



Between Proximity and Distance: Adult Migrants' Belonging in Racialised Social Networks

ALESSANDRA ALDROVANDI

TUULI KURKI

**Author affiliations can be found in the back matter of this article.*

RESEARCH

HUP HELSINKI
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

ABSTRACT

This article examines how adult migrants in Finland experience belonging through the social networks they form within and beyond institutional contexts. Drawing on ethnographic research, including interviews with 29 adult migrant students and participant observations in two adult education institutions, the present study explores how adult migrants build, sustain and navigate social ties in their everyday lives. It pays particular attention to how education and employment settings influence these connections.

The findings show that structural arrangements in adult education and the labour market often limit opportunities for interaction with the majority population, reinforcing racialised and classed segregation. Institutional logics intended to promote integration may, in practice, reproduce social separation. The emotional experience of belonging is also shaped through everyday encounters, where many participants reported feeling misrecognised or excluded due to racialisation. Intersecting dynamics of race, class and nationality influence who connects with whom, under what conditions and with what consequences.

By foregrounding how institutional and everyday practices shape social ties, the article contributes to debates on integration and social inclusion. It argues that belonging is not simply about participation but instead is a deeply political and affective process shaped by power relations embedded in social life.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Alessandra Aldrovandi

Department of Education,
University of Helsinki,
Finland

alessandra.aldrovandi@helsinki.fi

KEYWORDS:

Adult migrants, social networks, social inclusion, sense of belonging, adult education, intersectional lens

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Aldrovandi A, Kurki T. Between Proximity and Distance: Adult Migrants' Belonging in Racialised Social Networks. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*. 2026; 16(2): 1, 1–19. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.973>

INTRODUCTION

In the Nordic countries, discourses of equality and social inclusion are central to national self-understandings and welfare state imaginaries (Keskinen 2019). However, these ideals coexist with persistent racialised hierarchies and everyday racism, which significantly shape migrants' pathways to belonging (FRA 2017; Rytter 2018). These pathways are not only structured by formal integration policies and institutional frameworks but are also deeply mediated by everyday encounters in education, the labour market and other social settings. Such encounters often reveal the disconnect between official narratives of inclusion and lived realities of exclusion (Vuori 2015).

Integration measures such as language instruction, vocational training and work-based programmes are typically framed as tools that promote inclusion and economic self-sufficiency (e.g. Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment n.d.). Recent integration policies also highlight the role of social networks in enhancing inclusion, social cohesion and even national stability (Integration.fi n.d.). However, research shows that these same mechanisms can also serve as sites where racialised and classed dynamics of inclusion and exclusion are reproduced (Kurki 2019; Masoud 2024; Pötzsch 2020).

The policy emphasis on social networks often overlooks the structural conditions under which these networks are formed and maintained. For instance, the Government Integration Programme 2024–2027 (Bruun 2025) frames the prevention of so-called 'parallel societies' as a question of national security (p. 10), implicitly positioning migrant social networks as potential risks to social cohesion. This securitised framing reduces social networks to instruments of governance, rather than recognising them as lived, relational and affective resources rooted in everyday experiences. This approach fails to consider the emotional and political dimensions of social networks. Current anti-immigration rhetoric further entrenches these hierarchies by suggesting that some migrants are inherently more 'integrateable' than others (Ensser-Kananen et al. 2023; Masoud 2024), thereby reproducing racialised assumptions of difference and deficiency. While policies commonly invoke ideals of 'integration' and 'social inclusion,' these concepts often obscure the deeper inequalities they reproduce.

Yet, migrant social networks have long been recognised as essential for navigating life in host societies (Lew 2024; Ryan 2011). Migrant networks are not simply channels to economic integration or cohesion; they are shaped by ongoing struggles for recognition, access and safety. Social ties are rarely freely chosen but are embedded in broader power relations, including racial and class hierarchies that structure who is recognised as belonging and who is rendered an 'other' (Anthias 2007; Lew 2024). In the Nordic context, whiteness continues to function as a normative standard that defines the boundaries of belonging (Hoegaerts et al. 2022). These networks facilitate access to employment (Ahmad 2011; Aldrovandi et al. 2024), housing (Eskelä 2017), public services (Mölsä et al. 2017) and emotional support (Pirkkalainen et al. 2022), all of which contribute to a sense of belonging (Tuominen et al. 2023). However, some research has treated these networks in reductive ways – either as co-ethnic enclaves or as instruments of successful adaptation – thereby neglecting the complexity, fluidity and diversity of migrants' social worlds (Keskinen et al. 2022). Rather than adopting this kind of essentialist lens, this article foregrounds how migrants' social networks are shaped by institutional settings and race, class and nationality, offering a nuanced understanding of how social inclusion and exclusion are lived and negotiated.

We focus on how adult migrants' sense of belonging is shaped through their social networks, understood as both interpersonal and institutional ties connecting individuals to family, friends, community and key institutions such as education and employment. Drawing on ethnographic research, including interviews with 29 adult migrants enrolled in a vocational education and training college or a general upper secondary school for adults, as well as participant observations in these two educational institutions in the Helsinki metropolitan area, we explore how adult migrants build, maintain or struggle to access social networks in their everyday lives.

We argue that, while such networks can foster emotional support, practical assistance and a sense of social inclusion, they may also reproduce societal boundaries of exclusion – especially when shaped by racialised and classed dynamics. These dynamics, we argue, not only influence who forms connections with whom but also affect broader processes of recognition, exclusion and belonging in the Finnish context.

Although this study is situated within educational contexts, our analysis extends to the broader social worlds that adult migrants inhabit. Education is easily romanticised as a site of integration and a space of potential connection, but, as this article shows, it is also marked by tension and fragmentation, a site where racial and class boundaries are actively reinforced. Rather than fostering meaningful intercultural counters, education can segregate migrants into language tracks or employment sectors where interaction with the majority population is limited. These institutional logics, framed as pathways to inclusion, may in fact sustain or deepen social division. As such, the desire for social cohesion benefits the majority of society more than migrants themselves, reinforcing asymmetrical power relations under the guise of inclusion (see also [Kurki 2019](#)).

We focus on the formation of social networks both within and beyond institutional settings. Our aim is to reframe belonging not merely as an individual achievement, but as a collective and politicised process, deeply embedded in structural conditions and institutional practices. We address the following research questions: (1) how do adult migrants build and navigate their social networks in institutional contexts of integration, and how are these networks shaped by race, class and nationality? In addition, (2) how do social networks contribute to adult migrants' sense of belonging?

In the sections that follow, we first present our conceptual framework on belonging, drawing from an intersectional perspective. We then describe the study design and methods. The findings section is structured in two parts: we begin by examining adult migrants' interpersonal social networks, then conduct an analysis of their institutional social networks and the ways in which both influence their sense of belonging. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of our findings for adult education practices and integration policy in Finland.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this article, we examine how adult migrants in Finland experience and negotiate belonging, focusing on the intersecting influences of race, class and nationality. Rather than treating belonging as a binary state – either belonging or not – we approach it as a complex, multidimensional process shaped by both institutional structures and everyday interpersonal encounters.

Belonging, as theorised in migration and critical social studies, is not a static or purely individual condition. It is relational and situated within broader social, political and

historical contexts marked by the tensions between inclusion and exclusion (Pötzsch 2020). The concept has been explored as spatial, temporal, emotional and material in nature (Lähdesmäki et al. 2016), and is shaped by intersecting positionalities and power relations. As Nira Yuval-Davis (2006, p. 199) puts it, ‘people belong in many different ways’ depending on their histories, social relations and locations.

Following Yuval-Davis (2006), we distinguish between the emotional dimensions of belonging – the feeling of being at home – and the politics of belonging, which refers to the socio-political processes through which belonging is regulated, granted or withheld. Although analytically distinct, these dimensions are deeply entangled in practice (Antonsich 2010). Belonging is always mediated through broader societal structures, including citizenship regimes, migration policies and dominant narratives of national identity, culture and race.

The emotional dimension of belonging emerges through community, relationality and proximity – nurtured through everyday encounters, mutual support and shared cultural practices (Ali 2023; Haapajärvi 2022). In Finland, research shows that, when migrants feel recognised and valued in their daily environments, their well-being and mental health are positively impacted (Abdulhamed et al. 2024; Seppänen et al. 2022). This underscores that belonging is not only a matter of formal inclusion or structural integration but also an affective condition of social attachment and recognition.

Belonging also has spatial and temporal dimensions. It often transcends national borders, drawing on transnational ties and connections (Khayati & Dahlstedt 2014), and is shaped by past experiences as well as future aspirations for security and legal stability (Fathi 2022). Such a perspective demands attention to how belonging shifts across time and place, and how specific social identities are valued – or devalued – depending on the context (Anthias 2013; Koskela 2019).

In the Finnish context, adult migrant education operates within a broader Nordic welfare ideology, which promotes ideals of equality and equity while simultaneously emphasising individual responsibility and labour market participation. Within this framework, adult migrants are primarily expected to demonstrate ‘successful integration’ through employability (Masoud 2024). While these expectations may open certain opportunities for participation, they are also structured by racialised, gendered and classed assumptions about who is imagined as a legitimate member of society and on what terms (Keskinen 2022; Yijälä & Luoma 2018).

Belonging is thus closely tied to institutional sites of integration (Kärkkäinen & Tarnanen 2022). Adult migrant education may provide opportunities for social interaction and network formation. Yet, these spaces also reinforce social hierarchies by segregating migrants into parallel systems, thereby limiting sustained contact with the majority population (Kurki 2019). Similarly, employment can offer routes to social embeddedness but may also reproduce precariousness and marginalisation, especially in racialised and low-wage sectors (Kurki et al. 2018; Näre & Maury 2024).

We approach these institutional and everyday settings as relational arenas where belonging is negotiated, fostered or constrained. The social networks that adult migrants form within these spaces play a central role in shaping their emotional and material experiences of integration and inclusion. Previous research has shown that racial hierarchies operate in conjunction with other identity markers to shape who is perceived as belonging (Toivanen 2014). Visual and auditory cues, such as skin colour,

accent or name, function as racialised signifiers in determining inclusion or exclusion. Class further complicates these dynamics, as racialised and classed logics intersect to determine who is granted access to the privileges of social mobility (Krivonos 2023).

To better understand the differentiated experiences of belonging, we adopt an intersectional lens (Anthias 2011; Crenshaw 1989), analysing how race and class interact to mediate access to social networks and produce experiences of belonging. We explore how adult migrants' sense of belonging is shaped through the social networks they build both within and beyond educational spaces, and we argue that belonging is not merely a product of formal integration measures but a lived, negotiated and often contested experience shaped by intersecting relations of power.

METHODOLOGY

This article draws on ethnographic fieldwork conducted by Author 1 as part of her PhD research on adult migrant education in Finland. The study focuses on two educational contexts central to many adult migrants: vocational training and language programmes. Unlike much research that concentrates on newly arrived migrants in early-stage integration programmes, this study also includes long-term residents, many of whom are no longer eligible for state-led integration measures.

Two educational institutions with a large adult migrant student population were selected as research sites: a vocational college (VET) and a general upper secondary school (GUS) for adults. Fieldwork was carried out by Author 1 in the vocational school between April and June 2022 and in the GUS school between October 2023 and May 2024. Both schools are located in the Helsinki metropolitan area, Finland. While the schools differ in terms of curricula and student profiles, they both provided valuable insights into how adult migrants navigate education, work and belonging.

In total, Author 1 carried out 12 days of participant observation in two VET groups (one in IT and one in Business) and 22 days in three groups at the GUS school, all focusing on Finnish language training. She observed classroom activities, informal interactions, breaks, events and assessment meetings. In addition, she conducted semi-structured interviews with 29 adult migrant students (see Table 1), exploring the participants' migration and integration trajectories, educational aspirations, experiences of career guidance and aspects of their social and family life.

The participants' ages ranged from early 20s to mid-40s, and all of them had moved to Finland as adults. Sixteen were student-migrants, four had reunited with Finnish partners, four had fled for political reasons, and others had arrived for work or other unspecified reasons. While a few were still in the early stages of state-supported integration, most had moved beyond the official three-year integration window and attended education voluntarily to improve language skills or gain qualifications. Thus, their motivations to attend education varied: for some, it formed part of their personal integration plans, while others sought skills for employment, further education or citizenship tests. The students in the VET school typically had moved to Finland more recently and were enrolled in English-taught courses; those in the GUS school had usually lived in Finland for longer and were enrolled in Finnish language tracks, often aiming for career advancement and broader social participation or preparing for the language test required for the citizenship test. Many worked in low-wage sectors, such as cleaning or hospitality, while a small number held jobs in fields like IT.

PSEUDONYM	SCHOOL	REGION OF ORIGIN	GENDER	YEARS IN FI
Ben	VET IT	Eastern Europe	M	0–1
Jenny	VET IT	East Asia	F	0–1
Layla	VET IT	South Asia	F	5–10
Lily	VET IT	Eastern Europe	F	2–4
Manuel	VET IT	Latin America	M	10+
Piotr	VET IT	Eastern Europe	M	0–1
Ali	VET Business	South Asia	M	2–4
Khalid	VET Business	North Africa	M	0–1
Maxim	VET Business	Eastern Europe	M	2–4
Ray	VET Business	Southeast Asia	F	0–1
Rayaan	VET Business	South Asia	M	2–4
Yasmeen	VET Business	South Asia	F	0–1
Alicia	GUS	Latin America	F	5–10
Arun	GUS	South Asia	M	5–10
Asli	GUS	Southeastern Europe	M	0–1
Cara	GUS	Southeast Asia	F	5–10
Daniel	GUS	Central African	M	5–10
Franck	GUS	West Africa	M	2–4
Isabella	GUS	Southeast Asia	F	0–1
Kadir	GUS	Southeastern Europe	M	0–1
Katarina	GUS	Eastern Europe	F	0–1
Lauren	GUS	North America	F	5–10
Luka	GUS	Central Europe	M	2–4
Samir	GUS	South Asia	M	2–4
Sofia	GUS	Southern Europe	F	2–4
Tay	GUS	South Asia	M	5–10
Timo	GUS	Eastern Europe	M	2–4
Vlad	GUS	Eastern Europe	M	0–1
Zoya	GUS	Eastern Europe	F	2–4

Table 1 Participants’ information.

Most interviews were conducted in English (N = 24), with the remaining five being carried out in a combination of English, Finnish and the participants’ preferred languages, supported by artificial intelligence translation tools. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

[Table 1](#) provides an overview of the participants by pseudonyms, school, region of origin, gender and years spent in Finland.

In addition to formal interviews, informal discussions during breaks and school events provided rich, spontaneous insights into the participants' daily experiences. These interactions helped build trust and deepen understanding of the students' social worlds, including community, daily struggles and aspirations for the future.

Throughout the research process, Author 1 reflected critically on her own positionality as a white, non-Finnish yet European woman conducting research with migrants with diverse backgrounds and positionalities within the Finnish migration system. While she shared certain experiences of being a newcomer in Finland, her racial privilege, freedom of mobility and reduced exposure to migration control shaped both her access and her relationships in the field. This shifting position between insider and outsider required continuous reflexivity on how knowledge was produced and whose voices were amplified (see also [Moralli 2024](#)).

Data analysis followed [Braun and Clarke's \(2006\)](#) thematic approach. Author 1 conducted the initial coding using Atlas.ti, identifying core themes across interview transcripts and fieldnotes. These themes were then refined and interpreted collaboratively by both authors. In the analysis, we paid particular attention to how race and class but also nationality shaped the participants' experiences of social networks and belonging.

The findings are presented in two thematic sections. The first section examines how education and employment shape the participants' opportunities to form meaningful connections. It highlights the structural segregation of adult migrants into separate education tracks or employment sectors and the limited interaction with the majority population. The second section focuses on how belonging is shaped through everyday encounters. It examines the constraints the participants face in forming cross-cultural ties, the role of racialisation and how social networks often remain within racially similar groups. Many participants shared experiences of racism, misrecognition and exclusion, which significantly affected their sense of belonging.

The article concludes with reflections on how these findings challenge dominant narratives of integration, inclusion and belonging in Finland. It offers recommendations for policy and practice, particularly adult (migrant) education, to better account for the complex and intersectional realities of migrants' everyday lives.

FINDINGS

INSTITUTIONAL SITES AND THE FORMATION (OR DISRUPTION) OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

In Finland, education and employment are central pillars of state-led integration policy and are widely framed as key pathways to migrants' social inclusion and sense of belonging. However, institutional settings are not neutral spaces; they are structured by racialised and classed dynamics that both enable and restrict the formation of social networks. As such, institutions can function simultaneously as sites of inclusion and exclusion.

In the educational context observed in this study, time-spatial arrangements, including how school days are structured and how students moved through physical spaces, played a significant role in shaping the participants' opportunities for interaction. These arrangements often affected their possibilities to practice Finnish, engage in peer relationships and develop connections with members of the majority population. Author 1's ethnographic observations revealed that social groupings within classrooms

and shared spaces were often organised along racial and/or linguistic lines, reflecting patterns of perceived cultural or racial similarity and proximity. These groupings, while offering safety and familiarity, also limited opportunities for broader social integration.

There are [13] students in the classroom. Students tend to sit roughly in the same places as they come in. Groups are again based on shared nationality and ethnicity. Some students sit on their own. Katarina and Vlad sit close to other Eastern European students – they all speak common language[s]. Franck normally sits by himself, but then [an] other student of colour who comes in late sits next to him. Students of colour sit at the back of the classroom, and they sit next to each other. (Observation notes from General Upper Secondary School for Adults.)

While some teachers actively encouraged interaction across group divides and promoted the use of Finnish instead of the participants' first languages or English, patterns of racial-linguistic clustering remained prevalent. This dynamic was also recognised by the participants themselves. Alicia, a young woman originally from Latin America, reflected on this during her interview.

Alicia: I don't know if you [Author 1] saw, but, in the group, the groups were created, like, geographically in the room: so there's the Turkish men, then there is the Americans... well, from the continent, I don't like saying American as the US, but the continent, which is [names a student], the US, Mexico and Peru in the back of me. And then there is the Ukrainians. And then the Afghans, they're kind of lost ... and the Filipino women. So, it's been funny to see how we have [it] in blocks.

Alicia's account highlights how patterns of social grouping in the school space often emerged along lines of shared geographical origin, race and common language. While many participants used English as a lingua franca, enabling broader opportunities for social connections, others relied primarily on their first language or the language in which they felt most comfortable, with Russian being particularly prevalent. The extensive linguistic diversity within the school environment meant that those who did not speak English were often limited to interacting with a small number of peers who shared their linguistic background. As a result, these participants faced an even greater dependence on learning Finnish to build social relationships and participate in broader social networks (see also [Pöyhönen et al. 2018](#)).

Labour market segmentation further contributed to the fragmentation of social networks. The participants who worked alongside their studies – often in low-status, physically demanding and isolated jobs – described having limited or no interaction with Finnish people. Many, especially those holding non-EU passports, reported facing distinct institutional constraints, since restrictive visa conditions required them to work while studying in order to secure sufficient income ([Finnish Immigration Services n.d.](#)). As a result, the need to balance employment and education significantly limited their opportunities for leisure, peer interaction and Finnish language practice, all of which are essential to building local social networks and a sense of belonging.

Layla, for instance, described how her opportunities to interact with Finnish people were further limited by her employment in exclusively low-status jobs where, as she put it, 'you don't find any Finnish people.' She felt that such work environments did not foster meaningful encounters with the majority population but instead deepened her sense of social isolation (comments edited for grammar).

Layla: I was working in some jobs, like in hotel and cleaning, those kind of things, and you don't find any Finnish people... I was doing my Master's degree because the policy was, like, we had to have [a] job contract or enough money to renew our visa. So, we need to renew our visa every year, so that's why we had to work, and I continued after graduation also.

Layla's experience illustrates the link between labour market segregation and social exclusion, with the former often reinforcing the latter. Visa regulations and the obligation to work during her studies pushed her towards the low-status sectors; a pattern reflected in the experiences of many participants with non-EU passports, who were primarily employed in catering and cleaning. For most, working alongside studying was not a choice but a financial necessity to support themselves and their families. This dual burden left little time or energy for social interaction beyond school and work. Many were employed in physically demanding jobs with long and irregular hours, further restricting opportunities to develop a social life. As a result, school often emerged as the primary – if not the only – space for encountering others and forming potential friendships.

As mentioned above, work can be a source of isolation, further distancing rather than including adult migrants into society. Franck, a young man originally from West Africa, described his job in the cleaning sector as particularly lonely, as he worked all his shifts alone. In the interview, he spoke about his lack of social connections and expressed dissatisfaction with his daily routine marked by loneliness. Being single and without family in Finland, Franck found it especially difficult to meet new people, build friendships, or access emotional support, as his days were consumed by the demands of both work and study.

Franck: People really don't talk about – if you don't ask, they don't ask you. Sometimes – like, you know, they don't, I feel like they don't have, what I can say, yeah – that is, like, motivation to know about people. Sometimes I feel that, you know, that is the challenge for me.

Author 1: Where do you feel most included?

Franck: I never feel like I'm included ... But, if you are single, you are man, like... It's difficult to find somebody you can talk to, and sometimes you feel, sometimes you feel what you are doing, you know, it's not important.

Franck's experience underscores how the absence of social connections, combined with workplace segregation and the isolating nature of working alone, can contribute to feelings of loneliness and a diminished sense of belonging. Despite these challenges, he remained committed to studying Finnish in hopes of improving his career prospects. However, he repeatedly expressed, both during the interview and in everyday school interactions, that he lacked both the time and spaces to practice Finnish language with Finnish speakers.

Arun's experience offers a perspective that highlights how class position and professional status can mediate experiences of belonging. A young man originally from South Asia, Arun's trajectory contrasts with many of the other participants' who worked in low-wage or precarious sectors. Having initially moved to Finland to pursue a master's degree in IT, Arun had secured stable employment in a multinational tech company at the time of the interview. He described having an international group of friends and expressed overall satisfaction with his life in Finland. Unlike many

participants, he reported feeling included in his workplace and able to participate in both professional and social interactions with colleagues.

Arun: Mostly people who are international are my friends. I also do have Finnish friends who are my ex-colleagues and then we have persisted our relationship and because, of course, not every colleague becomes your best friend after you left the place, but a few stick with you, and that's how that became my small friends' circle.

Arun's account illustrates how global capitalism and the demand for high-status labour in fields like IT can afford certain migrants a degree of privilege, even within racialised systems. While racial hierarchies remain operative, they are negotiated in complex ways through class, profession and (inter)nationality. Migrants in high-status sectors may be excluded differently – even temporarily exempted from racial exclusion – because of their economic value and alignment with the global talent discourse. However, this inclusion is often conditional and stratified; it does not necessarily translate into broader societal recognition or long-term belonging. Arun's case thus complicates assumptions about migrant exclusion by showing how class and professional privilege can mitigate, though not erase, experiences of racialisation and exclusion.

EVERYDAY ENCOUNTERS AND THE EMOTIONAL DIMENSIONS OF BELONGING

Although adult migrants often navigate social life independently, the interviews revealed significant challenges in forming meaningful connections and social bridges, particularly with members of the majority population. These efforts were often constrained by language barriers, perceived cultural distance and experiences of racism and racialisation.

In the Finnish context, where whiteness remains closely intertwined with ideas of Finnishness and dominant social norms, people perceived as white tend to encounter fewer barriers to integration (Keskinen 2013). This alignment with the dominant racial group can facilitate the process of integration by affording greater social acceptance and access to opportunities.

Whiteness, in this sense, can act as a form of protection from being immediately categorised as a migrant based on appearance (Rastas 2019).

Lauren, a young woman from North America, reflected on these dynamics, noting how her white privilege and racial and linguistic capital as a white English-speaking North American had facilitated her integration into Finnish society:

Lauren: I always think about, like, the fact that I have, like [North American nationality] and white privilege, and I'm, like English speaker.

Lauren's reflection resonates with previous research highlighting how whiteness, and the perceived desirability of certain migrant groups, can facilitate a smoother entry into Finnish social life. In Lauren's case, her whiteness likely played a key role in fostering a sense of belonging and making it easier to navigate processes of integration and social inclusion, free from the racialised scrutiny and stereotypes that often marginalise migrants of colour (Huttunen 2002). Moreover, Lauren believed that Finland actively sought to attract and retain highly skilled migrants like herself. Despite experiencing

a certain degree of work insecurity and facing some challenges with visa regulations, she expressed a strong sense of acceptance and the possibility of building a life in Finland. She described her daily life in a trendy neighbourhood as ‘cute,’ expressing feelings of comfort, warmth and happiness.

Lily, a young woman from Eastern Europe, had a Finnish partner, which, she reflected, increased her chances of forming connections with Finns, though she still described these relationships as superficial:

Lily: Erm, erm... I have, like, Finnish friends, but they're friends of my husband, so it's kind of they're friends of my friend. We don't – we're not that close, but we meet sometimes and go somewhere.

These narratives suggest that proximity to whiteness – both social and embodied – can ease access to social networks with Finnish people (see also [Kotavaara & Prokkola 2023](#)). However, in some cases, even those who can be racialised as white distanced themselves from the majority population. Maxim, a young man from Eastern Europe, openly expressed disinterest in engaging with Finns, citing ‘different mentalities’:

Maxim: Well, the thing is that I don't really talk to Finnish people, I have no Finnish friends or any other friends except for (same nationality).

Author 1: And how come you think you don't have any Finnish friends?

Maxim: It's just not interesting for me to speak with Europeans because I do feel the difference in our mentality and, for me, it's not... it's hard to have people ... close to me that are ... who have quite a different mentality to me.

Maxim's response complicates narratives of exclusion by highlighting self-separation and selective engagement. Yet, his framing also suggests emotional distance, reflecting how perceptions of difference can reinforce social segregation.

Similarly, Katarina and Vlad, a couple from Eastern Europe, primarily socialised with people from similar linguistic backgrounds. Limited free time, family obligations and intensive language study further restricted their opportunities to expand social networks. Predictably, a recurring theme in many of the adult migrants' accounts was that family served as an essential support network. Yet, however, for some, this reliance and family-related caring duties might also compensate for the absence of other social connections and limited opportunities to expand their networks (see also [Karimi 2019](#)). When asked about their social networks outside school, Katarina responded:

Katarina: Well, for this moment, we have not any Finnish friend. We have only – we have online friends from (Eastern European countries).

At the time of the interview, Katarina had only lived in Finland for a few months and had had little time to form social networks. Although social bonds and bridges are formed dynamically and over time, the assumption that newly arrived migrants' social networks might develop linearly simplifies the complexities of social processes in relation to contextual challenges ([Ryan et al. 2008](#)).

The different examples above show that distance is perceived even within whiteness and shared racial background with the Finns. Racial hierarchies within whiteness, combined with migrant status, class and nationality, complicate the formation of social networks and the development of a sense of belonging.

In contrast, Alicia, a young woman originally from Latin America, described the complexity of racial identification in transnational contexts:

Alicia: I'm, I'm very white, I'm white-passing, and I never know how to locate myself because in (country of origin), I am white... [...] Like, I'm privileged in that sense because (country of origin) is a racist country so – but then here, I am a person of color, but I'm white-passing person of color, so I don't know.... I don't know what the experience for – for example, my friend, he is dark-skinned. [...] He has had other experiences, like, just in the shopping centre, he got stopped by a guard who made him open the backpack because he said that he stole something. So, I've never had that happening to me.

Alicia's experience reveals how racialisation operates relationally and contextually. While 'white-passing' migrants, as she described herself, may experience conditional inclusion, those visibly marked as non-white often face more overt forms of racism and exclusion. Like Lauren, Alicia felt that her whiteness as a person of colour had positively impacted her experiences in Finland. However, she also acknowledged that her nationality as Latin American had negatively affected her life, particularly due to visa regulations. Alicia's reflection that her proximity to whiteness is a privilege underscores the complex relationship between racial perception and social acceptance for migrants. Her experience highlights how racial visibility and perceived proximity to whiteness significantly shape the migrant experience, affecting both social integration and the sense of belonging.

Isabella, a young woman from Southeast Asia, explained her difficulty in making Finnish friends, attributing it to her limited Finnish language skills and not race. Her response reveals, however, how she had internalised responsibility for exclusion:

Isabella: Yeah, and all (from my country of origin). Yeah, I wanted to engage more on the Finnish people, but they're, they're not really into that when you can't speak Finnish. I think.

Other participants echoed similar emotions, describing a lack of friendships with the Finns and identifying their teachers as the only consistent Finnish contacts in their daily lives. Layla, from South Asia, reflected on how this absence has impacted her sense of inclusion:

Layla: I have lived here for so long, and it's strange... erm, what I don't like is, I don't have any Finnish friends. We don't get any opportunity to get integrated into the culture or with the people.

Layla also described how the lack of diverse social groups in Finland was a key factor contributing to her feelings of isolation and confinement, along with her desire to live somewhere else:

Layla: I would like to live in an environment, like in a society, where I can interact with more, not only confined with (community from same country of origin), but more multicultural.

Analysing Layla's words, her desire to live in a more multicultural society can be understood as a longing to feel 'at home' (Yuval-Davis 2006) and to foster a sense

of belonging that she perceives as missing in a white normative society like Finland. Hall (1997) argues that cultural representation – seeing one’s culture reflected in the public sphere – can enhance both a sense of belonging and self-worth. Interacting with people who share similar cultural and racial backgrounds, and witnessing these cultural practices visibly accepted in public spaces, can help reduce feelings of marginalisation (Mirza 2013). In more diverse social spaces, there is often greater awareness of and sensitivity towards diversity, contributing to a stronger sense of belonging. Conversely, people may seek to leave or avoid spaces where they feel unwelcome or unsafe due to a lack of racial diversity (e.g. McClain et al. 2006).

Several participants of colour also shared experiences of racism, ranging from overt hostility to subtle microaggressions, with some describing discriminatory practices – for example, in job-recruitment processes. Such encounters often reinforced their outsider status and intensified feelings of exclusion and non-belonging (see also Essed 1991).

Yasmeen, a young woman from South Asia, had encountered racism that had impacted her sense of belonging, leading her to question what she described as a ‘belonging body.’ In white spaces, both the school and outside, her cultural and religious practices, such as wearing henna on her hands during Eid, contributed to a sense of non-belonging, making her feel uncomfortable expressing her cultural and religious identity.

Yasmeen: So over here, at times I feel ashamed of my culture in the way that I’m celebrating it, or if I feel weird wearing henna on my hands – like, Eid is coming up – so I want to wear henna, but I feel odd doing it because I’m the only one doing it.

Yasmeen’s words reveal her struggle to reconcile her cultural and religious identity with the dominant norms in Finland, leading to feelings of shame (‘I feel ashamed of my culture’), discomfort (‘I feel weird’) and outsiderhood (‘I’m the only one doing that’). Yasmeen’s reluctance to wear henna during Eid reflects an internalised pressure to conform to the Finnish cultural norms, making her feel out of place, and to distance herself from her cultural and religious background. This sense of marginalisation led her to express a desire to live in a more multicultural and inclusive environment. Yasmeen expressed a desire to leave Finland, envisioning raising her future children in a more inclusive environment.

In contrast, Samir, a young man originally from South Asia, indicated that his nationality placed him in ‘a lower position’ within Finnish society. Samir expressed a strong desire to belong to Finland and aspired to obtain Finnish citizenship, viewing it as a pathway to greater acceptance and recognition as a ‘desirable’ migrant in Finnish society (see also Toivanen 2014).

Samir: You will be a different personality if you have a Finnish passport coming from the Asian countries – you will behave different. You are treated differently. Of course, you have a different skin, but still, you know. It comes... I’m not being racist or stuff like that, but this is how the world sees each other.

Author 1: Can you explain what you said?

Samir: You know, it's not being racist, but people are just, people are categorised depending on their skin color. Depending on the nationality. You know, that way. So, that's why I say it like, I will be here until I get the passport. Because, after you have this, I will not be the same person as before.

Samir's excerpt illustrates how societal dynamics are shaped by racial hierarchies (Keskinen et al. 2021; Souto & Lappalainen 2025). Considering his experience of social inclusion (or the lack of it) being shaped by both race and nationality, Samir was keenly aware of his perceived inferiority within the hegemonically white spaces he navigated; this contributed to his sense of non-belonging.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we explored adult migrant students' social networks and how these shape their sense of belonging. We investigated informal and interpersonal networks on the one hand and the ones emerging in institutional settings on the other, along with their intersection. The analysis highlighted the influence of these dimensions on one another, as networks emerging in institutional settings affect the ones flourishing in the interpersonal sphere and vice versa.

The intersectional lens sheds light on how race, class and nationality contribute to the formation of social (dis)connections, enabling a discussion on who gets access to socially valuable networks and how this affects the participants' sense of belonging. Furthermore, the framework shaped the analysis by highlighting the complexities behind social network formation, being located in a particular socio-political context where migrants fluctuated between distance and proximity, exclusion and inclusion in relation to the broader society (Pötzsch, 2020).

Despite the rhetoric of inclusion promoted in relation to education and employment, these institutions frequently operate as sites of institutionalised differentiation. Regarding the former, when navigating social networks within the educational spaces, the participants gravitated around others with whom they shared racial and linguistic commonalities and seldom had chances for interaction across different groups. Moreover, time and spatial arrangements in educational programmes aimed at adult migrants may be detrimental to their opportunities for interaction with the broader society and the Finns.

In line with previous research, the findings showed that the socio-economic and symbolic boundaries regulating migrants' access to employment contribute to social disconnections rather than fostering social networks and fulfilling the purposes of social inclusion, particularly for those working in low-wage, precarious positions. These racialising practices are closely tied to the reproduction of class hierarchies and socio-economic disparities, reinforcing structural inequalities in both employment and everyday life. These structures not only limit access to resources but also shape how migrants understand their place in society and how they are perceived by others.

In terms of interpersonal encounters, the analysis revealed how whiteness aided the formation of social networks and bridges, easing everyday encounters. However, this idea of proximity was disrupted even within racial lines when considering class and nationality. Although the distance perceived by adult migrants of colour was generally greater, the contextual intertwining of race and class combined with an '(un)

desirable' nationality affected social relationships from an institutional as well as an interpersonal perspective.

We acknowledge the limitations of the study in representing the reality of broader structural dimensions in Finnish society. The participants included a relatively diverse yet distinctly defined group of adult learners who were mostly highly educated and able to communicate in multiple languages. Thus, the data offer a partial overview of adult migrants' experiences of social networks and their sense of belonging, along with how these were affected by racialisation and white privilege.

On the other hand, this study's context – the educational programmes in VET and GUS – brought to light the wide range of experiences and life journeys among adult migrant students. When aiming to promote social inclusion by means of community and societal belonging, this should not be overlooked: being a migrant, particularly from a non-EU country, combined with the social identities of race and class influences how these people navigate and maintain, and, at times, it makes them struggle to form social networks. The loneliness and exclusion generated from the disconnections with other individuals and groups should be considered within policy and practice promoting social inclusion.

To conclude, the concepts of social networks, sense of belonging and social inclusion are deeply interconnected in this article; without belonging, people may feel marginalised and excluded, even when integrated into social systems. In other words, participation in societal structures measured by educational outcomes and work prospects does not equate to being socially included. Fostering a sense of connection and acceptance requires effort from multiple groups, including migrants and the majority society, as the lack of meaningful social ties and bridges, further exacerbated by institutions that segregate rather than integrate, can lead to isolation and undermine overall integration efforts. Proximity and togetherness are unlikely to be achievable, and may even be a chimera, if issues of racialisation, white privilege and racism fail to be addressed.

NOTES

Permission to conduct research in the VET school was obtained from the Programme Leader and in the general upper secondary school from the City of Helsinki Education Division, respectively. After gaining the research permits, Author 1 met with programme coordinators and teachers to discuss the study's aims and data-collection methods. In addition, Author 1 provided detailed information to all research participants, who then signed a consent form. The information sheet described procedures, ensuring participants' right to remain unidentifiable and to withdraw from the research at any time.

FUNDING INFORMATION

This work was supported by the Kone Foundation (202105849 and 202201896).

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

Alessandra Aldrovandi  orcid.org/0009-0006-3724-6073
Department of Education, University of Helsinki, Finland

Tuuli Kurki  orcid.org/0000-0002-0122-1775

CEREN (The Centre for Research on Ethnic Relations and Nationalism), Swedish School of Social Science, University of Helsinki, Finland

Aldrovandi and Kurki
*Nordic Journal of
Migration Research*
DOI: 10.33134/njmr.973

16

REFERENCES

- Abdulhamed, R., Hietajärvi, L., Skogberg, N., Klemetti, R. and Lonka, K.** 2024. 'Sense of belongingness, discrimination, and mental health: associations and buffering effects of sense of belonging on mental health among Finnish native and immigrant-origin youth', *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 103, pp. 102081. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2024.102081>.
- Ahmad A.** 2011. 'Connecting with work: the role of social networks in immigrants searching for jobs in Finland', *European Societies*, 13(5), pp. 687–712. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2011.580854>.
- Aldrovandi, A., Kalalahti, M. and Sundelin, Å.** 2024. 'Coping with discrepancies: Implications of career guidance and counselling for migrants' social inclusion in Finland and Sweden', *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, 10(2), pp. 98–113. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20020317.2024.2348617>.
- Ali, A. January** 2023. 'Warming up narratives of community: queer kinship and emotional exile', *Intersections East European Journal of Society and Politics* 8(4), pp. 10–24. <https://doi.org/10.17356/ieejsp.v8i4.1014>.
- Anthias, F.** 2007. 'Ethnic ties: social capital and the question of mobilisability', *The Sociological Review*, 55(4), pp. 788–805. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2007.00752.x>.
- Anthias, F.** 2011. 'Intersections and translocations: new paradigms for thinking about cultural diversity and social identities', *European Educational Research Journal*, 10(2), pp. 204–217. <https://doi.org/10.2304/eeerj.2011.10.2.204>.
- Anthias, F.** 2013. 'Intersectional what? Social divisions, intersectionality and levels of analysis', *Ethnicities*, 13(1), pp. 3–19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796812463547>.
- Antonsich, M.** 2010. 'Searching for belonging – an analytical framework', *Geography Compass* 4(6), pp. 644–659. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8198.2009.00317.x>.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V.** 2006. 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), pp. 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>.
- Bruun, A.** 2025. *Government integration programme 2024–2027: government resolution*. Publications of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment Enterprises, p. 4. Government Integration Programme 2024–2027: Government Resolution – Valto.
- Crenshaw, K.** 1989. 'Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: a black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics', *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 140, pp. 139–168.
- Ensser-Kananen J., Karimi, Z., Petäjäniemi, M., Sadatizarrini, S., Masoud, A. and Khalimzoda, I.** 2023. Introduction: thinking integration otherwise,' in **Z. Karimi, J. Ensser-Kananen, S. Sadatizarrini (Rahaa), M. Petäjäniemi, I. Khalimzoda, and A. Masoud (eds.).** *Rethinking integration: challenging oppressive practices and pointing to ways forward*. Migration Institute of Finland. pp. 15–32. <https://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-7399-38-5>.

- Eskelä, E.** 2017. 'Housing pathways of skilled migrants: Indian professionals in Helsinki, Finland,' *Housing, Theory and Society*, 35(4), pp. 474–494. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14036096.2017.1387172>.
- Essed, P.** 1991. *Understanding everyday racism: an interdisciplinary theory*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA).** 2017. *Second European Union minorities and discrimination survey - main results (EU-MIDIS II)*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. <https://doi.org/10.2811/268615> (Accessed 21 February 2018).
- Fathi, M.** 2022. 'My life is on hold': Examining home, belonging and temporality among migrant men in Ireland', *Gender, Place & Culture*, 29(8), pp. 1097–1120. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2021.1916445>.
- Finnish Immigration Service.** n.d. *Income Requirements*. <https://migri.fi/en/income-requirement>.
- Haapajärvi, L.** 2022. 'Pitfalls of belonging-work. The dialectics of belonging and exclusion in Finnish immigrant integration policies', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 46(14), pp. 3058–3078. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2022.2149274>.
- Hall, S. (ed.).** 1997. *Representation: cultural representations and signifying practices*. New York: Sage Publications, Inc; Open University Press.
- Hoegaerts, J., Liimatainen, T., Hekanaho, L. and Peterson, E. (eds.)** 2022. *Finnishness, whiteness and coloniality*. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
- Huttunen, L.** 2002. *Kotona, maanpaossa, matkalla: Kodin merkitykset maahanmuuttajien omaelämäkertoissa*. SKS.
- Integration.fi.** n.d. *The act on the promotion of immigrant integration guides integration work*. The act on the promotion of immigrant integration guides integration | Integration (Accessed 23 June 2025).
- Karimi, Z.** 2019. 'Intergenerational ambivalence among Iranian Refugee Families in Finland', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 9(3), pp. 347–362. <https://doi.org/10.2478/njmr-2019-0023>.
- Kärkkäinen, K. and Tarnanen, M.** 2022. 'Teachers' and adult migrant students' perspectives on integration and belonging in the context of Finnish vocational education and training', in **L. Moreno Herrera, M. Teräs, P. Gougoulakis, and J. Kontio (eds.)**, *Migration and inclusion in worklife: the role of VET*. Stockholm: Atlas Akademi. Emerging issues in research on Vocational Education and Training, 7, pp. 373–403.
- Keskinen, S.P.** 2013. 'Anti-feminism and white identity politics: political antagonisms in radical right-wing populist and anti-immigration rhetoric in Finland', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 3(4), pp. 225–232. <https://doi.org/10.2478/njmr-2013-0015>.
- Keskinen, S.** 2019. 'Intra-Nordic differences, colonial/racial histories and national narratives: rewriting Finnish history', *Scandinavian Studies*, 91(1-2), pp. 163–181. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/scanstud.91.1-2.0163>.
- Keskinen, S.** 2022. *Mobilising the racialised 'others': postethnic activism, neoliberalisation and racial politics*. 1st toim. Milton Park: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003002031>.
- Keskinen, S., Mkwesha, F., and Seikkula, M.** 2021. 'Teoreettisen keskustelun avaimet – rasismi, valkoisuus ja koloniaalisuuden purkaminen', in **S. Keskinen, F. Mkwesha, and M. Seikkula (eds.)**, *Rasismi, valta ja vastarinta. Rodullistaminen, valkoisuus ja koloniaalisuus Suomessa*. Gaudeamus, pp. 45–68.
- Keskinen, E., Eve, M. and Ryan, L. (eds.)** 2022. *Revisiting migrant networks: migrants and their descendants in labour markets*. Berlin: Springer.

- Khayati, K. and Dahlstedt, M.** 2014. Diaspora formation among Kurds in Sweden: Transborder citizenship and politics of belonging', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* 4(2), pp. 57–64. <https://doi.org/10.2478/njmr-2014-0010>.
- Koskela, K.** 2019. 'Intersecting experiences: class, gender, ethnicity and race in the lives of highly skilled migrants in Finland', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 9(3), pp. 311–328.
- Kotavaara, N. and Prokkola, E.-K.** 2023. 'Role of social ties in long-term settlement of highly skilled migrants in Finland', *Migration Letters*, 20(4), pp. 88–96. <https://doi.org/10.47059/ml.v20i4.3195>.
- Krivosos, D.** 2023. 'Racial capitalism and the production of difference in Helsinki and Warsaw', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 49(6), pp. 1500–1516. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2022.2154911>.
- Kurki, T.** (2019). *Immigrant-ness as (mis) fortune?: Immigrantisation through integration policies and practices in education*. University of Helsinki.
- Kurki, T., Masoud, A., Niemi, A. M. and Brunila, K.** 2018. 'Integration becoming business: Marketisation of integration training for immigrants', *European Educational Research Journal*, 17(2), pp. 233–247. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474904117721430>.
- Lähdesmäki, T., Saresma, T., Hiltunen, K., Jäntti, S., Sääskilähti, N., Vallius, A. and Ahvenjärvi, K.** 2016. 'Fluidity and flexibility of “belonging”: uses of the concept in contemporary research', *Acta Sociologica*, 59(3), pp. 233–247. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0001699316633099>.
- Lew, J.** 2024. 'Refugees and claims-making in spaces of urban marginality: Syrian refugees build alliances across racial lines for collective action', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 50(4), pp. 1013–1030. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2022.2121270>.
- Masoud, A.** 2024. *Constructing the integrateable refugee and immigrant through integration policies and practices in Finland*. Helsinki: University of Helsinki. <https://helda.helsinki.fi/items/32c49007-c26c-425e-8de1-1f07dc6af177>.
- McClain, P.D., Carter, N.M., DeFrancesco Soto, V.M., Lyle, M.L., Grynaviski, J.D., Nunnally, S.C., Scotto, T.J., Kendrick, J.A., Lackey, G.F. and Cotton, K.D.** 2006. 'Racial distancing in a Southern City: Latino immigrants' views of black Americans', *Journal of Politics*, 68, pp. 571–584. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2508.2006.00446.x>.
- Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland.** n.d. *Non-discrimination and cooperation are a prerequisite for successful integration of immigrants*. Integration of Immigrants. <https://tem.fi/en/integration-of-immigrants>. (Accessed 18 October 2024).
- Mirza, H.S.** 2013. "A second skin": embodied intersectionality, transnationalism and narratives of identity and belonging among Muslim women in Britain', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 36, pp. 5–15, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2012.10.012>.
- Mölsä, M., Tiilikainen, M. and Punamäki, R. L.** 2017. 'Usage of healthcare services and preference for mental healthcare among older Somali immigrants in Finland', *Ethnicity & Health*, 24(6), pp. 607–622. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13557858.2017.1346182>.
- Moralli, M.** 2024. 'Research as care: positionality and reflexivity in qualitative migration research', *Qualitative Research*, 24(3), pp. 751–770. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14687941231176946>.
- Näre, L. and Maury, O.** 2024. 'Multiple sources of precarity: bureaucratic bordering of temporary migrants in a Nordic welfare state', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 50(11), pp. 2729–2746. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2023.2298543>.

- Pirkkalainen, P., Näre, L. and Lyytinen, E.** 2022. 'I do not trust any of them anymore': Institutional distrust and corrective practices in pro-asylum activism in Finland', *Current Sociology*, 72(3), pp. 562–580. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00113921221129313>. (Original work published 2024).
- Pötzsch, T.** 2020. *Critical perspectives on social inclusion in integration education programs for adult migrants*. University of Helsinki. <https://helda.helsinki.fi/server/api/core/bitstreams/6ad7112f-3bba-4d4d-ab4e-053dd5499e24/content>.
- Pöyhönen, S., Tarnanen, M. and Simpson, J.** 2018. 'Adult migrant language education in a diversifying world', in **A. Creese, and A. Blackledge (eds.)**, *The Routledge handbook of language and superdiversity*. Milton Park: Routledge.
- Rastas, A.** 2019. 'The emergence of race as a social category in Northern Europe', in **P. Essed, K. Farquharson, K. Pillay and E.J. White (eds.)** *Relating worlds of racism: dehumanization, belonging and the normativity of European whiteness*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 357–381.
- Ryan, L.** 2011. 'Migrants' social networks and weak ties: accessing resources and constructing relationships post-migration', *The Sociological Review*, 59(4), pp. 707–724. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2011.02030.x>.
- Ryan, L., Sales, R., Tilki, M. and Siara, B.** 2008. 'Social networks, social support and social capital: the experiences of recent polish migrants in London', *Sociology*, 42(4), 672–690. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038508091622>.
- Rytter, M.** 2018. 'Writing against integration: Danish imaginaries of culture, race and belonging', *Ethnos*, 84(4), pp. 678–697. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2018.1458745>.
- Seppänen, A., Kuusio H., Mäkipää L., Lilja, E, Rask, S. and Castaneda, A.** 2022. 'National belonging and psychological strain among Finnish migrant populations', *European Journal of Public Health*, 32(3), p. ckac131.513. <https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckac131.513>.
- Souto, A.M. and Lappalainen, S.** 2025. 'Normative whiteness in Finnish university education', *Critical Studies in Education*, 66, pp. 91–107. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2024.2347276>.
- Toivanen, M.** 2014. The visual lexica of (national) belonging and nonbelonging in the accounts of young Kurds in Finland. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 4(4), pp. 192–200.
- Tuominen, M., Kilpi-Jakonen, E., Velázquez R.G., Castaneda, A. and Kuusio, H.** 2023. Building social capital in a new home country. A closer look into the predictors of bonding and bridging relationships of migrant populations at different education levels', *Migration Studies*, 11(4), pp. 598–630. <https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnad022>.
- Vuori, J.** 2015. 'Kotouttaminen arjen kansalaisuuden rakentamisena', *Yhteiskuntapolitiikka*, 80(4), pp. 395–404.
- Yijälä, A. and Luoma, T.** 2018. "En halua istua veronmaksajan harteilla, haluan olla veronmaksaja itse": Haastattelututkimus maahanmuuttajien työmarkkinapoluista ja työnteon merkityksestä heidän hyvinvoinnilleen. (Tutkimuksia 2018: 2). Helsingin Kaupunginkanslia. https://www.hel.fi/hel2/tietokeskus/julkaisut/pdf/18_06_20_Tutkimuksia_2_Yijala_Luoma.pdf.
- Yuval-Davis, N.** 2006. 'Belonging and the politics of belonging', *Patterns of Prejudice: Boundaries, Identities and Borders: Exploring the Cultural Production of Belonging*, 40(3), pp. 197–214.

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Aldrovandi A, Kurki T.
 Between Proximity and
 Distance: Adult Migrants'
 Belonging in Racialised
 Social Networks. *Nordic
 Journal of Migration
 Research*. 2026; 16(2):
 1, 1–19. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.973>

Submitted: 27 December
 2024

Accepted: 20 November
 2025

Published: 21 January
 2026

COPYRIGHT:

© 2026 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons NonCommercial-NoDerivatives Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0), which permits unrestricted distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited, the material is not used for commercial purposes and is not altered in any way. See <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.

Nordic Journal of Migration Research is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Helsinki University Press.