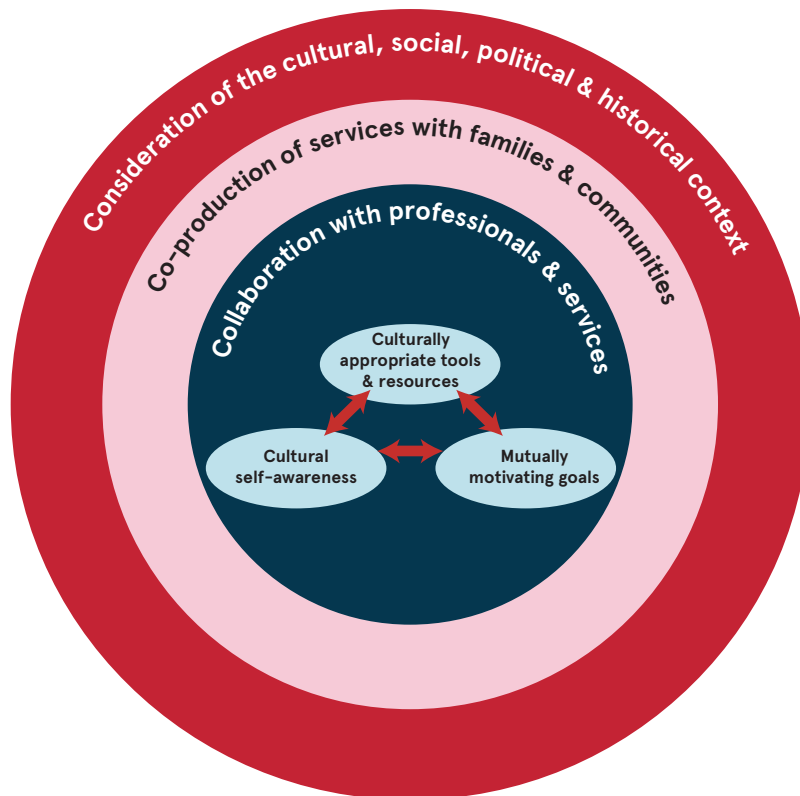
So, what should we do? As it’s provided in the EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation by the European Commission, *it is crucial to recognise the diversity among Roma people and communities when designing national strategic frameworks. The EU Roma strategic framework promotes empowerment of Roma women, young people and children (and Roma living with disabilities, elder Roma, LGBTI+ Roma and EU mobile citizens) to overcome socio-economic gaps, fully exercise their rights, realise their potential and be active agents of change.*

Key points to remember

- The Roma are not a single, homogeneous group - they include many communities, traditions, and languages.
- Diversity exists not only between different Roma groups, but also within families and individuals.
- Valuing diversity means seeing it as a strength that enriches mentoring relationships.
- Mentors should approach each mentee with openness, curiosity, and respect, avoiding assumptions about “the Roma experience.”
- Recognizing diversity helps build trust and ensures that mentoring is authentic, inclusive, and empowering.

When you meet a new mentee, don't assume you already know her story because of her background. Instead, ask open questions, listen carefully, and let her show you what is important in her life. This simple practice builds trust and honors diversity.

5.4. How to apply culturally responsive mentoring



The principles of culturally responsive practice (Verdon, S. 2021)

The picture is the visual representation of the 6 principles of culturally responsive practice, which translates also into the mentoring process.

Cultural self-awareness

Mentors should reflect on how their own culture, values, and worldview shape the way they interact with others. This self-awareness helps them recognize how their perspective influences the mentoring relationship and ensures they remain open and respectful.

Shared and meaningful goals

Mentoring goals work best when they are developed together with the mentee and, where relevant, her family or community. Goals should feel relevant, motivating, and connected to the mentee's cultural context and lived experience.

Relevant tools and resources

The approaches, methods, and resources used in mentoring need to make sense in the mentee's cultural and linguistic world. Standard "one-size-fits-all" tools may not always fit - sometimes more flexible or creative approaches are needed.

Partnership with families and communities

Families and communities carry knowledge, traditions, and support networks that can enrich mentoring. Involving or acknowledging these networks helps create a safe and affirming environment for the mentee.

Awareness of broader context

Mentors should consider the wider cultural, social, and historical factors that shape the mentee's life. Economic conditions, past experiences, and social expectations all influence how a young person engages with mentoring.

Collaboration with others

Mentoring does not happen in isolation. When appropriate, mentors can work alongside teachers, community leaders, or other trusted figures to create a more holistic and supportive environment for the mentee (Verdon, S. 2021).

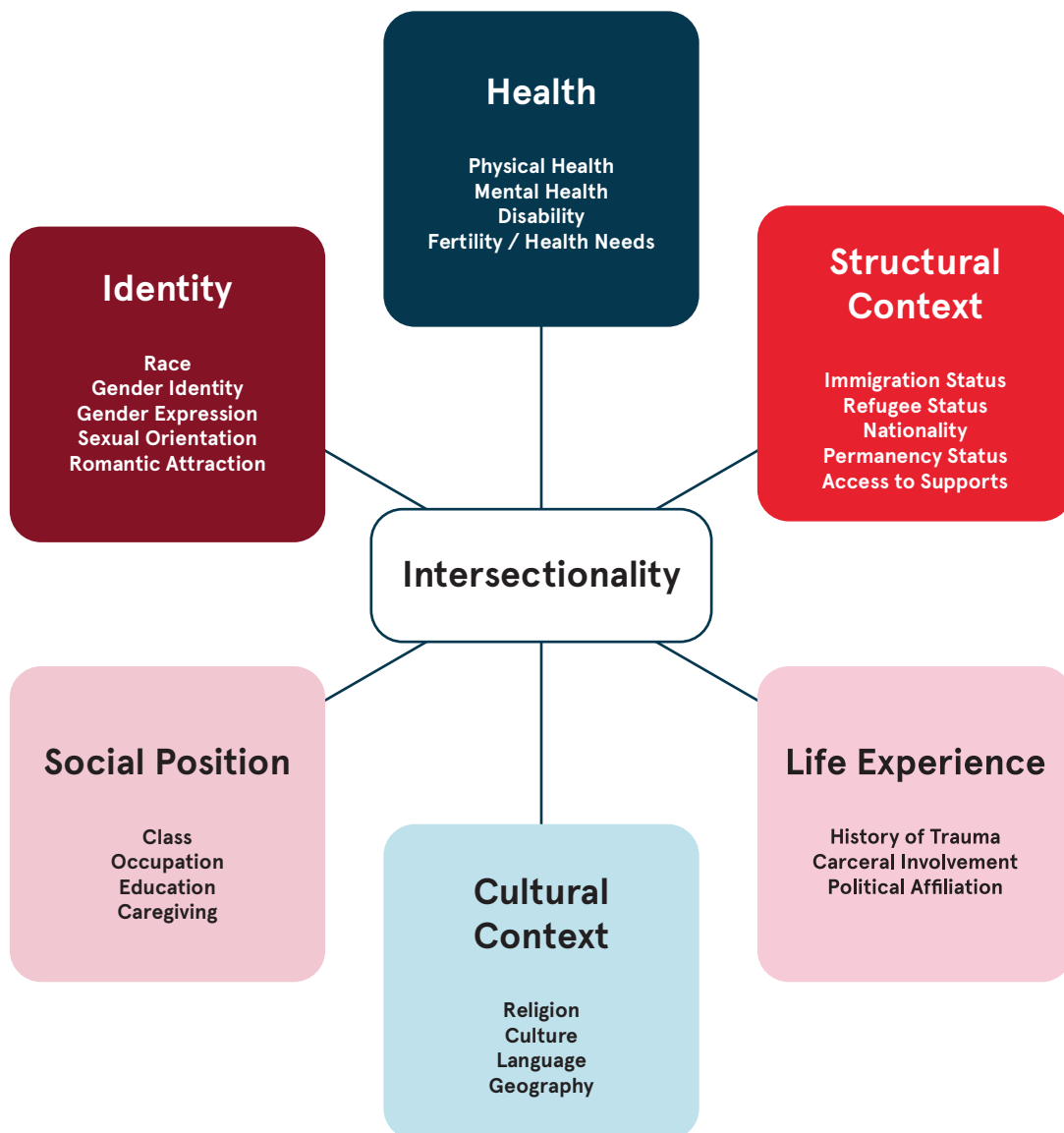
It is interesting to note that while culturally responsive mentoring is shaped by the mentee's background and experiences, many of the starting points actually lie with the mentor. A mentor's own beliefs, values, and biases (which we will revisit later on) influence the relationship, often more than they/you realize. Developing cultural self-awareness is therefore essential as mentors need to reflect on their perspectives and be conscious of how these shape their interactions. When mentors begin with themselves, they are better able to create space for the mentee's identity, goals, and voice. This balance between the mentor's self-reflection and the mentee's lived experience is what makes culturally responsive practice meaningful and effective.

5.5. Intersectionality in mentoring

5.6. What is intersectionality?

To begin exploring intersectionality, we first introduce it as a broad, umbrella concept and then connect it to the mentoring process. The picture below captures this idea well – the more chaotic, the better. Why? Because it reflects our differences, our colors, and the many ways in which we stand apart from one another. At the same time, it reminds us that a single person can hold multiple identities and differences that shape their realities and their experiences.

When these differences are recognized as strengths (as they should be), they become a source of empowerment and growth. But when viewed negatively, they can expose individuals to multiple layers of discrimination, creating added difficulties and challenges. Intersectionality helps us see both sides and encourages us to focus on valuing diversity as a foundation for inclusion and equity.



Intersectionality (University of Windsor, n.d.)

Intersectionality is a concept that can be traced through history, examined from different perspectives, and understood as something that evolves - beginning with smaller scales and gradually expanding to include more identities and differences. In this section, we will first offer a brief definition and then explore how intersectionality shapes the mentoring process and the way mentors can apply it in practice.

For those interested in a deeper dive into the development of the theory, we recommend the article “Intersectionality: Mapping the Movements of a Theory” by Devon Carbado, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Vickie M. Mays which can be accessed via the following link - https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266477028_Intersectionality_Mapping_the_Movements_of_a_Theory (last accessed 19. 8. 2025.). This work provides valuable insight into how intersectionality has grown and shifted over time, and how it continues to influence different fields.

Intersectionality is both a concept and a framework that helps us recognize how different social identities overlap and interact. In some situations, these overlapping identities can lead to compounded discrimination and multiple forms of exclusion. In more positive contexts, however, the same intersections can enrich a person’s life, offering additional sources of strength and identity. Intersectional discrimination can take many forms. In addition to racism or discrimination based on language, religion, or belief, people may also experience prejudice connected to socioeconomic situation, health or disability, migration background, age, gender, or sexuality (United Nations Network, 2022).

For example, the lived experience of a young Roma woman will differ from that of a Roma man in the same community. While both may face discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, a Roma woman can also encounter gender-based discrimination, creating a unique set of challenges shaped by the intersections of her identity.

Inequality is complex and shaped by many overlapping factors. It cannot be fully understood by examining just one aspect in isolation. Likewise, meaningful responses must take into account the ways these different forms of inequality are interconnected.

Intersectionality provides a powerful framework for understanding how inequalities are experienced – especially by individuals and groups who face multiple, layered forms of disadvantage. These experiences are not fixed; they shift depending on context and the combination of influences such as ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, religion, origin, ability, education, language, and more (Robert Bosch Stiftung, n.d.).

Now that we’ve defined what intersectionality is, it’s useful to take a step back and also look at what it isn’t. Over time, researchers and practitioners have explored intersectionality in depth, unpacking its evolution, benefits, limitations, and real-world implications. While the full story of intersectionality continues to develop, for the purpose of this Handbook, we’ll focus on the core definitions and understandings that are most relevant to our context. These give us a strong foundation to move forward with clarity and purpose.

FOCUS OF INTERSECTIONALITY	WHAT IT IS...	WHAT IT ISN'T...
Social inequality	A recognition that social categories intersect and shape lived experiences	Simply adding up advantages or subtracting disadvantages
Dynamic nature of inequality	Understanding inequalities as shifting and relational (dynamic relationships)	Viewing inequalities as fixed and separate
Contextual dependency	Acknowledging that power structures change based on time and place	Assuming the importance of one or more categories without considering context
Structural and political context	Focus on systems and structures that produce inequality	Focusing only on individual behavior without considering broader forces
Power relations	Exploring how inequalities are created and maintained through power dynamics	Ignoring the role of power in shaping inequality
Implications for most disadvantaged	Prioritizing those most marginalized within a group	Centering only those already in positions of security or privilege within the group
Reflexivity	Practitioners reflecting on how their identities influence their work	Assuming complete objectivity and neutrality in analysis, completely removing practitioners from the analysis

What intersectionality is compared to what it isn't (UN Women, 2022)

You will notice that here as well it's instructed that reflexivity holds an important piece of the puzzle. We will talk more shortly about why that's important and how you can practice it to overcome your own biases before entering a mentoring process, and a mentoring relationship.

You'll notice that reflexivity once again plays an important role. Soon, we'll explore why it matters - and how you, as a mentor, can practice reflexivity to become more aware of your own biases before entering the mentoring process and building a mentoring relationship.

5.7. Intersectionality in practice

Intersectionality was developed as a way to challenge the assumption that people within a single group (such as women, or Roma communities) all share the same experiences. Its primary aim is to center the voices and lived realities of those who are most marginalized. One of its key strengths is the ability to highlight what life looks like at the “margins”, where individuals experience overlapping forms of exclusion or disadvantage.

From a practical standpoint, intersectionality helps uncover and give space to experiences of marginalization and oppression. Creating safe, supportive spaces, such as interviews, group reflections, or workshops, where people can share these experiences, can be deeply meaningful and even transformative. In some studies, participants described this opportunity to speak freely about how their identity shapes their experience as “cathartic,” “eye-opening,” and a moment of “new learning” (Atewologun, 2018).

These safe spaces can become powerful starting points for personal growth and even small shifts in how individuals engage with the world around them. At the same time, intersectionality is a valuable tool for identifying both differences and commonalities across social categories, and for better understanding group dynamics and potential divisions within teams or communities.

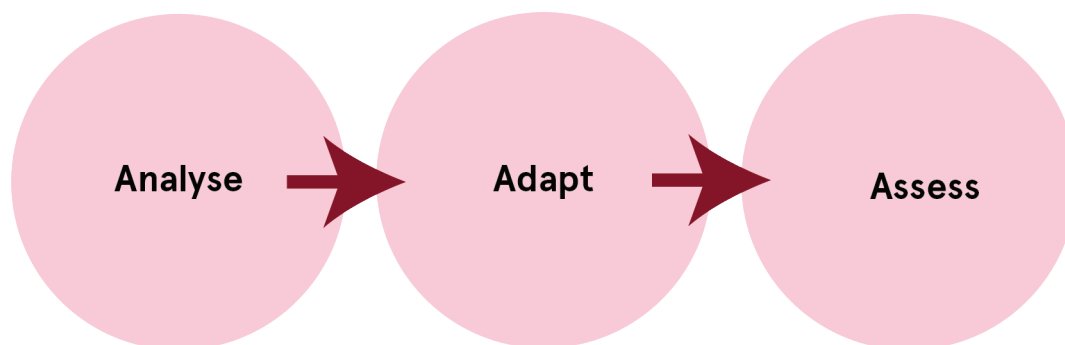
Intersectionality can be understood and applied in different ways depending on the focus and approach of a program, organisation, or initiative. The table below presents several applied concepts of intersectionality – from very broad, general approaches to more focused and intentional strategies that directly engage with overlapping identities and inequalities. Understanding these distinctions helps us reflect on how inclusive and intentional our own work is, and how we can move toward deeper, more responsive mentoring.

Generic	Little or no focus on specific equality strands. The work is designed to benefit everyone but may overlook the unique needs of marginalised groups.
Pan-equality	Focuses on broad issues that affect most or all marginalised groups, without distinguishing between them.
Multi-strand	Addresses different areas of inequality (such as gender, ethnicity, disability) separately, but at the same time and with equal importance.
Diversity within	Explores differences within a single group (e.g., different experiences among women). One identity or issue may be prioritised over others.
Intersections of strands	Engages directly with groups who live at the intersection of multiple identities (e.g., Roma women, LGBTQ+ youth with disabilities), without placing one identity above another.

These different approaches remind us that how we apply intersectionality matters. Some models are broader and more surface-level, while others dig deeper into the lived experiences of those most impacted by overlapping inequalities. As mentors, aiming for approaches that recognise and respond to intersecting identities helps us create more meaningful, inclusive, and empowering relationships.

5.8. How to apply intersectionality

It's often more straightforward than it seems, or at least it can be - applying intersectionality simply means being willing to look at situations from multiple perspectives and experiences. But just as importantly, it means starting with ourselves: reflecting on our own identities, positions, and assumptions before stepping into someone else's world.



How to apply intersectionality (UN Women, 2022)

We look at it through three simple stages:

Let's go a bit further and analyze the three proposed steps/phases.

Analysis

Take time to reflect on the current situation. Where are the gaps? Who might be left out? What identities or experiences are not being seen or supported? This step is about understanding the context and identifying where change is needed.

Adaptation

Based on what you've learned, adapt your approach. This could mean designing new mentoring practices, adjusting your communication, or involving others in ways that better respond to diverse needs and lived realities.

Assessment

Reflect on the impact. What has shifted? What still needs attention? This final step is about learning from experience and continuing to improve your mentoring approach in an ongoing, responsive way.

Remember, this process is not linear. It's a cycle of listening, adapting, and growing. These three steps offer a simple, thoughtful way to bring intersectionality into mentoring practice. They encourage us to stay aware of the realities around us, to adapt with intention, and to keep learning through reflection.

CASE STUDY 1: MENTOR IN A NEW CONTEXT - NOTICING THE WHOLE PICTURE

Jovana, a 22-year-old mentor, has been matched with Mirela, a 16-year-old Roma girl from an urban area. Mirela lives with her parents and two younger siblings in a small apartment. Her family is relatively supportive, and she is currently attending vocational school, studying hairdressing.

During their first few mentoring sessions, Jovana notices that Mirela is confident when talking about her goals and dreams - she wants to open her own salon one day. But Jovana also picks up subtle hints: Mirela often avoids eye contact when speaking about school, and seems hesitant when Jovana asks about her group of friends.

Later, in a casual conversation, Mirela mentions she doesn't really "fit in" at school. She says she feels like "no one really sees her" and jokes about always being the "quiet one in the back." She also shares that she's the only Roma girl in her class, and that she often hears comments like "You're not like the others". Jovana starts to reflect:

- How does Mirela's identity shape her experience in school?
- What role does Jovana play in offering a space where Mirela can feel fully seen and heard
- - not only as a student but as a young Roma woman navigating multiple social expectations?
- How can mentoring support both Mirela's ambitions and the complex, subtle challenges she faces?

Mirela hasn't expressed any immediate "problem," and things are going relatively well. But Jovana senses there's more beneath the surface - not necessarily a crisis, but an opportunity to connect more meaningfully.

Take some time to reflect on this situation - use the questions below to support yourself in the process.

- What do you notice about Mirela's situation?
- What would you do as a mentor at this moment?
- How would you respond to her comment about not fitting in?
- What aspects of Mirela's identity might be influencing her experiences - in school, at home, and in mentoring process?
- What kind of support might she need, that isn't obvious at first?

To wrap up this topic, we'll take a moment to explore what UN Women, in their INTERSECTIONALITY RESOURCE GUIDE AND TOOLKIT - An Intersectional Approach to Leave No One Behind, call intersectionality enablers - key concepts or practices that help put intersectionality into action. At first glance, these terms might seem obvious or even familiar. But in real-life mentoring situations, it's easy to overlook them or underestimate their importance unless we've reflected on them beforehand.

That's why it's valuable to name them clearly now. When mentors are aware of these enablers in advance, they're more likely to recognise them in the moment, and thus be more prepared to respond with intention and care.

1. Reflexivity

Take time to reflect on your own assumptions, beliefs, and behaviours, including those you may not be fully aware of. Ask yourself how your background, privilege, or personal experiences might shape the way you interact with others. This also includes reflecting on the values and practices of your organisation.

Reflect:

- Do I question how my own views influence my actions and decisions?
- Could my position or privilege unintentionally make it harder for others to feel seen or heard?
- What steps can I take to become more aware and intentional in my mentoring approach?

2. Dignity, choice and autonomy

Every person has the right to be treated with respect and to make decisions about their own life. As mentors, it's important not to assume what's best for someone or make choices on their behalf. Instead, we create space for young people to express their own views, make informed decisions, and define what empowerment means to them.

Ask yourself:

- Who has the freedom to choose, and who might feel limited?
- Whose voice is heard in the decision-making process?

Am I supporting the mentee's autonomy, or unintentionally speaking for them?

3. Accessibility and universal design

Accessibility means creating conditions where everyone can take part without unnecessary obstacles. Universal design focuses on planning environments, communication, and activities so they work for a wide range of people from the start. This includes being proactive about physical, communication, and social access, as well as checking in to understand specific needs.

Reflect:

- Have I asked people what they need to participate comfortably and confidently?
- Are there barriers in the environment, information, or attitudes that I can address?
- Am I offering different ways for people to engage, depending on their needs?

4. Diverse knowledges

Knowledge comes in many forms, e.g. lived experience, cultural wisdom, community insight, and everyday practice all matter. Those who are often excluded from decision-making or labeled as "beneficiaries" are often those who carry the most relevant knowledge. Valuing diverse perspectives challenges traditional ideas of who holds expertise and reshapes how we design and act.

Reflect:

- Where does my understanding come from, and whose voice shaped it?
- Who was asked or included in forming this knowledge or approach?
- Whose knowledge might be missing, overlooked, or undervalued?

5. Intersecting identities

People's experiences are shaped by the interaction of multiple aspects of their identity, such as gender, ethnicity, age, class, disability, and more. These identities do not exist in isolation, and their impact depends on the social and cultural context. Mentoring with awareness of intersectionality means recognising this complexity and avoiding one-size-fits-all assumptions.

Reflect:

- What different identities shape the lives of the people I work with?
- How might these identities overlap to affect someone's experience in this context?
- Who might be missing from the picture because of how programs or spaces are designed?

6. Relational power

Power is not fixed, power shifts depending on relationships, context, and time. Someone may hold power in one situation and be marginalised in another. Mentors and program facilitators need to be aware of how power operates in their relationships, remain accountable, and create space for shared decision-making wherever possible.

Reflect:

- Who holds influence in this situation, and how is that power being used?
- Who makes key decisions, and who is left out of them?
- How can I be more accountable in the way I support others?

7. Time and space

Context matters. The way people experience privilege, discrimination, or social roles can shift depending on where they are, when they live, and who is around them. Social norms, expectations, and opportunities are shaped by both place and generation. Being sensitive to this helps mentors respond more thoughtfully to each situation.

Reflect:

- How might privilege or exclusion look different in a specific place or community?
- How do experiences shift across generations or over time?

Am I considering the social and cultural moment that shapes my mentee's experience?

8. Transformative and rights-based

A rights-based approach goes beyond inclusion as it actively works to change the systems that create inequality in the first place. This means challenging how power, resources, and opportunities are distributed, and supporting practices that create long-term change and fairness.

Reflect:

- Are we working toward lasting change, or simply fitting people into existing structures?
- How are power and resources being shared or redistributed in this space?
- What role can I play in supporting fairer, more equitable relationships? (UN Women, 2021)

These eight enablers offer a practical foundation for applying intersectionality in real-life mentoring contexts. While each enabler stands on its own, they are most powerful when considered together - as a mindset, a method, and a way of showing up with awareness and care.

5.9. Overcoming own biases

Before stepping into any mentoring relationship, it's essential to take a look inward. Our beliefs, assumptions, and unconscious biases, shaped by personal experience, culture, and social norms, all influence how we see others, how we listen, and how we respond.

This section invites mentors to reflect honestly and critically, not to feel judged, but to grow more aware and intentional. Recognising our own biases is not a one-time task, but an ongoing practice, and one of the most important steps toward truly inclusive, intersectional mentoring, and, if we do it right, a one-step forward for a truly inclusive and intersectional community.

5.10. What is unconscious bias and how it occurs?

Take a deep breath before you read this - WE ALL DO IT.

Unconscious bias isn't a flaw or a failure. It's part of being human. What matters most is whether we're willing to notice it, acknowledge it, and take steps to stop it from shaping how we engage with others.

As per the Royal Society, adapted by Professor Uta Frith DBE FBA FMedSci FRS from guidance issued to recruitment panels by the Scottish Government:

“Unconscious bias is when we make judgments or decisions on the basis of our prior experience, our own personal deep-seated thought patterns, assumptions or interpretations, and we are not aware that we are doing it. The irony is that prejudice and discrimination are inevitable by-products of the efficiency of human cognition.”

Much of what we do in daily life happens without us even realising it. Psychologists agree that a large part of our behaviour is guided by unconscious processes, including the decisions we make, the judgments we form, and the way we interact with others. We're not always aware of what we're doing, and even less aware of why we're doing it. Research in social psychology shows that our thoughts, perceptions, and social behaviour can be shaped by mental shortcuts and habits that operate without conscious intent or control (Wheeler, R. 2015).

As great minds often think alike, we found ourselves aligned with what Wheeler (2015) pointed out - using drivers as an example to explain how unconscious processes work. While the original context refers to car drivers (but it might be equally appropriate to other types of vehicles, you can be the judge of that), the insight holds true across many areas of life.

If you're not a driver, bear with us - this example is still worth reflecting on.

Try to recall a time when you drove along a familiar route - maybe to work, to visit family, or to your regular grocery store. You got in the car, you started driving, and then... you arrived. But if someone asked you to describe what happened along the way, e.g. what you saw, thought about, or passed, you might not remember much at all.

Sound familiar?

That's the unconscious at work. Your brain knew (or suggested) what to do, and you followed the routine without needing to consciously focus on every single action or decision. And just like this happens behind the wheel, it happens in how we relate to others, how we judge, and how we respond.

From the moment we're born, we're naturally inclined to feel more comfortable around those who surround us and to learn from them. As we grow, our views and attitudes are shaped by the cultural values we absorb, both directly and indirectly, through conversations, media, and everyday experiences. Our unconscious mind constantly sorts through huge amounts of information, looking for patterns. When it repeatedly sees certain things together, like men in leadership roles or women in caregiving professions, it starts to associate them. Over time, these patterns begin to feel "normal," while other combinations may seem unfamiliar or harder to process. If we don't pause to question these associations, they can lead to automatic assumptions, which can result in anything from unexamined stereotypes to outright discriminatory behaviours (The Royal Society, 2015).



**SYSTEM 1
INTUITION**



**SYSTEM 2
REASONING**

System 1 & System 2 model of thinking (Ten, 2025)

A helpful way to understand how our minds work in these situations comes from Daniel Kahneman's model introduced in 2011 – the System 1 and System 2 thinking model. It offers a simple and intuitive explanation of how our brains process information, make decisions, and form judgments, often without us even realising it.

According to Payne et al. (2017), System 1 thinking operates quickly and automatically – without conscious effort or control. It's intuitive, emotional, and based on mental shortcuts. In contrast, System 2 thinking is slower and more deliberate. It activates when we engage in complex reasoning, focus our attention, or make conscious choices (Mariani, 2019).

People often identify more with System 2, believing their decisions are thoughtful and intentional. And while this is sometimes true, research by Sander et al. (2020) shows that System 2 works in structured, logical steps which allow us to pause, reflect, and resist certain automatic reactions. But it also requires effort, and we don't always engage it as often as we think we do (Suveren, 2022).

5.11. How do we overcome our own biases?

The first step we can all take is surprisingly simple – develop greater self-awareness. While it may sound too easy to be effective, research in contemporary social psychology confirms its value. Implicit attitudes, the ones we're often unaware of, can be difficult to detect through ordinary reflection. But with intentional and focused self-reflection, we can begin to recognise their influence and take steps to manage them more consciously.

Another powerful way to reduce bias and become more aware of unconscious choices that hinder inclusion is through meaningful intergroup contact. Research in social psychology shows that constructive interaction between diverse groups can lead to greater understanding and mutual appreciation. But it's not enough to simply share space with those we hold biases against. Effective intergroup contact requires certain conditions: equal status in the setting, shared goals, collaboration to achieve those goals, and support from leadership or authority figures (Wheeler, R. 2015).

Mentoring projects, teamwork, or shared community efforts often create the ideal environment for this kind of exchange – where interaction is purposeful, balanced, and grounded in respect. We mention this because it's important to start with a simple truth: we all have unconscious thoughts and biases. What matters is what we choose to do about them. Continuous learning, mentoring, and meaningful connections with others all play a vital role in this process – they give us the space to grow, to reflect, and to stay mindful. These practices create a foundation for ongoing awareness and a deeper, more lasting understanding of ourselves and others.

Let's take this a step further. As part of your ongoing growth, we invite you to regularly engage in the following 5-step process - whether individually, with fellow mentors or professionals, or even with your mentees during shared reflection or self-awareness activities.

These steps are designed to support continuous self-examination, challenge unconscious patterns, and strengthen your ability to mentor with intention and care.

**1. ACKNOWLEDGE AND ACCEPT
THE EXISTENCE OF IMPLICIT BIAS,
ITS MANIFESTATIONS, AND ITS IMPACT**

This is and must always be the first step in any self-reflection process: to recognize that there is a problem, and to accept it. Only then can the path toward a meaningful solution begin. It may well be the hardest step to take, but it is also the most essential. Here are 5 action steps to guide you through this first stage.

Recognize that we all have implicit biases. Bias is a natural part of how the human brain processes information. This includes mentors, educators, and professionals in any field.

Understand that unconscious bias can influence mentoring relationships. These biases can shape how we perceive and interact with others, potentially affecting how we set goals, offer guidance, or interpret behavior, often without even realizing it.

Acknowledge the real-world impact. Unconscious biases can affect everyday interactions; from the way we listen to someone's experience to the assumptions we make about their potential or needs. Left unchecked, they can unintentionally reinforce inequality.

Let go of guilt or blame. Feeling guilty about having biases isn't helpful. Instead, focus on the intentional actions you can take to reflect on and reduce these biases.

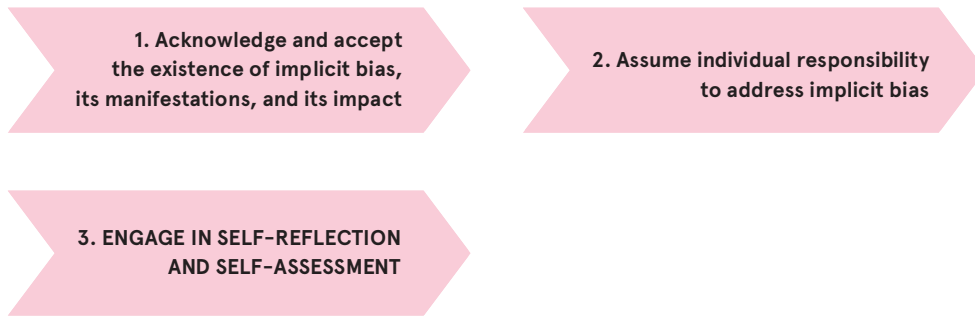
Know that change is possible. There are practical ways to work on implicit bias and reduce its influence. Throughout this section, you'll explore several strategies that can support this journey and make your mentoring practice more conscious, inclusive, and effective.

**1. Acknowledge and accept
the existence of implicit bias,
its manifestations, and its impact**

**2. ASSUME INDIVIDUAL
RESPONSIBILITY TO
ADDRESS IMPLICIT BIAS**

Self-awareness is not enough, of course. We also need to actively take responsibility for identifying and working through our biases. This step is about moving from acknowledgment to action, through intentional, ongoing personal and professional development. Here's what you can do to help you in this process:

- Write down some of your own beliefs, assumptions, or attitudes that may (even unintentionally) lead to biased thoughts or behaviors toward others.
- Invite feedback from a trusted colleague, peer, or friend who can offer honest observations about moments where your words or actions might reflect unconscious bias.
- Reflect on how these beliefs or behaviors could affect your interactions, especially in mentoring relationships, teamwork, or community engagement.
- Make a clear commitment, both personally and professionally, to challenge and reduce these biases in your everyday practice.
- Seek out learning opportunities (such as workshops, mentoring circles, or courses) that focus on understanding and addressing implicit bias.
- Encourage the inclusion of discussions about bias, privilege, and equity in events, meetings, or training that you are part of or help organize.



We've already explored the importance of reflection in mentoring - particularly in the context of planning and delivering educational activities, responding to group dynamics, and supporting learning processes. Now, however, we're shifting the focus inward. In this section, reflection becomes a more personal and introspective process, one that asks us to examine our own emotions, assumptions, and internalized biases. This type of self-reflection is not about how we guide others, but how we better understand ourselves in order to become more empathetic, inclusive, and effective in our roles.

For this purpose, you can use the following approach, referenced from American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2021). Cultural competence check-in: Self-reflection. <https://www.asha.org/siteassets/uploadedfiles/multicultural/self-reflection-checklist.pdf?srsltid=AfmBOoqMKH2MTJTJ-fY8EQqU9T6R5jfO4Zs1z8x1-gZ1B5KXJMzXn0a7>. (last accessed 12. 8. 2025.).

This self-assessment helps you reflect on how cultural and linguistic factors influence your attitudes and actions.

Rate each statement from 1 (Strongly agree) to 5 (Strongly disagree).

Focus especially on anything you rated 3, 4, or 5, as these may highlight areas for further reflection and growth. There are no right or wrong answers – just opportunities to learn.

<input type="checkbox"/> I am aware of and acknowledge the influence of others' cultural backgrounds.	<input type="checkbox"/> I am aware of my beliefs and value systems and do not impose them on others.	<input type="checkbox"/> I believe that it is acceptable to use a language other than the official language.
<input type="checkbox"/> I accept all levels of acculturation into the dominant culture.	<input type="checkbox"/> I am inclusive of individuals who are LGBTQIA+ (the common abbreviation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Pansexual, Transgender, Genderqueer, Queer, Intersex, Agender, Asexual).	<input type="checkbox"/> I know how to use pronouns that reflect all genders–binary and non-binary.
<input type="checkbox"/> I know that not all genders align with sex assigned at birth.	<input type="checkbox"/> I take responsibility for my comments or behavior that may result in a negative impact on others.	<input type="checkbox"/> I recognize that not all groups experience equal degrees of privilege and/or marginalization.
<input type="checkbox"/> I am driven to respond to others' insensitive comments or behaviors.	<input type="checkbox"/> I do not knowingly participate in insensitive comments or behaviors.	<input type="checkbox"/> I am aware that the roles of family members may differ within or across cultures or families.
<input type="checkbox"/> I recognize family members and other designees as decision-makers for services and support.	<input type="checkbox"/> I am inclusive of all family structures (e.g., divorced parents; same-gender parents; grandparents as caretakers; non-binary family members, close friends, and loved ones).	<input type="checkbox"/> I understand the difference between communication disorder and communication difference.
<input type="checkbox"/> I understand that views of the aging process may influence the decision to seek intervention.	<input type="checkbox"/> I understand that there are different dialects within a language.	<input type="checkbox"/> I recognize that all English speakers use at least one dialect of English.

I understand how culture can affect child-rearing practices such as the following:

<input type="checkbox"/> Discipline	<input type="checkbox"/> Dressing	<input type="checkbox"/> Toileting
<input type="checkbox"/> Feeding	<input type="checkbox"/> Self-help skills	<input type="checkbox"/> Expectations for the future
<input type="checkbox"/> Communication		

I understand the impact of culture on:

<input type="checkbox"/> Access to health care systems	<input type="checkbox"/> Education	<input type="checkbox"/> Family roles
<input type="checkbox"/> Religion/faith-based practices	<input type="checkbox"/> Gender roles	<input type="checkbox"/> Alternative medicine
<input type="checkbox"/> Customs, practices, or traditions	<input type="checkbox"/> Perception of time	<input type="checkbox"/> Use of AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication - all forms of communication (other than oral speech) that are used to express thoughts, needs, wants, and ideas such as gestures, sign language, picture boards, or speech-generating devices.)
<input type="checkbox"/> Views on wellness	<input type="checkbox"/> Views on (dis)ability	<input type="checkbox"/> The value of Western medical treatment
<input type="checkbox"/> Employment		

I understand how cultural norms may influence social communication in many ways, including:

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Eye contact | <input type="checkbox"/> Interpersonal space | <input type="checkbox"/> Use of gestures |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Comfort with silence | <input type="checkbox"/> Turn-taking | <input type="checkbox"/> Topics of conversation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asking and responding to questions | <input type="checkbox"/> Greetings | <input type="checkbox"/> Interruptions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Use of humor | <input type="checkbox"/> Decision-making roles | <input type="checkbox"/> Directness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Play, including the value of play | | |

I understand that the use of a foreign accent or limited English skill is not a reflection of:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reduced intellectual capacity | <input type="checkbox"/> The ability to communicate clearly and effectively |
|--|---|

1. Acknowledge and accept the existence of implicit bias, its manifestations, and its impact

2. Assume individual responsibility to address implicit bias

3. Engage in self-reflection and self-assessment

4. COLLECT AND USE DATA EFFECTIVELY AND PERFORM SELF-MONITORING

Monitoring your own actions and collecting meaningful data is key to making mentoring more effective and inclusive. This step helps you stay aware of your progress, spot patterns in your behaviour, and adjust your approach based on real information rather than assumptions.

Whether through regular notetaking, check-ins with mentees, or feedback from others, gathering data allows you to reflect, improve, and stay accountable to your goals. This is not about tracking others, but about understanding your own influence and making sure your work truly meets the needs of those you support.

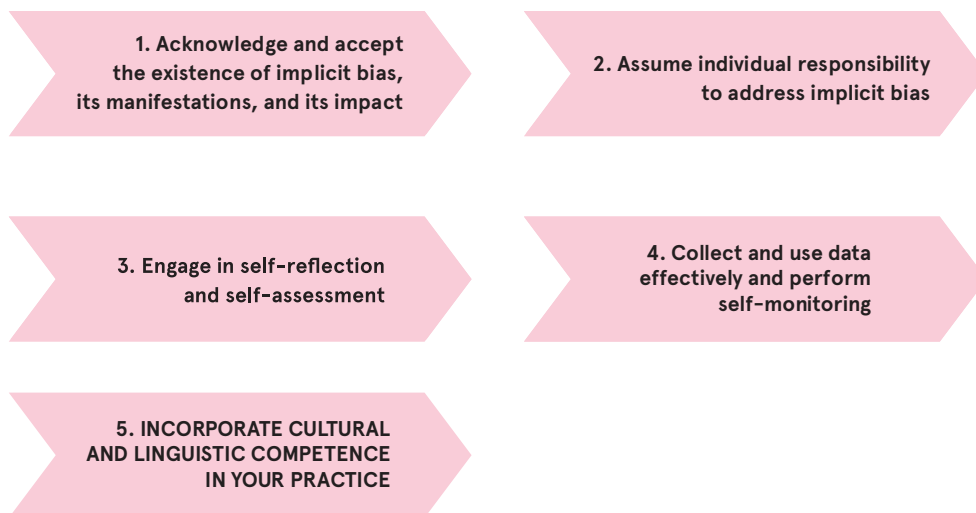
As part of a continuous effort to better understand and reduce implicit bias, many researchers recommend practicing mindfulness in relation to one's thoughts, emotions, and reactions. Bishop, Lau, and colleagues (2004) propose a two-part model of mindfulness. The first part focuses on learning to manage your attention by keeping it centered on the present moment. This makes it easier to notice your own thoughts and reactions as they occur. The second part is about developing an attitude of openness, curiosity, and acceptance toward these experiences (National Center for Cultural Competence, n.d.).

PAUSE & REFLECT

You stumbled upon another reflection moment. Take a few quiet moments to check in with yourself:

- What kinds of thoughts or reactions tend to come up for you in new or unfamiliar mentoring situations?
- Can you notice these thoughts without judging them?
- How might approaching them with curiosity rather than guilt or shame change the way you respond?

Try setting aside 5-10 minutes this week to sit quietly and simply observe your thoughts. You don't need to "fix" anything, just notice what comes up.



There are five key practices that support cultural and linguistic competence on an individual level:

- Recognize and respect cultural differences - understanding that differences are not deficits allows us to approach mentoring relationships with openness and appreciation.
- Understand your own cultural identity - self-awareness helps prevent projecting personal norms or assumptions onto others.
- Engage in regular self-assessment - reflection is ongoing; it allows us to monitor how our biases or blind spots may affect our work.

- Build cultural knowledge and practical skills – this includes learning about the traditions, communication styles, and worldviews of the people we work with.
- View behavior through a cultural lens – instead of interpreting actions as right or wrong based on one dominant norm, we aim to understand them in context (National Center for Cultural Competence, n.d.).

We would like to use the opportunity to forward you to the National center for cultural competence and their manual on Conscious & Unconscious Biases in Health Care, available here - <https://nccc.georgetown.edu/bias/module-4/2.php>. All previous stages were extracted from their mentioned work and there's a lot more content, interesting videos and tools available there.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this chapter, we explored how culture, identity, and social positioning shape mentoring relationships. We reflected on the importance of recognizing diversity within Roma communities, applying culturally responsive approaches, and understanding the intersecting identities that influence each mentee's lived experience. We highlighted the value of self-awareness, reflexivity, and intentional practice in creating meaningful, inclusive mentoring environments.

Culturally responsive and intersectional mentoring is not about following fixed rules, it's rather an ongoing process of learning, unlearning, adapting, and growing. It starts with the mentor, but it flourishes through respectful, open, and reciprocal relationships. These approaches remind us that every mentee carries a unique story and strength, and that our role as mentors is to make space for those stories, to listen deeply, and to support each mentee in reaching her full potential.

Let these reflections and tools guide you, challenge you, and empower you in your mentoring journey.

5.12. Reflection

Before you move forward, take a moment to pause and reflect. This module introduced important concepts around cultural responsiveness, intersectionality, and inclusive mentoring. These questions are here to help you process what you've learned and consider how it connects to your values, attitudes, and future mentoring practice.

- What does cultural responsiveness mean to me now, compared to before reading this module?
- How have my perceptions of diversity within Roma communities evolved?
- Which elements of intersectionality were new or particularly impactful to me?
- In what ways do I see my own identity influencing how I mentor or support others?
- What insights did I gain about the importance of reflexivity in mentoring?
- Which biases or assumptions did I notice in myself while going through this content?
- How can I apply one principle from this module to make my mentoring more inclusive?
- What challenges do I foresee in applying these approaches – and how can I prepare for them?

5.13. Self-assessment

This tool helps you reflect on the key concepts presented in Module 5: Applying culturally responsive and intersectional approaches. Use the checklist to assess your level of understanding and integration of the ideas covered. You may return to this matrix regularly to track your growth.

You may find that you identify with more than one stage at the same time and that's perfectly normal. Feel free to mark more than one box if it reflects your current experience. As you complete the table, take your time to reflect honestly on each statement. Think about what you've learned in this module and how your understanding or practice might still be developing.

Key concept	I understand it	I've started applying it	I want to go deeper
Diversity within Roma communities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Intersectionality and overlapping identities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Culturally responsive mentoring practices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recognizing and addressing unconscious bias	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reflexivity and critical self-awareness in mentoring	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inclusive and shared goal setting with mentees	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Valuing diverse family and community structures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Awareness of power dynamics in mentoring relationships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Making space for intersecting experiences in mentoring conversations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Tip: Focus on the areas marked "I want to go deeper". These could guide your next steps in learning or discussion with fellow mentors.

6. Module 5: Monitoring, evaluation & responsive adaptation

Mentoring is not a one-time event – it is a dynamic and evolving process. While earlier modules emphasized the importance of reflection and cultural awareness, this module focuses on how mentors can continuously adapt and grow their practice based on what they observe, assess, and learn throughout the mentoring relationship.

Tracking progress, revisiting goals, and recognizing signs of disengagement are essential for creating a mentoring process that remains relevant and supportive. Reflection remains important here, not only as a personal practice, but also as a tool for evaluating effectiveness and making informed changes.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this module, participants will be able to:

- Use appropriate tools to monitor mentoring progress and outcomes
- Conduct ongoing needs assessments and revisit goals collaboratively
- Identify signs of disengagement, stagnation, or shifting priorities
- Apply reflection as a means for improvement and adaptation
- Integrate feedback and insights into future mentoring practice

6.1. Monitoring and evaluation

We've already explored the importance of setting meaningful goals in mentoring relationships, whether in one-on-one or group settings. Now, it's time to shift our attention to how we can effectively monitor progress toward those goals, ensuring that the mentoring journey remains purposeful, responsive, and supportive over time.

But what is monitoring, and what does it really mean?

Monitoring refers to the ongoing process of observing, recording, and assessing activities and progress. It plays a vital role in the success of any project, program, intervention, or public policy. Rather than being a one-time task, monitoring is continuous – it involves gathering information at different stages, starting from the very beginning to establish a baseline.

The goal of monitoring is to track progress and performance over time, helping stakeholders understand how well a program is working and whether resources are being used effectively. This process enables timely adjustments and informed decision-making to improve outcomes and ensure the mentoring journey stays on the right path (Eval Community, 2023).

Let's quickly differentiate between monitoring and evaluation, so we're sure that we're on the

same page. So, what's evaluation? Evaluation is a structured process used to assess the quality, value, or impact of a program or activity. But what does that really look like in practice?

Let's take program evaluation as an example. (Mentoring) programs and projects are usually created with the intention of making a positive change. Evaluation helps us find out whether that change is actually happening. It asks questions such as:

- How well is the program meeting its goals?
- What can be improved?
- Is it worth continuing?
- Are the outcomes justifying the effort and cost? (American Evaluation Association, 2015)

If you're still unclear on the difference, let's look at it side by side.

Monitoring	Evaluation
Ongoing: During the life of the programme	Periodic: Important milestones of the programme
Documents progress made towards each intended outcome	Analyzes outcomes to ascertain overall worth and impact
Focuses on the implementation realities	Focuses on outcomes and impacts
Provides real-time feedback about the implementation process	Provides us with strategy and policy options
Internal or external	Internal or external

Difference between monitoring and evaluation (side by side comparison) (Lloyd et al., 2011)

It's important to remember that monitoring is an ongoing process which is the most effective when established at the beginning of your mentoring program or even better, prior to it, when you're designing the program itself.

6.2. Different types of monitoring

While there are many ways to track and assess programs, mentoring initiatives benefit most from a few key types of monitoring that ensure relevance, effectiveness, and responsiveness. Below are the types of monitoring most applicable to mentoring, particularly in community-based or youth-focused settings:

1. Process monitoring

This type focuses on how the mentoring process is being implemented. It tracks whether activities are carried out as planned, whether resources are used appropriately, and whether participants remain engaged. It also helps identify challenges early on.

Example: Are sessions consistent? Are mentors supported? Are mentees actively participating?

2. Outcome or results monitoring

Outcome monitoring tracks the changes or progress that result from mentoring. This may include increased confidence, clearer goals, or improved social skills.

Example: Have mentees grown in their self-awareness? Are their goals being reached? Has their engagement improved?

3. Beneficiary monitoring

This approach gathers direct feedback from mentees and mentors about their experiences. It helps ensure the program is meaningful and responsive to their needs.

Example: Do mentees feel heard and supported? Are mentors confident in their role? What improvements do participants suggest?

4. Context or situation monitoring

This monitors the external environment and changing conditions that may impact mentoring. It helps programs remain flexible and responsive.

Example: Has anything changed in the mentees' environment (e.g., school, home, community) that affects the mentoring relationship?

5. Financial monitoring

This involves keeping track of how the program's budget and resources are used. While often handled by program coordinators, it ensures efficient resource use. Even though not specifically valuable in our context, it's worth mentioning, as the need for managing financial resources can arise anytime, especially if programs are funded through different projects or initiatives. However, this will in most cases be the responsibility of the program/project staff, not the mentors themselves.

Example: Are funds used effectively for mentor support, materials, or mentee activities?

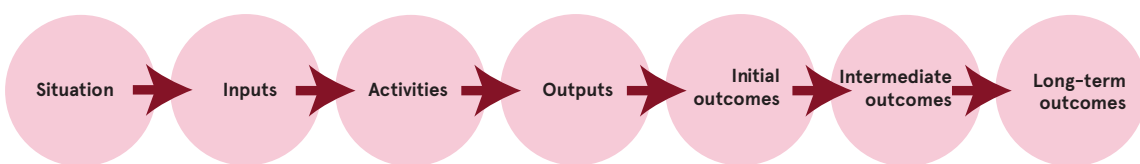
6. Compliance monitoring

This ensures the program follows policies, regulations, and ethical standards, including safety, confidentiality, and inclusivity.

Example: Are safeguarding practices in place? Are participants aware of their rights? Is the program aligned with ethical and donor requirements? (Intrac, 2017)

6.3. Basic logic model

The logic model is a widely used tool among practitioners and evaluators for clearly outlining and communicating a program's underlying theory. The strength of the logic model lies in its structured format as it breaks down a program into key components like inputs, outputs, and outcomes, helping users to visualize how each part connects. This approach not only clarifies the program's design but also makes it easier to assess whether the flow of activities and goals is logical, realistic, and achievable.



Basic generic logic model (Savaya & Waysman, 2005)

The Logic Model is a useful tool for planning, implementing, and evaluating mentoring programs. It provides a clear structure that connects the resources you invest, the activities you implement, and the results you aim to achieve. More importantly, it provides you with information on what and how to track your progress – what to monitor during the course of your mentoring program.

Let's look at the components through steps that you need to follow to establish a basic logic

model in your mentoring process.

Before designing a logic model, you need a clear understanding of the problem your mentoring program is meant to address. The logic model provides a structured way to connect identified needs with planned activities and intended results. Let's walk through how to build one step-by-step.

Step 1: Start by defining the need

Take time to examine the purpose of your program. Ask yourself:

- What specific challenge or issue is the program trying to solve?
- What data supports the need for this program?
- How widespread is the problem (consider scope, scale, and affected communities)?
- Who is the program targeting - young women, Roma girls, first-time mentees, underrepresented groups?
- Is the proposed program appropriate and realistic given the need?

Also consider:

- Who will use the logic model and why?
- Who should be included in creating it (staff, mentors, mentees)?
- What similar efforts or models already exist?

Step 2: Define your long-term outcomes

These are the ultimate changes you want to see in your mentees' lives as a result of the mentoring program. They represent success as experienced by the mentees—not just your organization.

Ask yourself:

- What transformation are we hoping mentees will achieve?
- How will we know their lives have improved because of mentoring?

Examples (mentoring context):

- Mentees develop sustained self-confidence and independence.
- Young women increase their participation in education or employment.
- Roma girls become active community advocates or peer mentors.

Step 3: Identify initial and intermediate outcomes

These describe the short- and medium-term progress mentees make along the way.

Initial outcomes (focus on knowledge, skills, attitudes):

- Mentees improve their understanding of personal boundaries.
- Mentees develop communication and goal-setting skills.
- Mentees recognize their rights and self-worth.
- Intermediate outcomes (focus on behavior change):
- Mentees actively apply new skills in their relationships or school settings.
- Mentees seek out resources or support independently.
- Mentees initiate and follow through on personal or academic goals.

Longterm outcomes

- Roma girls become active leaders and advocates in their communities.

- Mentees achieve sustained access to education, training, or meaningful employment.
- Increased social inclusion and reduced discrimination for marginalized young people.
- Improved long-term emotional well-being and resilience.
- Creation of intergenerational cycles of support, where former mentees become mentors.

Step 4: List the core activities

These are the mentoring actions designed to bring about those outcomes.

Think: If we do this, then mentees will gain that.

Examples:

- One-on-one mentoring sessions focused on personal development.
- Group workshops on leadership, communication, or emotional regulation.
- Community visits, peer meetups, or exposure to role models.

Step 5: Identify the needed inputs

What resources are required to run these activities?

Examples:

- Trained mentors and coordinators.
- Safe physical space for sessions.
- Learning materials, snacks, or transportation support.
- Partnerships with schools or community centers.

Step 6: Clarify the outputs

Outputs are the tangible results of your activities – they measure what you did, not what changed.

Ask:

- How many participants?
- How often did activities occur?
- What was delivered?

Examples:

- 7 mentees participated in 10 mentoring sessions each.
- 4 group workshops held over two months.
- 5 mentors trained in inclusive mentoring practices.

STOP for quick practice.

Would you like to make a short stop to practice? Follow the template below and create your own logic model. Be careful to be as specific as possible, as later on, you'll use this model to track the progress of your mentoring program.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

What problems or issues does the project attempt to solve or address? What is needed by the target population and what strategies will lead to positive change?

Project objective(s): [State the project objective here and divide the logic model by each objective. Objectives are concrete and viewed as targets under the general goal.]

Needs	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact
<i>What are the needs of the community, based on the social, political and economic condition of the country or region?</i>	<i>What human and financial resources will be used for this project?</i>	<i>What activities will be conducted to meet the needs or address the issues of the community?</i>	<i>What will be produced or delivered or who will participate in activities?</i>	<i>What changes will happen after an activity has been implemented?</i>	<i>What long-term changes will occur in the social, cultural political or economic context?</i>
Assumptions		External factors			
<i>What factors need to occur, or which stakeholders or grantees need to be involved, for the project to be successful? How and why will proposed activities lead to proposed outputs, and how will outputs lead to outcomes?</i>		<i>What factors that are not in the control of the project—e.g. changes in government policies or the political situation—could affect expected activities, outputs and outcomes?</i>			

Basic logic model template (U.S. Department of State, n.d.)

6.4. Collecting data for monitoring

Now that we've explored the inputs - what you need to set up your mentoring program, and how to structure goals and outcomes - it's time to shift our focus to how you'll collect data to track progress along the way. In this section, we'll look at what kind of data to collect, how to collect it, and how to make it useful for keeping your mentoring activities on track and responsive to the needs of mentees.

But before we move on, there's one more important element to add to the previous section. Think about it for a moment - before you start collecting data, what do you actually need in place to know what to track and how to measure progress?

The answer lies in defining indicators.

As described by Savaya & Waysman (2005), indicators are specific measures that reflect larger set of circumstances. They serve as a bridge between your logic model and your data collection process. Well-defined indicators help you assess whether your activities are making the intended impact and provide a clear framework for monitoring progress effectively.

90%

**of Roma mentees set
at least two personal
development goals
within the first month
of mentoring.**



For example, if your logic model includes activities like mentoring sessions, community engagement, and mentor capacity-building, your indicators might look like:

- 90% of mentees set at least two personal development goals within the first month of mentoring.
- 3 community partners collaborated in delivering mentoring activities.
- Mentors reported increased confidence in using intersectional approaches, as measured by pre- and post-training surveys.
- Each mentor submitted monthly reflection logs outlining challenges and successes in their mentoring relationship.

As you see from the previous example, indicators can be qualitative and quantitative, and they depend on the context and what you aim to measure. Ideally, using a mix of both types gives you the most complete picture:

- Quantitative indicators help you track measurable progress and outputs - such as how many mentees participated or how often sessions occurred.
- Qualitative indicators give insight into how participants experienced the program - such as shifts in confidence, relationships, or perceptions.

By combining both, you gain not only the numbers but also the meaning behind them, which allows for a more informed, responsive, and human-centered approach to monitoring your mentoring work.

Quantitative methods

- Surveys - standardized questionnaires to capture mentees' or mentors' experiences, satisfaction, or progress.
- Incoming (baseline) interviews - conducted before entering the program to document starting conditions, expectations, and initial needs of both mentors and mentees.
- Exit interviews - structured questions conducted at the end of a mentoring cycle to assess changes and lessons learned.
- Record abstraction - this means drawing information from existing documentation rather than creating new tools. In mentoring, it can include session notes, attendance logs, mentor reports, or short progress updates. Reviewing these records provides a structured overview of how often meetings take place, what themes are addressed, and whether agreed activities are being followed through. When used systematically, record abstraction helps connect day-to-day practice with broader monitoring goals.

Mentor work logs are a simple way to document activities before details are forgotten. By noting down key actions, reflections, and outcomes, mentors create a reliable record that supports later data analysis. These logs also make progress visible over time - whether tracked daily, weekly, or at another interval that fits the program.

- Checklists - tools for systematically tracking activities, milestones, or competencies achieved.
- Observation - besides tracking attendance or activities, observation is especially important in mentoring because it shows how relationships actually unfold in practice.
- Noticing dynamics such as trust, participation, and communication style can reveal much more than written feedback alone. Structured notes or simple checklists help make these impressions useful for monitoring.

Qualitative methods

- Key informant interviews - in-depth conversations with mentors, mentees, and/or coordinators to capture insights, challenges, and success stories.
- Focus group discussions - collective reflection sessions that reveal shared experiences, group dynamics, and community-level impact (Lloyd et al., 2011).

DATA RELIABILITY

You can use this title to pause for reflection for a moment. When we engage in monitoring, we need to make sure that we use good data sources. The ones listed earlier may seem obvious, but their real value depends on how thoughtfully we use them. So before moving on, take a moment to ask yourself:

What makes a data source “good” for you? Which elements or characteristics ensure that the data you collect is reliable, meaningful, and useful in mentoring practice?

Reliable	data should come from a stable, consistent collection processes that can be trusted over time.
Easy to collect	information should be practical to gather with the resources available and, where possible, collected regularly.
Relevant	the data must connect directly to the purpose of monitoring and reflect what you actually need to know.
Verifiable	good data can be checked or confirmed, giving confidence that it is accurate and trustworthy.
Timely	data should be recorded soon after an activity or event, while details are still fresh, and made available within a reasonable timeframe.

Characteristics of good data sources (Lloyd et al., 2011)

6.5. Responsive adaptation

This section is a continuation of 6.1, since monitoring and adaptation are closely connected. Earlier in the handbook, we already dedicated space to the topic of reflection and provided meaningful tools to support it. Because of that, we will not go into much more detail on reflection here. Instead, the focus now shifts to how monitoring and reflection naturally lead to adaptation

- the practical step of making adjustments along the way. Responsive adaptation means using what you observe and learn to remain flexible, ensuring the mentoring relationship continues to meet real needs. One of the most effective ways to do this is through regular and thoughtful check-ins, which turn insights into concrete improvements.

6.6. Checking-in

- Stay in regular contact - make it a habit to check in with your mentee at least once a month, whether by phone, video call, or in person, depending on what works best for both of you.
- Ask open-ended questions - invite conversation rather than yes/no answers. This helps your mentee share more freely about their experiences, needs, or challenges.
- Use supportive communication - highlight strengths, affirm contributions, and when difficulties arise, approach them calmly and constructively rather than defensively.
- Keep brief notes - documenting your check-ins (even in a simple journal or work log) helps you track progress over time and notice changes that might otherwise go unseen.
- Seek continuous learning - reflect on your own communication and, when needed, look for opportunities to strengthen your cultural awareness, active listening, and conflict-resolution skills (Mentor, n.d.).

Regular check-ins help mentors stay connected and aware of how the mentoring relationship is developing. They show commitment, build trust, and give space to notice changes early on. By checking in, mentors can address small challenges before they grow, celebrate progress, and make sure the mentoring process continues to feel supportive and relevant for the mentee.

But don't forget to check in with yourself as well. Just as your mentee benefits from regular support, you also need spaces to reflect and recharge. This might come from the coordinating organization, fellow mentors, or external experts. And if such opportunities aren't offered, you are encouraged to seek them out on your own. Taking care of your own support needs is part of ensuring a strong and sustainable mentoring process. Below are a couple of intertwining processes you can keep in mind when checking in, that help you remember how checking in is not only for mentees but works on all levels in this process/relationship.

- Establishing routine check-ins

Setting up a regular rhythm of contact creates stability. Decide together how often and in what way you will connect (in person, phone, video call). A predictable routine builds trust and makes check-ins part of the relationship rather than an interruption.

- Checking in with mentors

Mentors also need support. Peer conversations or brief exchanges with a coordinator/staff member can provide fresh perspectives, encouragement, and a safe space to share challenges. Regular mentor check-ins prevent isolation and help maintain energy for the role.

- Checking in with mentees

These are the core of mentoring relationships. Use them to listen actively, explore goals, and understand how your mentee is experiencing the process. Open questions and attentive communication help mentees feel heard and valued.

- Checking in with parents/guardians

When appropriate, maintaining light contact with a mentee’s family helps build understanding and support for the mentoring process. Respect cultural norms and boundaries, but aim for cooperation, clarity of expectations, and reassurance that the relationship is positive.

- Plan match activities

Check-ins are a crucial part of planning what comes next – from small, shared tasks to larger activities. Joint planning reinforces collaboration and helps mentees take ownership of their growth.

- Celebrate matches (rewarding)

Recognizing milestones, achievements, or simply the consistency of the relationship strengthens motivation on both sides. Celebrations don’t need to be formal; a kind word, a small, shared activity, or acknowledging progress can all serve as meaningful rewards. When possible, you might also consider small gestures such as a movie ticket, museum pass, or other shared events that help mentors and mentees continue building their connection. With permission, stories of success can also be shared more publicly, which highlights positive experiences and inspires others.

When celebrating in this way, be mindful of boundaries, cultural sensitivities, and fairness. Rewards should always feel inclusive and supportive, not create competition or dependency.

These processes were referenced and adapted to our context from Mentor, Building Your Capacity for Match Support: Chapter 3 - MONITORING AND SUPPORTING THE MATCH, available here - <https://www.mentoring.org/resource/building-your-capacity-for-match-support-3-monitoring-and-supporting-the-match/> (last accessed 24. 8. 2025.). You can also visit this website to learn more about these processes and many more, as they offer quality mentoring content for various situations.

6.7. Reflecting on the progress

Reflection is an essential part of responsive adaptation, but we will attend to it only briefly here. Since section 4.1 already offered several practical tools for personal reflection, you can always revisit that part of the handbook for more detail. In this section, the focus is broader: reflecting on the mentoring process itself from different points of view. This includes looking at how the relationship is developing, whether goals are being met, and what adjustments may be needed.

To support this, you may use guiding questions that encourage honest, open consideration of how the mentoring journey is unfolding.

Progress and gaps

- What work has been completed so far?
- What work was planned but has not yet been done?
- What were the reasons this work was not completed?

Challenges and responses

- What challenges have been encountered?
- How were these challenges addressed, if at all?
- If they were not addressed, what prevented this?

Opportunities and lessons

- What opportunities have been identified along the way?
- What lessons have been learned up to this point?
- How can these lessons be applied to future activities?

Objectives and direction

- Is the project or program still on track to deliver its objectives?
- Are those objectives still the right ones?

Context and adjustments

- Have there been any changes in the target group or their needs?
- Has the external context changed (e.g. political, socio-economic)?
- What immediate adjustments to plans are needed?

With this, we move into the final part of the handbook before the conclusion - the monitoring and evaluation plan. In our context, we prefer to call it the monitoring and adaptation plan, because progress is monitored with the intention of making adjustments right away. This approach keeps the mentoring process alive, flexible, and responsive to real needs as they emerge.

6.8. Monitoring and adaptation plan

All of the elements we have discussed so far - monitoring, reflection, and responsive adaptation - come together in this final step. To make these practices practical and sustainable, it helps to bring them into a single, simple plan. A monitoring and adaptation plan provides mentors with a structured way to track progress, reflect on challenges, and make timely adjustments. With just a few clear steps, and some practical suggestions and tips, this plan can become a crucial tool for the overall development of the mentoring relationship. It offers one place where procedures are set, actions are recorded, and improvements can be acted upon.



Monitoring and adaptation (ACI Redesign, n.d.)

1. Identify what to monitor

Think about the key areas you want to keep an eye on in your mentoring relationship. This might include meeting frequency, progress toward goals, challenges that arise, or changes in your mentee's engagement. Be realistic and focus on things that can be noticed and tracked clearly.

2. Prioritise what matters most

Not everything needs to be monitored. Choose a few points that are both important and practical to follow. Focus on information that tells you whether the relationship is moving in the right direction and that you can record without too much extra effort.

3. Monitor and keep notes

Decide how often you will reflect on progress, for example, after each meeting, monthly, or at another rhythm that works. Keep short notes in your mentor's journal or work log so that you can look back and see patterns, achievements, and difficulties over time.

4. Act on what you learn

Use your observations and notes to adjust your approach. Celebrate progress with your mentee, and if challenges appear, think together about what could be done differently. Don't hesitate to reach out to other mentors or coordinators for advice if needed.

Additionally, and equally important, think about the following points:

Keep it going

Consistency matters. Try to sustain your check-ins and note-taking until they become a natural part of the mentoring process. It takes some discipline, but sticking with it helps you and your mentee stay on track.

Celebrate progress

Acknowledge and appreciate achievements when they happen, big or small. Celebration motivates both you and your mentee, but pace yourself - sometimes it's better to save recognition for when progress is steady and lasting.

Make it visible

Find ways to make progress tangible. This could mean sharing updates with your mentee, using a simple chart, or even telling a success story to peers. Making progress visible keeps motivation alive and creates space for honest conversations.

Consolidate

From time to time, take a step back and bring everything together. Look at the notes, reflections, and feedback you've collected, and consider what they say about the development of relationships. This helps you see whether goals are being met and what adjustments might strengthen the mentoring process going forward.

MONITORING AND ADAPTATION TEMPLATE/WORKSHEET

Identify what to monitor

Key areas I want to track in this mentoring relationship are:

Prioritise what matters most

The top 2-3 points that are most important and realistic to monitor are:

Monitor and keep notes

My chosen rhythm for reflection/check-ins is:

- After each meeting
- Monthly
- Other:

Short notes / observations:

Date:

What went well:

What was challenging:

Next step:

Act on what you learn

What I will celebrate or acknowledge:

What I want to improve or adjust:

Support I may need from others (mentors, coordinators, peers):

Responsive adaptation brings monitoring and reflection to life by turning them into action. Through regular check-ins, ongoing reflection, and the use of a simple monitoring and adaptation plan, mentors can stay flexible and responsive to their mentees' needs. This approach strengthens trust, supports growth, and ensures that the mentoring relationship continues to develop in a meaningful and sustainable way.

6.9. Reflection

Before moving on, take a moment to think back on the key points from this module. Reflection helps connect what you've just read with your own practice and prepares you to apply the tools more effectively. Use the questions below as a guide, and feel free to note down your thoughts.

- What stood out to you most in this module on monitoring and adaptation?
- How confident do you feel about using monitoring tools (e.g. checklists, work logs, adaptation plan) in your mentoring practice?
- Which ideas from this module would be easiest for you to apply right away?
- Which ones might be more challenging, and why?
- How do you see regular check-ins and reflection influencing your relationship with your mentee?
- What adjustments could you make in your current approach to make it more responsive?

6.10. Self-assessment

Test what you learned in Module 6 by answering the following questions. When you're done, check your answers and feedback below.

- Which of the following is not a characteristic of good data?
 - a. Reliable
 - b. Easy to collect
 - c. Complicated
 - d. Relevant

✓ Correct answer: c) Complicated

Feedback: Good data should be simple, reliable, relevant, verifiable, and timely. If it's complicated, it usually means it's harder to collect or use effectively.

- What is the main purpose of "incoming interviews"?
 - a. To collect stories at the end of the program
 - a. To capture the starting point, expectations, and needs before the mentoring begins
 - b. To evaluate the mentor's performance
 - c. To train mentors in communication skills

✓ Correct answer: b) Capture the starting point, expectations, and needs

Feedback: Incoming (baseline) interviews give you a picture of where mentees and mentors are starting from, so you can measure change over time.

- Why is observation an important monitoring tool in mentoring?
- a. It provides insight into how relationships work in practice
- b. It replaces the need for other tools
- c. It allows mentors to grade their mentees
- d. It avoids the need for reflection

✓ Correct answer: a) Provides insight into how relationships work

Feedback: Observation helps notice trust, communication, and engagement in real time. It complements other tools but never replaces them.

- What is the final step of the monitoring and adaptation plan?
- a. Prioritise what matters most
- b. Monitor and keep notes
- c. Act on what you learn
- d. Identify what to monitor

✓ Correct answer: c) Act on what you learn

Feedback: The value of monitoring comes when you actually use the results – adapting your approach, celebrating progress, and addressing challenges.

- Which of the following is a good example of celebrating mentoring progress appropriately?
- a. Offering small, shared activities or public recognition (with permission)
- b. Giving expensive gifts
- c. Ignoring achievements to avoid competition
- d. Making celebrations mandatory for all pairs

✓ Correct answer: a) Offering small, shared activities or public recognition

Feedback: Celebrations should be simple, thoughtful, and inclusive. They should never create dependency or competition.

- Which of the following best represents the logic of monitoring and adaptation in **mentoring**?
- a. Inputs → Activities → Outputs → Outcomes → Adaptation
- b. Activities → Outcomes → Inputs → Outputs → Adaptation
- c. Adaptation → Outcomes → Activities → Inputs → Outputs
- d. Outcomes → Outputs → Activities → Inputs → Adaptation

✓ Correct answer: a) Inputs → Activities → Outputs → Outcomes → Adaptation

Feedback: Monitoring follows a clear flow. We begin with inputs (resources), move through activities (what we do), see outputs (direct results), and then outcomes (changes achieved). Adaptation happens when we use this information to improve the process.

Scoring & Feedback

- 5–6 correct: Excellent! You understand the key points of Module 6 and are ready to use them in practice.
- 3–4 correct: Good work. You may want to revisit some parts of the module (e.g. monitoring tools or the adaptation plan) for clarity.
- 0–2 correct: Take another look at the module. The tools and concepts here are essential for making mentoring flexible and effective.

Remember: This isn't about passing or failing. The goal is to strengthen your confidence and ensure you're ready to put these ideas into practice.

7. Conclusion

With this handbook, we have walked through the journey of mentoring step by step – from understanding the role of the mentor, to building and sustaining relationships, and finally to reflecting, monitoring, and adapting along the way. Each part offered tools, questions, and suggestions designed to support you in practice, but also to encourage you to think critically about your approach.

Taken together, these chapters remind us that mentoring is both structured and flexible. It requires clarity about roles and boundaries, but also openness to change and responsiveness to individual needs. The tools included here, from reflection exercises and emotional safety plan to monitoring templates, are meant to be companions that you can return to whenever you need direction, reassurance, or inspiration.

The importance of this work lies in the difference it can make: for mentees, who gain support and confidence in pursuing their paths, and for mentors, who grow through the experience of guiding and learning alongside someone else. Strong mentoring relationships ripple outward, strengthening communities and contributing to broader change.

As you close this handbook, you might choose to pause and revisit certain sections, try out the templates in practice, or reflect once more on the values that guide your role. Whatever next step you take, let it be one that helps you and your mentee move forward with purpose.

8. Glossary

Accountability - taking responsibility for one's actions and commitments within the mentoring relationship, ensuring trust and reliability.

Adaptation - making changes to mentoring approaches and activities in response to reflection or monitoring, so the relationship stays relevant and effective.

Advocacy - speaking up and taking action to support mentees in accessing opportunities, rights, and resources, especially when facing barriers.

Autonomy - the ability of the mentee to make independent choices and decisions, supported but not controlled by the mentor.

Baseline interview / Incoming interview - an interview conducted before the start of mentoring to understand the initial situation, expectations, and needs of mentors and mentees, providing a reference point for later monitoring.

Boundaries - agreed limits and responsibilities that define the scope of the mentoring relationship and protect both mentor and mentee.

Capacity building - strengthening skills, knowledge, and confidence so mentors and mentees can take on greater responsibility and sustain progress.

Celebration - recognizing progress and milestones in a mentoring relationship, often through small gestures, shared activities, or words of acknowledgment.

Check-in - a regular, intentional conversation between mentor and mentee (or mentor with coordinators or peers) to share updates, address challenges, and strengthen the relationship.

Closure - the process of ending a mentoring relationship in a thoughtful and respectful way, ensuring both mentor and mentee reflect positively on what was accomplished.

Confidentiality - respecting and protecting personal information shared in mentoring, unless there is risk of harm or legal obligations require otherwise.

Consent (Informed consent) - a clear, mutual agreement to participate in mentoring, given with understanding of roles, boundaries, and expectations.

Culturally responsive mentoring - mentoring that recognizes and respects the cultural backgrounds, identities, and lived experiences of mentees, and adapts practices to honor these.

Emotional safety - creating a mentoring environment where mentees (and mentors) feel respected, secure, and free to express themselves without fear of judgment.

Empowerment - supporting mentees in recognizing and using their strengths, resources, and agency to achieve their own goals.

Ethics / Ethical reflection - principles and practices that guide mentors to act responsibly, respectfully, and fairly, especially in sensitive contexts.

Exit interview - an interview conducted at the end of the mentoring process to reflect on progress, evaluate outcomes, and gather feedback from both mentors and mentees. It helps bring closure to the relationship and provides insights for future improvements.

Intersectionality - a way of understanding how overlapping aspects of identity (such as gender, ethnicity, and class) shape experiences, opportunities, and challenges.

Logic model - a framework that connects inputs (resources), activities, outputs (direct results), and outcomes (longer-term change), showing how mentoring efforts lead to impact.

Mentee - a person who takes part in the mentoring process, receiving support, guidance, and encouragement.

Mentor - a person who supports a mentee by sharing knowledge, experience, and encourage-

ment, while respecting boundaries and fostering empowerment.

Mentor journal / Work log - a simple record where mentors note down activities, reflections, and observations to track progress and avoid forgetting important details.

Mentoring - a supportive relationship built on trust, where a mentor accompanies and encourages a mentee in reaching her personal, educational, or professional goals.

Milestones - key points or achievements along the way that show progress is being made toward longer-term outcomes in mentoring.

Monitoring - the ongoing collection and review of information, such as notes, observations, or check-ins, to track progress and quality in the mentoring relationship.

Monitoring and adaptation plan - a structured tool that brings together monitoring practices and adjustments into one document, helping mentors act and intervene on the mentoring process.

Observation - paying attention to dynamics such as trust, participation, and communication during mentoring, and recording these insights to enrich monitoring.

Outputs - the immediate, tangible results of mentoring activities (e.g., number of meetings held, sessions completed).

Outcomes - the longer-term changes or benefits resulting from mentoring (e.g., increased confidence, improved skills, stronger networks).

Qualitative data - non-numerical information collected through methods like interviews, observations, or open-ended questions, often providing depth and context.

Quantitative data - numerical information collected through counts, surveys, or structured tools, often used to measure frequency, scale, or trends.

Reflection - the process of looking back on experiences, actions, and relationships in order to learn from them and improve future mentoring practice.

Resilience - the capacity to cope with challenges, recover from setbacks, and continue progressing in mentoring and personal growth.

Roma women - a diverse and heterogeneous group of women and girls belonging to Roma communities across Europe and beyond. They share certain experiences but differ widely in culture, language, traditions, socioeconomic background, education, and personal aspirations. It is important to avoid treating Roma women (and Roma population in general) as one uniform group.

Self-assessment - a short test or reflection exercise at the end of a module that helps mentors check their understanding of key content and identify areas to revisit.

Self-worth - a sense of personal value and confidence, often strengthened through trust and recognition in the mentoring process.

Sense of agency - the feeling of being in control of one's own decisions and actions, developed and reinforced through mentoring.

Support network / Support system - people or structures (coordinators, peer mentors, professionals, family) that provide emotional or practical support to mentors and mentees.

SWOT analysis - a planning and evaluation tool used to examine Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. In mentoring, it can help mentors and mentees reflect on their situation and identify areas for growth and potential challenges.

Trust - the foundation of mentoring relationships, built through consistency, respect, and confidentiality.

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