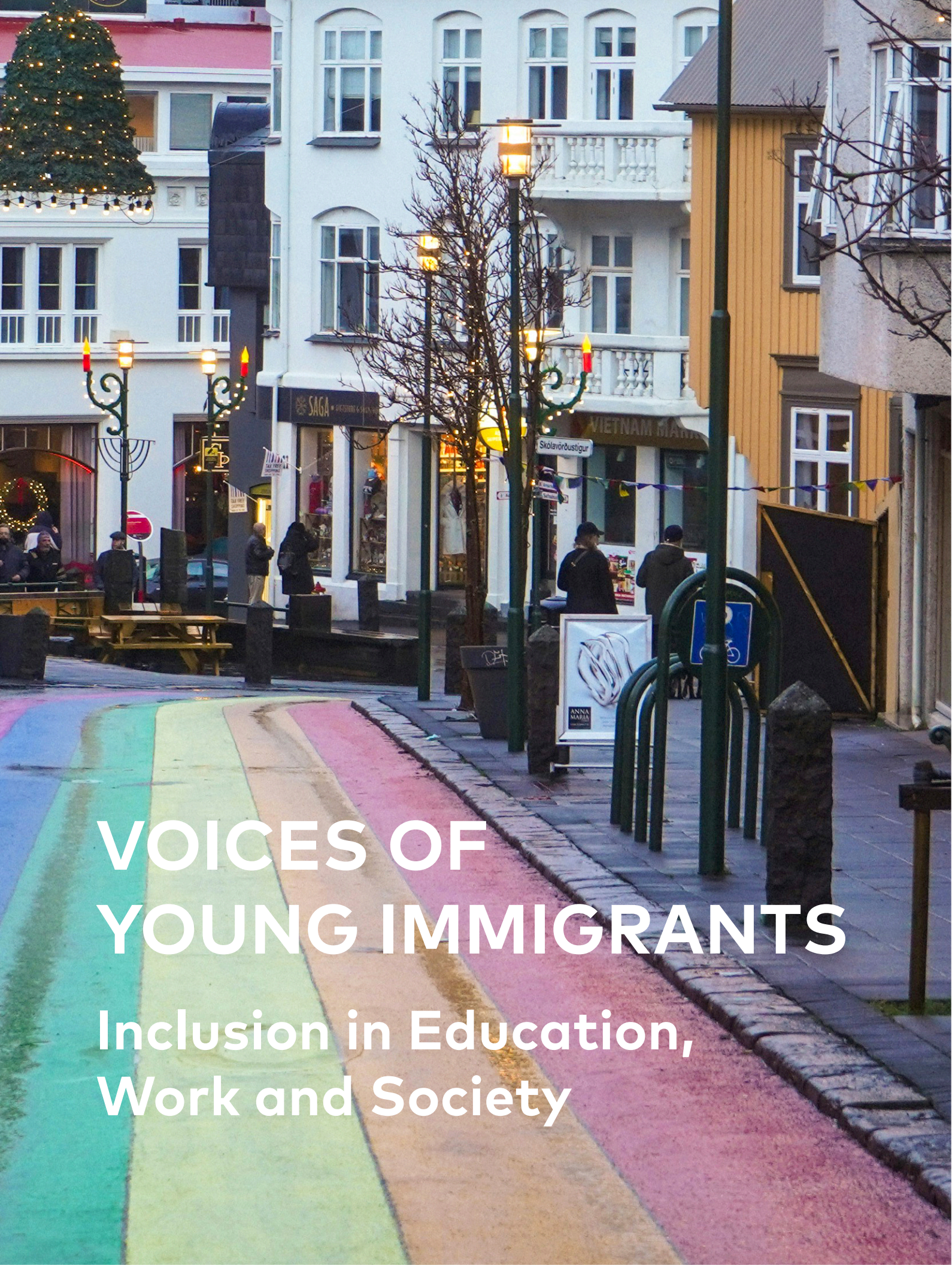

VOICES OF YOUNG IMMIGRANTS

Inclusion in Education, Work and Society

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EDUCATION AND TRAINING SERVICE CENTER, ICELAND

Nordic Network for Adult Learning

Government of Iceland
Ministry of Education and Children

Government of Iceland
Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour

Preface

The project "Voices of Young Immigrants – inclusion in education, work and society" has been one the focus areas within the field of education during the Icelandic presidency in the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2023.

This report presents the process and the results of this project. The report explains how Iceland has used the method and the model for co-creating meaningful and sustainable solutions and policies for fostering an inclusive environment for young immigrants in Iceland.

The Sustainable Model for Change methodology is designed to address complex societal challenges and supports:

- Joining forces of citizens, organisations and policymakers for collaborative actions.
- Involving relevant stakeholders in the whole process of creating and testing solutions.
- Building networks across sectors and countries around a common agenda.

NVL has applied this methodology to working with challenges linked to digitalisation and the target group of hard-to-reach learners and with challenges linked to integration and learning. Both, the researchers, and the practitioners, who have used this methodology, recognise that it can be adjusted and used in different contexts and with different target groups.

In Iceland a Design Based Research process was applied to enable the unlocking of insights from immigrants as well as various stakeholders looking specifically at challenges linked to inclusion. Findings reveal, among other things, that a closer attention is needed regarding integration into jobs, education and society through a more focused cooperation with the target group and all relevant stakeholders based on the identified solutions. Specific "blind spots" were identified revealing that many of the current measures in place are inefficient.

The report is part of the result package that was produced during the Icelandic presidency in the Nordic Council of Ministers and is supplemented by the:

- Policy Brief supporting decision makers
- One-pager supporting organisations and practitioners
- Video interview with key experts

The project has been commissioned by the education and working life sectors in the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Hope you find inspiration and guidance for your own work!

Antra Carlsen, NVL Head-coordinator

Project overview

Background

The "Voices of Young Immigrants – Inclusion in Education, Work, and Society" project, coordinated by the Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC) in Iceland and the Nordic Network for Adult Learning (NVL), focuses on the inclusion and empowerment of young adult immigrants in the realms of education, working life, and broader societal engagement. This initiative is executed in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour and the Ministry of Education and Children. It is a crucial component of Iceland's agenda during its Nordic Council of Ministers presidency in 2023.

The Nordic Council of Ministers, Education and Research (EK-U) and Labor (EK-A) funded the project.

Rationale for the Project

Iceland has seen a significant rise in its immigrant population during the last two decades. Data from Statistics Iceland (2022a) show that between 2000 and 2022, immigrants and second-generation immigrants increased from 3.2% to 18% of the Icelandic population, with further growth expected. These numbers further stress the importance of establishing an inclusive society and labour market.

In response, the Icelandic government has introduced a new action plan emphasizing the need to support the adjustment and integration of immigrants. This plan underscores the importance of enabling immigrants to work and contribute their skills and experiences to Icelandic society. In recognizing the need to address this growing demographic, the ETSC and its partners have identified a crucial gap: the need to actively listen to the voices of young adult immigrants and engage key stakeholders in identifying practical solutions to enhance their inclusion.

Identifying and defining the target group of young immigrants requires some level of categorization. Categorizing people into groups of immigrants vs. non-immigrants may seem simple. However, Statistics Iceland refers to six different background categories of inhabitants:

- Individuals with no foreign background
- Individuals born in Iceland with one foreign parent
- Individuals born abroad but with both parents of Icelandic background
- Individuals born abroad with one foreign parent
- Second-generation immigrants
- Immigrants

These categories are problematic as they do not differentiate between people's ethnicity and citizenship. However, they lean toward people's ethnicity rather than citizenship. Here, the term 'foreign' refers to individuals born outside of Iceland with no ethnic connection to Iceland. In the context of this report, the participants in the focus groups are immigrants according to the definition of Statistics Iceland.

Project Objectives

The primary objectives of the project were to:

- Amplify the voices of young adult immigrants
- Illuminate the challenges they currently face
- Propose and develop practical solutions to these challenges
- Involve a vast network of stakeholders.

The project represents a significant step towards a more inclusive Iceland, ensuring that young immigrants have the necessary support and opportunities to thrive and contribute to the country's development.

Method

The project applied the Desing-based research method to address its objectives and purposes. This chapter provides a general description of the technique, its core principles, strengths, and limitations in relation to the project's objectives.

Summary

Design-Based Research (DBR) is a methodological framework that tackles societal challenges through collaboration. It involves iterative design, implementation, and evaluation cycles, allowing for ongoing refinement of educational and social interventions in real-world contexts.

DBR emphasizes engaging relevant stakeholders, including a main target group of people facing a specific situation or experience, organisations, policy leaders, community leaders, employers and educators, throughout the research process. This engagement ensures that solutions are informed by the experiences and needs of those who use them, leading to more meaningful and sustainable changes.

DBR aims to bridge the gap between research and practice by integrating theoretical insights with practical applications. Researchers work as agents of change, developing both practical interventions and theoretical knowledge that directly apply to educational and social settings.

The approach values the diversity of participant groups and actively challenges structural racism and biases. DBR encourages self-reflection among researchers and participants to promote an equitable research process and create inclusive environments.

DBR's strengths include its adaptability to various educational contexts, its capacity for fostering innovation, and its use of mixed methods to understand interventions comprehensively. Its collaborative nature helps address practical problems with grounded solutions.

Despite its benefits, DBR faces challenges such as managing large amounts of data, potential biases due to researcher involvement, and the complexity of implementation. To enhance its effectiveness and validity, clear standards and improved methodological procedures are also needed.

Design-Based Research (DBR)

Design-based research (DBR) is a robust methodological framework that tackles societal challenges by collaboratively creating impactful solutions for lasting change. This approach is well-suited for initiatives that involve establishing connections across different sectors and countries around a shared goal. By engaging relevant stakeholders throughout the process, DBR ensures that solutions are shaped by those who use them daily, leading to more meaningful and enduring changes.

Design-Based Research (DBR) is a cutting-edge methodological framework within the social sciences. Its solid and iterative cycles are crucial for developing, implementing, and refining educational and social interventions. This collaborative and adaptive approach begins with an initial hypothesis, rigorously tested and refined through continuous engagement with the relevant target groups. The methodology is distinguished by its cyclical nature, as opposed to traditional linear methods, requiring ongoing resources and a degree of flexibility to accommodate iterative refinements that are a hallmark of the process.

DBR is dedicated to improving educational and social practices and developing theories through a collaborative design and evaluation process due to the urgent need to bridge the gap between practice and research. It emphasizes creating and refining social interventions, tools, and policies while also contributing to advancing theoretical understanding. As agents of change, researchers work closely with stakeholders, who are actively involved as collaborators, ensuring that the research is grounded in practical realities and that the outcomes directly apply to social settings. Cited by Armstrong et al. (2019) and Tseng et al. (2016), DBR is recognized for its potential to yield sustainable innovations, effectively bridging the gap between design and research knowledge and fostering a more integrated approach to social improvement.

DBR works with three core principles: Iterative design and implementation cycles, engagement with target groups, and evaluation and reassessment.

- **Iterative Design and Implementation cycles**: DBR operates on cycles that involve designing interventions, implementing them in real-world settings, analyzing the outcomes, and refining the interventions based on feedback. This cyclical nature ensures that the interventions evolve to meet the participants' needs better.

- **Engagement with Target Groups**: The approach emphasizes direct engagement with the target groups throughout the process. The engagement includes initial hypothesis testing and gathering feedback during the pilot phase to ensure the interventions are grounded in the participants' experiences and needs.
- **Evaluation and Reassessment**: After the pilot phase, a thorough assessment is conducted to assess the effectiveness of the interventions. The findings from this evaluation lead to recommendations and a reassessment of the initial hypothesis, ensuring that the interventions remain relevant and practical.

DBR inherently values the diversity of participant groups, recognizing the richness that different perspectives bring to the research process. It actively challenges structural racism and individual biases that can create barriers to participation and success. Key aspects include:

- *Challenging 'Blind spots'*: By acknowledging and addressing the unique experiences of different groups, DBR avoids the pitfalls of 'blind spots', which can inadvertently lead to exclusionary practices.
- *Engaging Actors*: It involves a heterogeneous group of stakeholders such as educators, employers, and community leaders reflecting on their practices and biases, promoting a more inclusive environment.
- *Self-Reflection*: Researchers and participants are encouraged to recognize and address their prejudices, contributing to a more equitable research process.

Trust is fundamental in DBR. The methodology advocates for creating a safe and welcoming environment for participants:

- *Informal Interactions*: Researchers use informal interactions to build rapport and trust before formal data collection.
- *Small Groups for Feedback*: Smaller settings are recommended to enhance social safety and facilitate more meaningful feedback.
- *Flexible Data Collection*: While structured sessions and scripting are helpful, DBR allows flexibility in adapting conversations as they evolve naturally.

DBR emphasizes the importance of a collaborative environment where participants feel comfortable sharing their experiences:

- Personal Story Sharing: Ample time is allocated for participants to share personal stories, helping to build a deeper understanding of their contexts and challenges.
- Workshops and Communal Activities: Workshops often include communal activities like shared meals to foster community and collaboration.

DBR Strengths

Design-based research (DBR) is a powerful approach that offers several key strengths in developing and testing social interventions. One of the primary strengths of DBR is its iterative process. The iterative process involves a continuous cycle of design, implementation, and evaluation, which allows for the ongoing refinement and improvement of educational interventions (Armstrong et al., 2019). By conducting research within real-world contexts, DBR ensures that findings are highly relevant and applicable to social settings, enhancing their practical value (Tseng, 2016).

Collaboration is another significant aspect of DBR. The approach emphasizes close collaboration between researchers and practitioners, ensuring that the research addresses practical problems and benefits from the insights of those directly involved in the educational process (Armstrong, 2019). This collaboration helps ensure that the interventions developed are practical and grounded in educational environments.

Furthermore, DBR integrates theory and practice by aiming to develop practical interventions and theoretical knowledge. This dual focus helps to bridge the gap between research and practice, allowing theoretical insights to inform practical applications and vice versa (Christensen & West, 2018).

DBR's flexibility is another advantage. The approach is adaptable and can be applied to various educational contexts and problems. This adaptability allows for various applications and innovations, making it suitable for diverse educational challenges (Ponte et al., 2016).

Moreover, DBR positions researchers as agents of change, actively working to improve educational practices rather than merely observing them (Armstrong, 2019). This focus on change and improvement distinguishes DBR from other research methodologies.

DBR often employs mixed methods, combining qualitative and quantitative data to comprehensively understand the educational interventions being studied (Rawson, 2015). This mixed-methods approach enables researchers to gain a richer and more nuanced understanding of how interventions work and how they can be improved.

Finally, DBR has a strong capacity for innovation, particularly in creating sustained innovations in educational practice. By integrating design principles with empirical research, DBR fosters the development of innovative solutions that are both effective and grounded in real-world practice (Reinmann, 2005).

Overall, these strengths make Design-Based Research a practical approach for developing educational interventions that are impactful and deeply rooted in practical experience.

Weaknesses and limitations

Design-Based Research (DBR) is a valuable approach to educational research, but it also has several weaknesses that researchers must consider. One major challenge is the copious amount of data it generates, which can be overwhelming and difficult to manage effectively (Rawson, 2015). This abundance of data requires meticulous organization and analysis, which can be time-consuming and resource intensive.

Another issue with DBR is the lack of clear standards to determine whether an initial design is sufficiently developed to undergo further iterations. Without clear benchmarks or criteria, judging when a design is "good enough" to proceed can be difficult, leading to potential inconsistencies and inefficiencies in the research process (Rawson, 2015).

The interventionist nature of DBR presents unique validity concerns. Since researchers are actively involved in the design and implementation of interventions, there is a risk of introducing bias. This involvement can affect the objectivity of the research and raise questions about the validity of the findings (Rawson, 2015).

Implementing DBR is inherently complex and requires careful planning and execution. The method demands a high level of skill and expertise to be carried out

effectively, which can be a barrier for some researchers (Christensen, 2018). Additionally, while the flexibility of DBR is often seen as an advantage, it can also be a weakness. This adaptability may lead to DBR being perceived as a multipurpose tool that attempts to do many things but does not excel at any aspect (Rawson, 2015).

Researcher enthusiasm is another potential source of bias in DBR studies. The intense and long-term nature of DBR projects necessitates dedicated and enthusiastic researchers, which can sometimes lead to biased results despite efforts to minimize this risk (Rawson, 2015). Furthermore, improved methodological procedures and greater capacity for theoretical elaboration are needed within DBR. Enhancing these areas can help produce more robust results that can be effectively integrated into educational practice (Ponte, 2016).

These weaknesses highlight the challenges and complexities of conducting Design-Based Research. Despite its potential benefits, researchers must carefully navigate these issues to ensure the validity and reliability of their findings.

DBR application in this project

The Education and Training Service Center (ETSC) is owned by the Icelandic Confederation of Labour (ASÍ), the Confederation of Icelandic Employers (SA), the Federation of State and Municipal Employees (BSRB), the Ministry of Finance and the Association of Local Authorities in Iceland.

In connection with the collective agreement between ASI and SA in 2002, the Icelandic government issued a statement of intent which led to the establishment of FA. The ETSC works according to the Law on Adult Education (2010) aiming at meeting the needs of adults with little formal education as well as labour market needs for competence development. ETSC had the coordinating role in the project in close cooperation with the Nordic network for adult learning (NVL), the ministry of social welfare and labour and the ministry of education and children.

The Nordic network on adult learning (NVL) provided guidance regarding the DBR/DBT methodology and connecting to specialists in the other Nordic countries.

Target groups

The project gathered detailed information through focus groups of young immigrants and relevant stakeholders. This approach aimed to surface the real-life experiences and challenges the immigrant community faces.

The insights from these focus groups formed the foundation for a significant event held in Reykjavík in May 2023. During this event, design thinking workshops were conducted, bringing together Icelandic and Nordic participants to brainstorm and devise solutions to the identified barriers. Additionally, Nordic partners shared their experiences and best practices from their respective countries.

The target groups for the project are as follows:

- **Target group A:** Immigrants who are in jobs or studying, but have limited formal education, particularly those who have not completed Upper Secondary school or had their foreign education validated.
- **Target group B:** Stakeholders involved in immigrant matters, including key stakeholders in the labor market.

- **Target group B:** Businesses and institutions, especially those sectors that employ many individuals from target group (a).

Structure and Roles

- ETSC – coordinator: Responsible for forming and coordinating the process, activating networks, organizing events and tasks, evaluating results, writing products and reports and disseminating solutions.
- Nordic network for adult learning (NVL) – active participation and support in the proces: National coordinators in each Nordic country and region oversee networks of experts focusing on specific topics of adult learning. Information was shared into the project and back into the relevant networks. Recruitment of experts to the main event. The head of NVL was a part of the project steering group.
- Researcher(s): Two researchers from Iceland prepared and conducted focus groups in cooperation with the coordinator. A Nordic researcher led the DBR process. Responsible for collecting and analyzing data and sharing knowledge through various channels.
- Regional lifelong learning centers (organisations): Reaching the main target group and participating in the reference group discussions and focus group. Participating in the main event – workshop on solutions. Identifying ways to test the solutions locally based on findings and local situation (regional lifelong learning centers in Iceland).

Participants

The participants were selected from three different target groups. The target groups were as follows:

Target group A (Focus groups): Young immigrants aged 18 and 35 who work or study but have limited formal education. The participants needed to speak English or Icelandic, as the sessions were conducted in English or Icelandic. They had to have lived in Iceland for at least three years, be active in the labour market (working full or part-time or actively looking for a job) and/or study and have an Icelandic identity number (kennitala). Individuals who had not completed upper-secondary school or had their prior education and experience validated were preferred. The project management emphasized that all genders were presented in the focus groups.

These individuals comprised five focus groups spread over five regions in Iceland: the capital area, South-, East-, North- and West-Iceland *(N=29)*

The purpose of the focus group was to collect the life experiences of young immigrants in the Icelandic labour market and get first-hand insight into their challenges and experiences.

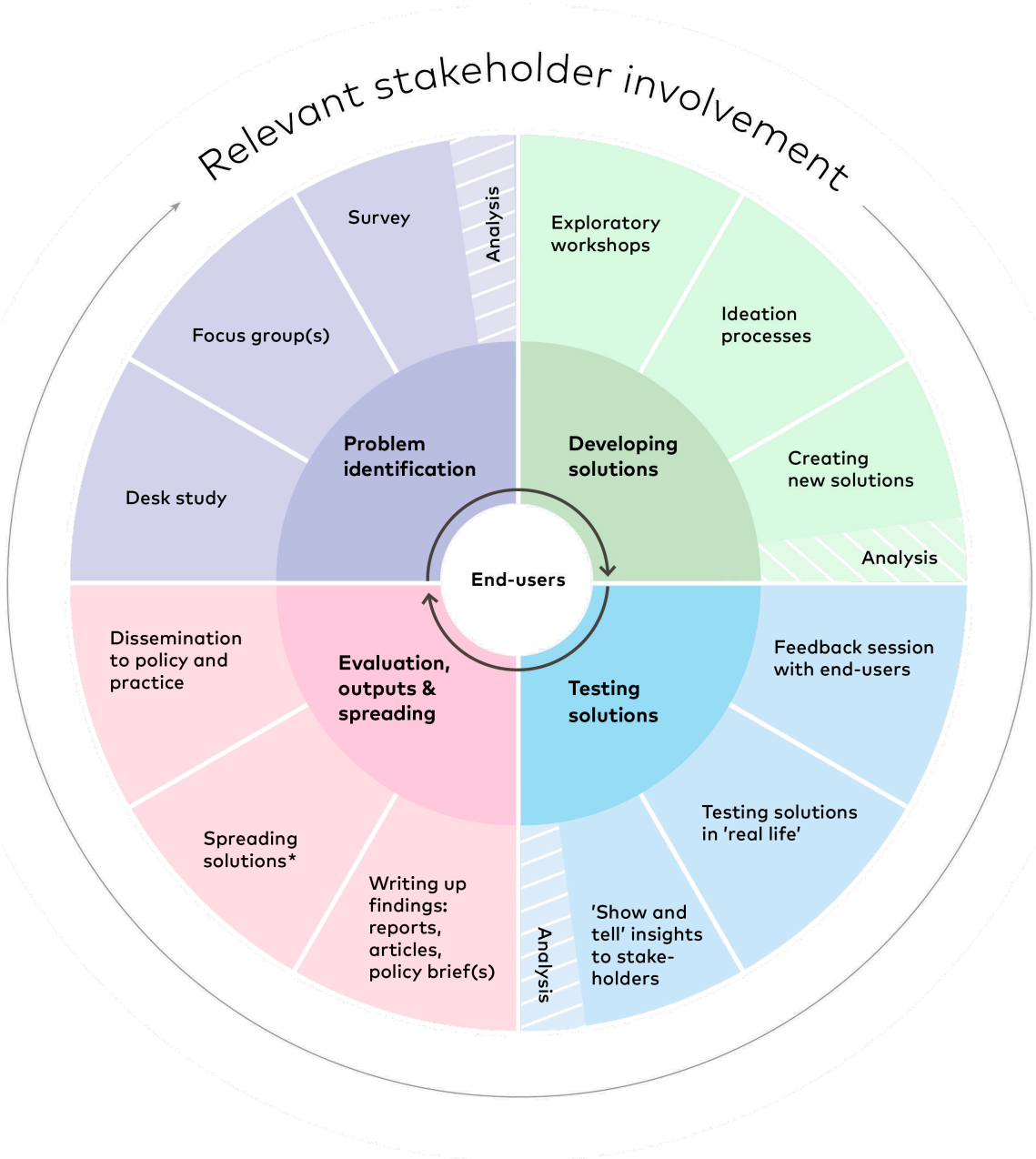
Target group B (Stakeholders): This group consisted of representatives of organizations and institutions involved in immigrant matters, including the labour market. This group formed a reference group, which consisted of the following institutions (N=22). The group was non-exclusive.

- Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour
- Ministry of Education and Children
- Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation
- Labour market partners
- Icelandic Association of Local Authorities (SÍS)
- Multicultural information center
- National Association for Adult Learning (LEIKN)
- Association for Regional Educational Providers (SÍMENNT)
- Directorate of labour (VMST)
- University of Iceland – ENIC/NARIC researchers
- University of Akureyri - researchers
- Associations for specific immigrant groups
- The Council for Welfare
- Municipality-based educational institutions and public institutions
- Private language schools
- Regional lifelong learning centres
- Upper secondary schools

Target group C (Businesses and institutions): Here, emphasis was on getting data from businesses and institutions that employ many individuals from Target group A (N=3000).

The phases

The project was divided into four interconnected phases, each focusing on different aspects of the problem-solving process. These phases follow both linear and circular logic, allowing for continuous feedback and adaptation based on new insights from stakeholders. The whole process of the project, and in the spirit of DBR, emphasized collective learning and collaboration between the coordinator, stakeholders, researchers, and target groups.



Phase 1: Problem identification – Handbook

The aim

The first phase aims at identifying the challenges or problems. There should be topics or issues that need addressing and require solutions. It starts with an open angle and brainstorming allowing for open discussions that are used for further analysis. **Who should participate?**

To identify the problems or challenges, multiple relevant perspectives are essential. Depending on the nature of the issue these could include clients, practitioners, managers, politicians etc.

How?

It is essential to gather existing knowledge of the challenge that is being worked on. This knowledge should be available through research reports, national evaluations, theory. Examples of activities in this phase include desk study, surveys, individual interviews or focus groups, network meeting/partnership meetings.

Analysis

This phase contains data analysis. After analyzing the information acquired, a comprehensive and clear picture, containing multiple perspectives emerges of the problem studied that serves as a stepping-stone for the next phase: developing solutions (Lab-phase)

Phase 1: Problem identification – Project versions

The aim

This phase aimed to identify young immigrants' challenges in the Icelandic education system and labor market.

Participants

In this phase, meetings were held with the reference group and researchers to shed light on the topic's status and form the questions to be used in the focus groups and the focus group process. Data was gathered through focus group interviews; Focus interviews were conducted with the reference group.

Also, a survey was sent to 3000 businesses, to which 130 responded. Of those 130 businesses, 80 employed immigrant workers. In addition, the coordinators performed a desk study, reviewing various domestic and international research reports and action plans regarding immigrants and immigration to be reflected on with the reference group.

How?

The research activities were uniquely designed and encompassed three distinct methods: desk study, focus group interviews, and survey.

The Desk study included revising various domestic and international research reports and action plans regarding immigrants and immigration.

The Focus Group interviews were a collaborative effort, structured and executed by researchers from the University of Akureyri in partnership with five Lifelong learning centres around Iceland. The questions were carefully crafted to draw out diverse perspectives on education, work, and society.

Lastly, a survey was sent to businesses. The survey consisted of open-ended and closed questions. The open-ended questions inquired about the challenges regarding employees with foreign backgrounds, how the organization had confronted those challenges, and whether there was something else that they wanted to convey regarding foreign employees. In total, 45 responded to the first question, 36 to the second one, and 10 to the last one.

Analysis

Results from the focus interviews with young immigrants was analyzed by the two Icelandic researchers formulating reoccurring themes. Results from the focus interviews with the reference group were analyzed by the Nordic researchers formulating categories of challenges identified. An expert at the ETSC identified themes from the company survey. All the information was prepared for dissemination at the main event – the expert seminar/workshop.

Phase 2: Developing solutions – Handbook

Aim

This phase aims to develop solutions to the challenges identified in Phase 1 and build those solutions on insights from that work. Due to the DBR's multi-perspective nature, the emphasis is on collaboration and how the group can solve common problems together.

Who

It is vital to involve relevant stakeholders (the same as the phase before or maybe new ones) and invite them to ideate solutions for the barriers, challenges, and possibilities that make up the problem identification.

How

Numerous methods exist to identify the most effective solutions to the challenges. Design-thinking exercises, such as building personas and scenarios, mapping user journeys, brainstorming, and prototyping, offer a range of approaches that can be tailored to your project specific needs.

It is important to prepare a venue where different stakeholders can work together on discussing challenges identified in a safe environment focusing on commonly finding solutions to be presented. Coordination is a key element in this phase, navigating information at hand based on Design-Based-Thinking.

Analysis and output

The output is solutions addressing the identified problem(s) made ready for testing with a relevant user group (for example, citizens or politicians).

Phase 2: Developing solutions – Projects version

How

This phase was executed at an expert seminar/workshop in Reykjavík in May 2023. Research findings and results from the first phase were introduced and discussed at the event. Nordic experts also presented the status of the topic and main policies in their respective countries as well as in the Nordic region.

Who

An extended group of stakeholders were invited to the conference. In total, 90 participants attended the conference, including participants from other Nordic countries. The group included policymakers on the national and municipal levels, non-formal and formal adult education organisations/institutions, universities, upper secondary schools, and other social partners.

What

For the collaborative development of solutions, the conference was split into x groups, building personas as a young immigrant. The purpose was to allow participants to explore immigrants' experiences, challenges and expectations in depth and identify possible solutions to address the challenges identified in Phase 1. After creating the personas, a fair of introductions was held where people walked around the room looking at each other's cases of personas, creating the possibility of adding perspectives or discussing the results.

The groups were selected beforehand to ensure diversity and multiple perspectives for the task.

Analysis and output

After the conference, an expert at the ETSC analyzed the groups' output thematically, exposing a set of solutions directed at solving the challenges identified in Phase 1. These themes were discussed and reviewed with the steering group and researchers.

Phase 3: Testing solutions – Handbook

How

This phase aims to investigate how viable and feasible the solutions provided in Phase 2 are. Here, the solutions developed in Phase 2 are tested in everyday life or work situations using relevant tools according to the project context.

Who

By activating your network of relevant stakeholders (for example, your partnerships or people who have participated in the Lab-Phase).

What

Numerous ways exist to perform relevant and constructive interventions or tests, such as workshops and hearings, which can be integrated into everyday work.

Analysis and output

While analyzing this phase's input, the project should ask: Are the solutions relevant and a need for a re-design? It is possible to revisit the prior phases if needed to clarify topics.

The output of this phase, entering the final phase, is a feasibility statement stating how relevant and feasible the solutions are for solving and addressing the challenges posed in Phase 1.

Phase 3: Testing solutions – Projects version

Aim and purpose

Here the aim was to present the output of the lab-phase to the immigrants and get their feedback on the proposed solutions and research. Also, reflecting on findings with educational providers.

Who

Ten young immigrants who had participated in the focus groups earlier participated in a dialogue with the Nordic researcher, a national researcher and two representatives from ETSC (coordinators) to provided support.

How

In a focus group session on Teams, the group evaluated and provided feedback on the viability and feasibility of the solutions identified at the expert seminar / workshop in Reykjavík. They also prioritized the main solutions.

Analysis

The researchers and steering group gathered the data from the immigrant groups and analyzed it according to thematic analysis. The results evaluated the viability and feasibility of the solutions suggested in the lab phase, enabling the researcher to indicate change in policy and practice as well as the priority and urgency of issues concerning young immigrants in Iceland.

Phase 4: Evaluation, outputs and spreading – Handbook

Aim and purpose

The aim and purpose of this phase are to look at what is learned from the intervention (Phase 3). The focus should be on evaluating and reflecting on the output from the intervention phase and taking an overall look at the learnings from the other two phases. Here, there is a need to consider whether this project process prompts you to go back and look deeper into your problem identification or revisit the Lab-Phase to re-design your solution based on the feedback from the testing phase.

Who

The steering group, coordinators, relevant stakeholders and researchers.

How

The execution of this phase depends on the result from the testing phase (Phase 3) and whether the group decides to re-design or go back to other phases. Following are examples of methods to report on the project and disseminate:

- Summarize
- Write-up an analysis or policy recommendations
- Describe the strengths and weaknesses,
- Consider how to spread and scale up or down your solution
- Knowledge dissemination (media, articles, rapports, at the workplace, etc.).

Output

This phase's output is a comprehensive evaluation of the project's strengths and weaknesses, along with a detailed plan for spreading the solution and its news.

Phase 4: Evaluation, outputs and spreading – Project version

Aim and purpose

This phase's aim was to evaluate and reflect on the output from the intervention phase and take an overall look at the learnings from the other two phases, develop summaries of findings and disseminating identified solutions to inform policy, to support developments in regional lifelong learning centers and develop further within the realm of adult education.

Who

Coordinator, NVL, steering group, researchers and experts.

How

This phase is still ongoing and involves disseminating and presenting the project's outcomes through various means such as publications, presentations, and the development of further initiatives at the local level.

The project's impact on national policy, as well as the implementation of the Design-Based Research (DBR) method at local, national, and Nordic levels, will form the foundation for the project's long-term success.

Output

The project has several outputs in publications and steps for the coming phases.

Publications

- Policy brief: Amplify the voice of immigrants and cooperate based on effective solutions.
- A sustainable model for change. An overview of the project methodology

Presentations

- Results from the project Voices of Immigrants – inclusion in Education, work and Society presented at the Nordic-EU Meeting 23. Nov. 2023
- Presentation and dialogue with SÍMENNT, association of life-long learning centres in Iceland

Further elaboration of the results

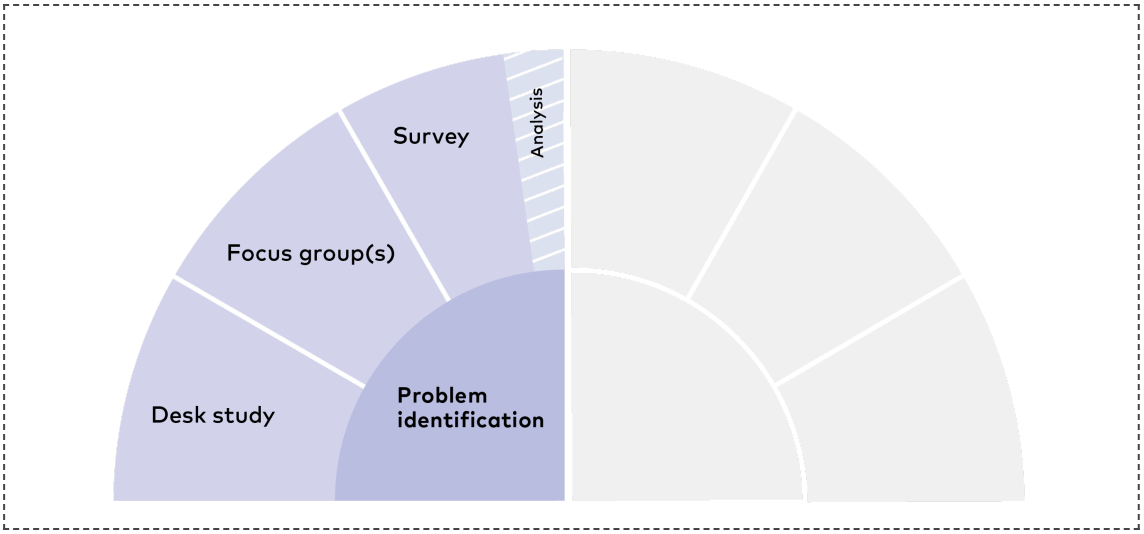
- Follow-up with five regional lifelong-learning centres to support them to work with the results locally according to the DBR methodology to support them in getting the most effective solutions in each context.

Findings

The following chapter details the findings from each phase of the project and concludes with a summary.

Phase 1 Identifying the problem Output

The first phase, problem identification, identified four main themes, representing the main issues that impede young immigrants' inclusion in the labour market and educational system. These themes are policy, the immigrant, initiatives and blind spots.



Theme 1: Policy

It comprises four subthemes, all of which relate to a policy level in that they address aspects of policy or require policy action in other ways.

Firstly, this has to do with the need to produce clear strategies. It is common experience that there is an unclear nationwide strategy, a lack of policies supporting the betterment of the inclusion of people with an immigrant background, and a lack of any authentic political leadership on the agenda.

Also, another sub-theme relates to what is perceived as unbalanced priorities and what could be framed as a lopsided political focus on the workforce value side of things and less so on education—and on how to create meaningful educational initiatives, for instance.

Lastly, we see a sub-theme relating to what we call belonging. This topic also connects to the sub-theme of unclear strategy as it raises doubt about where immigration issues belong. It is, perhaps, a bit of a "homeless" agenda in the political landscape – as a response to this, there is a discourse (in the data) that sympathizes with perspectives such as "immigration issues should belong to all ministries" or "inclusion is a responsibility that concerns all – public, private sector, the civil society as well as the individual citizens".

> "and I was making my degree to be able to move to [Country B] to make my master in this profession but I couldn't. So, I moved here [to Iceland] and now all my dreams, they're gone. So, I needed to restart and how do you call it, reinvent."

Theme 2: "The Immigrant"

The second theme concerns "the immigrant" and comprises three subthemes relating to the newcomers.

First and foremost, this concerns their 'group identity' as a very heterogeneous group. Not only does this refer to the fact that this is a very mixed group of people coming from many different countries, cultures, and backgrounds, but it is also a group that is constantly changing and thus requires a very adaptive societal response.

Furthermore, this theme comprises a sub-theme concerning certain narratives of immigrants' motivation or willingness to learn:

For example, there is a narrative depicting a perceived disinterest in learning amongst people with immigrant backgrounds. The rationale is that it is simply too easy to speak English in Iceland since people in general, at workplaces, and within education are willing and able to speak English.

Lastly, we see a sub-theme connecting to the previously mentioned sub-theme of belonging, but in this case, it relates to the identity struggles of the immigrants themselves. In the focus groups, phrases describing feelings of "I don't belong here", "how do I fit into this society", "they don't want me here", etc., emerged repetitively.

Theme 3: Initiatives

The third theme relates to initiatives or practices currently being carried out to enhance inclusion. This theme comprises three subthemes.

Here, we see a subtheme regarding communication amongst the people involved, or rather, the lack of communication. This subtheme addresses how these initiatives often happen or play out in silos, so enclosed within specific departments or companies – and consequently, producing solutions that only reach a small group of immigrants and that cannot address some of the complexities when migrating to a new country.

For instance, it is perhaps not only a matter of learning a new language but also of getting a job, translating one's credentials, getting a place to live, making sure your kids are all right, getting medical help if needed, etc.

Consequently, a second subtheme, coordination, emerges or lacks thereof. The focus groups experienced a lack of coordination between the stakeholders in developing and carrying out all the different initiatives and programs.

Lastly, a subtheme relates to "one-fits-all" models and the tendency in Icelandic society today to make the immigrant fit the program instead of the program fit the immigrant. In this sense, this also connects to the other subtheme of the immigrant population being a heterogeneous group, which is why one-fits-all models are perceived as problematic.

Theme 4: Blind spots

The fourth theme relates to blind spots. This theme comprises four types of blind spots that the participants in the workshops have articulated themselves. The blind spots that are enhanced here are the ones that recur across the data and, therefore, are more common.

The first concerns what in the data was framed as a "self-centered mindset". This blind spot relates to the often-one-sided focus on "our" (Icelandic) point of view on

what is best for the immigrants. So, it is a blind spot that potentially makes us forget to ask and involve people with immigrant backgrounds when thinking about what is best or when developing new initiatives.

The second blind spot we call an exclusive language focus. This blind spot addresses the intense focus on immigrants' learning Icelandic as the ultimate solution or obstacle to better inclusion – A blind spot that potentially prevents us from seeing other just as important aspects of creating better inclusion.

The third blind spot we called "been there—done that" connects to the blind spot of a self-centered mind as it addresses an attitude of "we know all there is to know—or we have heard it all before"—thus, a blind spot that potentially will close one's mind to being surprised or rethinking old ways, approaches, perspectives, etc.

The fourth blind spot concerns a common societal perception of immigrants as either "a project or a problem" – a blind spot that may make us forget that immigrants are more than just a problem to society or a project that needs to be solved. They are, for instance, contributing colleagues, neighbors, friends, classmates, etc.

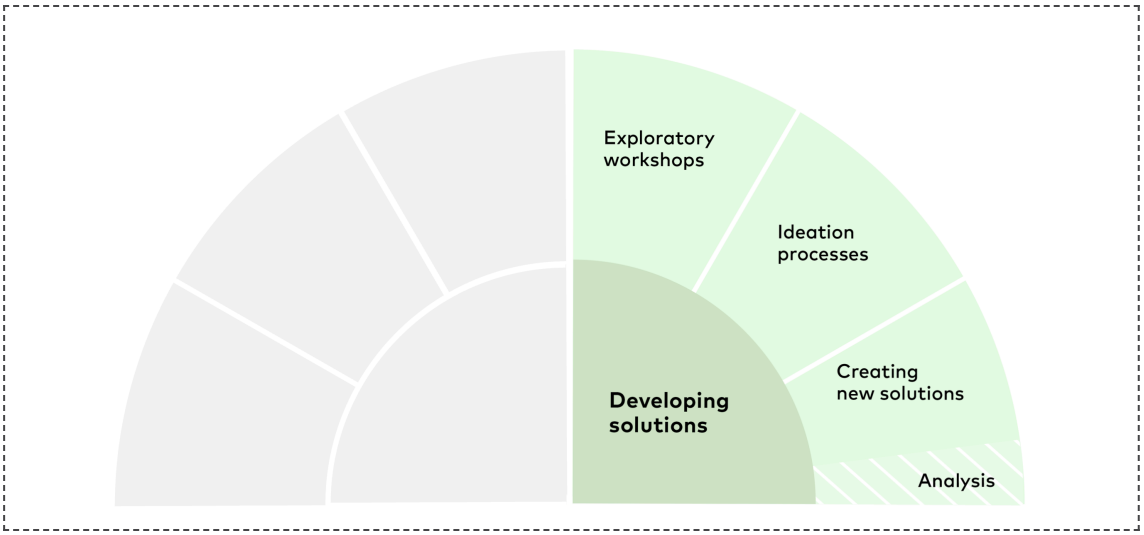
Young immigrants in Iceland face numerous challenges in education and employment, primarily due to a mismatch between their educational background and the jobs available to them. Many find themselves working in positions unrelated to their field of study, leading to frustration and underutilization of their skills. A significant contributing factor is the need for more flexible educational options. Since many immigrants work alongside their studies, they require course schedules that can accommodate their jobs. However, a lack of information about available courses, particularly those offered in English, limits their educational opportunities.

Language barriers further complicate the situation for immigrants. Opportunities to study in English are limited, which is challenging for those who wish to prioritize learning English before becoming proficient in Icelandic. Many immigrants repeatedly enroll in the same level of Icelandic language courses, needing additional support to progress. For non-fluent Icelandic speakers, extra academic assistance is crucial to their success. Additionally, discrimination against immigrants, particularly those with foreign names, exacerbates these challenges. Both first- and second-generation immigrants, including those who moved to Iceland as children or youth, report being excluded from group work because of their names.

Young immigrants often rely on informal networks to secure employment in the workforce, but they need help networking and obtaining local reference letters. The language barrier is a significant hindrance, as proficiency in Icelandic is often required for jobs within their expertise. Furthermore, the support and training immigrants receive from managers and colleagues can vary greatly, affecting their ability to integrate into the workplace. Many immigrants do not receive adequate training, which hampers their ability to effectively adapt to new roles and responsibilities.

Beyond education and employment, immigrants in Iceland face societal challenges, particularly a lack of support systems. This absence of support exacerbates feelings of exclusion and makes it difficult for immigrants to navigate challenges in their personal lives. For example, during illness or other hardships, immigrants often lack the assistance they need to cope effectively. Transportation is another significant barrier; limited access to a car or insufficient knowledge about Iceland's transportation infrastructure hinders mobility, further restricting opportunities and participation in society. These multifaceted challenges highlight the need for better support systems and more inclusive policies to help immigrants thrive in Iceland.

Phase 2 The lab phase output



Here, the ideas for solutions suggested by the workgroups at the expert seminar Voices of people with immigrant backgrounds in May 2023.

At the conference, strategies and initiatives emerged that proposed improving the integration and support of immigrants across different aspects of society. These strategies focus on enhancing communication and networking, improving access to information, supporting language acquisition, providing on-the-job learning opportunities, recognizing qualifications, and involving immigrants in policy-making processes.

Communication and Networking Platforms

One of the crucial suggestions is the establishment of diverse communication and networking platforms to foster connections between immigrants and the local community. Host families have been proposed to provide immigrants with a welcoming and supportive environment. Additionally, pop-up events like informal coffee chats can create opportunities for immigrants to engage with locals in a relaxed setting. A dedicated local centre could facilitate networking, create opportunities, and help build connections. Furthermore, activity coordinators who visit immigrants in their homes can play a crucial role in bridging gaps and offering support where needed.

> "For me, again, the problem is that nothing is clear how to do it! Everybody is doing it in a different way and there's no specification about how to do it!"

Access to Information

Improving access to information is another critical area of focus for immigrants. One approach is to have active coordinators visit immigrants' homes to provide necessary information and support. Establishing formal immigrant informants can ensure that the specific needs of immigrants are addressed. Creating a unified circle of officials who share consistent information is essential, as multiple stakeholders often disseminate conflicting or incomplete information. Additionally, consolidating public offices into one location would make it more convenient for immigrants to access essential services without navigating multiple buildings.

Icelandic Language Learning

Several initiatives have been proposed to facilitate language learning and acquisition. Making language learning obligatory but free of cost would encourage

immigrants to learn Icelandic without financial barriers. Innovative approaches like the "lingua café" and campaigns like "Inspired by Icelandic" can further promote language integration. Implementing buddy systems that pair newcomers with Icelandic people can create an environment conducive to language practice and cultural exchange. Additionally, expanding access to courses and further education in English would allow immigrants to pursue their academic and professional goals more effectively.

"the manager she gave me the jacket and told me „Go to the kassa [register]!" And I told her „I don't have any English or Icelandic!" And she told me „Don't worry, you will just learn." I said „Okay." And I just start to work in 10-11, two years and half and I just start speak English but I don't know how! I have no idea how I can speak English!"

On-the-Job Learning

Integrating language training with job training and mentor assistance can significantly benefit immigrants. On-the-job learning opportunities that combine these elements provide immigrants with practical skills and real-world experience while enhancing their language proficiency. This approach helps immigrants adapt more efficiently to their roles and workplaces.

Recognizing Qualifications

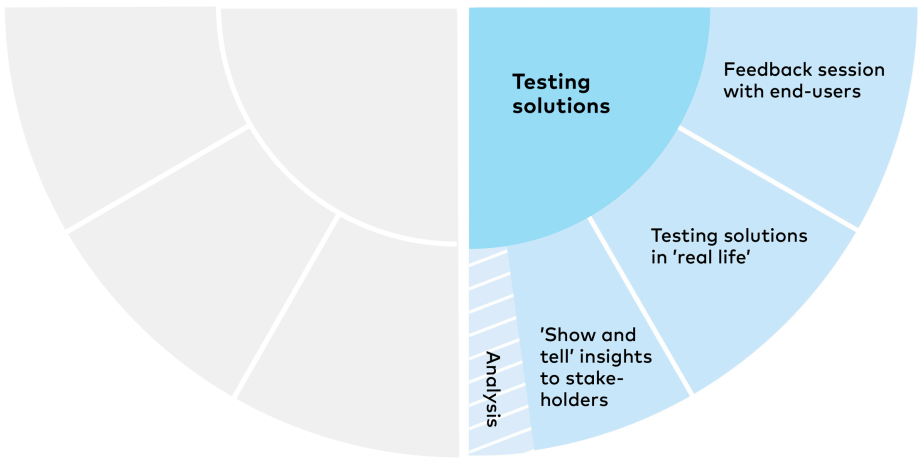
Recognizing immigrants' qualifications is crucial for utilizing their skills and talents effectively. Implementing a qualification auction can help identify and validate immigrants' skills and experience. Hiring practices that use blinded CVs or applications without names or IDs can reduce biases and ensure fair evaluation based on qualifications and experience. Initiatives like "switch-jobs-day," where employees can experience a colleague's workday, foster mutual understanding and collaboration. Additionally, facilitating the validation of prior learning and making it easier for immigrants to have their credentials translated can enhance their employability and career prospects.

Immigrants' Involvement in Policymaking

Involving immigrants in policy-making processes at both local and governmental levels is essential to ensure their voices are heard, and their needs are met. Utilizing available resources, such as lifelong learning advisors and ambassadors, can initiate meaningful conversations. Advisory boards with immigrant representation provide valuable insights and perspectives in decision-making. Immigrants should be active participants in service planning, particularly when developing solutions at the local government level. Engaging with individuals who have daily interactions with immigrants, such as teachers, advisors, and coordinators, can provide valuable input for policymaking. Formally involving immigrants in these processes ensures that policies are inclusive and effective in addressing their challenges.

Overall, these comprehensive strategies and initiatives are designed to support the integration and empowerment of immigrants in Iceland. By fostering communication and networking, improving access to information, supporting language acquisition, providing on-the-job learning opportunities, recognizing qualifications, and involving immigrants in policymaking, Iceland can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for its immigrant population.

Phase 3 intervention and activities Output



The feedback on the proposed strategies and initiatives for improving the integration of immigrants in Iceland has been largely positive. The **focus groups** expressed that most ideas are relevant and address real issues faced by immigrants

rather than focusing on perceived problems that may be insignificant to the target group. The emphasis on better inclusion shows a solid commitment to understanding and addressing the challenges immigrants encounter in Iceland.

Solutions to Be Highlighted

Access to Information

One critical area where improvements can be made is providing immigrants with accurate and timely information. Receiving the correct information from the beginning is crucial to a smooth transition and successful integration. Initiatives like a podcast for immigrants aim to disseminate important information and serve as a valuable resource. In addition to these digital solutions, initiatives like lingua cafés and pop-up events can support immigrants by facilitating networking and social connections.

Mentorship is another valuable resource for immigrants. It provides guidance on basic procedures for accessing services in Iceland according to individual needs. Being able to connect with a mentor when needed can help immigrants navigate the complexities of settling into a new country and foster a sense of belonging.

"I actually started a podcast for people from abroad in English [...] so that people know things"

Language Learning

Language acquisition remains a top priority for immigrants seeking to integrate into Icelandic society. Language courses that include proficiency tests at the university level can help students identify their current level and advance accordingly. Establishing clear levels of language courses is crucial to ensure that learners can progress and acquire new skills. Currently, some courses have participants with varying proficiency levels, leading to inefficient learning experiences where individuals must advance beyond their existing knowledge.

Evening classes are essential to accommodate working individuals. On-site learning that pairs immigrants with personal mentors can provide tailored support and real-time language practice. Additionally, instructional materials could be improved by taking inspiration from countries like Finland, where language books include complex words translated into English to save learners time.

The suggestion to hold pop-up events that promote language practice and on-site learning opportunities underscores the importance of social engagement in language learning. These events provide immigrants a platform to connect, socialize, and practice the language more informally.

Additional comments highlight that refugees need motivation and care to progress in their language-learning journey. Validation of prior learning is also crucial, as it recognizes immigrants' existing skills and experiences and enhances their career prospects.

> "I am a doctor. For that I got a diploma, like general doctor. [...] really hard to continue here. I need to start again from first course until sixth course, I'm not ready, you know, to do it again. [...] I want to work as a doctor. Right now I'm working in the rental company. Before I was working in the car washing also, rental company also, uhh.. Building, like working outside, it was hard job."

Problems Not Solved by These Solutions

Despite these promising solutions, some challenges still need to be addressed. When moving to a new country alone, immigrants often experience loneliness and isolation, which can take time to overcome as they establish new connections. Participating in the community and receiving local outreach is vital for combating these feelings. While pop-up events and mentoring can help, there is a need for more widespread interest and involvement from the local population. Engaging in multicultural events can help immigrants be seen as individuals, not just members of an immigrant group.

Additionally, the limited availability of language courses and higher education options in smaller towns poses a challenge. For instance, after completing all available language courses, some immigrants face difficulties pursuing further education due to a lack of housing options near universities. Establishing branches of educational institutions in smaller localities or offering online courses could provide immigrants with opportunities to continue their studies without relocating.

Furthermore, immigrants often need help with economic challenges, including high taxes, difficulties obtaining credit cards, and navigating the cost of living without savings. For example, S, who lives in Akureyri, noted that they would have faced significant difficulties without connections to rent an apartment. Raising awareness of these economic challenges is essential to ensure immigrants are better prepared and financially supported.

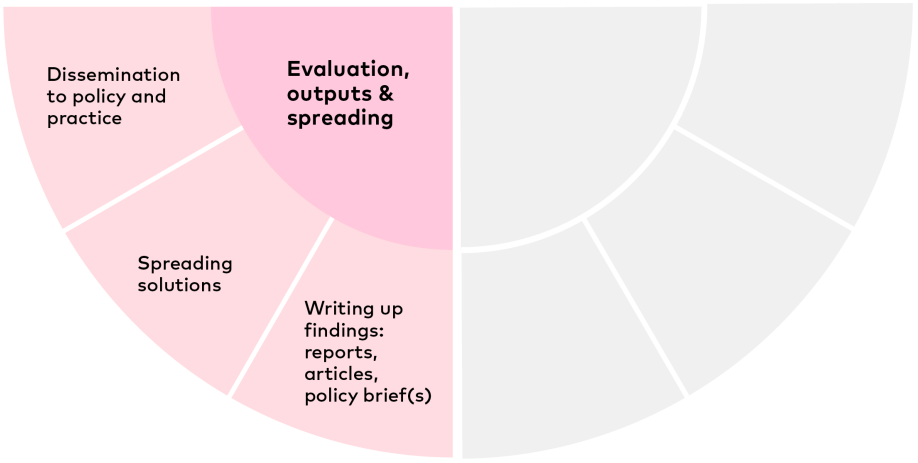
The role of mentors is highlighted as an essential support mechanism for immigrants. However, it is noted that only some are naturally equipped to be a mentor or make friends easily. There is a need for professional training for mentors to ensure they can provide the necessary support and guidance effectively.

> “I feel that I’m safe in everyday life and my child is safe. So those things are always the foundation, the number one. “

Conclusion

In conclusion, the proposed solutions for improving immigrant integration in Iceland are relevant and address key issues such as access to information, language learning, and social engagement. However, challenges related to loneliness, limited educational opportunities, and economic difficulties remain. By continuing to refine and expand these initiatives and raising awareness of the ongoing challenges, Iceland can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for its immigrant population. Through collaboration between immigrants and the local community, and with targeted efforts to address these complex issues, the integration process can be improved significantly, benefiting both immigrants and Icelandic society.

Phase 4 Evaluation and refinement output



As of the writing of this report, the evaluation and refinement of the project's outcomes are still ongoing. The nature of the proposed solutions requires a long-term evaluation process. However, the results of this project have already influenced Icelandic government policy regarding the inclusion of immigrants in Icelandic society, with further evaluation to take place over the long term.

"I think I will stay until I will be retired or something."

Challenges and limitations

The project aimed to enhance the integration of young adult immigrants in Iceland by amplifying their voices, illuminating their challenges, and developing practical solutions.

It also sought to involve a vast network of stakeholders to create a more inclusive society where young immigrants can thrive and contribute to the country's development. However, as with any complex initiative, several challenges emerged during the project. These challenges were addressed collectively, providing valuable lessons for future efforts.

Primary Objectives of the Project

The project had four primary objectives:

1. **Amplify the Voices of Young Adult Immigrants**: The goal was to provide a platform for young immigrants to express their experiences, challenges, and needs, ensuring their perspectives are heard and considered in policymaking and community planning.
2. **Illuminate the Challenges They Currently Face**: By identifying and analyzing the barriers young immigrants encounter, the project aimed to highlight areas requiring attention and improvement, such as education, employment, and social integration.
3. **Propose and Develop Practical Solutions to These Challenges**: The project sought to devise actionable strategies and interventions to address the identified challenges, drawing on various stakeholders' best practices and innovative approaches.
4. **Involve a Vast Network of Stakeholders**: Engaging a broad range of stakeholders, including governmental bodies, educational institutions, community organizations, and immigrants, was crucial for ensuring a holistic and coordinated approach to inclusion.

The project represents a significant step towards a more inclusive Iceland, ensuring that young immigrants have the necessary support and opportunities to thrive and contribute to the country's development.

Challenges Regarding Objectives

While the project had clear objectives, several challenges arose related to achieving these goals:

Shaping the Selection Criteria for the Focus Group

One of the primary challenges was determining the selection criteria for the focus groups. There was a need to reach those immigrants who had not been able to find suitable resources to thrive in education, work, or society, with a particular focus on language groups. The reference group emphasized the importance of including specific language groups within the focus group. However, this presented logistical challenges, such as communicating, scripting, and analyzing discussions when participants spoke different languages. Although the ETSC explored possibilities by consulting experts, it was not technically or financially feasible within the current project framework. This experience, however, serves as a learning moment for future projects, highlighting the importance of early planning and resource allocation.

Recruitment of Participants in Regional Lifelong Learning Centers

Recruiting participants for the regional Lifelong Learning (LLL) centres proved to be a significant challenge. Considerable effort was required to reach out to immigrants locally and form focus groups at specific times for the researchers to meet them. For instance, creating a group in the eastern part of the country was not manageable, so efforts were redirected to the LLL centre in the Westfjords. This logistical challenge underlines the importance of flexibility and adaptability in project planning and the need for robust local networks to facilitate recruitment and participation.

Low Response Rate to Surveys

A survey sent to companies yielded a meagre response rate, limiting the accuracy of the information gathered. While the survey provided some insights for future outreach to companies, it was concluded that conducting focus groups with businesses might have been more effective. However, organizing such focus groups would have required significantly more time and effort. This challenge highlights the need for strategic engagement with businesses and the potential benefits of direct, qualitative research methods.

Coordination Among Stakeholders

Coordinating communication among the extensive network of stakeholders and organizing the main event required significant time and effort. The project's success depended on the robust networks established nationally by the ETSC and the practical support provided by the Nordic Network of Adult Learning (NVL). With NVL's involvement, the project achieved a robust Nordic dimension. Analyzing and presenting the findings also demanded substantial time and resources, emphasizing the importance of effective collaboration and coordination among stakeholders.

Challenges Regarding Outcomes

Challenges related to the outcomes of the project were closely linked to those faced during the objective-setting phase:

Communication with Stakeholders

The extensive communication required to engage the stakeholder group and coordinate the main event was time-consuming. Establishing sound networks through the ETSC and leveraging NVL's resources were critical to overcoming these challenges. Without these networks, the project would have lacked the Nordic dimension that enriched its outcomes.

Analysis and Presentation of Findings

Analyzing the data collected and presenting the findings required considerable effort from ETSC staff. Experts were needed to support the development, analysis, and presentation of findings, ensuring that the insights gained were effectively communicated to stakeholders.

Diverse Viewpoints

Incorporating diverse viewpoints from various stakeholders was essential for a comprehensive understanding of the issues. Initially, there was a strong focus on Icelandic language teaching as the primary solution for inclusion. However, the project highlighted that other issues, such as inclusion in education, work, and society, are equally important. Balancing these perspectives required careful consideration and adaptation of strategies.

Challenges Regarding Activities

The main event or the expert seminar, was designed for 80 participants by invitation only. However, as word spread about the event, many more national stakeholders and practitioners expressed interest in attending, leading to an overbooked event. While the high level of interest was appreciated, it posed logistical challenges in accommodating additional participants.

Various stakeholder viewpoints needed to be considered to ensure a comprehensive presentation of findings and products. Initially, there was an overly strong focus among stakeholders on Icelandic language teaching as the primary solution for inclusion. The project demonstrated that other vital dimensions are linked to the three categories in focus: inclusion in education, work, and society.

The project's emphasis on diverse solutions highlights the importance of addressing the multifaceted nature of immigrant integration.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the project represents a significant step towards a more inclusive Iceland by amplifying the voices of young adult immigrants, highlighting their challenges, and proposing practical solutions. While several challenges were encountered, the collaborative efforts of the ETSC staff and stakeholders enabled the project to address these issues and achieve its objectives. By continuing to refine and expand these initiatives, Iceland can create a more supportive environment for its immigrant population, ensuring they have the necessary support and opportunities to thrive and contribute to the country's development.

Transferability

The "Voices of Young Immigrants – Inclusion in Education, Work, and Society" project has demonstrated significant potential for transferability across various contexts in Iceland and internationally.

This chapter explores the elements that make the project adaptable, the challenges encountered, and the opportunities for implementing similar initiatives in other regions.

Key Elements for Transferability

Community-Centric Approach:

The project strongly emphasizes amplifying the voices of young immigrants, ensuring that their perspectives and experiences shape the initiatives aimed at improving their inclusion. This community-centric approach is crucial for any successful transfer as it ensures that the solutions are tailored to the specific needs and challenges faced by the target group.

Collaborative Framework:

The collaboration among the Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC), the Nordic Network for Adult Learning (NVL), and various stakeholders has been instrumental in the project's success. The project has created a robust support network that can be replicated in other regions by involving multiple stakeholders, including government agencies, educational institutions, and immigrant communities.

Design-Based Research (DBR) Methodology:

DBR allows for iterative testing and refinement of solutions, making it adaptable to different contexts. This methodology encourages continuous feedback and improvement, essential for addressing the unique challenges immigrants face in other countries.

Focus on Practical Solutions:

The project has developed practical solutions that address real issues, such as access to information, mentorship programs, and language learning. These

solutions can be customized to fit other regions' specific socio-economic and cultural conditions.

Challenges in Transferability

Cultural Differences:

While the project's framework is adaptable, cultural differences can pose challenges. Understanding the local cultural context and adapting the solutions to align with the values and norms of the target community is essential.

Resource Availability:

Implementing similar projects in other regions may require scarce resources. These include funding, skilled personnel, and technological infrastructure. Ensuring that these resources are in place is crucial for successful transferability.

Policy and Regulatory Environment:

Different countries have varying policies and regulations regarding immigration and integration. These legal frameworks can impact the implementation of similar projects and must be carefully navigated.

Opportunities for Implementation

Scalability:

The project's design allows for scalability, making it suitable for small communities and larger populations. By adjusting the scale of interventions, the project can be implemented in diverse settings, from rural areas to urban centres.

Cross-Border Collaboration:

The project's success in Iceland highlights the potential for cross-border collaborations. Countries can collaborate to share insights, resources, and best practices, enhancing the project's impact on a broader scale.

Integration into Existing Programs:

The solutions developed can be integrated into existing educational and social

programs for immigrant inclusion. This integration can enhance the effectiveness of these programs and provide additional support to immigrants.

Use of Technology:

Technology can significantly contribute to transferring the project's solutions to other regions. Online platforms for language learning, information dissemination, and mentorship can be used to reach a wider audience and overcome geographical barriers.

Conclusion

The "Voices of Young Immigrants" project serves as a valuable model for enhancing the inclusion of young immigrants in education, work, and society. Its focus on community engagement, collaboration, and practical solutions makes it highly transferable to other contexts. By addressing the challenges and leveraging the opportunities for implementation, similar initiatives can be developed to support immigrant communities worldwide. The project contributes to a more inclusive society in Iceland and offers a blueprint for other regions striving to achieve the same goals. The sustainable model for change is also transferable to other target groups and contexts as presented in the output, based on the DBR design.

Final remarks

The "Voices of Young Immigrants — Inclusion in Education, Work, and Society" project marks a significant milestone in pursuing a more inclusive and equitable society in Iceland.

By centering the experiences and perspectives of young immigrants, the project has brought to light the multifaceted challenges they face and proposed practical solutions to address these issues. This project's journey has been one of learning, adaptation, and collaboration, reflecting the dynamic nature of integration efforts.

Achievements and Impact

The project has successfully achieved its primary objectives of amplifying the voices of young immigrants, highlighting their challenges, and proposing viable solutions. Through a community-centric approach and the involvement of a vast network of stakeholders, the project has laid the groundwork for systemic changes in education, employment, and social inclusion. The collaboration between the Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC), the Nordic Network for Adult Learning (NVL), and various local and national stakeholders has been pivotal in driving these outcomes.

The project has identified barriers and developed innovative strategies to overcome them. Initiatives such as mentorship programs, flexible language courses, and accessible information channels have already begun to make a positive difference in the lives of young immigrants. Moreover, the project's focus on practical, evidence-based solutions has ensured that these interventions are effective and sustainable.

Importance of Design-Based Research (DBR)

A vital component of the project's success has been using the Design-Based Research (DBR) methodology. DBR has played a crucial role in developing and implementing solutions, offering a structured yet flexible approach that allows for continuous improvement. The following aspects highlight the importance of DBR in this process:

- **Iterative Development**: DBR facilitated an iterative cycle of designing, testing, and refining solutions based on real-world feedback from young immigrants and stakeholders. This iterative process ensured that solutions were continuously improved and adapted to better meet the target group's needs.
- **Evidence-Based Approach**: By grounding the project in empirical research, DBR ensured that solutions were innovative and grounded in evidence. This approach helped validate the effectiveness of interventions and provided a solid foundation for scaling successful initiatives.
- **Collaboration and Co-Design**: DBR encouraged active collaboration between researchers, practitioners, and participants, fostering a co-design process that empowered young immigrants to play a central role in shaping the solutions that affect their lives. This collaborative aspect ensured that the solutions were relevant and tailored to the community's specific needs.
- **Real-World Application**: DBR's focus on real-world application allowed the project to address practical challenges young immigrants face in education, work, and society. By situating research within actual contexts, DBR ensured that solutions were theoretically sound and practically applicable.
- **Adaptability and Flexibility**: The DBR methodology's inherent adaptability allowed the project to respond to unforeseen challenges and changing circumstances. This flexibility was crucial in addressing young immigrants' diverse and evolving needs, enabling the project to remain responsive and effective.

Lessons Learned

Throughout the project, several valuable lessons have been learned that will inform future efforts:

- **Importance of Inclusion**: The active involvement of immigrants in the planning and implementation of initiatives ensures that solutions are relevant and practical. Empowering immigrants to participate in decision-making fosters a sense of ownership and agency.
- **Flexibility and Adaptability**: The diverse needs of immigrant communities require flexible approaches that can be adapted to different contexts. The project's success in navigating challenges highlights the importance of being responsive to changing circumstances and needs.

- **Collaboration as a Catalyst**: The collaboration between various stakeholders, including governmental bodies, educational institutions, and community organizations, has been instrumental in the project's success. Building solid partnerships enhances the reach and impact of integration efforts.
- **Holistic Approach**: Addressing immigrants' challenges requires a holistic approach that considers the interconnectedness of education, employment, and social inclusion. Solutions must be comprehensive and address multiple aspects of immigrants' lives.

Conclusion

The "Voices of Young Immigrants" project has made significant strides in promoting the inclusion of young immigrants in Icelandic society. The project has created a more welcoming and inclusive environment for immigrants to thrive by listening to their voices and responding to their needs. As Iceland continues to evolve as a multicultural society, the insights and achievements of this project will serve as a guiding light for future efforts. Together, we can build a society that values diversity, fosters inclusion, and empowers all individuals to reach their full potential. The successful application of the Design-Based Research methodology underscores the importance of adaptive, evidence-based approaches in creating lasting positive change.

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Appendix 1

Design thinking toolbox

VOICES OF YOUNG IMMIGRANTS
Inclusion in Education, Work and Society

www.nvl.org