



*is a not-for-profit,  
non-governmental  
organization that is  
dedicated to fostering  
the processes of universal  
education among all  
people, with the goal of  
encouraging women and  
children to contribute  
their talents to the peace,  
security and well-being of  
humanity*

**O**ngoing Opportunity for Growth

**M**anpower Development

**A**dvancing Education

**N**eeds-based Improvements

**B**uilding Capacity

**A**dvocate Awareness through Individual Community Engagement

**H**uman Rights Sustainability

**A**ccess to Services and Learning Programs

**I**nnovative Training Strategies

**Field Research Report on Iceland  
for Citizen of the World  
Erasmus+ Funded Project**

### **Executive Board Members**

*Guðbjörg Ottósdóttir, Ph.D*

*Kristín Ólafsdóttir, M.Ed*

*Hoda Thabet, Ph.D*

E-Mail: *omahaingo@gmail.com*

*<https://www.omahai.org>*

*<https://www.facebook.com/www.omahai.org>*

*<https://twitter.com/OMAHAINGO>*

*<https://www.linkedin.com/in/omahai>*

# Field Research Report on Iceland for Citizen of the World Erasmus+ Funded Project







<b>Funding Acknowledgment: Erasmus+</b>	1
<b>State of the Art Report – Iceland</b>	2
<b>O.M.A.H.A.I</b>	3
<b>Introduction</b>	4
<b>Methodology</b>	7
The professional group	7
The beneficiary group	8
<b>The research results</b>	9
The marginalized population: the beneficiary group	9
<i>Prior to Arriving to Iceland</i>	9
<i>After Arriving to Iceland</i>	11
The professional group	16
<b>Recommendations and Conclusion</b>	21



## **Funding Acknowledgment: Erasmus+**

Citizen of the World (COTW) is a 24-months long project that started in September 2020. Citizen of the World is co-funded by the Erasmus+ program of the European Union under the Key Action 2: Strategic partnerships in the field of Adult Education. This is the project's website: <https://www.cotw-erasmus.com>

## State of the Art Report – Iceland

Citizen of the World is an Erasmus+ funded project which O.M.A.H.A.I is participating in, as the only organization representing Iceland, alongside Italy, Sweden, and the Czech Republic.

The project is based primarily on conducting field research in the partner countries (Iceland, Italy, Sweden, and the Czech Republic) through 2 sets of questionnaires that were designed; one for the professionals who work with the marginalized migrants in the partner countries, and the other is for the marginalized migrants themselves. The results of the field study research will form the basis for designing the Handbook for professionals working to empower marginalized migrants. The questionnaire for professionals is to gather ample evidence of the professionals' genuine needs, (in Iceland, Italy, Sweden, and the Czech Republic ). It will serve as the core of the Handbook for professionals working to empower marginalized migrants, in Iceland as well in other European countries.

This is a draft report from the field study that was conducted in Iceland from October 2020 to January 2021. It contains a deep insight into the integration obstacles migrants confront in their everyday life in Iceland as well as challenges professionals experience in their work with marginalized migrants.

The final State of the Art Report from Sweden, Italy, Iceland, and the Czech Republic will be published on the project's website and e-learning platform, as a free tool for all the professionals who work with marginalized migrants. The report will be easily transferable for further initiatives and/or follow-up projects targeting marginalized migrants.

The results of the field study research will form the basis of an *INTERNATIONAL HANDBOOK FOR PROFESSIONALS WORKING TO EMPOWER MARGINALIZED MIGRANTS (IHP)*. The IHP will be a useful instrument for professionals all over Europe in their work with marginalized migrants.

## O.M.A.H.A.I

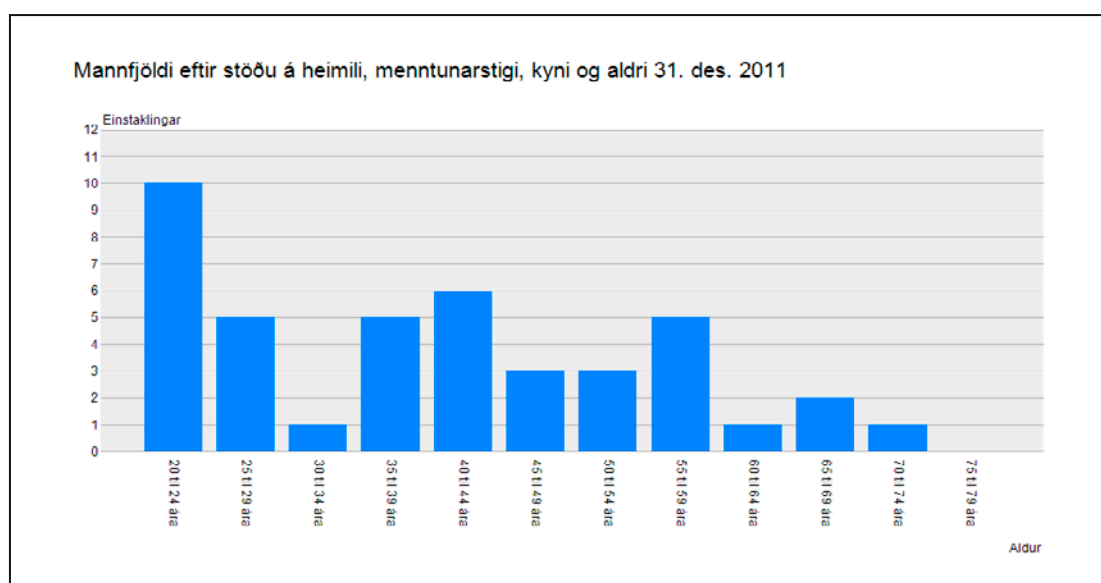
O.M.A.H.A.I is a specialized and a high-performing organization in Iceland in the field of immigrants' education and integration. It is well known for designing, developing and implementing sustainable programs of growth that address the need of grassroots population from the marginalized groups such as women, children and refugees. O.M.A.H.A.I Executive Board of Directors work has three main components:

- conducting field research,
- designing programs of growth that address the results of the field research and,
- launching educational programs for marginalized groups in their own languages.

By designing and launching sustainable programs of growth O.M.A.H.A.I addresses the individual need to progress intellectually, materialistically, physically and spiritually. Furthermore, the sustainable programs of growth aim to release the capacities of individuals and collective communities towards contributing to the emergence of building a united world. The education of Women and Children stands in the very heart and soul of this firm foundation. Through its education programs, O.M.A.H.A.I is dedicated to empowering the marginalized, and to enlist the constructive potential of individuals who have traditionally been excluded.

## Introduction

Integration program in Iceland appears to be offered in isolation from information on background education and in isolation to the literacy levels of immigrants. The curriculum for teaching Icelandic for immigrants greatly emphasizes Icelandic skills, language, and culture. However, there is a lack of long-term educational infrastructures and policies to create sustainable programs of growth for immigrants for the coming decades. To design holistic and durable integration programs, there is a need to provide a road-map of those factors which have impacts on the immigrants' opportunities in the labor market, recreation activities and educational activities, to determine their situation with relation to work, leisure activities, social and financial aspects. There is a need for designing and launching sustainable innovative need-based building capacity advanced educational programs in Iceland. Moreover, there is a need for developing researched-based integration programs for immigrants in Iceland, in which their background education and literacy levels are taken into consideration and their growth is addressed through a holistic approach. There are no studies or statistics available on the background education that those who are living in Iceland as immigrants, asylum seekers or refugees have had obtained before they come to Iceland. There are no studies or statistics available on the number of illiterate individuals who are arriving in Iceland as immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. The only information that is available on the Statistics of Iceland regarding the number of people who do not have formal education in Iceland goes back to 2011 and it does not explain the background ethnicity or the nationality of this population. The 2011 figures show that there are 37 individuals living in Iceland between the ages 20 to 79 without having any formal education. This information has not been updated yet. No information on education is available on the Statistics Iceland<sup>1</sup> for the Arabic speaking and Afghan nationals to this date.

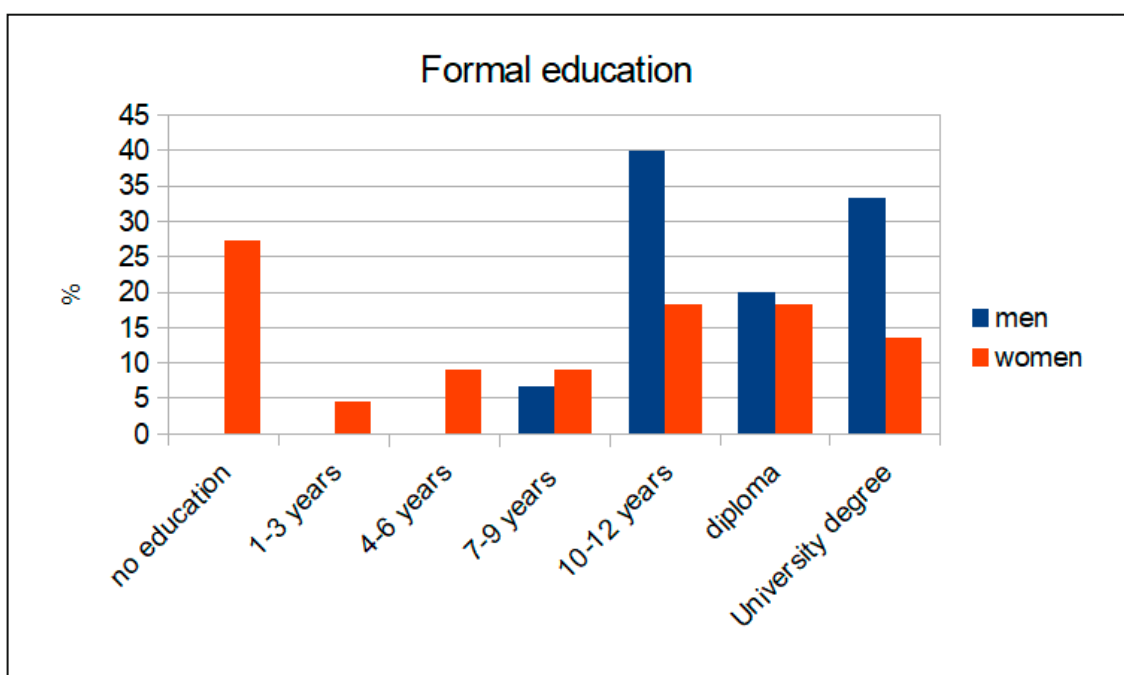


<sup>1</sup> <https://hagstofa.is>

The only study that is available on the education background of the Arabic speaking and Afghan nationals is a research that O.M.A.H.A.I conducted in 2019 after receiving a grant from the Human Rights Office in Reykjavík municipality for this purpose<sup>1</sup>. The survey was designed to be completed by the Arabic speaking and Afghan nationals, aged 18+ years, to capture information relating to areas such as Level of education, Occupation, Recreational activities, Mother-tongue and Icelandic language programs.

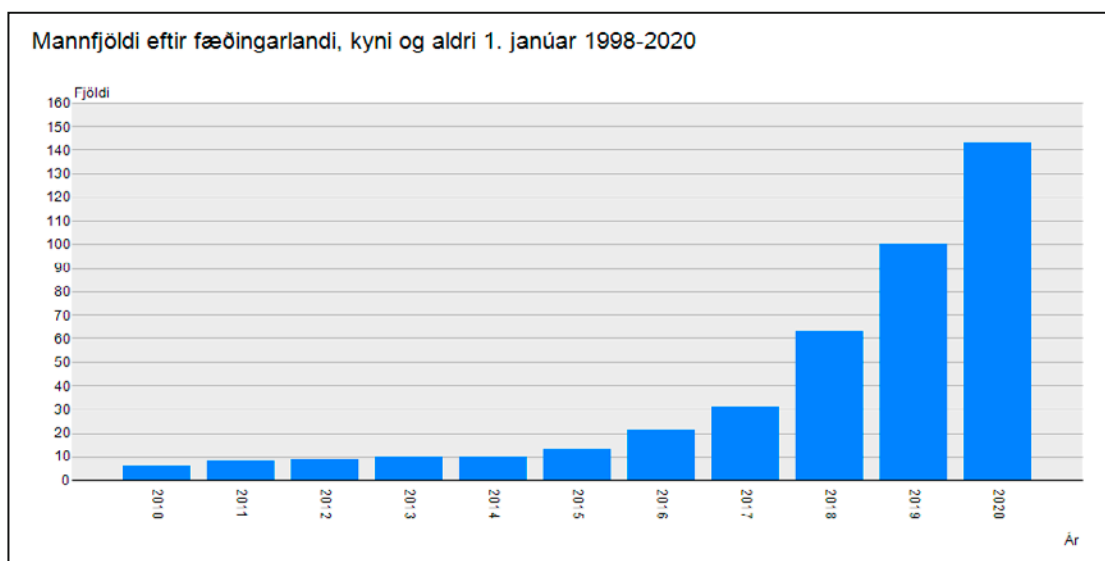
Participants were recruited by using a purposive sampling method; a snowball sampling strategy, a non-random sampling technique. There were 40 participants who answered the questionnaire, 16 men and 24 women. Majority of the participants came to Iceland in 2016 or later.

The aim of this study was to understand the ongoing integration challenges that the Arabic speaking and Afghan nationals are facing in Iceland, through analyzing their educational backgrounds, with a particular emphasis on the educational backgrounds of the Arab and Afghan women, for the purpose of proposing solutions.

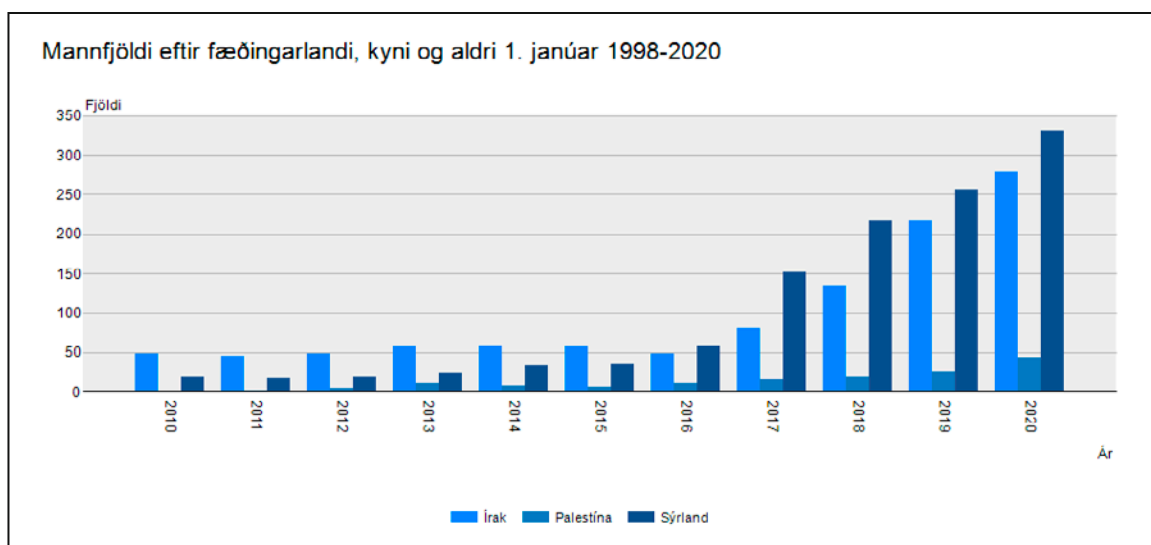


<sup>1</sup> <https://www.omahai.org/uploads/2/2/3/0/22300012/omahai-report-edited.pdf>

The Statistics of Iceland shows that Iceland received 358 Afghan nationals between 2016 to 2020.



As for the Arab nationals, the Statistics of Iceland shows that Iceland received between 2016 to 2020, 1016 Syrian nationals , 114 Palestinian nationals and 759 Iraqi nationals.



Due to language and cultural barriers, the integration programs in Iceland face challenges on helping the Arabic speaking and Afghan nationals to integrate. The reason that this group was chosen to represent the beneficiary population for this study is because the voice of this group is usually not heard in Iceland.

## Methodology

The research engaged a qualitative (survey questionnaire) method. Two sets of questionnaires were designed, one was for the beneficiary group and the other was for the professionals who are working with the beneficiary groups. Ten participants from the beneficiary groups and ten participants from the professional groups were recruited, by using a purposive sampling method; a snowball sampling strategy, a non-random sampling technique.

Various methods have been followed to conduct the interviews. A focus group has been chosen from the beneficiary group. With the beneficiary group, first the project and the propose of the questionnaire was explained to each one of them individually in a face to face meeting. Then, online meetings were organized for smaller groups. A small number of beneficiaries were invited each time to join as a group in one of the online meetings.

The aim of these group online meetings were to explain the questions in the questionnaire to the beneficiaries. Then the interviews were conducted individually with each beneficiary participant. The interview method varied between meeting face to face or meeting virtually on zoom. The interviews were held in the beneficiaries' mother-tongues: Arabic and Dari. Questions were translated directly when interviews were held and the beneficiaries responses were registered directly in English by the researcher.

## The professional group

With the professionals, also various methods have been followed to conduct the interviews. First at the beginning of the project, a public call has been posted on various FB groups for professionals that working with the beneficiaries and also on O.M.A.H.A.I FB page. One face to face meeting was held with a group of professionals to introduce the project and the questionnaire. Additionally, the project and the questionnaire have been introduced to many individual professionals through various channels, phone-call, email, FB private messenger, and face to face meeting. After forming a focus group from the professionals who agreed to participate, the professionals worked individually on answering the questionnaire. Afterwards, all participant professionals sent in their responses electronically.

In order to develop a holistic view on the integration programs that are offered in Iceland the study tried to reflect the voices of professionals from various fields. The focus group was formed by inviting the professionals who are working closely with the beneficiary groups. The job-title of professionals who participated varies from one participant to another. Because the group of professionals who are working in this field forms a small community in Iceland, it is not possible to reveal some specific information that can identify the identity of the participants. However, from a general perspective, Social workers, Project Managers, Specialists, and Educators are among those who answered the call and participated with their voice in this study.

## **The beneficiary group**

As for the beneficiary group, Arabic speaking and Afghan nationals were invited to participate in this study because the voices of this group are usually not heard in Iceland due to language barriers. The questionnaire for the beneficiary group included 30 questions. Interviews were conducted directly in their own mother-tongue which helped them to convey freely their thoughts when answering the questionnaire. A key element for the success of our data collection was having each participant connect through open communication channels with the researcher who could provide them with culturally and linguistically relevant information. Each participant from the beneficiary group was interviewed alone. The universe of the study included both Arabic speaking and Afghan nationals. Males and females, literate and illiterate were invited to participate in order to develop a holistic view about the beneficiary group.

The beneficiary group was formed from ten participants from the Arabic speaking and Afghan nationals. It included six women of which five are non-literate and one semi-literate. Also the beneficiary group included four men, of which three are literate and one non-literate. All women are married. The number of children for each woman is between two to six, and their children's age is between three to forty six. All men are married. The number of children for each man is between two to seven and their children's age is between one to nineteen. Only one individual from each family was invited to answer the questionnaire. Therefore, the beneficiary group in this study represent ten different families. In order to reflect a holistic view of the beneficiaries' needs and skills, the questionnaire for the beneficiary group was divided into two sections: one was related to their lives prior to arriving to Iceland and the other was related to their lives after arriving to Iceland.

## The research results

### The marginalized population: the beneficiary group

#### *Prior to Arriving to Iceland*

For the question *“How did you manage to fill-in official documents and paying the bills of water and electricity?”* all females, non-literate or semi-literate, responded that they did have the responsibility of paying bills in their home-countries as this was the responsibility of the men in the family. They explained it is not proper for women to go to public places to pay bills. On the other hand, all men, including the non-literate, responded that they were capable of paying the bills. For the non-literate participant he explained that he received help, from the literates, when he was attending to his duty to pay the bills in his home-country.

For the question *“What was your occupation status?”*, five women answered that they were house wives, taking care of husband and family. Only one woman, in addition to her duties at home, was also working in a farm. The woman who was working in a farm is an illiterate female. All men answered that they were employed/working in their home country for example as a mechanic in a car-garage, as a clerk in a private firm, as a truck driver or as a worker at a shop.

For the question *“What are your capabilities, capacities and skills?”*, five women answered that they: did not go to school and they do not read and write in any language. One woman was semi-literate. She studied until grade 4 in her country of origin. She can read and write basic words in her mother-tongue. As for the men, their capacities ranged between being a very good driver, knowing how to fix cars to making sculptures. Only one man said that he does not have any specific skill.

For the question *“Which activities/hobbies did you have?”*, all women and men answered that they did not have any activities.

For the question *“What dream/wish did you have for yourself to fulfil/achieve?”*, all men had personal dreams which they wished to fulfil. Three men wished to continue their studies and have their own business. One man wished to own his personal car. On the other hand, all women did not have any personal dreams or wishes for themselves after getting married. They all were child-brides who were married at a very young age. As a child they wished if they could go to school. After marriage, all their wishes circled around their children and the welfare of their families. They did not present any identity beyond being a mother or a wife. These are some of their dreams:

When I was a child I wanted to go to school	My dream was for my children to have a good life	When I was a child I wanted to learn how to bike
I only wanted to be a good wife and a good mother	I like cooking	I always dreamed to sell my food and get some money for myself

For the question “*Were your education and occupation suitable to your capacities, wishes and skills?*”, five of the women did not go to school and only one went up to grade four in school. None of them were offered any opportunity to decide for herself. They said that:

I was never able to take my own decision but that is ok, because we should follow the decision of the men in the family	I don't have any education. Girls are not allowed to make decisions
When I got married to my husband, no one asked me about my opinion. After I became a married woman, I had to follow him and his family in all their decisions	I did not study. I never had an opinion
I was never allowed to have an opinion	I did not make any decisions

Similarly to the women, all men also answered that they were not given any opportunity to make their own decisions. For them, it was their life circumstances that shaped their path. Some of their answers:

I did not get the needed marks to enter a university. The only decision that I made was to leave my home country and save myself and my family from dying in the war	I did not have a higher education. I learned by doing. I am a hard working person	When you are poor, you can not make your own decisions
I did not complete my school education. I left school to work because my family was poor and we were many brothers and sisters	I did not have a chance to have a different life or to finish my school. When I got married I had to provide for my family	I did not go to school. People in my country don't know how to make their own decisions. We don't have a chance to do so

## After Arriving to Iceland

For the question *“Do your children have any impact on your decision regarding educational programs you enrol in?”*, five women had young children that required them to take care of. They explained that they can’t participate in any activity, for example language courses, when the children return home from school. Language courses that are offered in the evenings are the most difficult ones for them to attend. One of them said:

“I don’t have much time to study. I have to clean the house, prepare food, take care of the children. When they are home, I can’t go out. Also, I can’t study because I just have to be around. I can’t study difficult topics because my brain just does not understand”.

As for the men, two of them said that the responsibility of taking care of their children falls on their wife therefore, it did not have any impact on their educational programs. On the other hand, two men responded that they can’t attend courses when their children return home because it is their responsibility to take the children to their sport or leisure activities.

For the question *“Did you receive any formal education (school/ university) in the country you live in now?”*, all women and men participants, did not receive any formal schooling education in Iceland. The only education they were offered was Icelandic language courses.

For the question *“What is your occupation status?”*, all women and men participants are not working. They all are living on the social salary.

For the question *“Which activities/hobbies do you have?”*, none of the women participate in any activities. Two men said that they do not participate in any activities. Two men said that the only activity they are doing is to go to swimming pools.

For the question *“Are you currently or have you been participating in a language course?”*, majority of the women attended Icelandic language courses. Only one woman could not attend any course because there were no morning courses for her to attend. Those women who attended the language courses said:

The course was very difficult for them because they could not understand what was said

The teacher was writing on the board, and they could not write

All men attended Icelandic language courses. All of them said that because they don’t know English or Icelandic, it was difficult for them to understand the teacher. One of them said that he is not very good in learning languages. He likes to open his own mechanic-workshop and he is interested to receive Icelandic language courses related to this specific field. The non-literate explained that the language courses were difficult for him because he could not write.

For the question “*What dream/vision/goal do you have for yourself to fulfil/achieve?*”, except for the dream of becoming literate, all the dreams of the women participants, were circled around their family lives and the welfare of their children:

I want my children to have a good life	I want to go to school	I want to live a peaceful life
I want my children to be fine	I don't have any dreams, I just want my children to be fine	Maybe if I learn how to write in my mother-tongue then I can write the Icelandic words in my language similar to what the other students are doing

All men had dreams related to establishing themselves in the job market. Majority said that those Icelandic courses which they are offered do not help them to fulfil their dreams. Some of what they said:

To find a job	To go to university
To learn computer or graphic designing	To open my own mechanic workshop and start fixing cars again. It is killing me to sit day and night and do nothing

The non-literate participant explained why he is not able to achieve his dream. He said:

“I want to become a driving instructor for the people from my home country who are living here. It is very difficult for me to achieve my dream because I can't register in the course and I can't pass the exam for two reasons, first is because I don't know Icelandic and the second is because I am illiterate”.

For the question “*What would you need in order to obtain your goal?*”, the women answered this question from various angles. Some of their responses included:

I like to get some courses in my language to teach me about things. I don't understand Icelandic. I watch YouTube	I am very old now, I don't have any goals	Icelandic is very difficult, I don't know English. I feel lonely here
I don't understand the language, I can't read and write	GYMs are mixed and my husband does not allow me to go	There is no school here for me. I can only go to Icelandic language courses. But these language courses are very difficult for me
I like to learn how to use computer	I like to cook. For cooking, it is very difficult or expensive to get all the ingredients	No one has taught us how to use computer. It is good to know how to use computer

The men participants explained some practical solutions that might help them to enter the job market. Some of them said:

It is difficult to pay rent and support my children with the salary of cleaning jobs	If the social continues helping us by paying the rent, then maybe I can get a job	If the social help me to go to school, then maybe I can study
I need to enrol in a graphic designing course that is taught in my language. There are no courses here offered in my language	I need to learn what is needed to open my own mechanic-workshop. I need to learn the vocabularies that I can use at my work in the workshop. Also, I need to find a job at a car-workshop to learn how is the system in Iceland	I must learn how to read and write. I must go to school. There is no school for people who are illiterate, like me

For the question *“Do you believe in your own responsibility to develop your capabilities and skills?”*, majority of women did not understand the concept of being responsible for developing their own capabilities because they have never been introduced to this concept and also because they have never been offered an opportunity to decide for their own growth. They answered:

I don't know	I don't know what to do	I always wanted to learn new things. I also wanted to go to school. But I can't do those things. I don't live alone to decide for myself
I don't know. I can't teach myself also I don't understand Icelandic. In my country I did not have to do anything except to take care of my family and my husband and my children	I am very old now to learn anything	I don't have time to develop myself, because if I waste my time on myself then I will be like all the other selfish mothers who forget their children and go to work

Also, the majority of men participants did not believe in their own responsibility for developing their own capabilities. They answered:

I don't think I can do anything by myself	I need money, I need training, I need support to develop my skills
When you are poor, you can't do many things and you can't develop	If the government does not help me and give me support then I can't develop myself

Only one participant believed in his responsibility to develop his skills. He explained that in his home country he did not get the opportunity to develop himself and in Iceland he believes that this opportunity is available but unfortunately there are no schools in the country that can teach him how to develop his skill.

For the question *“What does motivate you concerning the life in the new country?”*, the women answered that:

We live in a house here. My children go to school. My son can go to university	My children go to a good school. They will have a good future	Maybe I can learn something new. Maybe one day my children can teach me what they learn in school
I am very lonely here. In my country I used to visit my relatives and neighbors. Here I am just home	It is safe here. My children can go to school	My children are happy here. They will have a future. There is no war. I have my social salary to give to my children when they need money

The men's responses were similar to the women's responses. For example, they said:

I receive social money	Life is easy here	My children go to school and they can finish school and go to university
I have money even if I don't work	We are safe here because there is no wa	I hope my sons will go to university
I hope my sons will have good jobs	I hope to go to school	I hope I can become a driving instructor for people from my home country who can't speak Icelandic and want to learn how to drive a car

For the question *“What is the most important support that you received in your host country?”*, all the women participants said that receiving the social salary is the most important support that they have been receiving in Iceland. Some of what they said:

I have social salary. My children go to school. I want to go to school	I have money which the social gives me. My husband uses my money but that is fine because my money is the family's money. I don't have friends here. Icelandic people don't come to my house for a visit and I don't go to their house	I get money from the social. I want to learn how to drive a car but I don't understand Icelandic. Also, I can't read or write so I don't know how to do the exam
The most important support is that they put my children in school. I am very happy that my children can have education. Maybe one day someone can teach me how to sell my food because whoever eats my food says that I will become very rich if I sell it	For the first time in my life I have my own money. I never had my own money. The social money is nice. I like to learn to write Icelandic words in my mother-tongue to help me to learn faster. It is very difficult for me to learn Icelandic	My children go to kindergarten and school. It would be good to learn something

Similar to the women participants, all the men participants said that receiving the social salary is the most important support that they have been receiving in Iceland. Some of what they said:

I am receiving social salary but I want to work. The job salary is very low and I will not be able to pay rent	I asked many times for mother-tongue education for my children but they don't have this service in the schools here	I want to attend courses that are taught in my mother-tongue
I wish to learn how to read and write to pass the driving-instructor exam	I need support to open my own mechanic-workshop to fix cars. I know how to fix cars but I don't know anything else. I don't read or write English or Icelandic	My children go to school here, this is a very important support

## The professional group

The questionnaire for the professionals included 11 questions which aimed to reflect the professionals' voices in their respected field of specialization in working with the beneficiary groups. The majority explained that the language barrier is the first challenge that the professionals are facing with the beneficiary groups, and the beneficiary groups are facing in their quest to integrate in Iceland. The language barrier is caused for two reasons, lack of professional interpreters/translators and lack of cultural specialists who are hired to work with the beneficiaries.

Most professionals mentioned lack of funding as the main second challenge that both the professionals and the beneficiary groups are facing. For the professionals, lack of funding leads to having to serve a huge number of beneficiaries without having enough staffs and without having access to the cultural specialists. On the other hand, lack of funding has its destructive affects on the beneficiary groups as it leads to lack of receiving the basic support such as finding housing and jobs. Lack of funding is also the main reason for lack of offering educational supports that the beneficiary groups need in order to grow and to integrate.

Most of the professional workers stated their need to receive specialized courses in relation to their work with the beneficiary groups. They have also expressed a need to receive more knowledge and information about "best practice" in working with the beneficiary groups. Also, most professional workers stated that "Unity in Diversity" program is not included as part of the integration programs in Iceland. They also stated the need to offer courses to the beneficiaries in which they learn about their personal responsibilities to grow as well as their responsibility to contribute to the ongoing process of community building and social progress.

For the question “*What are the main challenges you are facing in your work with the beneficiary groups?*”, some of what they said:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Finding the immigrants who most need information and services regarding their rights and obligations</li> <li>-Convincing local authorities to implement ways that would increase the access of immigrants to information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-We are faced with a new group of children and youth attending the school and leisure system by receiving asylum seekers and refugees. Within these group are mostly children whom have lack of school education and need to catch up to be able to follow their peers in school</li> <li>-Combination of lack of education with traumatized background makes it challenging to give sufficient support and education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- We do not have enough manpower to provide the support and services that refugees need</li> <li>- We are also seeing a huge increase in families with children</li> <li>- Refugees are facing various challenges and there are many who need a lot of support and services.</li> <li>-We are seeing an increase in the number of refugees suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and various other ailments</li> <li>-We need more specialized resources to handle this rapidly growing group</li> <li>-We need more education and knowledge</li> <li>-There is a shortage of professional interpreters</li> <li>-We are not receiving any additional funding to provide special programs or activities for refugees</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Communicating with the students</li> <li>- Meeting their social needs.</li> <li>- Meeting children’s needs for education, as most of them have missed out almost all schooling in their native tongue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strengthening the professionals so all personals in all fields are qualified enough to provide best possible service for the beneficiary groups</li> <li>- Strengthening to diverse the society we live in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Difficulties delivering information due to language barrier, information often only in Icelandic</li> <li>-Transportation especially for asylum seekers since UTN no longer provides for bus fares</li> <li>-Housing for immigrants and asylum seekers that get a status</li> </ul>

<p>Communication and trust: working with people who have been through a lot and come from different backgrounds can be very challenging. Gaining peoples trust and establishing a good relationship with them is key for any kind of work to be done with them</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Understanding: Of their culture and background. Not only experience from home country but also the things they have been through on their journey to get here in order for us to be able to know how to best assist them and understand their needs.</li><li>-The beneficiaries need to be met by the staff from where they stand, often we cannot understand their reality and backgrounds</li><li>-General system in the country: Specially the health care system</li><li>- More knowledge is needed to best assist these different groups of people that very often have different needs than natives, specially when it comes to their mental and physical health</li><li>-Lack of time and resources: more time is needed to focus on each case, we have too many beneficiaries and not enough staff. If we had more staff we could also focus on more strategy building</li><li>-One of the things I would like to do would be to develop empowerment courses for the beneficiaries. Something that would give people useful tools both if they stay and if they have to go elsewhere</li></ul>		
--	--	--

For the question “*What is needed to tackle the main challenges you are facing in your work with the beneficiary groups?*”, some of what they said:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Resources</li> <li>- Budget</li> <li>- Changes in human resources such as creating a more diverse workforce</li> <li>- Change of attitude from those who lead and have power</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Training</li> <li>- Information and good practice in working with this vulnerable group</li> <li>- We need to acknowledge that the parents need education and support in learning both new language and new customs and learning about a new culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More professionals to provide services and support to refugees</li> <li>- More funding</li> <li>- More knowledge and information about “best practice” in working with refugees</li> <li>- More professional interpreters</li> <li>- More knowledge about working with refugees with post-traumatic stress disorder</li> <li>- Courses and ways to strengthen parents in their parenting role</li> </ul>
<p>It is a difficult challenge for any student that has missed out almost all schooling as many are illiterate in their native tongue, to be sent in a class with students that are far ahead in education as also being learning a second or third language. These students need longer time in special departments while foundation in education is built</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The challenge is to inform the Icelandic school system that these students need more support in education while their foundation is built and acknowledge if we are not going to do so then we will face a big gap in equality between Icelandic students and students that are immigrants</li> <li>- Receiving students from different places from the world and giving them mandatory education in Icelandic means that we need to provide staff that can communicate with them in their language</li> <li>- We need good access to skilled professionals as psychologists and developmental therapists as we have seen that many of our students are dealing with all kinds of emotional difficulties like traumatic stress disorder</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promote personal connection between diverse group of people or everyone to have the opportunity to belong to our community.</li> <li>- Strengthen positive communications and strong social skills for everyone with a special focus on children</li> <li>- Support a strong front-line service of the municipality with specific focus on new citizens of our municipality and especially for those of foreign origin</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More education</li> <li>- Knowing more about the situation the beneficiaries are coming from and what they have gone through <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Having a person on the team that could help build these bridges of understanding (e.g. someone who has gone through similar things or is from a similar region as the beneficiaries)</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Speaking the native language of the beneficiary is something that I could never have imagined was so important, but that gives a great advantage when it comes to working with a person</li> <li>- Adding extra staff is necessary.</li> <li>- Staff in the health care system needs to be educated better on how to receive and treat the beneficiaries</li> <li>- Refugees, asylum seekers as well as immigrants should not be excluded too much in learning and activities</li> </ul>

-Government, municipalities and institution to invest in making their resources available in other languages than Icelandic	-The same/similar model of support to all asylum seekers and refugees as other Nordic countries	-There should be a re-educative course for everyone who works with these groups such as culture,race and diversity courses
---	---	--

For the question *“Please explain, in your opinion, which critical barriers are beneficiaries facing preventing them to become independent citizens?”*, some of what they said:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of information</li> <li>- Lack of respect</li> <li>- Lack of recognition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Insufficient support to deal with trauma and pdst</li> <li>- Illiteracy</li> <li>- If we don't react and support this group right from the beginning it becomes complicated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-They do not get enough opportunities to participate in Icelandic society and there are far too many obstacles to meet. Examples: labor market, activities, learning Icelandic as a second language, prejudice, etc</li> </ul>
<p>Language barriers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It is very important to teach the families and their children how to respect their origin and their culture as well as respecting and understanding the Icelandic culture</li> <li>-We need to teach them that they can provide knowledge and some innovation into our Icelandic community and that every person can bring value into the society they are living in. And that living in a different culture means that some of their values need to be reviewed to be able to fit into the new culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Obstacles on the job market</li> <li>-Employers not willing to hire people of foreign origin, especially refugees</li> <li>-Hidden information about the local public service and community</li> <li>-Social isolation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Moving to a country where one can not access information in any other language then the native language really prevent these groups to become independent citizens</li> <li>- They have to depend on others to help them navigate the system if they can not manage the language</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Lack of opportunities and support</li> <li>-The beneficiaries that have gotten citizenship need more support.</li> <li>-Nearly all of them want to start working but getting work is difficult</li> <li>-Many of the beneficiaries want education but they do not get enough support with that</li> <li>-It would benefit them and also the welfare system in the long-term if they would get opportunities to be empowered and learn a profession (many already have a profession) right from the start</li> <li>- If they could get more support with the language (for some also learning how to read and write) in the beginning would be very important</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Language</li> <li>- Lack of basic support of municipalities and government to beneficiaries regarding finding housing, jobs and education</li> <li>- Lack of support regarding Icelandic learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Exclusion is one factor</li> <li>- Inferiority in host country</li> </ul>

## Recommendations and Conclusion

Some of the barriers that the beneficiaries are facing in Iceland are related to their own cultural packages that shape their identity. For example, the study reveals that neither men, nor women were given an opportunity to decide and plan for their lives when they were in their home-countries. Because of this, most of the participants did not believe in their own responsibility to develop and grow. To introduce the beneficiaries to the importance of taking charge of their own growth, it is important to design integration programs in which this concept is addressed. This is a skill which both genders require to learn.

Gender equality is another concept which the beneficiary groups need to learn about. Although all men had personal dreams which they wished to fulfil, women's dreams were related to the welfare of their families and children; this reflects that their identity did not exist beyond the identity of their families. Furthermore, in their home-countries, most women did not work outside the house, while all men had an occupation prior to arriving to Iceland. This reflects a cultural frame, in which women are required to stay home and take care of the family welfare inside the house, while men are expected to work outside the house and to provide for their families. Because of this cultural frame that decides for women to stay inside while the outside place is reserved for men, education and work are not seen as a priority need for women.

For the educational courses that offered to help the beneficiary groups to integrate in Iceland, the timing, context, content and the instructing-language are some major elements which require special attention. For example, most of the women participants explained that it is very difficult for them to attend courses when their children are home. On the other hand, most of the men participants asked for courses that they can relate to, such as courses that can help them to start their own business instead of normal Icelandic language courses.

“Unity in Diversity” is another concept which the beneficiary groups need to learn about in addition to introducing more formal programs in which they learn about their personal responsibilities to grow as well as their responsibility to contribute to the ongoing process of community building and social progress.

As for the professionals, majority have voiced their need to receive further specialized courses, to develop their capacities and skills in their respected fields of working with the beneficiary groups. Also, they have suggested to include more specialized courses into the university program for those who are studying to work in this field.



E-Mail: [omahaingo@gmail.com](mailto:omahaingo@gmail.com)  
<https://www.omahai.org>  
<https://www.facebook.com/www.omahai.org>  
<https://twitter.com/OMAHAINGO>  
<https://www.linkedin.com/in/omahai>