REBEL

REDESIGN BELONGING

Design Brief for Open Call 2025

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LAU REA

FUNDACIÓN EUROÁRABE
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VISIO education

WHAT DESIGN CAN DO

The following insights are based on the research conducted by all of the partners.
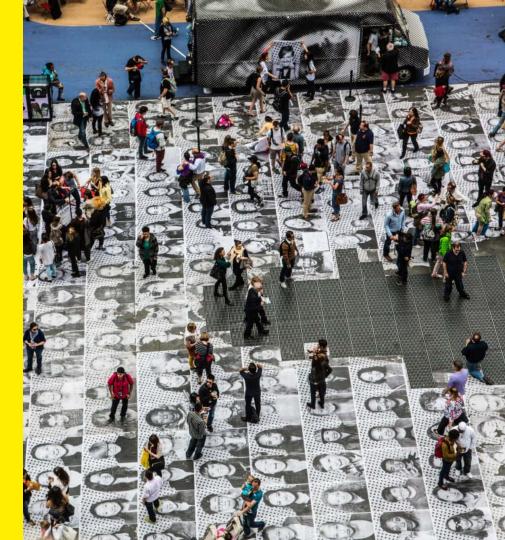
Research data & analysis

THE PROBLEM

People who migrated within or towards Europe often experience challenges regarding their feeling of belonging in their new host society. This remains true even for people who have been in their host country for several years.

Simultaneously, there are not many programs & support resources available to help strengthen the sense of belonging of migrants who have been in their host country for many years and intend on staying.

This is due to the gap in research in this area. **Most research focuses on newcomers and indeed integration programmes are often designed solely for incoming migrants, asylum seekers and refugees (first reception).**

Research shows that this is especially a problem for women. This means that often migrant **women who arrived over 5 years ago, for both economic and political reasons can be "forgotten", or assumed to be "already integrated".**

WHAT DO PEOPLE MEAN BY "BELONGING"

SAFETY

- Having legal documentation
- visa/residence permit
- Job security

COMMUNITY & HUMAN CONNECTION

- Connections with other migrant women to share experiences
- Connections with local people, also to get insights about the culture from them
- Having friends

SELF-REALISATION

- Being seen as a full person by the host society/country
- Being able to keep your own culture without being perceived as a threat
- Having a routine in the host country
- Sense of control/autonomy
- Practicing hobbies/recreational activities

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE CULTURE/SOCIETY

- Speaking the language

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

- Knowledge of one's rights

WHAT "BELONGING CHALLENGES" DO PEOPLE FACE

DISCRIMINATION

- Hate crimes

- Police brutality/discrimination

- Racism

- Sexism

- Exploitation

- Being treated as a threat by host society

- Not being seen as intelligent

- Being treated as a threat by host

- Excoticising

- Structural discrimination (e.g. in educational system)

SOCIAL ISOLATION/MARGINALISATION

- Feeling of "not fitting in" due to cultural barriers

- Few social connections/difficulty forming friendships

- Being separated from one's family

- Lack of places to facilitate cross-cultural social interaction

- Difference in cultural norms making it difficult to connect

- Lack of motivation by locals to connect

- Homesickness, maintaining stronger relationships to home country

- Lack of affordable & accessible recreational activities

WHAT "BELONGING CHALLENGES" DO PEOPLE FACE

JOB SECURITY

- Entering the job market

- Securing a lasting job

- Pressure to work in unqualified fields

- Jobs discrimination for people with disabilities

KNOWLEDGE GAPS

- Not knowing one's rights

- Difficulty accessing information due to fractured/not centralised information

CULTURAL MISUNDERSTANDINGS

- Not knowing the language

- Lack of language courses

- Lack of empathy/understanding from host country society

- Lack of programs/services providing cultural awareness/understanding

PUBLIC SERVICE INACCESSIBILITY

- Registering for health care

- Feeling of not being taken seriously by medical professionals

- Arbitrary & complicated social service system

WHAT "BELONGING CHALLENGES" DO PEOPLE FACE

ADMINISTRATIVE STRUGGLES

- Difficulty navigating bureaucracy
- No recognition of qualifications/certifications from home country
- Excessive bureaucratic regulations regarding jobs, housing, visas, education

UNCERTAINTY

- Lack of social security
- Feeling unsure about the future
- Lack of information
- Feeling unsafe in public places
- Health issues

Designers can address the solidarity related challenges of our society through service design and co-creative models

THE ROLE OF DESIGN

CO-CREATIVE DESIGN

- The project employs co-creation service design and innovation to empower the participants to create new innovative solutions - bringing designers and migrant women together.

- Co-creation happens where participants are also the protagonist of the identification and resolution of a challenge rather than passive actors.

- Generally, communities rather than being treated as co-researchers and partners, have been seen as the place to conduct research or source data which prohibits co-creation practices.

- Co-creation and participatory methods are the most innovative and are used to empower participants.

Source: Desk Research by Fundea

DESIGN OPPORTUNITIES

REDEFINING BELONGING

- Shifting understanding of & finding new terms for what it means to belong

ADDRESSING IGNORANCE/STEREOTYPES/DISCRIMINATION

- Working to address the prejudice the host society holds against migrants

SECURITY

- Creating systems that provide security in administration, financial, job, housing, etc. to decrease feelings of uncertainty

INFORMATION ACCESS

- Creating systems & services that gather all important information, allow for filtering & translation

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

- Creating systems to help with finding employment, maintaining a job and building a stable career

SOCIAL SERVICES

- Creating services that support migrant women with their unique responsibilities & struggles

SENSORY ACTIVATION

- Engaging in sensory activating activities and seeking stimuli to remind yourself of your home culture & create new pleasant experiences

DESIGN OPPORTUNITIES

SPACES
- Creating spaces that address the specific needs of migrant women & foster cultural dialogue with the host country community

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT
- Providing services, products, systems, etc. to support & build people's mental health, and working on their mindset

SELF-FULFILLMENT
- Creating a strong sense of self and opportunities to reinvent yourself & discover new things about yourself

COMMUNITY BUILDING
- Creating experiences & spaces to bring people together, foster initial meeting and continuous contact

CULTURAL LEARNING
- Learning the culture of the host country to immersive yourself in the country & society

RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES
- Engaging in recreational activities to spark sense of joy

DESIGN OPPORTUNITIES

REDEFINING BELONGING

Re-design the word integration and see it as co-existence

ADDRESSING IGNORANCE/STEREOTYPES/DISCRIMINATION

Increasing trust to employ, recognising existing skills/degrees

more effectively

SECURITY

- Financial security funds for unemployed, refugees, etc.
- "Freedom budget" to improve personal finances
- Platforms to manage administrative responsibilities

INFORMATION ACCESS

- Information gathering in one place
- Filtering relevant information

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

- Creating meeting spaces for employers & migrants
- Creating opportunities to show your work skills

SOCIAL SERVICES

- Proving spaces where children can be without
 parental supervision

SENSORY ACTIVATION

- Food/taste , Smell
- Color
- Being outiside

DESIGN OPPORTUNITIES

SPACES

- Safe spaces for women
- Family cafes & associations

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

- Offering new perspectives
- Mindset shift to increase resilience
- Having time & space to process one's emotions

SELF-FULFILMENT

- Exploring new hobbies
- Finding purpose

COMMUNITY BUILDING

- Connecting migrant women to each other to share experiences/feelings
- Creating connections based on similar interests/hobbies
- Systems of mutual help & support

CULTURAL LEARNING

- Language support groups
- Watching news/listening to radio from host country
- Cultural events
- Facilitating cultural awareness/knowledge sharing

RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

- Working out
- Being outside
- Creating art

SOME REFLECTIONS FROM THE RESEARCH DIALOGUES

- Agency, self-determination & autonomy play a role in someone's experience of belonging > "belonging is not so much a matter where you come from or where you are"
- the concept of "being at home" is not necessarily tied to a place but also to people/food/feelings
- job insecurity is a huge contributor to a decreased sense of belonging
- sense of being "lost" or continuously "searching" for something can make people feel like they haven't fully arrived
- Sensory activation, i.e. food, smells, visual stimulation is used by people to increase their sense of belonging
- Building people's mental health can increase feelings of hope, resilience, autonomy
- Missing, searching & finding "Finding [something]" was a phrase that kept repeating in different workshops as a way to belong more and as a inhibitor to belonging (when not finding something).
- Ability/inability to find information or receive advice can greatly influence how smoothly you integrate into society.
- Information can be very scattered and hard to find and combine in principle

SOME REFLECTIONS FROM THE RESEARCH DIALOGUES

- It is possible to feel safe but financially, socially insecure if you fail to find a job, education, housing etc.

- Official foreign qualifications (like certificates and degrees) are not necessarily trusted and instead the "trust" to take a risk to recruit from company's side is often established by recruiting from existing or known networks (friends of current employees). This makes it harder to get employed if you come into the country without networks.

- Racism quite prevalent, both overtly (by public interactions on street) and overtly (what kind of service you receive from public or social service officials

- Increased participation in labour unions (or other existing 3rd sector orgs) can help to curb discrimination in workplace and increase knowledge of labour rights (esp. if your home country does not have clear safe guards for that), at least in Finland labour union membership is very low amongst immigrant background

DESIGN SOLUTIONS IMAGINED BY MIGRANT WOMEN

What if…

Building Connections and Community

- People can contribute to the local community

- We could create a program where the local community and foreigners come together

- This program could work as a facilitator to shine a light on the shared values

- There is a place for cultural exchange

- People would find an ally

- People had a mentor

- People had a local person to guide them (professionally & personally)

- I had found a cultural buddy when I first moved here

- There was a culture buddy system (a reciprocal one)

DESIGN SOLUTIONS IMAGINED BY MIGRANT WOMEN

What if...

Empathy and Understanding Through Shared Experiences

- There is a shared experience that increases empathy and understanding and a sense of we instead of us and them
- Locals knew what it felt like to be a migrant
- Dutch people experienced the integration exam > reverse integration exam about how to live in a society with mixed backgrounds, to be aware of the challenges immigrants go through

- You could do a 24-hour life swap with someone from a very different bubble/community and experience each other's lives
- We all were taught to be curious about people more than places they belonged to

DESIGN SOLUTIONS IMAGINED BY MIGRANT WOMEN

What if...

Inclusive and Transformative Public Spaces

- Migrant people had been included in the design process of public spaces
- Public space was designed to help us connect and nurture our sense of self
- Public spaces encouraged more day-to-day creative activities
- Public spaces tailored to positive sensory activation to help people connect to themselves

- Cities designed their new migrant experience with getting people to belong there in mind
- We created resting spots in the city where people could have mutual cultural transformation free from time (by leaving notes for future people)
- There were urban spaces for both outward and inward connection
- There were sensory spaces for women in the workplace to support the menstrual cycle

DESIGN SOLUTIONS IMAGINED BY MIGRANT WOMEN

What if…

Creative and Cultural Initiatives

- There is a place where people can feel safe to experiment
- There is a place where people feel safe to learn, create art together and experiment
- We commissioned & designed a period monument in the city
- One reads (in a collective reading group) "Belonging" by bell hooks

- There were more "human libraries" concepts
- There were labelled interaction benches with questions
- We had experiences that celebrated each other & created space to connect with people and nature around us

DESIGN SOLUTIONS IMAGINED BY MIGRANT WOMEN

What if…

Redefining Belonging and Challenging Norms

- We developed a language to express why we do not want to belong somewhere > "You don't have to belong everywhere"
- Locals question their sense of belonging
- immigration /immigrants were viewed as positively as expats
- Moving for work can be more of an exciting challenge than a stressor
- Shame was removed from loneliness
- Talking to strangers was something we looked forward to
- We were free of prejudice

Fostering Nature and Connection

- People were cultural ambassadors
- There were belonging-oriented walks around nature

This design brief is part of the Redesigning Belonging Project (ReBel). ReBel is co-financed by the European Commission in the framework of the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV). The project consortium includes Laurea University of Applied Sciences (Finland, coordinator), Euro-Arab Foundation for Higher Studies (Spain), Educational Centre Visio (Finland) and the international organization What Design Can Do (The Netherlands).

Views and opinions expressed are however those of the event only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the granting authority, European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

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