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# **I FELT LOST BUT NEVER LOST HOPE**

**A guidebook for better communication between social service workers and women immigrating to Helsinki**



## ABSTRACT

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I felt lost but never lost hope.

A guidebook for better communication between social service workers and women immigrating to Helsinki.

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This thesis presents a social service work tool in the form of a guidebook. This guidebook was created for social service workers in the Helsinki region working with women who have immigrated to Helsinki.

The information used to compile the guidebook were focused on intercultural communication, migration and integration, as well as gender-related issues. They included a range of materials such as interviews, journals, books, e-books, professional publications, government documents, records, laws, and statistics, as well as theses at the doctoral, master, and bachelor levels, and manuscripts. The result is a tool where social service workers have information specific to women immigrating to Helsinki to help them have better dialogue with clients and to provide quality service.

From an end-user perspective, this guidebook affords the client a more significant opportunity to receive the help they need from the social service worker with whom they are engaging.

Keywords: Female Integration, Immigrant Women, Social Service Worker, Communication, Nicehearts ry, Multicultural Social Work and Experts by Experience



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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Being a woman in Finland means equal fundamental rights, empowerment, and safety (Enloe et al., 2021), but that is only sometimes the case for immigrant women (Draude, 2020; Emmenegger & Stigwall, 2019). Research conducted previously has indicated that immigrant women, particularly those from the global south, encounter numerous obstacles in Finland such as a greater likelihood of unemployment, social exclusion, and violence (Mendizabal, 2018; Näre, Saarinen, & Tiilikainen, 2018; Valtioneuvosto, 2016).

This thesis will introduce a guidebook as a tool for better communication and understanding between female immigrants and social service workers. The guidebook was created in collaboration with Nicehearts ry project "Naapuriäidit". Nicehearts ry is an organisation for women and girls, and Naapuriäidit is a project for and from women with diverse backgrounds. The guidebook's content is based on immigrant women's expertise regarding the integration and immigration process in Finland. Female immigrants who already went through the immigration and integration process are experts in what is needed to make the process smoother, more accessible, and easier for everyone, including professionals from different areas and migrants (Moledo et al., 2018). Therefore, their opinions, stories, and thoughts were valued and used in the guidebook.

The guidebook aims to support social service workers to communicate better and assist immigrant women with integration in Helsinki. Furthermore, improving communication should make the integration process smoother and more accessible for female immigrant clients. Therefore, this thesis will include two parts: The process of creating the guidebook and presenting the completed guidebook for social service workers. Key concepts used for creating the guidebook are communication, multicultural social work, Finnish migration and integration, experts by experience and gender-related issues. The main emphasis in creating the guidebook will be on the effective communication

between female immigrants and social service workers, as well as gender-related issues and how to access and receive needed services. During the interviews, immigrant women gave us an overview of the services, information and support they needed.

## 2 FEMALE IMMIGRATION AND INTEGRATION CHALLENGES

Finland has been increasingly diversifying in terms of its population in recent years, with immigration being one of the key drivers of this change (Statistics Finland, 2021). Among the immigrant population, women constitute a significant proportion (Statistics Finland, 2021), and their experiences and perspectives on integration are particularly important. In this chapter, we will explore the phenomenon of women's immigration into Finland, including the factors that contribute to their migration and the challenges they face during the integration process. We will also examine the unique experiences of immigrant women in Finland, particularly from a female perspective, and explore how gender interacts with other social identities to shape their integration experiences. The summarised key concepts allow the reader to understand better the process of creating a guidebook for social service workers and why the guidebook is needed for professionals.

### 2.1 Female Immigration to Finland

The Finnish history of immigration is short and instead characterised by economically motivated emigration (OECD, 2017). Only in the 1990s did Finland become an immigrant-receiving country, which is still seen in the low percentage of the foreign-born Finnish population (Martikainen, 2013). Compared to other Nordic countries, the percentage rate of the foreign-born Finnish population is less than half of the other Nordic countries (OECD, 2017). This is seen in a report by Pettersen and Østby (2017), which states that as of 2015, Norway, Sweden and Denmark had a population of foreign-born inhabitants with a range of 19 to 21 per cent of the total population, whereas according to Statistics Finland (2021) as of December 2021 foreign-born inhabitants were 6.77 per cent. According to Mahler's (2022) OHCHR report on the ageing situation in Finland, statistics show that out of every 100 employees in Finland, more than 39 are over 65. With its low population, Finland needs work-based immigration for every sector to compensate for the labour deficit (Bontenbal & Lillie, 2021). However, more than

the current work-based immigrants are needed to replace those ageing out of the labour market (YLE, 2022). Currently, however, the main reason for migration to Finland is family ties, followed by employment (European Migration Network & Finnish Immigration Service, 2020).

Although the history of receiving immigrants is relatively short, immigration to Finland has increased and become more diverse in recent years (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, 2022). With its low population, Finland needs immigrants in all sectors (Kovalainen, 2019). Furthermore, any sustainable solution to Finland's growing social services crisis must include increasing the immigrant workforce (Zechner et al., 2022). In the past years, immigration has increased, and therefore the diversity of society changed (Verkuyten et al., 2019).

According to the International Organization for Migration (2019), historically, the differences in gender concerning immigration have not been studied. The findings assume there is no difference between men and women in migration. This report states that as a fundamental organising principle of society, gender is a critical part of the conversations of causality and consequences of immigration. Having conversations about gender in migration can shed light on whether migration is caused by gender inequality or if migration itself is promoting gender disparities.

According to a United Nations (2015) report on female migration, the role of women in international migration has always been an essential component of the overall process. This report states that as of 2015, women and girls make up 48 per cent of the total migration numbers, increasing 2 per cent over the United Nations (2005) earlier report. Often women migrate as dependent family members with other migrants. In the past decade, though, women have been increasingly part of the migrant workers moving internationally (International Organization for Migration, 2019). This is because they are moving independently and becoming the primary wage earner for their family (United Nations, 2015). For the most part, migrant women move voluntarily. Still, women and girls are forced to leave their countries to avoid conflict, persecution, environmental



issues, natural disasters, and other reasons that affect their safety, livelihood, or housing needs (United Nations, 2016).

Compared to women with a Finnish background, the employment rate of women with a foreign background is 17% lower, while the employment rate of immigrant men is almost equal to the rate of men with a Finnish background (THL, 2023). The main issue of unsuccessful integration into the Finnish labour market is that many women are responsible for juggling childcare responsibilities that often differ from involvement in early integration activities and language classes. However, even women who arrive for reasons other than family-related immigration are more vulnerable to becoming distant from the labour market (OECD, 2018). Immigrant women are more likely to face discrimination based on ethnic background and gender, especially in the labour market. (THL, 2023). Most importantly, no matter the reasons for their migration, these women do not become isolated from Finnish society and support them in finding their place in society and the labour market (OECD, 2018; Korkiasaari et al., 2019).

Based on a case study of migrants to Finland, Koskela (2019) explored immigrants' social identities and categorisation in everyday life. Koskela surmised that Finnish migration must be evaluated in light of intersecting social categorisations, stereotyping and general assumptions of nationality, gender, race, and ethnicity. Anthias (2008) referred to this intersection of nationality, race, gender and ethnicity as translocational positionality. Koskela's research shows that this translocational positionality is a key to Finland's development as an immigrant-friendly country and that there is no easy classification of the foreign-born Finnish population.

Finland has consistently ranked first in the world happiness report for the past few years, with one key statistic being the happiness among immigrants (Helliwell et al., 2022). This finding is particularly significant for female immigrants in Finland, who often face discrimination based on both gender and ethnic background, especially in the labor market. (THL, 2023). Despite these challenges, Finland's high ranking in the world happiness report is a positive sign for female immigrants. It suggests that Finland is making progress in creating an

environment that is welcoming and supportive of immigrants, including women. This positive environment is crucial for the integration of female immigrants into Finnish society and the labor market, which in turn can lead to increased happiness and well-being.

Moreover, it is important to note that the happiness of immigrants in Finland is not just a matter of statistics. It reflects the experiences and perceptions of actual individuals who have chosen Finland as their new home. For female immigrants, feeling happy and accepted in their new country can have a significant impact on their overall well-being and their ability to successfully integrate into Finnish society.

During the United Nation's seventy-first session of the General assembly, they released a report on international migration and development (2016) stating that four questions must be considered when analysing gender perspectives on immigration. First, how do the expectations, relationships and hierarchies connected to being female and male affect the immigration process? Second, how do gender inequalities in the destination country affect the experience of immigrant women and men? Third, in what way does immigration benefit or disadvantage women and men? Fourth, what steps should be taken to ensure women's and men's equality in the immigration process (United Nations, 2016)? The Finnish immigration system has made efforts to address the four questions posed by the United Nations regarding gender perspectives on immigration. Firstly, expectations, relationships, and hierarchies connected to gender have been taken into consideration in the immigration process in Finland. The Finnish immigration policy and legislation have been reformed to promote gender equality in the immigration process. For instance, the Finnish Immigration Service provides gender-sensitive services to immigrants, especially women, to ensure their needs are met during the immigration process (Finland, 2022). Additionally, Finnish society has made progress in promoting gender equality, with women holding high positions in government and the private sector.

Secondly, gender inequalities in the destination country have been addressed in Finland. The government and non-governmental organizations have

implemented policies to prevent discrimination and promote gender equality. In addition, Finnish law prohibits discrimination based on gender, race, and ethnicity, among other factors (Finland, 2021).

Thirdly, immigration has both benefits and disadvantages for women and men in Finland. On one hand, immigration provides an opportunity for both genders to improve their socio-economic status and attain better education and health services. On the other hand, women, especially those from non-Western backgrounds, face challenges in accessing the labour market due to cultural and language barriers, leading to their disadvantage in employment rates (THL, 2023).

Lastly, Finland has taken steps to ensure gender equality in the immigration process. The government has implemented policies that promote gender equality, and non-governmental organizations have advocated for the rights of immigrant women. Additionally, gender-based violence is taken seriously in Finland, and resources are available to assist victims of gender-based violence.

## 2.2 Female perspective on integration into Finland

According to the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (1386/2010) Section 1, "The purpose of this Act is to support and promote integration and make it easier for immigrants to play an active role in Finnish society. The Act also aims to promote gender equality and nondiscrimination and positive interaction between different population groups". Unfortunately, immigrants integrating into Finnish society is harder for many women than their male counterparts. Women integrating face additional obstacles, such as additional household chores and religious and societal challenges that men do not face (Heikkilä & Yeasmin, 2021). For many women immigrating into Finnish society can be liberating if given the freedom within their family hierarchy to integrate into the Finnish system fully (Korkiamäki et al., 2017). However, for many, the family hierarchy can be a prison. Due to the sudden change in gender roles and the traditional roles of family members, women reported increased domestic violence

at home (Säävälä et al., 2015). Still, in many countries, men are the head of the household, and a sudden change in that role might lead to increased violence at home (THL, 2023). However, immigrant women have limited access to counselling or other services to address their issues (Pittaway & Van Genderen Stort, 2011).

The unique issues facing immigrant women often lead to a breakdown in navigating the Finnish integration system leaving them with a need for additional help (Anthias et al., 2012). Reasons why women have a higher risk of being excluded from integration services, are being a mother and having to look after their children, which means there is not always time to attend training during the integration period. Secondly, women are more likely to immigrate as spouses. In this case, the introduction to integration services might happen differently for those who arrive as a refugee (THL, 2023). Immigrant women have different access to integration services and face discrimination in several Finnish service systems, such as the labour market or health care services (Korkiamäki et al., 2017).

Additionally, the Finnish institute for health and welfare (2023) states that immigrant women feel excluded from health services. Therefore, it needs a reform of service counselling for women to receive the services they need. Moreover, language skills are an essential part of the integration. Many services are more accessible for immigrants who are fluent in Finnish. However, even language learning shows gender-related issues and women especially experience difficulties (Migrant Health and we Wellbeing Study (Maamu), 2012). In Helsinki, some language courses are available for immigrant women as part of adaptation. However, these courses have been criticised for not reaching all immigrant women and may not work for mothers with small children who need to be looked after (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health; Brochure, 2013).

To immigrate to Finland and to integrate into society are two different things. It is a two-way process that requires commitment from both sides: the immigrants and the country's authorities (Birman & Trickett, 2001). However, what may sound easy in theory can be difficult in practice (Ministry of Economic Affairs and

Employment of Finland, 2022). Often clients of social service workers face an additional burden of unrealistic expectations for understanding how bureaucracy functions, whether with a local or foreign background (Punternold Bø, 2014).

Integration is a complex process that refers to the ability of immigrants to participate fully and effectively in the economic, social, and political life of the host society. Friedrich Heckmann and Ager & Strang provide different definitions and approaches to integration. Heckmann (2003) suggests that integration is a process of two-way adaptation where immigrants and the host society change and adjust to each other's cultural and societal values. Ager & Strang (2008) view integration as a multifaceted process that includes the social, economic, and cultural domains.

Mahaseth (2016) identifies four main aspects of societal integration: acculturation, placement, interaction, and identification. Acculturation refers to the process of adopting or borrowing certain parts of a new culture, such as language, food, clothing, music, religion, and marriage practices. Placement refers to the immigrant's position on the social ladder of the new society and how they function in it. Interaction is the immigrant's ability to connect with members of the host society and form relationships and networks. Finally, Identification is when the immigrant sees themselves as a relevant element of the acquired culture.

Female integration, specifically, is a crucial aspect of integration that has been overlooked for a long time. Women face unique challenges in the process of integration, such as gender-based discrimination, lack of access to resources, and traditional gender roles that hinder their full participation in society. For instance, being a mother and having to look after their children can make it difficult for women to attend training during the integration period (THL, 2023). Moreover, women are more likely to immigrate as spouses, which might impact their access to integration services (THL, 2023).

Therefore, it is important to ensure that immigrant women have equal opportunities to participate in the host society. This includes access to language classes, education, health services, and employment opportunities. Furthermore,

integration policies should consider the specific challenges that women face and provide tailored support to help them overcome these challenges.

In 2016, the OECD co-organised a workshop with the Finnish Ministry for Employment and The Economy to identify bottlenecks and issues in the current integration system and how to tackle these challenges and issues (OECD, 2017; Finnish Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2016). Their findings were that the primary responsibility for integration lies with the municipalities and the public employment services (TE offices) (OECD, 2018). The specific outlined issues were the coordination of policy development and strategy among all government agencies, a holistic approach that would see all those responsible for integration achieve greater levels of communication among themselves, and multiple providers of integration services filling the gaps in the current system (Korkiasaari et al., 2019; OECD, 2018).

### 3 EXPERTS BY EXPERIENCE

Nieminen (2014) defines expert-by-experience as someone who possesses experiential knowledge of a topic such as homelessness or immigration. This gained knowledge gives a unique and qualifiable understanding of their lived experience of the integration process from the end user's perspective. Furthermore, experts by experience have lived through immigration, integration, and other challenging life experiences giving them valuable information on what has helped or hurt them in the integration process (Videmšek, 2017). Therefore, the expert-by-experience must be given a voice in all levels of social integration (Koski, 2017).

The experience of immigration can be one of the most challenging and complex journeys a person can undertake (McBride, 2019). Moving to a new country often means leaving behind familiar things, including language, culture, and community. It is a journey fraught with obstacles, barriers, and uncertainties. Nevertheless, immigrants bring with them a wealth of knowledge and experience that is often overlooked or undervalued by the host society (Abada, Hou, & Ram, 2016). In fact, immigrants are experts by experience in their own migration stories (Castles, 2019), and their voices should be heard and valued in shaping policies and practices that affect their lives.

The idea of immigrants as experts by experience is grounded in the belief that individuals who have gone through a particular experience have unique insights and knowledge that cannot be gained through academic or theoretical training alone (Castles, 2019). In the context of migration, immigrants deeply understand the challenges and opportunities of settling in a new country, navigating systems and services, and building new networks and relationships. They also have a wealth of knowledge about their home country, including the political, social, and economic context that led them to migrate in the first place (Abada et al., 2016).

However, immigrants' voices are often silenced or marginalized in the host society (McBride, 2019). Immigrants may face language barriers, discrimination, and systemic exclusion, making it difficult to participate fully in society. This is

where the concept of participation, as developed by Laura Lundy (2007), is relevant. Lundy identifies four key components of participation: voice, space, audience, and influence.

Voice refers to the opportunity for individuals to express their opinions and ideas freely and without fear of retaliation. In the context of immigration, this means creating spaces for immigrants to share their experiences and perspectives and to have a say in decisions that affect their lives (Moss & Petrie, 2002). It also means ensuring that immigrant voices are heard and valued in policy discussions and that they are not simply tokenized or used to provide a veneer of inclusivity (Schachter & Singer, 2015).

Space refers to the physical and social environments in which participation takes place (Salamonson et al., 2012). This means creating spaces that are accessible, safe, and welcoming to immigrants and that provide opportunities for interaction and dialogue with other members of the host society. It also means recognizing the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity and creating spaces that respect and celebrate these differences (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010).

Audience refers to the individuals and groups who are willing to listen and engage with the opinions and ideas of immigrants (Lundy, 2007). This means creating opportunities for dialogue and exchange between immigrants and members of the host society and ensuring that immigrant perspectives are taken seriously and given equal weight in decision-making processes.

Influence refers to the ability of individuals to have an impact on decisions that affect their lives. This means creating systems and processes that enable immigrants to participate fully in society, including access to education, employment, and civic engagement opportunities. It also means recognizing immigrants' important role in shaping their new home's social, economic, and cultural fabric and ensuring that their contributions are valued and recognized (Salamonson et al., 2012).

The idea of immigrants as experts by experience is an important one that can help to challenge the dominant narratives and assumptions about migration



(Beirens & Allen, 2016). By recognizing immigrants' unique knowledge and perspectives, we can create more inclusive and equitable societies that can better respond to the challenges and opportunities of an increasingly globalized world (Gibson, 2018). This requires creating spaces for participation that are grounded in the principles of voice, space, audience, and influence (Lundy, 2007) and that value and respect the contributions of all members of society (Phillimore, 2019)

#### 4 COMMUNICATION IN MULTICULTURAL SOCIAL CARE SECTOR

Social service workers who share a different background than their clients might need help with client communication. This intersection of cultural differences can lead to a breakdown in communication. Puntervold Bø (2014) states that miscommunication with the client can lead to immigrants not receiving the same level of service as a client who shares the same cultural background as the social service worker. At a symposium between the EU and the United States of America discussing communication and integration, the crucial breakdown points stated were a lack of common language and social and health literacy (Soska et al., 2011). According to the Finnish Act on the promotion of immigrant integration, while communicating with authorities, everyone has the right to use their mother tongue or any other language the client is fluent in, even if that means the authority must acquire an interpreter (Ministry of Employment and the Economy, Finland, 2013). However, public authorities must be informed in good time (Rikosuhripäivystys, 2019). Unfortunately, the definition of "good time" is not given. Considering the high demand for available times at the Finnish Immigration Service and the associated waiting times (Maahanmuuttovirasto, 2022), the waiting time for an appointment may be longer if the client needs an interpreter.

Intercultural competence (Bhawuk & Brislin, 2019) is becoming increasingly important in today's diverse society. Social service professionals, in particular, need to possess intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes to work effectively with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Intercultural knowledge refers to understanding the beliefs, values, and customs of different cultures. Social service professionals must be knowledgeable about cultural differences and similarities to provide appropriate services to their clients. For example, they need to be aware of different communication styles, dietary restrictions, and religious practices (Gudykunst & Kim, 2017).

Intercultural skills (Gudykunst & Kim, 2017) involve the ability to communicate effectively and work collaboratively with people from diverse backgrounds. Social service professionals should possess strong communication skills to effectively

engage with clients and understand their needs. They should also be able to adapt their communication style to meet the needs of different clients. In addition, social service professionals should be able to work effectively in a team environment that includes individuals from different cultural backgrounds (Bhawuk & Brislin, 2019). Intercultural attitudes involve having an open and non-judgmental mindset towards people from diverse backgrounds. Social service professionals should be respectful of different cultures and be willing to learn from them (Bhawuk & Brislin, 2019). They should also be aware of their own cultural biases and work to overcome them.

Another common issue concerning communication is different codes of behaviour in professional interactions. It can lead to misunderstandings and misconceptions. Intercultural communication is the key. It is defined as an exchange of information between two groups of people. Rubtsova (2019) identified three areas of intercultural communication. The first is the use of words and being silent. Verbal communication is essential and significantly influences behaviour. Second is vocal tonality. In certain cultures, the tone of voice changes the meaning significantly. Third, body language and gestures are crucial aspects of many cultures and can often communicate the same as words. According to Mata et al. (2021), the five keys to effective communication are choosing your words wisely, listening to what others say, considering your tone, inflexion, and body language, writing less, saying more and knowing when to stop talking. Furthermore, Mata stated that most breakdowns in communication stem from needing to implement these five keys effectively.

The key concept of multicultural social work refers to a general idea of social work in a culturally diverse environment with clients of different cultural, ethical, and religious backgrounds (Anis & Turtiainen, 2021). Social service workers who work with immigrants work with clients who have different backgrounds and often do not know the same language. In addition, social service workers have clients who may have gone through challenging situations, suffer from post-traumatic experiences, or have experienced racism and discrimination due to their skin colour (Punternold Bø, 2014). Social service workers are responsible for promoting social justice, challenging discrimination and institutional oppression

and respecting diversity (Sobočan et al., 2018). Working with clients who do not share the same background or language is challenging for both sides. Social service workers work practice based and should follow ethical principles and challenge the system and themselves (International Federation of Social Workers, 2022).

## 5 PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVE OF THE THESIS

### 5.1 Purpose of Thesis

Women especially struggle to integrate successfully into Finnish society. However, how can this be possible in a country which stands for equality? Often this happens due to the need for childcare opportunities or information about services and NGOs. However, both Finland and female immigrants benefit from successful integration in Finland. Our guidebook is based on experiences from experts and women who already went through the process and is specially developed for social service workers.

This guidebook is a tool for better communication between social service workers and female immigrants. Often services are based on a male perspective and are not equally applicable (Criado-Perez, 2019). This guidebook aims to support immigrant women, who make up fifty-one per cent of the immigration statistics (UN, 2005). Specifically, based on a female perspective and experiences, this tool is ideal for social service workers to provide essential information. Finland is often criticised for having too many unnecessary rules and regulations (YLE, 2015). This makes the bureaucracy of Finland's immigration process a barrier; however, many NGOs in the Helsinki area specialise in working with and supporting migrants and their families toward successful integration (Pittaway & Van Genderen Stort, 2011). Therefore, our target group often needs to be made aware of those services and NGOs. Our guidebook will also provide a list of NGOs and services that specialise in cultural and gender-sensitive work and are mentioned as essential services by our experts by experience.

There needs to be more than this thesis to change the Finnish system or minimise the bureaucracy immigrants face. However, by creating a tool for better communication and understanding of what female immigrants are going through, we can further support the female immigrants' integration process.

## 5.2 Objective of Thesis

The project-based thesis aimed to create a tool that would provide social service workers with specific information about women immigrating to Helsinki. The objective of the thesis was to create a guidebook that would help social service professionals offer better service to their clients by facilitating a better dialogue. The guidebook was developed with the end-user in mind, and it affords the clients a greater opportunity to receive the help they need.

One of the key features of the guidebook is a section where immigrant women shared quotes about their experiences in immigrating to the Helsinki region. This section was designed to help social service workers better understand the end-users' needs. By having direct input from the target group, social service workers can tailor their services to better fit the unique challenges that immigrant women face.

Punternvold Bø (2014) highlighted that the communication barrier between immigrants and social service workers is a major issue in the social services process. This guidebook helps break down that communication barrier by providing essential information specific to women immigrating to Helsinki. The guidebook equips social service workers with the necessary tools to communicate effectively with their clients and provide quality services.

The thesis's objective aligns with the SMART analysis criteria, as it is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound. The objective was to create a guidebook that would provide social service workers with specific information about women immigrating to Helsinki to improve communication and service quality. The guidebook's success can be measured by the extent to which it helps social service workers provide better service to immigrant women in Helsinki. The guidebook's development was achievable, as it was based on experiences from experts and women who had already gone through the integration process.

The guidebook is highly relevant, as female immigrants make up a significant portion of the immigrant population in Finland, and they face unique challenges

that need to be addressed. The guidebook's development was also time-bound, as it was developed within the scope of the thesis project.

In conclusion, the project-based thesis aimed to create a guidebook to improve communication and service quality for social service workers assisting women immigrating to Helsinki. The guidebook was developed with the end-users' needs in mind and offers essential information specific to their unique challenges. The guidebook's development aligns with the SMART analysis criteria and has the potential to break down communication barriers and provide better services to immigrant women.

## 6 DEVELOPMENT PROCESS AND METHODS OF THE GUIDEBOOK

The development of a guidebook for social service professionals can be a critical tool in improving the quality of care and support provided to clients. The following sections will provide an overview of the process and methods used to develop this guidebook.

### 6.1 Target Group and Stakeholders

Defining the target group and stakeholders is an essential part of project planning and further project development. A target group is the group of people that a policy or campaign hopes to influence, and stakeholders are interested in a company's or organisation's affairs (Collins Dictionary, 2023). The target group defined for this thesis is social service workers who work with immigrant women in Finland. This also includes governmental and non-governmental organisations and their services. Moreover, immigrant women actively volunteer for an NGO and work with immigrant women themselves. A model of immigrant women helping other immigrant women can be found in the project Neighbourhood Mothers Helsinki, aiming to produce community-based activities for girls and women of different ages and backgrounds. Nicehearts' ry mission is to enable girls and women to find their place in society as equal and unique members (Nicehearts ry, 2018).

The guidebook will help with a smoother integration process for female immigrants. Multicultural social work and multisectoral cooperation are essential key aspects in the developing process of the guidebook (Nash, Wong, & Trlin, 2006). Based on research and interviews, the guidebook is intentionally developed for social service workers, not immigrant women. The guidebook includes valuable information from experts by experience, helpful services, and NGOs for easier multisectoral cooperation integration (Integration. fi, 2021).



Stakeholders involved in this project-based thesis are Nicehearts ry and their project Naapuriäidit/Neighbourhood Mothers Helsinki. Nicehearts ry currently employs thirty professionals from different backgrounds and has diverse partners across the country and internationally. Their values are based on equality and a sense of community and joy. Nicehearts' activities create strong networks and opportunities for daily encounters between girls and women while advancing a culture of peace and tolerance in our society. Gender and cultural sensitivity are at the core of all their activities (Nicehearts ry, 2018). Through the Nicehearts ry project, Naapuriäidit, female immigrants were contacted and later interviewed as a resource for the guidebook. Moreover, Nicehearts ry cooperates multisectoral with other governmental and non-governmental organisations, so the possibility of expanding the stakeholders exists.

## 6.2 Workshops and Interviews

The workshops consisted of open discussions about various aspects of the immigration and integration process, with a focus on pre-arrival, actual arrival and integration process, wishes for change in the system or the way immigrants are treated, essential services and NGOs, as well as gender-related issues. The participants were encouraged to share their personal experiences and views on each topic. Two group workshops were held with a total of eight women. The duration of each workshop was about 1.5 hours.

The workshop discussions focused on pre-arrival experiences, such as the challenges faced while preparing for immigration and the expectations that the participants had before arriving in Finland. The participants also shared their experiences of the actual arrival process and the difficulties they faced in adjusting to the new environment. The integration process was also discussed, with participants sharing their views on the support available for immigrants, such as language courses and job training programs.

Furthermore, the participants expressed their wishes for changes in the system or the way immigrants are treated, such as better job opportunities and improved

access to housing. They also shared their experiences with essential services, such as healthcare and education, and discussed the role of NGOs in supporting immigrants. The workshops also explored gender-related issues, including the challenges faced by female immigrants in accessing employment and their experiences of discrimination based on gender.

In addition to the workshops, individual interviews were conducted with six women who preferred one-on-one interviews and six who chose to answer some questions in written form. The aim of these interviews was to provide an opportunity for more in-depth discussions and to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and perspectives of female immigrants.

The interviews focused on the same topics as the workshops, including pre-arrival experiences, actual arrival and integration process, wishes for change, essential services and NGOs, and gender-related issues. The participants were able to share their experiences in greater detail and provide more nuanced perspectives on each topic.

### 6.3 Content of Guidebook

The guidebook will be divided into two parts; The first part will be about communication and codes of behaviour based on the experience of immigrants who have settled in Finland and went through the process. It should help social service workers to understand their clients and what they go through better. The second part will list several services considered essential by the experts by experience. The main reason for migrating to Finland is the grounds of family ties. (European Migration Network & Finnish Immigration Service, 2020) This also means minors are migrating to Finland and might require specific services. Services listed in the guidebook will be divided into services for women and services for children. A source for needed and valuable services will be the experts by experience. Moreover, the lack of childcare opportunities and services for children was addressed as a significant issue during interviews and research,

which led to the section on services for children, even though the focus is on women immigrants.

Although a general list of social services exists (City of Helsinki, 2022), this guidebook only includes the essential services used by female immigrants in Helsinki. Besides, NGOs which offer activities for female immigrants are included as well since many women with migration background desire to work with local service providers in government and non-government organisations. In this way, women experienced a meaningful contribution to Finnish society. Furthermore, through community-based activities, immigrant women who successfully integrated into Finnish society can implement their previous expertise and knowledge to assist their communities (Pittaway & Van Genderen Stort, 2011).

#### 6.4 Development Process of the Guidebook

A meeting in May of 2022 was held with Anna Lenkewitz, the Helsinki area coordinator of Nicehearts ry. We shared our idea of doing a project-based thesis to develop a guidebook to help social service workers in Helsinki understand what migrant women in the integration process would need and want from their services. Anna was excited and had ideas of how this could help Nicehearts ry and their relationship with social service providers and their customers' integration into Finnish society. Nicehearts ry offered to help us facilitate group discussion workshops with their customers in Helsinki who are part of their Neighbourhood Mothers project. This was done both in person and online group meetings. We were given access to a customer base of fifty-four women. We asked our working life partners for their cooperation and interaction on planning and to share their thoughts regarding what best would help their client base in our information guidebook.

We first contacted the women of Neighbourhood Mothers through the group's online WhatsApp platform. We sent fliers inviting participants to join the discussion workshops (see Appendix 2). To create a more open dialogue, we chose to have three workshops with fewer women than just one workshop with a

large group of attendees. The second round of contact involved a shift in approach to an interview questionnaire method of information gathering. We sent out invitations (see Appendix 3) asking volunteers to answer questions regarding their integration process in Helsinki (see Appendix 4). In these two stages of interviews, we gathered information from 25 per cent of the client base to which we were given access. We used the recordings from the workshops, field notes and the returned interviewee emails to gather the information and quotes found in our guidebook. At the conclusion of our thesis, all of the gathered data from our interviewees will be destroyed.

## 6.5 Research and Interviews

The information for this guidebook and the theoretical background were derived from many sources. First, valuable data for the guidebook was received through interviews and conversations with women who have immigrated to Helsinki and have utilised the social services system provided to all immigrants in Helsinki. We valued their input as they are experts by experience. In the conversations facilitated both in person and online, we engaged these women in an open dialogue about being foreign in Finland and their experience with the social service system in Helsinki. A topic discussed with all interviewees was what worked and what could have been improved to help with their experience. Data collection was done by researching what government agencies, third-party organisations and NGOs are doing in the Helsinki region and compiling available services available to immigrant women. We also listened to podcasts and interacted with social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter.

For our thesis's theoretical background, we searched journals, books, e-books, professional publications, government publications (documents, records, laws, and statistics), Theses (doctoral, master and bachelor) and manuscripts. Through this research, we were able to find the information needed to give us an understanding of the theoretical background of our thesis topic, which allowed us to create something unique to the social services field in Finland. All this research

combined to provide information to complete the guidebook. Stoecker (2005) referred to this process as The Project-Based Research Cycle, which is to evaluate, diagnose, prescribe, and implement.

## 6.5 Risks

In preparing for this project-based thesis, there was a prominent concern about potential risks for all involved parties. Therefore, we broke the risks into physical, psychological, social/economic, and legal categories to help best prepare for potential issues. With these categories in mind, we implemented a risk assessment using five risk analysis principles (Aven, 2016). The five principles used were identifying risks, assessing the risks, controlling the risks, recording the findings and reviewing the risk controls. See table 1 below for a detailed risk analysis of our thesis project.

**Table 1.** Project Risk Analysis.

Interviewee Risks	Identifying Risks	Assessing Risks	Controlling Risks	Control Review
Physical Risks	Many have fled violence in their home country and fear being discovered in the new country.	A perceived or actual risk of physical violence in being discovered by people from their old life.	We implemented the use of anonymity in all conversations with interview subjects.	Verified that all recordings and correspondence were deleted after the project was complete.
Psychological Risks	The potential for the interviewee to be triggered by past traumas in the sharing of dialogue related to their experiences in the Finnish social work system.	We asked what the likelihood of an interview subject being triggered was, and we assessed it was very likely.	In our conversations and interviews, we started the dialogue with an agreement that if they felt unsafe or triggered, they could step away until they felt safe.	After the interviews, we reviewed the dialogue and looked for places where the interviewee might have felt triggered and accessed the implementation of our interviews.
Social/Economic Risks	That talking to us could somehow affect their standing with the social service system that would affect them adversely.	There is a real fear among some immigrants in Finland that talking badly about their experiences could affect their financial situation here. For many in their home country, speaking negatively about government agencies could	We explained that we were not part of the Finnish government or from the city of Helsinki, that their answers were anonymous, and that we would destroy all records of our conversations after the	Verified that all recordings and correspondence were deleted after the project was complete.

		have negative consequences.	guidebook was complete.	
<b>Legal Risks</b>	We identified the potential for violating the interviewees' fundamental rights regarding data collection guaranteed by law.	The potential for mishandling the interviewees' information was real and an important issue to consider in how we gathered information.	We clearly stated how we would use their words and thoughts in our guidebook and that it would be anonymous. Furthermore, all information would be deleted after the guidebook was created.	Verified that all recordings and correspondence were deleted after the project was complete. In addition, we verified that their names were never used in any of our writings.

At the heart of our thesis is the Finnish Constitution 1999/731, Sections 6–23 (Ministry of Justice, Finland, 1999), which guarantees rights to Finnish citizens. These rights include the right to life, personal liberty and integrity, freedom of movement, freedom of religion and conscience, freedom of expression, protection of property and the right to privacy. Keeping this in mind during our interviews kept us on track to avoid the risks mentioned above in Table 1. In addition, we followed the ethical principles of research from the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK (2019). The research aims not to cause significant risks and harm to the participants of our interviews, Nicehearts ry, or Diaconia University of Applied Sciences. In addition, the consent of participation by all participants in one of the following ways, orally, in writing, electronically or by other means, is documented. This is also done per the (TENK) guidelines. Regarding our own needs, we were aware that in engaging with the interviewees, there was a potential for secondary trauma (Diaconescu, 2015). Communicating with survivors of traumatic experiences elicits an emotional response, whether the interviewer is aware of it. (Killian, 2008). In preparation for potential secondary trauma, we implemented a self-care program to ensure that we were not taking emotional things away from the research that was not ours to carry (Salloum et al., 2015). Examples of self-care used were yoga, long walks and swimming. Another essential part of this was talking through the interviews with each other to allow us to process the heavy emotions at the moment and then let them go (Rager, 2005).

## 7 ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES

The research on immigration, especially regarding women, must be approached with care. There is a social responsibility of researchers to engage interviewees while incorporating moral responsibility. Researchers must critically reflect on the socio-ethical aspect of their work (Schuurbiens, 2010). There has been a central aspect of research that the researcher must always maintain neutrality. Schuurbiens (2010) contends that this needs to be revised in research when engaging with those from vulnerable contexts. In the area of female immigration, there is often the potential that the interviewee has been exposed to some form of trauma in the originating country, during the transition and in the host country. It is crucial to explore and report the events without triggering or traumatising the women. That is why there are better approaches than neutrality in this type of research (Brzuzy & Segal, 1997; Campbell et al., 2009; Hlavka et al., 2007; Klempner, 2000). The best ethical approach in this type of research is to engage emphatically and communicate before the interview the ground rules and the interviewee's options if they feel triggered or unsafe at any time.

## 8 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The main point of our project-based thesis was to give social service workers an understanding of what these migrant women would like from them in the integration process, and to that end, we chose the quotes found in our guidebook. Through our interviews with the women of Neighbourhood Mothers, we found common threads of satisfaction and dissatisfaction in the stories shared by these migrant women. The quotes we shared in our guidebook are just the tip of the iceberg of the frustration these women have endured navigating the integration process in Helsinki regarding how those in the place of authority to help them have not adequately met their expectations or needs. The most common frustration was in the area of the needs of their children not being addressed or even acknowledged. One of our interviewees stated that they had fled their home country due to violence and that her son had experienced significant trauma. However, the trauma her son had experienced in Finland in the integration process was far more significant. Another of the interviewees stated that the typical answer from Finnish authorities in dealing with the presented issues of their child was, "he will be fine, kids are resilient". The other common area discussed with these women was the frustration of tracking down all the information themselves instead of getting it early on from the social service providers. Often these women found out much later about services that would have been available to them for free, but they were unaware of, such as free Finnish language courses. Through our discussions, the common area of satisfaction in the integration process in Helsinki was the rights they have as women in Finland. Some interviewees had come from countries with fewer female rights, and it was refreshing to be seen as equal and valued as a woman in Finnish society.

We have shown a need for better communication and cultural understanding between immigrant women and social work providers in Helsinki, Finland and have provided a tool to aid in this communication and understanding between these two groups. In addition, we have given immigrant women a voice in our guidebook and for social work providers a tool to help them function better in their



roles as social service workers. This can be seen in our guidebook, where we present information on intercultural communication and provide information on positive communication through body language.

The information in this thesis and provided in the guidebook was gathered from interviews, journals, books, e-books, professional publications, government publications (documents, records, laws, and statistics), Theses (doctoral, master and bachelor), and manuscripts. Nevertheless, we assert that much more work is needed in the communication and understanding between immigrant women and social service workers in Helsinki, Finland. Therefore, we recommend that the city of Helsinki and the Finnish government invest time and resources in developing the systems of engagement within the immigration system and ensure greater involvement of the immigrant voice in the decision-making process.

Our guidebook has provided a much-needed tool to help ensure better quality in the social work interaction with those women integrating into Helsinki. In addition, this tool gives social service workers information on how best to assist their clients in these unique situations. We hope our guidebook will be a tool that sparks a deeper understanding of the needs of immigrating women to Helsinki and helps shrink the divide that has existed to this point.

In regard to the Diaconia University of Applied Sciences' competency requirements our thesis process and outcomes have been aligned with all the requirements for Bachelor of Social Services graduates (Diaconia University of Applied Sciences, 2023). The first competency requirement is ethical competence, and our project created a tool for social service workers to better communicate with immigrant women and provide quality service. In developing this tool, we have ensured that it is in accordance with legislation on human rights and basic rights, and we promote equality and non-discrimination. We also advocate for socially vulnerable individuals and groups and work in an ethically justified manner in situations involving value conflicts.

The second competency requirement is customer work competence, and our project involved building professional relationships with customers and assessing

their service needs. We also supported individual growth and development and planned, implemented, and evaluated customers' service processes in a participatory manner. We identified protective and risk factors in welfare and applied preventive and early support approaches in our work. We guided customers, customer groups, and communities in a goal-oriented, empowering, and participatory manner. We worked with cultural sensitivity, supported diversity, and promoted intercultural dialogue. Additionally, we evaluated customer service and documented it in a customer-oriented manner.

The third competency requirement is social service system competence, and our project analyzed local and global challenges related to welfare and sustainable development and their impacts on the health and social care system. We demonstrated knowledge of the legal basis of the social sector and applied key legislative provisions. We also demonstrated a command of service production and provision methods in health and social care and education and of their management and oversight. We matched needs and services and drove change. We played an active role as experts in social services and represented and justified the customer's interests in multidisciplinary and multisectoral collaborations.

The fourth competency requirement is critical and participatory societal competence, and our project used critical reflection in our professional practice. We analyzed national and global structures and processes that contributed to inequality, deprivation, or welfare and worked to prevent marginalization. We represented the interests of vulnerable and voiceless people and contributed knowledge about unacceptable life situations to inform policymakers and responsible agencies. We demonstrated knowledge of the public decision-making system and acted according to its operating principles. We also promoted citizen participation and opportunities and carried out advocacy work with various actors.

The fifth competency requirement is research, development, and innovation competence, and our project innovatively solved problems and participated in networks in the development of the social sector. We developed customer service

methods, working practices, and service processes with a partnership approach. We planned, implemented, and evaluated development projects. We applied research and development methods in the development of practices and produced and appraised information for welfare promotion purposes. We also adhered to the ethical principles and guidelines of research and development. Additionally, we demonstrated an entrepreneurial mindset, identifying opportunities for improvement and innovation in our work and seeking ways to implement these ideas.

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## APPENDIX 1. Guidebook example

What immigrants would like from social service workers for successful integration.

A tool for better communication



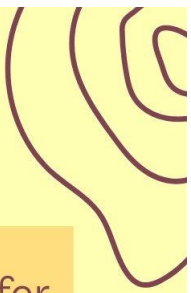
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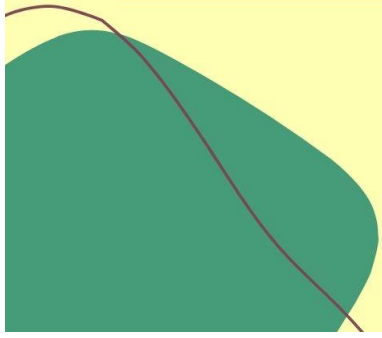
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This Guidebook was created as a tool for better communication between Social Service Workers and female Immigrants in cooperation with Nicehearts ry.

We want to thank every woman who participated in workshops, discussions, and interviews. With your input and ideas, we were able to create this Guidebook and therefore support newcomers' integration process in Finland.



## INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

When communicating with clients who do not share the same background as the professional many issues and misunderstandings may occur (Punternold Bø, 2014).

Even if it seems your opponent is fluent in the common language, be aware that participants may use the same verbal language, not yet the same behaviour codes. It shows that participants will express themselves in the communication style of their first language. In a new language, it takes much longer to master rules of cultural values and personality than to master vocabulary and pronunciation. When your opponent masters verbal communication but communicates in a style that is unvalued in my culture, we make judgments more often (FitzGerald, pp. 79-85, 2002).

Positive body language and a better understanding of intercultural communication can help to strengthen relationships, trust, and feeling respected and heard. Positive and negative examples of body language follow.

## Communication through body language: Positive Examples



### Your behavior

- Open hands, palms facing up
- Stand straight / Sit straight
- Eye contact
- Nodding or tilting head
- Natural Smile

### What you communicate

Indicator to be open and honest, approachable and welcoming

Showing confidence and self-belief, Capable in your role

Confidence, Trust, and Promotion to open conversation. Note! Break eye contact at intervals to show respect

Showing focus and active listening.

Friendliness, Openness, Being approachable and likable

## Communication through body language: Negative Examples



### Your behavior

- Arms crossed
- Finger or foot-tapping
- Legs crossed
- Avoiding Eye Contact
- Frowning

### What you communicate

Defensive posture, closed off, unwilling to discuss

Impatience, Boredom, Anxiety, no Time, Nervous, Lack of confidence

Similar to crossed arms, Discomfort, Disrespect

No positive gesture, Lack of confidence, Having something to hide

Lost in thought, anger, or sadness Note! Sometimes happens without the realization

# Experts by Experience

Suggestions, Statements, and Quotes from Women in Helsinki



***"I am a person, not only a number."***

When talking to a client or peer, remind yourself every person is different and never just a number.

***"I felt lost with the trauma of my child. They had to go through it over and over."***

Children seem to adapt easier and are easily forgotten. They need services and support too.

***"They expected me to know everything and have everything prepared."***

Even simple things like opening a bank account or having a phone contract turn into a big obstacle for foreigners. Offer support and show understanding.

***"I don't want to be a burden for anyone, I want to be active in the community and give something."***

Many people feel better when they can give something positive and be an active part of a community. Offer information about Volunteering or NGOs.



***"I feel like I have to swallow my feelings to be accepted in society."***

Moving to a foreign country often causes stress and unbalanced our mental health. Support women to find peer support for mental health.

***"I am a stay-at-home mother and feel isolated."***

In Helsinki, many services exist for parents and babies/children. Provide information about those services. (Helsinki City Social Services List)

***"I didn't know about an integration plan and paid hundreds of euros for language classes, yet there were free classes I just didn't know about."***

Through TE Office integration plans can be made and are free of charge.

***"I suffered from loneliness and mental health problems."***

Provide information about counseling services, crisis phones, and peer support groups.

# Services for immigrant Women

An essential selection from experts by experience

## Services for Women:

**Nicehearts ry:** [www.nicehearts.com](http://www.nicehearts.com)

- Neighbourhood Mothers (Naapuriäidit): Community-based activities for immigrant women

**Mieli ry Mental Health Finland:** [www.mieli.fi](http://www.mieli.fi)

- Counseling, Peer support, Crisis phone

**African care:** [www.africancare.fi](http://www.africancare.fi)

- Peer support, Support with authorities, Workshops, Training

**INY ry (Iraqi Women's Association):** [www.iny.fi](http://www.iny.fi)

- Support for study and working life
- Support for women who faced domestic violence

**Monika Naiset:** [www.monikanaiset.fi](http://www.monikanaiset.fi)

- Multicultural Women's Association, Women's Rights

**Amal ry:** [www.amalry.fi](http://www.amalry.fi)

- support and promote girls' and women's well-being according to Islamic values

## Services for Families :

**Familia ry:** [www.familiary.com](http://www.familiary.com)

- For intercultural Families: Peer support, language support, activities

**Moniperhet:** [www.moniperhet.fi](http://www.moniperhet.fi)

- Supports the well-being and equality of multicultural families

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Interviewee #2, anonymous interview, November 28th, 2022

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In cooperation with Nicehearts ry and Naapuriäiti

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## APPENDIX 2. Workshop Invitation Example

# FOREIGN IN FINLAND?

*GREAT - We need your opinion!*

## WHO?

Anni and Eric, 2 Diak  
Students working on  
their Thesis.

 045 321 1123 (Anni)  
044 202 0472 (Eric)



## WHAT?

We organize several group discussions and want to hear about **your experience** with Finnish authorities. Based on your information we will create a guidebook for social (service) workers to help them guide newcomers through the Finnish jungle of bureaucracy and integration.

**NOTE!** You are very welcome to bring friends and/or your partner.

For more information feel free to contact Anni or Eric!

## When and where?

**24th of August, 9.30 a.m.**  
Helsinki Central Library Oodi,  
Group Room 3



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## APPENDIX 3. Interviewee Invitation Example

# INTERVIEWEES NEEDED!

*Because your experience matters!*

## WHO?

Anni and Eric, 2 Diak Students working on their Thesis.

 045 321 1123 (Anni)  
044 202 0472 (Eric)



## WHAT?

We want to interview you for our project-based thesis. The topic is about **women's integration process in Finland** and what it needs from professionals to make the process smoother.

Your experience and opinion matter! Together we could make it easier for newcomers.

For more information feel free to contact Anni or Eric!

## When and where?

We'll agree together on a date+time and it will be online.



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## APPENDIX 4. Interviewee Questionnaire Example

### Interview "Foreign in Finland"

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The interview is anonymous and confidential. The outcome will be used as a guidebook for Social Service professionals. There is no need to answer all questions, please only answer if you feel good.

We are also happy to receive quotes for our guidebook! In a section of the guidebook, we want to give experts by experience the space for statements and quotes. (e.g., "I am a person, not only a number." Or "Everything was too overwhelming; I didn't know what to do next. "etc.)

- Preparations:
  - How did you prepare yourself for Finland?
  - Did you already know about Finland, the culture, and the system here?
  - Did you already know what you will do in Finland? (Family reunion, study, work, etc.)
- Arrival / Actual integration process:
  - How would you describe your integration process?
  - Was there any help from Finnish authorities or social service professionals?
  - What was essential for your integration in Finland?
- Wish for Change:
  - What would have been needed for better integration?
  - Was there anything Social Service Professionals could have done better? (Kela, TE-Office, NGOs, others)
  - Were there cultural differences/behaviour differences which led to misunderstandings?
- Gender-related issues:
  - Did you face any discrimination or different services due to your gender?
  - Do you think there were any gender-related issues?
  - If you faced gender-related issues, do you want to give an example? How could Social Service Professionals support women more?