

BUILDING BRIDGES IN SOCIAL WORK



We are two social work students from Norway, Diana Demiri, 22 years old, and Mathias Guerra, 30 years old, currently in our final year of our studies. We were drawn to the field of social work because we truly value meaningful human connection, and our own experiences have given us a strong awareness of

what it means to stand between cultures and find your place. We are completing our internship at Stichting Mano in Rotterdam, where we work with topics related to integration, inclusion, and social work in a diverse urban environment. De Stadscoalitie initiates, since four years a program with first-year social work students at High School of Applied Sciences Rotterdam and new residents in the city. We were invited to join. The purpose was to contribute our perspectives as international students and to share our experiences with how the welfare and healthcare systems function in Norway compared to the Netherlands.

The day started at 08:15, when we arrived and prepared to meet the students. We first introduced ourselves to the group, after which the organizers presented the program and the goals of the workshop. The students were then divided into smaller groups, and we as participants rotated between the groups. Each group had approximately 20 minutes of discussion. In the groups, we discussed different perspectives on social work and how social workers can understand and meet people in various life situations. We were also asked many questions about our experiences with healthcare and welfare systems in our home countries, while at the same time gaining insight into how these systems function in the Netherlands.



Different artworks at spread out in High School of Applied Sciences

The questions also addressed what it is like to live in Rotterdam, our personal experiences, and how integration is experienced in practice. The conversations were characterized by both group dialogue and reflection, where we were met as individuals and given space to share our experiences of having a migration background. Equality, openness, and mutual understanding were central to the dialogues.

What made a particularly strong impression was how curious, respectful, and careful the students were in the way they asked their questions. They clearly showed a genuine desire to listen and understand, which created a safe and supportive atmosphere. The main insight from the workshop was to explore the role social workers can play in making the integration process easier for new residents.

Rotterdam is a highly multicultural city, and in several of the student groups there were also students of different nationalities. Although not all of the students had an immigrant background themselves, many had experiences through family or close relations. This contributed to many meaningful conversations and an engaged learning environment where the discussions flowed naturally and openly.



We left the workshop feeling genuinely inspired and motivated. This experience is something we hope to bring back to Norway, where we can share it with others and encourage similar initiatives. We believe that this type of interactive learning environment is highly valuable, as it not only provides students with meaningful input but also strengthens their ability to communicate and engage with people from diverse backgrounds.

Workshops like this contribute to shaping a new generation of social workers who can create positive change for refugees and people with migration backgrounds, drawing on the stories, insights, and experiences shared by the participants. Moreover, these workshops help build new bridges and relationships between students and the individuals they meet, fostering mutual understanding and long-lasting connections.

By Diana Demiri & Mathias Guerra, Rotterdam, 11th of December, 2026