Theory of Change

Organisational level

How Coders Beyond Borders expects its work to create change, why we believe it will work, and what evidence supports that belief.

Organisation	Stichting European Newcomers Tech, trading as Coders Beyond Borders
Programmes	Factstream AI, Project WISE, WorkBridge
Document level	Organisational. Programme-level theories of change sit underneath this one.
Version	Draft v0.1, March 2026
Owner	Directeur-bestuurder

Contents

1. Purpose and scope

This document sets out how CBB expects its work to create change, why we believe it will work, and what evidence supports that belief.

It is the organisational level. Each of the three programmes has its own theory of change that sits underneath this one, uses the same outcome language, and draws indicators from the same shared set. This document does not repeat programme detail. It explains how the three fit together.

2. Long-term outcome

> IMPACT
>
> **Refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and newcomers in the Netherlands can use their rights, their skills and their voice on equal terms.**

3. The problem

Dutch integration does not fail at one visible point. It fails slowly, and the national data shows where.

Work arrives late and stays insecure

Of the people who received an asylum permit in 2014, 40 percent had work as their main source of income ten years later, and 25 percent were still mainly dependent on a benefit. Counting only those still living in the Netherlands, the employment figure is 43 percent.

Most work part-time (66 percent) and on a temporary contract (72 percent). Almost a quarter of those with a job work through a temp agency. After ten years, 41 percent of the 2014 cohort had held five or more jobs.

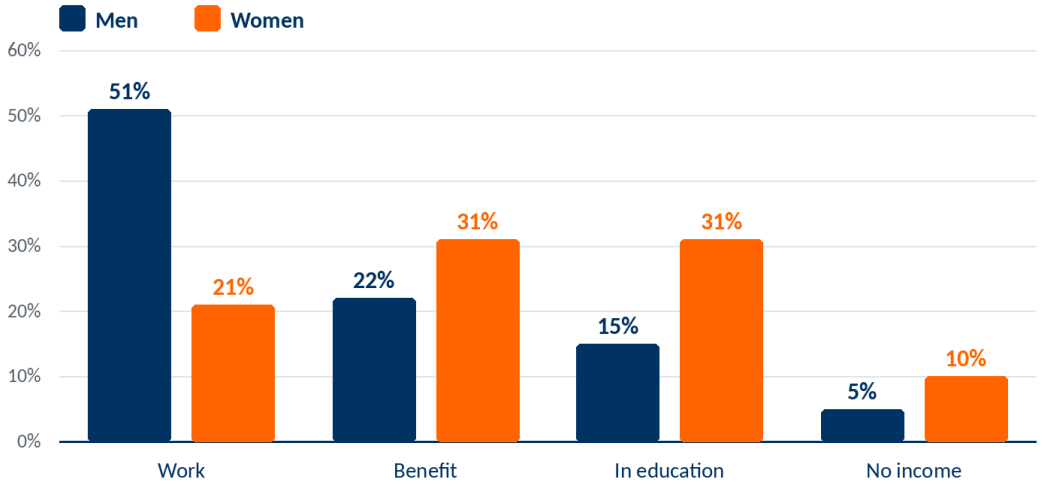
The system certifies people below the level their qualifications need

92 percent of the 2014 cohort who passed the inburgering exam passed it at A2. B1 is the level required to work or study at mbo 3 or 4. B2 is the level required for hbo or university. A qualified engineer completes integration holding a certificate that does not open the work her degree qualifies her for.

Women are on a different track entirely

Ten years after receiving a permit, 51 percent of men had work as their main income source, against 21 percent of women. Among those who do work, 82 percent of women work part-time, against 60 percent of men. Only 10 percent of women statushouders live alone, against 36 percent of men, and women are far more often a parent in a single-parent household.

The gap is not a smaller version of the general gap. It is a different problem.



Main source of income ten years after receiving an asylum permit, 2014 cohort.
Source: CBS, Asiel en integratie 2026.

Figure 1. The gender gap in the 2014 cohort, ten years after the permit.

Procedures are long, and the information need lasts the whole time

The average wait from entering COA reception to receiving a permit is 204 days across all cohorts, up from 175 days two reporting years earlier. For Iranian applicants the average is 699 days. Afghan and Iraqi applicants wait around 400 days.

Support is weakest where it is needed most

OpenEmbassy's research with newcomers in the Netherlands finds that networks matter in every phase of settling, and that access to support is at its thinnest during the reception phase. OpenEmbassy's stated purpose is building evidence-based newcomer policy that lets newcomers participate fully, and its measurement model is built so that the indicators can only be read through newcomers' own experience.

Where reliable information is missing, unreliable information fills the space

Research published in International Studies Quarterly (2018) describes how information vacuums in asylum contexts push people toward informal sources, and how anxiety and low trust make people more likely to accept information that matches what they hope for rather than what is accurate. It also notes that low trust often extends to NGOs and international organisations, because people group them together with government.

Any information service aimed at this group has to earn trust rather than assume it.

4. Theoretical foundation

Three frameworks underpin our design.

Indicators of Integration

Ager and Strang, 2008; updated in the UK Home Office framework, 2019. Integration operates across four connected layers: a foundation of rights and citizenship; facilitators such as language, cultural knowledge, safety and stability; social connections, split into bonds within one's own community, bridges to other communities, and links to institutions; and markers and means, meaning employment, housing, education and health.

The layers depend on each other. Work without rights knowledge is exploitable work. Rights knowledge without networks rarely turns into action. OpenEmbassy applies the same Indicators of Integration model in its research, which means our outcomes can be compared against a body of Dutch evidence rather than sitting on their own.

Legal capability

Pleasence, Balmer, and the wider access to justice literature. People fail to resolve legal problems not only because help is expensive. The ability to respond to a legal problem is usually constrained by the elements of personal capability a person needs to function in the domain of law and justice institutions, and functional literacy is foundational to that. People do not recognise a problem as legal, do not know a route exists, or cannot follow the route once found. This matters for our design: publishing information is not the intervention. Making it recognisable, usable and trusted is.

Self-efficacy and social capital

Peer relationships raise a person's belief that action on her own behalf will work, because the person modelling it has done it from the same starting position.

How the three frameworks map onto our programmes

These three map onto our three programmes without forcing.



Figure 2. CBB programmes mapped onto the Indicators of Integration layers.

5. Pathway one: Factstream AI



> **SPINE**
>
> **Know. Rights that can be found, understood and acted on.**

The mechanism

Legal capability is the binding constraint on whether a right is exercised. A right that a person cannot find, read, or trust is functionally absent. Factstream AI closes the gap between a right existing in law and a person being able to act on it.

Why the evidence supports it

Procedures now run past six months on average and past two years for some nationalities, so the information need is sustained rather than momentary. The legal capability literature shows that the failure point is usually recognition and navigation rather than cost. The information vacuum research shows that where official channels are absent or distrusted, rumour takes the space, and that distrust extends to NGOs by association.

This last finding is the reason for our architecture rather than an afterthought. The platform cites a source for every answer and refuses to answer where it cannot answer from verified sources, because a service that occasionally invents an answer in this context does not just fail, it converts into another untrusted channel.

What we do

- Plain-language explanation of legal, civic and administrative information
- Access in the languages the target groups use
- Rights and obligations awareness
- Referral to trusted organisations, lawyers and legal clinics
- Escalation to a legal professional where a question needs one

The platform does not give legal advice and does not replace a lawyer.

Outcomes

People find the relevant information. People understand what applies to them. People act on it: better-prepared procedures, entitlements claimed, fewer avoidable errors. Partner staff answer client questions faster and more accurately.

Boundary

Factstream AI reaches many of its users through the organisations that already serve them. Its beneficiary chain is therefore partly indirect, and section 8 treats this explicitly.

6. Pathway two: Project WISE

SPINE

Belong. Peer leadership, networks and visible participation.

The mechanism

Social connections are the layer where newcomer women are most isolated and where the deficit is most consequential. Peer leadership builds bonds first, then bridges and institutional links, and converts recipients of support into providers of it.

Why the evidence supports it

The gender data is the strongest case in this document: a 30 percentage point employment gap between men and women ten years after arrival, alongside higher rates of no income and much heavier part-time work. Women are also far more likely to be in a couple with children or parenting alone.

An integrative review of peer mentoring programmes for refugee and migrant women, covering twelve studies, found enhanced social support, greater empowerment and confidence, and better access to education. The most effective programmes were co-designed with community organisations, and training and support for mentors was critical. A programme in Western Australia, with 21 mentors and 32 mentees, reported gains in social connection, self-esteem and self-efficacy.

DESIGN CONSTRAINT

The same review found limited success in obtaining employment, and mismatched expectations between mentors and mentees caused attrition. Project WISE is therefore not an employment programme and does not promise employment outcomes. It builds the connection layer, and sets expectations explicitly at matching.

What we do

- Rights literacy, financial literacy and digital literacy
- Leadership development and peer mentoring
- Community participation and safe referral routes
- Paid peer leadership roles for highly skilled refugee women

Outcomes

Trained peer leaders active in their communities. Women with wider networks and stronger institutional links. Women holding visible leadership roles. Women who make an onward step, through a route a peer opened.

7. Pathway three: WorkBridge

> SPINE
>
> **Contribute. Work that matches qualifications, on secure terms.**

The mechanism

Two things block qualified newcomers from qualified work: the network that surfaces vacancies and vouches for candidates, and the credential and language recognition that makes applications legible to employers. WorkBridge works on both.

Why the evidence supports it

The CBS figures describe occupational downgrading in structural terms rather than anecdotal ones: majority part-time, majority temporary, heavy concentration in temp agency work, trade and hospitality, and five or more jobs for two fifths of the cohort after a decade.

The language ceiling explains part of the mechanism directly, since inburgering certifies almost everyone at A2 while qualified work needs B1 or B2. OpenEmbassy's finding that networks matter in every phase, and that support is thinnest in the reception phase, explains the other part.

What we do

- Career readiness and application support
- Mentorship and mock interviews
- Employer partnerships and professional networking
- Internship routes and training
- Research on occupational downgrading and labour market exclusion

Outcomes

Participants with active mentoring relationships and stronger application skills. More participants in work matched to their qualifications. More participants on permanent rather than temp agency contracts. Employers with changed recruitment practice.

8. The multiplier: partner integration

A fourth route cuts across the three. We integrate our platform into other organisations, so that their staff and their clients use the same verified information infrastructure.

This is not a fourth pathway to individual change. It is how the first three scale, and it is why Factstream AI's beneficiary chain is partly indirect. Change reaches people through the organisations they already trust, which is also the honest answer to the trust problem identified in section 3. We do not ask people to trust a new organisation. We put verified information inside the ones they have already chosen.

9. Outcomes ladder, three-year horizon



Figure 3. The CBB outcomes ladder across the three pathways.

Baselines and targets per indicator are being set in 2026. Where an outcome depends on a partner organisation, the measurement expectation is written into the integration agreement at the start.

10. Assumptions, and how we test them

Each assumption is testable. Our research stream exists to test them.

#	Assumption	How we test it
1	Verified, understandable information changes decisions, not only awareness.	Track action taken, not pages read.
2	Trust must be earned through source-cited answers and refusal to guess.	User trust measures and escalation rates.
3	Peer and mentor relationships are what turn information into action.	Compare outcomes for matched and unmatched participants.
4	Communities engage more with tools built with them than for them.	Co-design participation and retention.
5	Legal aid organisations will adopt shared infrastructure rather than build their own.	Integration conversions and renewals.
6	Peer leadership improves connection and confidence, but not employment directly.	Treated as an established finding and held as a constraint on what WISE promises.

11. Evidence base

- **CBS, Asiel en integratie 2026**. Cohort study of asylum seekers and statushouders, tracking everyone entering COA reception from 2014 onward. Source for employment, contract type, hourly wage, language level, gender and waiting time figures.
- **OpenEmbassy research with newcomers in the Netherlands**, carried out for municipalities and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, including the Wegen naar Werk study. Source for the finding that networks matter in every phase and that support access is weakest in reception.
- **Ager, A. and Strang, A. (2008), Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework**, Journal of Refugee Studies; and the updated UK Indicators of Integration framework (2019).
- **Legal capability literature**, including Pleasence and Balmer on legal confidence and problem-solving behaviour.
- **Rumors and Refugees**, International Studies Quarterly (2018), on information vacuums, trust and rumour in asylum contexts.
- **Integrative review of peer mentoring programmes for refugee and migrant women** (2022), covering twelve studies published between 2005 and 2020.
- **EMPOWER peer mentoring study**, Western Australia (2022), 21 mentors and 32 mentees.

12. What this document does not claim

We do not claim that information alone produces outcomes. We do not claim that peer mentoring produces employment. We do not yet have our own longitudinal data, and the indicator baselines are being set rather than reported. Where we state a figure, it comes from a named source in section 11.

13. Review

Reviewed annually by the board. The programme-level theories of change are revised annually. This document is revised every three years, or when a programme is added or closed.