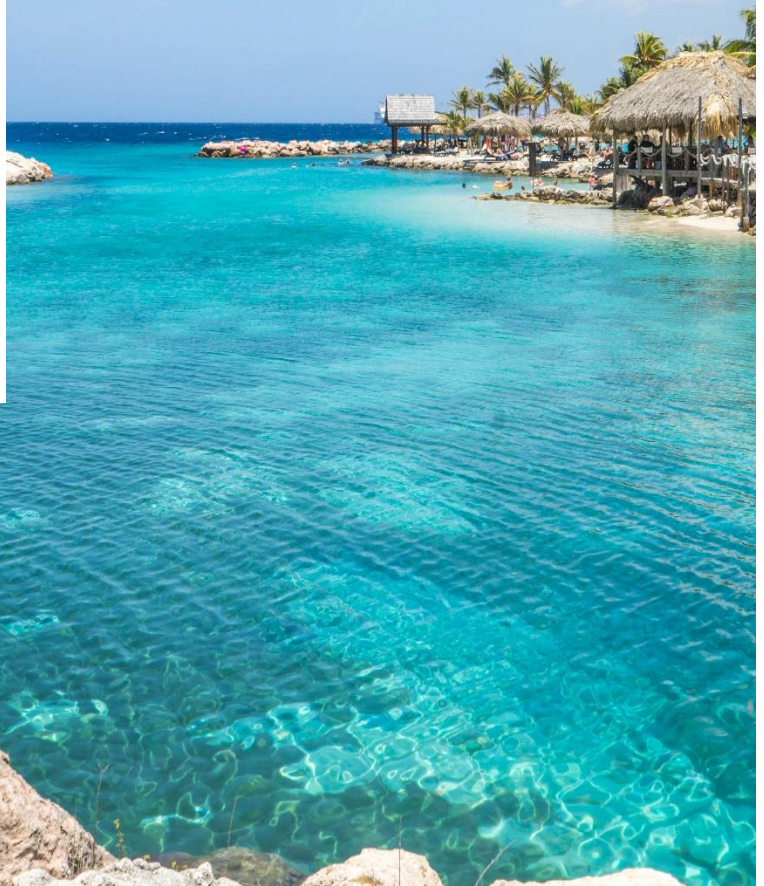


MPA 1 internship report

# Exploring the Sense of Belonging of Dutch Caribbean Students in the Netherlands



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# Summary

## Introduction

There are worrying statistics on the study success and mental wellbeing of Dutch Caribbean (DC) students, indicating the need for support for these students. Stichting WeConnect is one of the foundations that aims to support DC students by organising interventions to improve mental health, study success, and wellbeing. Due to the ongoing struggles of DC students, more ways to provide support for these students are necessary and are continuously looked for by WeConnect and other parties. One concept that is known for having an effect on the study success and (mental) wellbeing of students, is a sense of belonging. Contributing to the sense of belonging of DC students in the Netherlands could improve the difficult circumstances that thousands of DC students find themselves in. However, no research so far has looked at what is necessary to improve this feeling. Moreover, sense of belonging in the context of DC students in the Netherlands has received little attention from the world of research. The current study therefore aims to explore how the sense of belonging of DC students in the Netherlands can be improved, by examining the barriers and promoters of belonging.

With this aim in mind, the research question of this study is:

***How can the barriers and promoters of belonging be dealt with to improve the sense of belonging of DC students in the Netherlands?***

## Methodology

WeConnect has had an ongoing partnership with researchers of the Vrije Universiteit and has been looking to create meaningful interventions to address potentially sensitive topics to DC students. The current research is part of this collaboration and will partly be used to contribute to this project. Additionally, this study will look for ways that WeConnect and other stakeholders such as governmental bodies, educational institutes, and DC students themselves can contribute to the sense of belonging. A participatory action research approach was taken in which the barriers and promoters of belonging of DC students were explored. 4 workshops related to mental health, study success, wellbeing, and Caribbean identity in the Netherlands were organised and designed based on the preliminary results of this study. Along with the workshops, twelve DC students in different parts of the Netherlands were interviewed on topics related to the sense of belonging, and various barriers were identified.

## Results

This study revealed that DC students commonly experienced microaggressions during their student time in the Netherlands, which negatively impact the sense of belonging. The microaggressions occurred in various contexts and in a variety of ways. Most commonly, DC students experienced microinsults, situations where the offender does not necessarily have ill intentions, but where for example moments of ignorance or unknowingness result into actions that could offend the victim such as remarks about the level of Dutch language of DC students. In more severe cases, microaggressions took the form of microassault, where there were clear harmful intentions by the offender. Not only did these experiences affect belonging, but oftentimes had negative long lasting effects on the mental wellbeing of the participants as well. Moreover, participants commonly were struggling to find appropriate coping mechanisms for microaggressions. Where some students explained being seen as an angry black person when simply trying to have a conversation about the microaggression, and where others described not feeling confident enough to confront the wrongdoer, or not having the appropriate skills to do so.

Furthermore, DC students commonly experience being in a “gray area” as a result of legally being a Dutch student, while not being seen or treated as one. This identity crisis can make it difficult for DC students to determine which group they belong to. Students also feel a strong disconnection between DC students and Dutch people. Even though the parties have a shared history, DC students experience a big lack of knowledge from the Dutch side and, as a result, are commonly treated as “different” than the Dutch. Furthermore, in (rural) places outside of the Randstad, the opportunity to belong is missing, as there are few DC students to form a community with.

Furthermore, this study has found the importance for DC students of having DC communities in the Netherlands. Participants specifically described a need to be in contact with people who have had similar (life) experiences. The commonalities would result in DC students feeling better understood and not having to explain their struggles very detailed, suggesting that talking with fellow DC students helps let out frustration but more importantly, creates an environment in which these students feel at home.

Lastly, this study evaluated the current design of the workshops of WeConnect that have focussed on potentially sensitive topics such as experiences with exclusion and other struggles that come with being a DC student in the Netherlands. The workshops appeared to be very impactful on DC students, suggesting that the current structure of the workshops is effective. To be more precise, workshop participants appreciated the way that in the workshop, participants were eased into talking about their experiences and that the way a safe space was created was very much appreciated. Moreover, participants described a feeling of empowerment after the workshops and enjoyed reflecting on usually difficult topics.

## Discussion and conclusion

This study found various barriers and promoters for the sense of belonging of DC students in the Netherlands, and a series of recommendations are made for various stakeholders based on these findings.

Starting with WeConnect, due to the significant impact of microaggressions on the sense of belonging of DC students, it would be beneficial for WeConnect to focus its interventions on helping DC students heal from experiences with microaggressions and develop resilience and coping mechanisms for future confrontations with microaggressions. Other than that, WeConnect could try to not only execute its activities in the Randstad, but in other (student) cities in the Netherlands as well in order to provide DC students outside of the Randstad to develop a community and network with other Students. lastly, due to the positive responses to the latest workshop, WeConnect should continue to use the current design in future (mental health related) workshops.

Educational institutes can invest the possibilities of collaborating with culturally sensitive counsellors, to lower the barrier for help seeking for DC students and increase the efficacy of counselling. Moreover, educational institutes on the islands and in the Netherlands could collaborate and develop certain types of exchange programs, where future students could get into contact with other future students and current DC student in the Netherlands. According to participants of this study, this would help future DC students getting accustomed to the social and cultural differences between the islands and the Netherlands, while also providing future DC students with a network of fellow students that can provide guidance and support in early stages after arrival.

Furthermore, governmental bodies can help DC students as well. As DC students explained, microaggressions commonly arise from moments of unknowingness. DC students described that Dutch people are taught very little about the shared history between different parts of the Dutch kingdom, and that if people would be aware of this history, DC students would not be seen or treated as foreigners or outsiders. The Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science could revise the current requirements for primary and secondary education

curriculums to ensure that the history of the entire Dutch kingdom is taught, rather than just the history of the Netherlands.

DC study associations are encouraged to invest in providing future DC students with the necessary information about the options of joining DC associations, so that DC students can already be part of a DC community from early stages in their study. DC students themselves are encouraged to continue reflecting on their experiences in the Netherlands, in order to heal from negative past experiences with, for instance, microaggressions

To conclude, this study provides insights on the sense of belonging of DC students and uses these insights to provide recommendations to various parties on how to improve the sense of belonging of DC students in the Netherlands.

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## 1 Introduction

In the Netherlands, more than half of all students are struggling with mental health problems (RIVM, 2021). Students that completed their secondary education in a different country than the Netherlands are generally more prone to complications as a result of stressors that are related to adjustments to new social and cultural settings, financial situations, discrimination, etc. (Prieto-Welch, 2016). These adjustments can negatively affect students' so-called sense of belonging. Sense of belonging, the feeling of being connected to an environment or a group of people (Hurtado & Carter, 1997), can in turn be crucial for students' mental wellbeing, help seeking behaviour, and academic performances (Hagerty et al., 1992; Sithaldeen et al., 2021; Gopalan & Brady, 2020). The focus on research of sense of belonging has increased in recent years, but there are students of certain ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands that have been underrepresented in these studies.

A particular group that stands out among these students are students with Dutch Caribbean (DC) origins. Each year, roughly 1600 DC students move to the Netherlands to pursue higher education, as the options for higher education on the islands is limited (Van Casteren et al., 2021; National Ombudsman, 2022). However, In 2020, the National Ombudsman published an eye-opening report, in which was evident that DC students have a significant lower academic success rate than other international students, and struggle with unnoticed challenges. DC students face specific practical and sociocultural challenges prior, during, and after their move to the Netherlands (National Ombudsman, 2020). What is specifically problematic for this group of students is that, because of their technically Dutch citizenship, they generally do not enjoy the support that other international students experience.

The previous mentioned example can be considered as one of the many consequences of the colonial history of the Netherlands. To this day, Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao, St. Martin, St. Eustatius, and Saba are all part of the Dutch Kingdom and are therefore closely connected to the Netherlands. This is the reason why DC students are taught Dutch in primary school and why oftentimes DC students go to the Netherlands after completing secondary education.

The 2020 report had brought attention for the crucial need for both practical and psychological support for DC students, and was one of the driving forces for change regarding the situation that DC students found themselves in. Since 2020, the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science (MECS) has, in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations (MIKR), made progress towards a smoother transition for DC students. A 2023 report of the National Ombudsman has stated that significant effort is put into providing



DC students with the necessary information regarding their new situation, for instance (National Ombudsman, 2023). Though some of the practical barriers have been addressed, the need for more change is still evident. Moreover, the 2023 report addressed the practical barriers but had not laid eyes on the improvement of mental health of DC students, suggesting this is yet to be examined.

In addition to the efforts of the MECS, other parties have made efforts to promote study success and overall well-being of DC students. Re/Presenting Europe is one of the current projects that focuses on representing diverse, and often excluded groups of people in Europe. The researchers responsible for this project are, among other things, actively conducting research to shine light on present day consequences of European colonialism and finding ways to heal from the past (Re/Presenting Europe, 2024). The activities of Re/Presenting Europe are oftentimes executed in collaboration with various partners.

Stichting WeConnect is one of those partners and focuses on creating a network and providing support for DC students that are pursuing higher education in the Netherlands (WeConnect, 2022). Each year, WeConnect designs multiple projects that aim to address, for instance, mental health resilience of DC students in the Netherlands. WeConnect is continuously performing evaluations to improve its activities and find new ways to contribute to mental health, wellbeing, and study success of DC students.

As alluded to earlier, one potential theme that is worth exploring to better provide support for DC students, is the sense of belonging of these students. Moreover, during one of the previous workshops organized by WeConnect, it became apparent that DC students felt a certain need to cover topics such as racism and struggling to fit in. These topics are themes can be linked to a sense of belonging (Macneer & Hunter, 2023). This occurrence further indicates the potential importance of addressing sense of belonging in the activities of WeConnect.

## **1.1 Problem statement**

Promoting the sense of belonging of DC students is rather challenging, as it is yet to be examined how the sense of belonging for DC students in the Netherlands is actually perceived, what it is limited by, and what it is facilitated by. To further complicate matters, WeConnect has expressed its challenge with adequately reaching and getting through to all DC students by recognizing that addressing difficult topics to university students must be done in a different fashion than to, for instance, vocational school students. This challenge suggests that proper interventions require knowledge on the distinctive personal characteristics of the target audience and that there is no such thing as a “one-size-fits-all” approach, which had already been implied by previous research (Purgato et al.,2021). Further examination of the sense of belonging for DC students is necessary to adequately develop strategies to improve this feeling.

## 1.2 Research objective

The objective of this research is to explore how the sense of belonging of DC students in the Netherlands can be improved, by studying the most pressing barriers and promoters of belonging.

## 1.3 Research Question

The previously mentioned aim led to the following research question:

***How can the barriers and promoters of belonging be dealt with to improve the sense of belonging of DC students in the Netherlands?***

## 2 Contextual background

This part of the report provides information on the context of this study. Firstly, a short description of the link and shared history between the Netherlands and the DC islands will be given. Secondly, the origin of this research will be explained. thereafter, the relevant information on DC students is given. Lastly, the actions taken by WeConnect and its collaborations with other parties are explained.

### 2.1 Relationship between the Netherlands and the DC islands

The Netherlands and the DC islands are part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, in which the Netherlands, Aruba, Curacao, and St. Martin are seen as individual countries and have their own constitution and government. Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba are public bodies of the Netherlands, and thus directly adhere to the laws and regulations written by the Dutch government (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2022). The origin of the connection between the Netherlands and the DC islands dates back to the 17th century, when the Netherlands occupied several countries including the DC islands. This Dutch colonization lasted for multiple centuries and during this period, native inhabitants of the islands were enslaved and either sold or had to perform forced labour under inhumane conditions. The Dutch government has acknowledged and taken responsibility for its past actions, but the effects of slavery still linger in society to this day (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2023).

### 2.2 Consequences of colonialism and slavery

Though the DC islands are not formally seen as colonies of the Netherlands anymore, the Netherlands still holds some form of power over the islands. For instance, the Netherlands is responsible for the foreign policy of the entire Dutch Kingdom and represents the entire kingdom in international affairs (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2019). Another example of postcolonial influence of the Netherlands can be found in the education system, as DC students have to learn the Dutch language starting at primary school, and middle school students are oftentimes getting prepared for the transition from secondary education on the islands, to tertiary education in the Netherlands. There are also social consequences that are more challenging to detect. There are numerous social differences and segregations between Dutch people and ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands (Thijssen et al., 2021; Vermeij et al., 2009). Furthermore, ethnic minorities in Europe often encounter race based discrimination in various different contexts (European Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2023). An additional commonly found form of discrimination and exclusion is found in the world of research, where ethnic minorities are often severely underrepresented in studies (Redwood & Gill, 2013). Consequently, limited data is available on ethnic minorities, such as DC students, and science based policies are not adequately taking the needs of these groups into account.

## 2.3 Re/Presenting Europe

The problems that DC students and other ethnic minority groups face that have been covered in this report are some of the motivations for the researchers of the project “Re/Presenting Europe: Popular Representations of Diversity and Belonging” to take action and organise multiple activities to create a more inclusive European society. The project aims to do so by representing diverse groups of people to provide accurate information on the diversity of Dutch and European people (Re/Presenting Europe, 2024). Other than organising activities, Re/Presenting Europe is actively conducting research in an attempt to understand the process of othering, racialization in education and sports, the experiences of ethnic minorities, and the effect that othering and racialisation have on the sense of belonging. All these topics are studied in Re/Presenting Europe, while at the same time effective community-based methods to build societal inclusion are being explored (Re/Presenting Europe, 2024).

The current study is part of work package 5, also known as “Healing the Afterlives of Colonialism”, which focuses on acknowledging the colonial history of Europe and learning about both the current and past effects of colonialism, in order to contribute to a future that has healed from the wounds created by Europe’s colonial activities (Re/Presenting Europe, 2024). The need for research on this topic is evident, as the effects of postcolonialism are still found to this day. For instance, minority groups, formed by European citizens born outside of Europe, commonly experience hostility and being othered when visiting the European mainland, which negatively effects the feeling of belonging (Kinnvall, 2015).

## 2.4 Slavery memorial year

From July 2023 until July 2024, the Kingdom of the Netherlands has put extra effort in bringing attention to the Dutch historic involvement in slavery. Via this memorial year, the Dutch government aims to increase awareness and spread knowledge on the past events and increase connectedness between the different countries of the kingdom (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2023). The Dutch government also aims to reflect on how its history still has negative consequences to this day. Given the time period of this study (February 2024 – June 2024), the researchers see the memorial year as the perfect opportunity to further study the complications that DC students have to deal with in the Netherlands and send a message to the Dutch government on how these students can be helped with their struggles.

## 2.5 DC students

Students that were born in Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao, Sint Maarten, Saba, and Sint Eustatius are often forced to pursue higher education away from home, as the options for tertiary education on the islands are limited (Van Casteren et al., 2021; National Ombudsman, 2022). A sizable part of these students switch to different educational tracks after the start of their initial study and do not graduate within the regular timeframe (National Ombudsman, 2020). This switch and delay are caused by multiple factors. What is noticeable is that DC students are more prone to study- and mental health related problems compared to other groups of international students and European Dutch students. One of the reasons behind this is that, in most cases, only international students that are motivated, confident, and willing to move abroad are the only students that actually end up studying in a different country. Whereas DC students have to study abroad because they lack the opportunity to do so in their home country (Van Casteren et al., 2021). Furthermore, as DC students are technically Dutch citizens, they do not enjoy the support that is generally provided for international students. Adding to the problem is the practicality that historically, DC students have not been fully treated as Dutch students either. To exemplify this, only as of 2023, DC students have been able to apply for a citizen service number. Meaning that these students have only been able to apply for student finance recently, which every European Dutch student had already benefited from previously (National Ombudsman, 2023).

## 2.6 Stichting WeConnect

Stichting WeConnect is one of the foundations that provides support for DC students. WeConnect focuses on developing networks that connect students from all parts of the Dutch kingdom, by developing projects that are focused on educating students and young professionals on topics such as budgeting, communication, and mental health resilience (WeConnect, 2024). These projects are designed to reach the target group but this remains challenging, as the individual needs and characteristics within this target group can vary, meaning that a so called 'one-size-fits-all' rationale during the development of these project is flawed (Purgato et al., 2021). Therefore, WeConnect intends to use its tailor-made activities not only to reach a specific group, but also to educate this group, so that the information and skills that DC students learn through these projects are potentially relayed to other DC students that are not willing to participate in the projects.

## 2.7 WeConnect's Partnership with the VU

WeConnect has an ongoing partnership with researchers from the Vrije Universiteit (VU) and together, these two parties have been performing participatory action research (PAR) with the objective to find out how a safe space can be created for DC students in which these students have the opportunity to address their struggles related to the sense of belonging, exclusion mechanisms, and overall (mental) wellbeing in the Netherlands. In the past three years, multiple workshops have been developed and evaluated, various stakeholders have been interviewed, and multiple studies have been performed to find out what the ingredients are for successful (tailor-made) interventions for DC students. The current study is also part of this (continuous) project.

## 3 Theoretical background

In this section, the concepts and theories that are needed to further understand this study are explained.

### 3.1 Belongingness

The Cambridge Dictionary described belonging as “a feeling of being happy or comfortable as part of a particular group and having a good relationship with the other members of the group because they welcome you and accept you” (“Belonging”, 2024). Belonging is crucial for humans because it creates better relationships, increased mental and physical health and academic performances (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Hagerty et al., 1992), while a lack of belongingness is linked to depression, anxiety, and suicide (Theisen, 2021). Belonging has also been conceptualized as a principle that guides how people experience interaction with other people and social institutions (Halse, 2018). Maslow (1968) has gone so far as to say that belonging is a human need. However, ‘Sense of belonging’ is a broad and general term that indicates the feeling of connection and is commonly used in a wide variety of context. There is little consensus on the exact definition of belonging (Manning & Mohamad, 2023), so before exploring how to improve the sense of belonging, it is crucial to first apprehend what the feeling of belonging actually entails for DC student and what it could be affected by.

### 3.2 Microaggressions

Previous research found that encounters with microaggressions can impact the sense of belonging of ethnic minority students (Lewis et al., 2019). Given the context of this study, it is worth exploring the experiences that DC students have with microaggressions as well. Microaggressions have previously been described as subtle or unintended putdowns that in itself appear harmless, but in accumulation can deal great psychological damage (Pierce, 1995). Previous research determined that microaggressions can be subdivided into three categories: microinsults, microassaults, and microinvalidations (Ogunyemi et al., 2020). Microinsults are most commonly found and are described as subtle remarks that are rude to the recipient. Microassaults are purposeful actions with the intention of hurting the victim. Microinvalidations are interactions in which the feelings, thoughts, or experiences as a person of colour are dismissed (Sue et al., 2007). Dividing microaggressions into these three categories can give a better insight in the way DC students experience microaggressions, and are therefore taken into account during data analysis in this study.

### 3.3 Concepts and theories around belonging

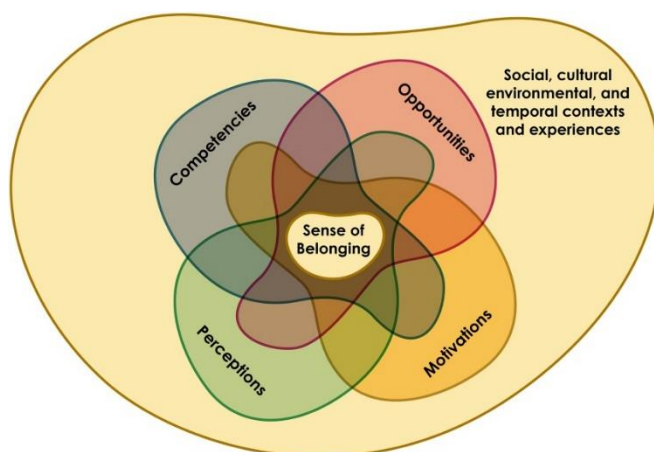
The Need to Belong Theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) suggests that humans are motivated by a need to belong, meaning that people actively seek for interpersonal attachment. However, the intensity of this need can vary from person to person.

A counter to this theory is the need for uniqueness. The Optimal Distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991) suggests that as much as there is a need to be similar to people within the same group, the need to be different is still evident. This theory indicates that the need to belong and feel included and the need to be unique both need to be fulfilled in order to reach an equilibrium.

In the context of DC students, this could imply that the need to be an integral part of society and educational communities is present, as well as the need to maintain the distinct character.

Researchers have further suggested that sense of belonging can be divided into two categories, the feeling of being at home in a specific place (place-belongingness), and as a feeling of socio-spatial inclusions (the politics of belonging) (Antonsich, 2010). This split of definitions suggest that in order to properly explore the sense of belonging of DC students, the factors that could potentially affect place-belongingness and the politics of belonging should be taken into account. It must therefore be explored what social and environmental factors influence this feeling of being “at home” and how this feeling is actually perceived. As for the politics of belonging, this feeling is influenced by the social experiences one has with other people. This view of belonging is strongly linked to the idea that a sense of belonging is dependent on being a member of a group (Crowley, 1999).

So far, this report has described belonging as a subjective feeling that is crucial for human wellbeing and is dependent on social and environmental factors. Allen and colleagues (2021) have indicated that belonging is not only dependent on external factors such as socio-spatial acceptance and place-connectedness, but also on intrinsic factors like one’s motivation to belong and the competency to belong. Taken all the internal and external factors into account, Allen and colleagues (2021) have developed a model which can be used to examine one’s sense of belonging while taking the complexity and importance of context into account (**figure 1**).



*Figure 1. the sense of belonging model developed by Allen et al. (2021)*



The sense of belonging framework developed by Allen and colleagues (2021) was used to guide measurement and examination of the sense of belonging of DC students in the Netherlands.

The model shows the domains formed by external and internal factors that form the basis for the sense of belonging.

## 3.4 Components of the belonging model

### 3.4.1 Competencies

The first domain of the framework consists of the competencies for belonging. The competencies can be broken down in multiple subdimensions. Generally, competencies refer to one's social ability to connect with people, but this domain also speaks to the emotional ability of an individual. It is not mere the skill one has to interact with people, but also the skill of being able to emotionally bond with someone and to recognize relatability. A lack of empathic and emotional skills hinder one's ability to develop a sense of belonging (Allen, 2019). Other than emotional skills, it is necessary to have cultural skills that can help understand norms and values within communities. The combination of social, emotional, and cultural skills form the basis for competencies to belong. In the context of DC students, it is necessary to explore the social and emotional skills of the students and how accustomed these students are to Dutch culture. It is common for international students to struggle with social and emotional adjustments when moving to the Netherlands (Rientjes & Tempelaar, 2013), meaning that it is worth examining if these adjustments also form barriers for the sense of belonging of DC students.

### 3.4.2 Opportunities

The second domain implies that belonging is dependent on opportunities. This domain covers the availability of belonging, taking into account that groups need to be accessible for people to form connections. This domain has multiple subdimensions too, starting with the physical practicalities of having the opportunity to belong. To exemplify this, it is necessary to be in the vicinity of people and have the spatial opportunity to talk and connect to people. For instance, people living in rural areas have less opportunities to belong as a consequence of being isolated from civilization (Correa-Velez et al., 2010). Furthermore, there must also be social opportunities to belong, this subdimension mainly refers to the openness of a community to welcome an individual. Especially in recent times, International students have not been welcomed with open arms due to political developments or the ongoing housing crisis in the Netherlands (Fang & Liempt, 2020), suggesting that DC students' social opportunities to belong could be limited as well.

Lastly, the circumstances must be taken into account when exploring the opportunity to belong. To provide a concrete example, the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 made it nearly impossible to meet new people and travel

to new places to develop a feeling of belonging. But also societal breakthrough events such as the increasing attention for the Black Lives Matter movement, has increased the opportunity for people of colour to form a strong community for those who are commonly excluded (Schuschke & Tynes, 2016).

### 3.4.3 Motivation

The third domain is the motivation to belong. As indicated before, humans have a certain desire to belong to groups, as well as being seen as a unique individual (Brewer, 1991). Meaning that this domain depends on the intensity of the willingness of someone to belong. This domain is further dependent on one's appreciation for belonging. A person that enjoys interaction with people, actively looks for interaction, and has positive experiences with interactions is seen as someone who is motivated to get a feeling of belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Leary and Kelly (2009) have established that the degree of motivation can vary from person to person and can have different causes, meaning that personal experiences also play a role.

### 3.4.4 Perception

The final domain indicates that a sense of belonging arises from one's perception of belonging.

This domain covers the view that one has on the sense of belonging. It is suggested that perception can be influenced by past negative experiences (Coie, 2004). Someone who has previously made attempts to form connections with others, but has been rejected several times, could have a negative view towards belonging. This indicates that there is a possibility that one could perceive the barrier to belong as too high or that one is content with not being part of a group, and therefore does not see the need to pursue a feeling of belonging. Furthermore, this domain explains that students' perceptions of what it takes to belong somewhere can affect how a student behaves. To exemplify this, it is quite common for internationals to struggle with the choice of retaining one's own identity, or to assimilate into the culture of the country that they study in (Andrade, 2006), resulting in some form identity crisis and making it difficult to find out in which group they would belong. To apply this theory to DC students, the earlier described "double" nationality could make it difficult to find out where these students belong and what they need to do to belong.

### 3.4.5 Contexts and experiences

As alluded to earlier, the beforementioned domains of belonging are dependent on social, cultural, environmental, and temporal contexts and experiences. The feeling of belonging is different in one setting compared to another. Therefore, the context one finds themselves in, and the experiences being lived through in that context must be taken into account when studying the sense of belonging. For this study, the four domains all take place in the context of the Netherlands, and are dependent on the experiences that DC students have had.

It must be noted that even though the domains and sub-domains have been explained separately here, they all interact and influence one another dynamically in reality.

## 3.5 Conceptualizing belonging

These theories and concepts can give an indication of what the sense of belonging could be affected by. However, as mentioned before, there is no clear consensus on the exact definition of sense of belonging, and the model of Allen et al. (2021) does not provide the proper concepts to fully grasp the meaning of belonging, meaning that it is still necessary to incorporate another framework to discover what that feeling of belonging actually entails for DC students. Mahar and colleagues (2012) have found that current literature has covered multiple concepts that are necessary to take into account when exploring what an individual's sense of belonging actually encompasses.

### 3.5.1 Subjectivity

As sense of belonging is a feeling felt by an individual, subjectivity is a key component of the sense of belonging (Mahar et al., 2012). The subjective nature of belonging further implies that belongingness can have multiple possible meaning and is a key element to understand that belonging is a very personal matter dependent on one's characteristics and experiences.

### 3.5.2 Reciprocity

Mahar et al. further found that shared feelings and experiences can affect the forming of a sense of belonging. Multiple studies have suggested that shared feelings and experiences can, for instance, result in group members being more in line with one another and can cause a feeling of trust and comfort within a group (Bettez, 2010; Levet-Jones et al., 2009). Current literature does, however, not explain the exact mechanism behind this phenomenon.

### 3.5.3 Dynamism

Mahar et al. (2012) also exemplify how sense of belonging is circumstantial and dependent on environmental factors. Furthermore, one's sense of belonging is related to how well one can adapt to new cultural settings when put in a new environment. Dynamism in the context of DC students would refer to the switch from living in on one of the Caribbean Islands to living in European Netherlands, for instance.

### 3.6 Integrated framework

By combining the work of Mahar et al. (2012) and Allen et al. (2021), the researchers have guidance on how to explore, first of all, what exactly is this feeling that is to be studied and, secondly, how the barriers and promoters can be identified and analysed. A visual representation of the integrated framework is shown in figure 2.

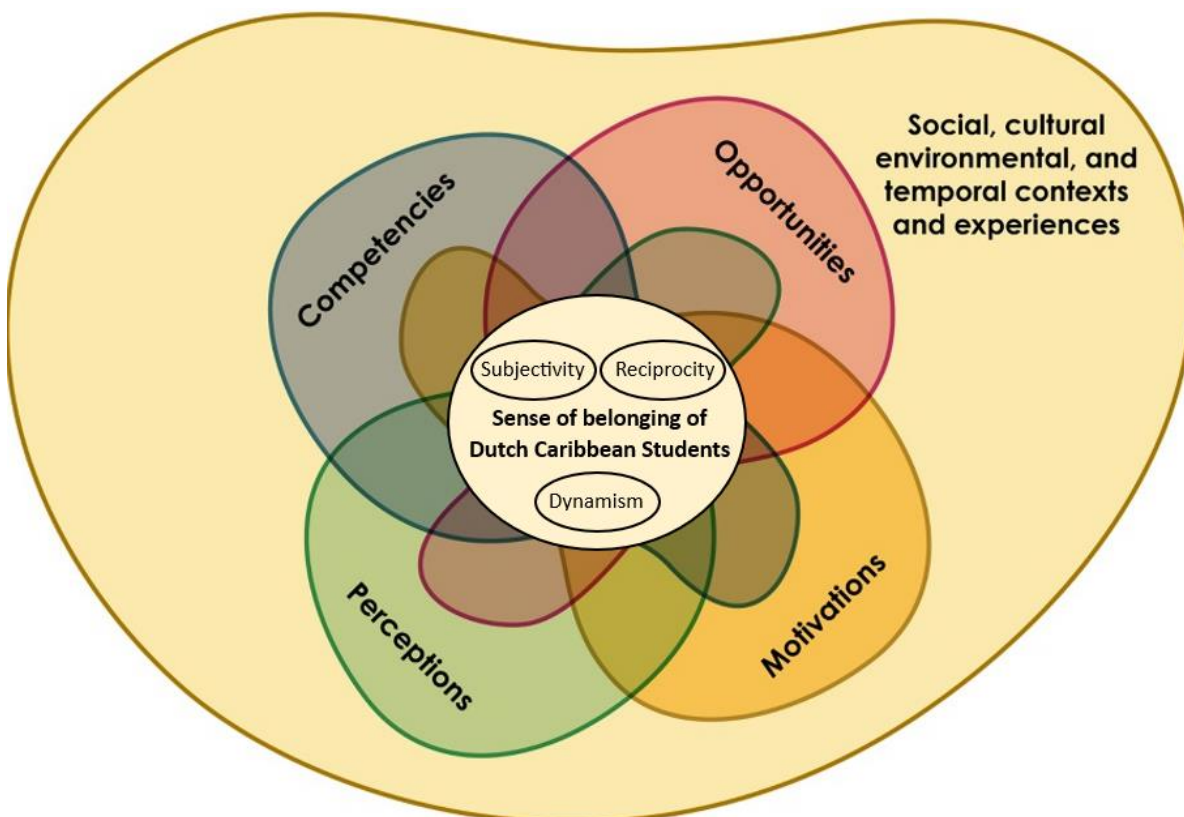


Figure 2. The integrated framework used to examine the sense of belonging of DC students

### 3.7 Sub-questions

To find out how DC students experience their sense of belonging in the Netherlands, sub-questions are created based on the problem statement, the objective and context of this study, the identified main concepts, and the integrated framework. These sub-questions are:

- 1. What do DC students in the Netherlands perceive as the barriers for belonging?**
- 2. What do DC students in the Netherlands perceive as the promoters for belonging?**
- 3. What is the role of microaggressions in the sense of belonging of DC students in the Netherlands?**
- 4. How can Stichting WeConnect address sense of belonging to DC students?**

## 4 Methodology

This section of the report elaborates on the methods that were used to provide answers for the research questions. Firstly, the chosen study design will be explained. Secondly, the participants and recruitment strategy will be described. Thereafter, the data collection methods will be explained, followed by information on the data analysis. Lastly, ethical considerations for this study will be provided.

### 4.1 Study design

This study gathered data on the sense of belonging of DC students in the Netherlands.

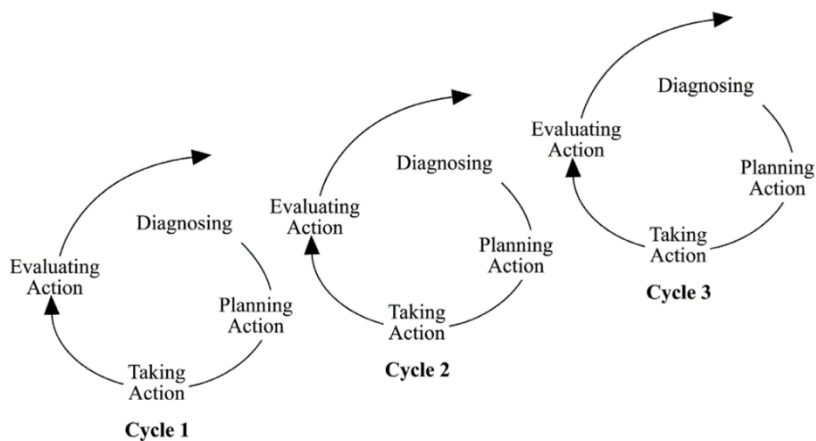
As mentioned in the previous chapters, development of sense of belonging is highly context dependent, dynamic and complex. Taking a qualitative approach was necessary to provide a holistic overview on the study topic (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Furthermore, this approach not only led to an understanding of what the perspectives of DC students are, but also provided an indication of how this perspective is formed.

A quantitative approach to study this topic was also considered, but this was rejected due to various reasons. The first one being the timeframe of this study. No validated pre-existing quantitative tool was found that fully covers the complex nature of the context of DC, meaning that new quantitative data collecting tools would need to be developed, tested, and validated for this study, which was considered impractical due to the limited timeframe of the study. Furthermore, during a previous workshop of WeConnect in February, the researchers noticed that the target audience participated very actively in group discussions on sensitive topics such as racism and fitting in, which was rather remarkable due to the reserved nature of DC students that WeConnect previously experienced. As a result, the researchers felt that the barrier for a qualitative approach was smaller than previously thought and determined that a qualitative approach would be a realistic way to obtain sufficient data for this study.

The community under study strongly participated in the designing process of multiple stages of this study, as previous workshops have been the key factor in deciding which data collecting tool will be used and how this tool will be designed. This implies that this study was structured as a participatory action research (Whyte, 1994). This approach can be further identified by the explanation that some students within the community under study are part of the organizational team of WeConnect as well. The result hereof was that the outcomes of this study will be implemented for the affected community, by the affected community, and because of the affected community. This methodological structure allowed for the DC students to use their knowledge and experience to influence changes that are necessary to properly address their psychological needs in the projects of WeConnect (Baum et al., 2006; Zeller-Berkman, 2017).

Furthermore, throughout this study, multiple projects of Stichting WeConnect were designed based on the (preliminary) results, meaning that the outcomes of this study were immediately translated into action. The projects were hosted and observed by the researchers as well. During these projects, the researchers examined how relatable the identified barriers and promotors of belonging for DC students were to the participants (other DC students) of the projects, in an attempt to validate the results. The projects of WeConnect were then analysed by both the research team and the team of WeConnect to see whether or not the implementation of the (preliminary) research results were successful or not, and what differences needed to be made regarding the research approach.

The concurrent implementation and analysis of this research and the projects of WeConnect looks very similar to the spiral of action research cycles developed by Coghlan and Brannick (2014) (**figure 3**). This model explains the recurring process of performing research and analysis to establish what actions need to be taken, followed by planning procedures to determine how these actions can be realised, after which the actions are taken and evaluated, before the cycle starts again.



*Figure 3. cycles of action research (Coghlan & Brannick., 2014)*

Considering all the beforementioned characteristics, this study is considered as qualitative participatory action research.

## 4.2 Participant selection and recruitment

All students in the Netherlands are enrolled in one of three types of postsecondary education: Secondary vocational education (MBO), higher education (HBO), and university education (WO). To get a complete overview of DC students' sense of belonging in this study, DC students from each of these types of education were invited to participate. This was done via purposive sampling methods. Potential participants were contacted via email or via LinkedIn.

to be eligible for participation, participants had to fulfil the following criteria:

1. **Participant was raised in Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao, Sint Maarten, Sint Eustatius, or Saba.**
2. **Participant has completed secondary education on the Dutch Caribbean islands.**
3. **Participant has moved to European Netherlands to pursue tertiary education.**
4. **Is currently enrolled in an MBO, HBO, or WO course.**
5. **Can understand and speak Dutch and/or English.**

These criteria were based on several assumptions and practicalities. The activities of WeConnect are focused on Dutch Caribbean students that completed secondary education on the Islands (criteria 1 and 2). Furthermore, this study focuses on the sense of belonging of DC students located in the Netherlands (criteria 3 and 4). Lastly, the activities of WeConnect, As well as the data collecting tools, will be presented in Dutch or English, meaning that it is necessary for the participants to understand and speak Dutch and/or English to actively participate (criterium 5). DC students studying in different parts of the Netherlands participated in this study. **Appendix 1** provides the demographics of the participants.

## 4.3 Data collection

Multiple data collection methods were used to study the sense of belonging of DC students. This triangulation of methods would take place to increase reliability (Gray, 2014), validity (Farmer et al., 2006), and to provide a more complete picture of sense of belonging of DC students (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

### 4.3.1 Interviews

For this study, semi structured in-depth interviews were conducted to collect data on the sense of belonging of DC students in the Netherlands. **Appendix 2** shows the semi structured interview guide that was followed during the interviews. This way of collecting data was chosen due to various reasons. Firstly, interviews are seen as an appropriate tool for in-depth exploration of one's perspective and experiences (Gray, 2014). Other tools, such as focus group discussions, were also considered but not chosen due practical reasons such as the



difficulties in organising said focus groups in a rather short time period, and potential complications during participant recruitment for these focus groups. A total of 12 interviews took place online or in person and were conducted in Dutch or English, dependent on the preference of the participant.

The first interview that was conducted did not only serve as a form of data collection, but was also a pilot interview to test if the interview guide covered all relevant topics and to find out if these potential sensitive topics were handled in such a way that it would not be harmful to participants. The first participant was aware that the interview was both a pilot interview and part of the data collection, and was willing to help the researchers further design the interview guide. This collaboration between participant and researcher is also a characteristic of the earlier mentioned participatory action research. Moreover, the pilot testing of the interview positively adds to the validity of the data collecting tool (Majid et al., 2017).

#### 4.3.2 Workshops by WeConnect

Throughout this research, Stichting WeConnect organised multiple workshops which were designed based on the (preliminary) results of this study. The workshops focused on the struggles that come with being a DC student in the Netherlands and on how to cope with these complications. These workshops were key in the designing process of this research and had a symbiotic relationship with the research, as the topics discussed in the workshops were covered in the interviews, and the data obtained from the interviews was used to design the workshops. 4 workshops were organised in total, all with different themes (**appendix 3**). these workshops were not only organised to provide support for DC students, but were also part of the cycles of action research. Evaluation of the workshops was important to find out if the topics addressed in both the study and the workshops were relevant and relatable for DC students.

#### 4.4 Analysis

This study aimed to explore the sense of belonging of DC students in the Netherlands, and find out what barriers and facilitators are experienced by these students. Interviews were recorded and stored as anonymous transcripts, after which the coding process started. Three transcripts were analysed first to develop a codebook (**appendix 4**) in which all relevant main- and subcodes were established. Subsequent transcripts were coded with the help of this codebook.

As mentioned earlier, the obtained results were immediately put into practice during the designing process of WeConnect's workshops. After the workshops, reflection sessions took place in which the research team and the team of WeConnect analysed how the workshop participants experienced the workshops.

## 4.5 Ethical considerations

This study involved human participants, meaning that certain ethical considerations had to be taken into account. As the interviews covered sensitive and potentially triggering subjects, precautions were taken in order to minimize potential harm. Firstly, all participants were informed on the nature of the study through an information letter (**appendix 5**). This letter contained all the details of the study in both English and Dutch, meaning participants were fully aware that potentially sensitive topics would be covered in the interview. Furthermore, all participants read and signed an informed consent form (**appendix 6**), in which was stated that participation is completely voluntary and that participants are free to drop out of the study at any point without having to give an explanation to do so. to further deal with potential harm, WeConnect has connections to numerous culture sensitive counsellors that speak the local languages of the islands. Participants were aware that the research team would share these contact details with participants if the participants had the need to receive counselling. Lastly, a data management plan (**appendix 7**) was developed to securely handle all the obtained data.

## 5 Results

This section elaborates on the findings obtained throughout this study.

### 5.1 Barriers for belonging

Students mentioned multiple barriers that hindered the feeling of belonging. These barriers are covered in this section.

#### 5.1.1 Negative past experiences

Multiple students mentioned having bad experiences with other people in the Netherlands. These experiences were mainly described as experiences with racism and other forms of discrimination. Some students said that they did not trust the people around them, which made it hard to form connections with other people:

***“Maybe they did invite me or whatever, but because I didn’t trust them, I acted distant towards them. And then maybe they tried to invite me once or twice and after that, they might have said “you know what, he’s a bit weird”, and therefore they didn’t invite me anymore I think”.<sup>1</sup> (P5)***

Moreover, multiple participants reported that these experiences also resulted in the feeling of not wanting to be in the Netherlands at all, as the experiences made them feel unwelcome and, in some cases, even made them regret their decision to come to the Netherlands. The negative past experiences of DC students also lead to a decrease in motivation of participants to be associated with certain groups of people:

***“We’ve all, as Dutch Caribbean students, have experienced some level of racism or discrimination that puts us off from the Dutch people, that you don’t want to associate yourself, myself included”. (P7)***

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<sup>1</sup> This quote was translated from Dutch to English. Original quote: “Misschien hebben ze wel mij uitgenodigd of wat dan ook. Maar omdat ik een beetje, ik vertrouwde ze niet, geef ik mezelf een beetje afstandig gevoel tegenover hen en misschien hebben ze één of twee keer geprobeerd en daarna zeggen ze van ja, weet je, hij is een beetje raar. Dus dan hebben ze mij niet meer uitgenodigd denk ik”.

### 5.1.2 DC students are in a “gray identity area”

Most participants described a form of identity crisis which is formed by the notion of legally being Dutch, but not being seen and treated as Dutch, while at the same time being an international student that is legally not an international student. In the context of belonging, this idea of both being a national and international student made it difficult for most students to find out to which group of students they belong: the Dutch students or the international students. Some students referred to this matter as “being in a gray area”:

***“You're not Dutch because you're not from the Netherlands in a way. Um, but you're not international either, because you have a Dutch passport and it's that gray area that a lot of Dutch Caribbean students find themselves in when they come to the Netherlands”. (P9)***

### 5.1.3 Accumulation of small complications is detrimental for DC students

Participants mentioned that the transition from the DC to the Netherlands can be a big step. The main point that stands out is that it is difficult to adequately prepare for the transition. Some participants indicated that they thought they were ready to study in the Netherlands. But after arrival, all the social and practical challenges appear to be greater than originally thought. Particularly, a lot of small complications tend to pile up and have a great accumulative effect. Examples of these small complications were not knowing what the do's and don'ts are in the Netherlands, not being fully accustomed to the cold weather, and not knowing where to go for help with school:

***“There are so many things going on in your first year if you have never been to the Netherlands before, that you can't fully focus on school and completing courses. (...) So for instance a lot of small things that, eventually, become so much that you can't perform to the best of your abilities at school”.<sup>2</sup> (P5)***

Students explained that, looking back, experiencing all these complications is very different than only hearing about them and preparing for them, and that proper guidance to help with all the little small struggles would be strongly appreciated.

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<sup>2</sup> This quote was translated from Dutch to English. Original quote: “Dus er spelen zoveel dingen in je eerste jaar als je nog nooit naar Nederland bent geweest dat je geen ruimte hebt om helemaal te focussen op je school en om je vakken te halen. (...) dus bijvoorbeeld veel kleine dingetjes zorgen ervoor dat het uiteindelijk een hoop dingen wordt, dat je uiteindelijk niet je beste prestatie gaat geven aan je studie”.

#### 5.1.4 Distance between DC students and Dutch people

Participants alluded to the fact that there is quite a lack of connection between DC students and Dutch people/students. Participants noted that there is a big lack of knowledge on the DC part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and that this lack of knowledge resulted in DC students not feeling understood and creating a distance between DC students and the people around them. Furthermore, participants mentioned that they often experienced microaggressions, which were due to unawareness and unknowingness of the aggressor:

***“They really think the Dutch kingdom only comprises of the Netherlands alone. (...) They don't think about those islands and then they see them as foreign, or we are foreigners and they don't want to adapt themselves to us. Or not to adapt themselves, but understand our struggles or say, when you say certain things, it's disrespectful or insulting”. (P7)***

Some participants also felt like their skin-tone added to the distance between themselves and people around them. This mainly occurred in areas where there are generally less people of colour. Participants indicated that they were very aware of the fact that they had a different skin colour than most people in these areas. Participants described this feeling as not being seen as normal and, to various extents, that it was apparent that people in these predominantly white areas made having a darker skin tone an issue:

***“I kind of am always sticking out and in my classes, a lot of the times I've been the only black girl, and definitely the only Caribbean girl. And so it's like here my race does feel like more of an obvious thing”. (P4)***

Moreover, most participants expressed finding it difficult to form connections with other students at some point since their arrival in the Netherlands. This is due to multiple reasons. It was pointed out multiple times that there is a significant size difference between the Netherlands and the DC islands. Due to the small size of the islands, most students were used to already knowing a lot of people, and were not really used to meeting new people. Not having trained the ability to form new connections made it difficult to realise new connections after moving to the Netherlands:

***“you come from an environment where you don't meet new people easily, so you are not really exposed to new people to whom you need to introduce yourself to and that introduce themselves to you. And then,***

***you come here and there is a whole lecture hall full of people that you don't know. (...)So basically that practice, and the social skills, I didn't have that".<sup>3</sup> (P2)***

Some participants mentioned that there is still some sort of language barrier between DC students and Dutch students, despite being fluent in Dutch. This is partly due to the way Dutch is taught on the islands, where formal Dutch is being taught. In the Netherlands, however, the use of certain slang, dialects, and cultural references while speaking can make it difficult for DC students to understand Dutch students and properly express emotions:

***"I tend to feel like I belong less because there's a lot of things that they have in common and understand and jokes that they make and, even though I speak Dutch, I might not understand, like all of the cultural things that might be part of the language. So then I kind of like feel a little bit outside because I can definitely communicate to a certain extent, but I can't understand everything because there's like a lot of cultural background that's missing there". (P4)***

### **5.1.5 Lack of community & support systems and the need for people with similar experiences**

Specifically in rural areas outside of the Randstad, some students described not having a (large) DC community, and therefore not fully having the opportunity to belong. Most participants described the importance of having a DC community. The effect of having a community that came up most is that participants felt most comfortable talking about their experiences to other people that have had similar experiences, as the participants felt better understood by fellow DC students, compared to other groups of students. Therefore, not having a DC community in certain places in the Netherlands leads to buildup of frustration, as the students without a DC community have limited opportunities to blow off some steam.

On another note, multiple participants mentioned the importance of family and close friends. Participants explained the difficulty of reaching out to friends and family in the Netherlands. This is due to multiple factors. One, for instance, is the distance. All participants that spoke on this topic mentioned the difference in size between the Netherlands and the DC Islands. Where on the islands you could drive for 10 minutes and you would be at a family member's house, in the Netherlands you need to travel multiple hours. Moreover, the participants mentioned a cultural and mindset difference between people in the Netherlands and people in their Caribbean home country. Where on the islands it is very common to visit someone without scheduling

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<sup>3</sup> This quote was translated from Dutch to English. Original quote: "Je komt van een omgeving waar je niet makkelijk nieuwe mensen leert kennen, dus je wordt niet makkelijk blootgesteld aan nieuwe mensen waar je dan jezelf aan moet voorstellen en die zich aan jou gaan voorstellen. En dan kom je opeens hier en dan is het gewoon een collegezaal aan mensen die je niet kent (...) dus eigenlijk die oefening gewoon, en die social skills had ik niet".

an appointment, in the Netherlands this would not work, as people in the Netherlands tend to follow their agenda very strictly. For most participants, these barriers lead to the feeling of not really having the opportunity to see and talk to the people that you want to see or talk to:

***“You know people, but they're not there, you know, they're not in reaching distance because I may be here, someone is in Tilburg, someone is in Groningen, someone is in Amsterdam. But we've also become adults. So it's very difficult to make plans”. (P12)***

### **5.1.6 Pressure to succeed and coping with problems**

Participants mentioned that they felt pressure, though there were various reasons for the experienced pressure. Most participants mentioned the need to do well, both in academic and personal life. This was mainly due to the Caribbean mindset that claims that it is shameful if you move to the Netherlands for education and return empty-handed. Furthermore, some participants described that DC students are commonly worried by the view that others have of them, adding to that pressure to succeed.

The pressure that participants also had multiple effects. Some students were forced to put so much time and effort into school that they did not take the time to connect with fellow students and also did not take the time to settle in their new area:

***“That pressure influences the way you behave. For instance, if I get invited to go out on Saturday (...) but I have an exam on Monday that I need to pass (...) then I'm definitely going to say “no, I'm not coming with you”. And that creates some sort of distance between me and the Dutch student that invited me to go out”<sup>4</sup>***  
**(P5)**

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<sup>4</sup> This quote was translated from Dutch to English. Original quote: “die druk heeft invloed gehad over hoe je jezelf gaat gedragen. Stel je voor ik heb een uitnodiging gekregen om zaterdag mee uit te gaan (...) maar maandag heb ik een toets die ik moet halen (...) ga ik sowieso zeggen van nee ik ga niet met jullie mee. En dat creëert een soort van afstand tussen mij en de Nederlandse student die mij heeft uitgenodigd om samen uit te gaan.”

## 5.2 Promotors of belonging

In the following section, the identified promotors for belonging are covered.

### 5.2.1 Diversity promotes belonging

Participants stated that their sense of belonging increases when they visit multicultural cities and other places where diversity of race and religion is prominent. These places make the participants feel like less of an outsider compared to places that were seen as “predominantly white”. What specifically stands out is the reaction and feeling of comfort that DC students have when hearing Papiamentu/Papiamentu in these culturally diverse areas. The increase in sense of belonging was further explained by stating that the people living in these culturally diverse places tend to have a more open, and less judgmental, mindset, as these people are more used to seeing people of colour. Which again, made participants feel like less of an outsider:

***“In the Randstad, I guess because it's bigger cities, there are more people of colour, there are more diverse people. I don't feel perceived as much as I do here or as much as I did here. So that made me feel quite comfortable when I'm in Randstad, compared to in Maastricht”. (P6)***

Most participants find comfort in being around people that have had similar experiences as DC students. This was described as feeling understood and not having to explain and exemplify all the struggles that participants face. This feeling of being understood is once again linked to the importance of being part of a DC community, where people can openly talk and relate to the struggles of being a DC student in the Netherlands:

***“We speak the same language, but despite that, we share the same experiences in the Netherlands, sometimes with racism, sometimes with the view people have of us without getting to know us. And I think, yeah, our lives are a bit more similar compared to other people”.<sup>5</sup> (P3)***

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<sup>5</sup> This quote was translated from Dutch to English. Original quote: “We spreken dezelfde taal. Maar ongeacht dat, we hebben dezelfde ervaring in Nederland zeg maar. Soms met racisme, soms hoe mensen al opvattingen hebben van ons zonder ons te leren kennen. En ik denk van ja. Onze levens zijn een beetje similar en vergeleken met andere mensen”.



### 5.2.2 Support system crucial for DC students

Most participants have had the opportunity to create some sort of support system around them. Some systems consist of family members, some consist of friend, and some consist of both. This support system appeared to be pivotal, especially in early stages after arrival in the Netherlands, as having this support helped get through moments of loneliness and periods of mental distress:

***“When I look around and see all my friends, then I think “we’re all in the same boat, so.... you’re not alone”. Sometimes you can just message each other asking them “hey do you want to cook together today”, and not be alone”.<sup>6</sup> (P10)***

The students had recognized the importance of belonging to a community. Some mentioned the need for proper guidance during the early phases of the transition to the Netherlands, others mentioned the importance of being able to speak to people in your native language, and others said they just really appreciate having people with similar backgrounds and experiences to talk to.

For the convenience of the reader, an overview of the identified barriers and promoters is given in **appendix 8**.

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<sup>6</sup> This quote was translated from Dutch to English. Original quote: “Als ik dan om me heen kijk naar mijn vrienden, dan denk ik van “ja, we zitten inderdaad in hetzelfde schuitje, dus..... je bent niet alleen. Je kan soms gewoon appen van “gaan we vandaag gewoon samen koken”? en niet alleen zijn enzo”.

## 5.3 Microaggressions

When talking about the barriers regarding the development of sense of belonging, multiple students mentioned having experienced microaggressions. These microaggressions have been analysed with the guidance of the review on microaggressions by Ogunyemi et al. (2020).

### 5.3.1 Microinsults

Microaggressions took place in different contexts such as at school or at home with housemates. Most students talked about people making snarky remarks and stereotyping DC students.

The large majority of the participants mentioned experiences with microinsults, moments with microaggressions that potentially occurred without the intend of hurting the recipient. For instance, participants mentioned receiving remarks on their level of Dutch, or receiving inappropriate questions about their home country. These moments came across as offensive to DC students as they felt underestimated, or seen than less compared to Dutch students. Multiple students have suggested that these moments arose from ignorance, rather than from ill intentions:

***“When I tell them I come from Curacao, “Oh, you speak such good Dutch. Did you start learning Dutch when you came here”? Stuff like that. Or “how is it like you guys all live in huts”? I genuinely got that question before, that we all live in huts on that island. Uh, yeah, and it's those not knowing situations that turn into microaggressions”. (P7)***

Furthermore, some students experienced institutional microaggression at school. These came in the form of snarky remarks, racial jokes by teachers, or school staff using inappropriate racial terms. Some students described being treated differently than their Dutch counterparts as well. In some cases, teachers graded assignments more strict or were even less willing to help DC students with their assignments.

### 5.3.2 Microassaults

The intensity of the microaggressions varied. In some instances, the microaggressions turned into bullying and direct racism. Where students described being yelled at for not being seen as Dutch or being called racial slurs due to their skin colour. The high intensity of microaggressions appeared to be more common in areas that were described as “predominantly white”. Students generally felt that microassaults they experienced were also due to a lack of knowledge on the shared history between the Netherlands and the DC islands, arguing that if people would understand how tied the islands and the Netherlands actually are, people would not perform such harmful actions. In some cases, however, it also became apparent that Dutch people were

not open to listening to DC students when being explained why certain actions are harmful, resulting in DC students not having the opportunity to properly handle the situation:

***“I experienced it at work (...). they said “yeah, I’m done with people coming here, because they come to the Netherlands and we are losing our culture (...)”. And they use certain racist slurs and I was like, can we have a conversation about this so I can explain why this is not okay? And then they were like yeah it doesn’t really matter, we’re Dutch, we can say what we want due to freedom of speech”.<sup>7</sup> (P3)***

### 5.3.3 Microinvalidations

Some participants had dealt with microinvalidations, moments where their feelings were not taken into account when expressing concerns or emotions. The earlier mentioned example about a student trying to have a conversation about the racist behaviour of their coworkers is not only an example of a microassault, but an example of a microinvalidation as well, where the student attempted to express their feelings about the situation, but was shut down. Other microinvalidations appeared in moments which participants described as not being understood by the people around them. In these moments, the participants again tried to express their concerns to their non-DC friends, and got their emotions invalidated:

***“I confided in my friends, and these people are not black people, they are people of colour, they are people with different sexual orientations, so they do know what, like, struggling like this means. But still, I was invalidated. They told me not to worry”. (P6)***

### 5.3.4 effects of microaggressions

The accumulation of microaggressions had different effects for participants. The most common effect was the feeling of frustration. This feeling is multi-layered. Most students expressed being frustrated by the fact that they often do not get the opportunity to talk about microaggressions. When trying to do so, the offender tends to quickly get defensive and try to tell the recipient to calm down, or that the action was not meant to be racist, thus shutting down the possibility of having a conversation about the microaggression.

Some students had difficulties coping with their emotions and did not know what the right way was to deal with emotions.

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<sup>7</sup> This quote was translated from Dutch to English. Original quote: “Ik had het op werk meegemaakt (...) en daar was het van “Ja, ik ben het gewoon zat dat mensen hiernaartoe komen. Want ja ze komen naar Nederland en we verliezen onze cultuur (...)”. En ze noemen mensen bepaalde racistische slurs en ik was van ja, mogen we even een gesprekje voeren en kan ik uitleggen waarom dat eigenlijk niet zo mogen. En dat was van ja, het boeit eigenlijk niet, we zijn gewoon Nederlanders, we mogen zeggen wat we willen, het is een freedom of speech”

In more extreme cases, the build-up of microaggressions led to students moving out of their house or discontinuing their study. In light of the sense of belonging, the accumulation of microaggressions resulted in participants not feeling comfortable in certain groups, as they did not feel like they could truly be themselves within these groups. Furthermore, institutional microaggressions made some participants realise that the gap between how Dutch students are treated and how DC students are treated is larger than originally thought, resulting in DC students working extra hard and even exhausting themselves to get the same grade that Dutch student would get.

## 5.4 Reflecting on WeConnect's interventions to help students deal with threats against belonging

WeConnect has organised multiple mental health related workshops for DC students and young professionals. In broad terms, the participants had the opportunity to talk about their Caribbean identity in the Netherlands in these workshops. The workshops were largely designed based on the (preliminary) results of the current study. This means that in the workshops, participants were asked to reflect on their own personal experiences with the identified barriers that participants of this study struggled with. During the evaluation of the earliest workshops, it became apparent that participants strongly wished for more depth, which was taken into account during the design of the later workshops.

As this study advanced towards its final stages, the previously unknown complications that DC students struggle with related to the sense of belonging became more and more clear, and on the 28 of June 2024, the final workshop of the series was organised. The participants of this workshop experienced the results of three years of participatory action research, which has led to an intervention in which students had a safe space to talk about their personal experiences with topics like exclusion and microaggressions.

During the reflection on the final workshop, it became apparent that participants appreciated being around people from their own community to talk about topics that are not commonly talked about. Moreover, students valued the way that these normally sensitive topics were addressed and how the opportunity to talk about these topics was created for the participants. Furthermore, the participants strongly appreciated the feeling of being understood by their peers, and even expressed gratitude towards the organisation of this event.

Not only did this workshop affect the DC students that were present, but left an impact on the representatives of the MIKR and the National Coordinator against Racism and Discrimination that were present at the event as well. These parties expressed feeling inspired and sensing a feeling of empowerment in the room, suggesting that the workshops are not only speaking towards DC students, but are also getting political attention.

The study and workshops of WeConnect did not only have an impact on the DC participants, but on the organisers and researchers as well. The (emotional) impact was one of the results of conducting PAR as well, and has been visualised in **appendix 9**.

## 6 Discussion

### 6.1 Key findings

The aim of this research was to explore how the sense of belonging of DC students in the Netherlands could be improved. For this objective, the barriers and promoters of belonging were studied. This was done via a PAR approach in which 12 DC students were interviewed and where there were various cycles of implementing and evaluating interventions of WeConnect that were based on (preliminary) results.

This study revealed that: 1) DC students face a wide variety of barriers that decrease the feeling of belonging such as a lack of connection with Dutch people, missing opportunities to belong, and a gray identity area. 2) DC Students experience an increased sense of belonging when being around people with similar (life) experiences and while being in (ethnically) diverse areas. 3) DC students commonly experience microaggressions that, in accumulation, have detrimental and long lasting effects on the sense of belonging and mental wellbeing. 4) The current interventions of WeConnect that focus on sense of belonging, mental health, and wellbeing appear to be meaningful and have empowering effects. The current section elaborates on these findings.

#### 6.1.1 Barriers for belonging

The first sub question of this research was aimed at the barriers of belonging. This study found that multiple students have limited options to belong. Though there are no (public) numbers on where and how many DC students are located in the Netherlands, the missing opportunities to belong were mainly a complication for participants in rural areas outside of the Randstad. This finding has previously been explained by the practicality that there are simply less people to form communities with for internationals in rural areas (Correa-Velez et al., 2010).

Furthermore, this study found that there is a lack of connection between DC students and Dutch people, where DC students explain being treated as an outsider while at the same time being part of the same kingdom as Dutch people. Though current research does not provide an exact explanation for this phenomenon, DC students explained this situation by pointing out the disbalance between the knowledge DC students have on the Netherlands and the (lack of) knowledge Dutch people generally have on the DC islands, and that educating people on the shared history between the islands and the Netherlands would greatly improve the situation for DC students. Moreover, DC students commonly have difficulties bonding with Dutch people, which is a result of not having the appropriate social skills or not fully being familiar with the way Dutch people communicate with one another.

Furthermore, this study has found that DC students commonly struggle to find the right group to belong in as a result of the duality of being a “national international” student, though the intensity of this notion varied from student to student. This concept is not only an internal struggle for DC students, but also a struggle that is affected by surroundings, as DC students are commonly faced with forms of double exclusion by both national and international students. The latter effect has previously been conceptualized as dual identity denial, an experience in which one’s self-identity is questioned or invalidated by others (Cárdenas et al., 2021; Cheryan & Monin, 2005). Cárdenas and colleagues (2021) have found that the barrier for belonging resulting from dual identity denial is more apparent for people that feel closely connected to their ethnic roots, compared to people that felt less connection with their ethnic background. This could explain the variety of impact of this barrier for DC students.

### 6.1.2 Promotors for belonging

The second sub question of this study was aimed at the promotors for belonging. this study found that DC students feel an increased sense of belonging while being around **people with similar (life) experiences**, as this resulted in being understood more easily. This result also further indicates the need for DC students to have a community formed by other DC students, to have a place in which DC students do not need to be worried they are not seen or misunderstood.

### 6.1.3 Microaggression

The third sub question focused on the role of microaggressions on the sense of belonging of DC students. In this study, almost all participants experienced microaggressions, which had an effect on their sense of belonging. By far, “microaggressions” was a concept that formed the largest barrier for the development of a sense of belonging for DC students.

Not only did microaggressions have an effect on the feeling of belonging, the consequences of microaggressions were also described as having long lasting effects that influenced overall (mental) wellbeing of students as well. This additional finding is in line with previous research (Nadal Et al., 2014).

As the conceptual model did not explicitly cover microaggressions and racism, further exploration of these topics was necessary to gain an understanding of the data. The microaggressions that students experienced were subdivided into three categories suggested by Ogunyemi and colleagues (2020). By doing so, it became clear that most DC students had experiences with microinsults. An accumulation of these moments led to multiple complications that negatively impacted the feeling of connection with people that DC students had. Some participants also experienced microassaults. As with microinsults, microassaults negatively impacted the feeling of belonging for students and, again, had multiple effects on overall (mental)wellbeing. This

finding implies the necessity for DC students to develop resilience against microaggressions in the Netherlands and learn appropriate coping mechanisms.

According to participants, microaggressions were most often the result of ignorance or a general lack of knowledge, and adequately reacting to microaggressions can be very difficult. The most common reaction was confrontation. DC students described wanting to talk to the offender, but getting shut down as the offender either got defensive or simply did not care about the victim. This has been an ongoing struggle for people of colour. Though confrontation is seen as the most common reaction to microaggressions, it can strongly backfire as well and result in stereotyping or even physical altercation in extreme cases (Ellefsen et al., 2022). DC students might find this relatable, as they often experienced being described as “angry black person” when standing up for oneself.

The difference in experience of students inside versus outside of the Randstad is also noteworthy. Specifically, the impact microassaults have on individuals outside of the Randstad appears to be greater, and the frequency of microaggressions in general appears to be larger in predominantly white areas compared to areas that have bigger ethnic diversity. It is challenging to get a grasp around this finding, as previous research has shown contradicting results when trying to find association between ethnic density in cities, ethnic racial harassment, and mental health (Becares et al., 2012; Nandi et al., 2020). DC students, however, have rationalized this finding by explaining that in the Netherlands, people in ethnically diverse cities such as Amsterdam and Rotterdam are more used to seeing people with varying ethnical backgrounds and, therefore, being a person of colour is not seen as a “weird” or “bad” thing, resulting in less (severe) microaggressions.

#### 6.1.4 interventions of WeConnect

The final sub question was aimed at finding out how Stichting WeConnect can properly address sense of belonging, mental health, and wellbeing to DC students. In the same timeframe as this study, multiple workshops were organised in which participants had the opportunity to talk about their struggles as a DC student (or young professional) in the Netherlands. It looks like WeConnect and the VU have done well in creating a formula to create a safe space to talk about sensitive topics by letting the monitors of the workshop tell personal experiences to break the ice, followed by other practices, such as a sketch that covers relatable problems for DC students, after which the participants themselves are encouraged to talk among each other about their own personal experiences. After quick evaluation of the workshop on the 28th of June, participants appeared to be content with the workshop and were happy they attended.



## 6.2 Strengths and limitations

### 6.2.1 Strengths

This study possesses multiple strengths. Firstly, the participants of this research live in different cities throughout various parts of the Netherlands and have been in the Netherlands for various amounts of time. The representation of a variety of DC students is important to provide a more holistic overview and a more generalizable narrative of the experiences of DC students in the Netherlands (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2022).

Secondly, this study took a PAR approach, in which the participants themselves strongly helped in developing strategies to help DC students and provided an improved opportunity to gain an understanding of the sense of belonging of DC students (Allen, 2016).

Lastly, the (preliminary) results were used for the design of the interventions of WeConnect. These interventions were visited by 5 to 60 DC participants and, for the researchers, were seen as a way of validating the data by evaluating if results of the study were relatable and, to a small extent, generalizable.

### 6.2.2 Limitations

This study also has some limitations, starting with representativeness of participants. In this study, only HBO and WO students participated, meaning that it is uncertain whether or not the results are also representative for the sense of belonging of MBO students. Furthermore, the large majority of the participants had Curacaoan origins, meaning that the data could be skewed. Further complications with generalizability result from the fact that no students from Saba, St. Martin, or St Eustatius participated in this study, meaning that it is also unsure if the results of this study are applicable for those students.

Additionally, as the researcher conducting the interviews does not speak all the languages that are spoken on the DC islands, interviews could only be done in English and Dutch. This resulted in exclusion of participants that would potentially want to participate, but could not be included due potential discomfort with the language spoken during the interviews

Furthermore, this study was done in a period of five months, meaning that assessment of long term effects of the interventions of WeConnect is yet to be done.

Lastly, as this study did not beforehand take the sizeable role of microaggressions into account, the effects microaggressions were only studied during analysis of the interviews, and were not properly taken into account while developing the interview guide, which could indicate that there is still missing data on the role that microaggressions play in the sense of belonging of DC students.

## 6.3 recommendations

Based on this study's results, strengths, and limitations, recommendations are provided for various parties playing a role in the sense of belonging of DC students.

### 6.3.1 Stichting WeConnect

Due to the immense role that microaggressions appear to play in the sense of belonging of DC students, and the success of the workshops WeConnect has organised in the past few months, it is advisable for WeConnect to continue its current practices in which DC students have a safe space to talk about their experiences with microaggressions, and the effects thereof. To help with the design of future workshops, Nair & Good (2021) expressed that there can be a need to emotionally or cognitively process the negative impact of experiencing microaggressions, which can be mentored in workshops. Nair & Good suggest it is necessary for individuals to reflect on not only the microaggression itself, but also on the coping mechanism against microaggressions. In the workshops, WeConnect could continue to encourage participants to reflect on their personal experiences with microaggressions and how they reacted in these moments, to help students process the negative impact.

This study has pointed out that the need to address belonging and (mental) wellbeing is not only a need for DC students in big cities in the Netherlands, but that there is also a need to address these topics for students in more rural areas. The researchers therefore advise WeConnect to not only organise its workshops related to belonging, mental health, and wellbeing in the Randstad, but also outside of the Randstad. This will give DC students in rural areas the opportunity to participate in the workshops as well.

### 6.3.2 Educational institutes

DC students commonly struggle with reaching out for help and receiving proper support, resulting in an accumulation of small problems and hampering the sense of belonging. To decrease this barrier, educational institutes could invest in culture sensitive counsellors that understand the struggles of being a DC student in the Netherlands as a result of once being a DC student themselves. Not only will this minimize risk of language barriers, but will also potentially decrease the negative stereotypes around seeking (mental) help (Yakubu, 2016).

Educational institutes on the islands can help promote the sense of belonging of DC students as well. Schools on the island can particularly help in the preparation phase before moving to the Netherlands by preparing students for the potential (social) struggles in the Netherlands. Participants have provided recommendations and described that it could be beneficial to organise a form of exchange activity, in which future DC students

on the islands can already have (online) contact with Dutch/DC students in the Netherlands, so it would be more easy to adjust to people and settle in the Netherlands after arrival. These exchange programs could be facilitated by collaborations between Dutch and DC educational institutes. Moreover, this program would result in DC students already having connections to other students in the Netherlands, which can also provide guidance and support in the early phases after transition to the Netherlands.

### 6.3.3 Governmental entities

DC students perceived the lack of understanding and open mindedness of people in the Netherlands as a (social) barrier and a cause for microaggressions , A shift in public mindset could help DC students. Though there is no quick solution for this matter, participants have suggested that educating (Dutch) people on the shared history between the islands and the Netherlands could help get rid of stereotyping and microaggressions. The MECS could revise the current requirements for primary and secondary education curriculums to ensure that the history of the entire Dutch kingdom is properly taught, rather than just the history of the Netherlands.

In the workshop on the 28th of June, representatives of several Dutch governmental bodies said that they felt empowerment and felt inspired by the stories of DC students, and were glad to attend the workshop to gain insights on the perspectives of DC students. This indicates the potential impact that these types of interventions can have on governmental bodies. It is therefore recommended that representative of governmental bodies, such as the MIKR and the MECS, continue to put in an effort to attend interventions by various organisations such as WeConnect, in order to gain insights and a better understanding of the experiences and needs of DC students, which can aid in the decision-making process for future policies.

### 6.3.4 DC students & study associations

Ethnic study organisations can play a crucial role in cultural adjustment of ethnic minorities in predominantly white institutes (Museus, 2008). This suggests the potential importance of DC study associations in promoting and maintaining the sense of belonging of DC students. Moreover, the current study found the importance for DC students of being around other people with similar (life) experiences, further indicating the importance of DC student associations. As of this year, organizations like DUO will organize information sessions on the islands, where future students learn about the practicalities of studying in the Netherlands. It is advisable for DC study associations to look at the possibilities of having representatives of the associations join these settings, to inform future students on the opportunities to join associations and get in contact with fellow DC students in the Netherlands and, again, have some form of guidance and support in early phases after arrival in the Netherlands..

Furthermore, as one of the biggest threats to belonging for DC students are microaggressions, and coping mechanisms for microaggressions can be different for everyone, DC students are advised to evaluate their own experiences with microaggressions and their reactions. Current research is still struggling to find concrete effective ways to heal from experiences with microaggressions for students, though participants in this study, as well as participants of the workshops of WeConnect, have indicated that talking about, and reflecting on, experiences with microaggressions in a safe space with other DC students could potentially beneficially affect this healing process. DC students are therefore advised to listen to this message sent by fellow DC students and evaluate the behaviours of others, as well as their own when confronted with microaggressions.

### 6.3.5 Future research

As a reaction to the generalizability problem of this study, a quantitative tool based on the results of this study could be developed and translated into all the languages spoken on the DC islands, to examine if the results of this study are relatable for groups of DC students that were not part of the current study. A quantitative tool, such as a survey or questionnaire, could lower the barrier for participating in a study for, for example, MBO students, meaning a quantitative tool can create the possibility to collect data on groups that were not included in this study (Gray, 2004).

Furthermore, the long term effects of the interventions of WeConnect related to mental health and sense of belonging are still unknown. Moreover, methods to accurately study the long term effects are yet to be developed, meaning that it is unsure how much the study success, mental health, and wellbeing of DC students is actually affected by the interventions. Future research should focus on finding ways to accurately measure these outcomes.

## 6.4 Conclusion

This study aimed to find out how the sense of belonging of DC students in the Netherlands could be improved. This was done by exploring the barriers and promoters of belonging. The key findings of this report highlighted the impact of microaggressions and identified that mainly social barriers negatively affect the sense of belonging of DC students. Moreover, this report highlighted how various actors can play a role in promoting the sense of belonging of DC students. Finally, as a final part of the PAR approach of this study, the points of discussion and recommendations are not just aimed at guiding the actions of parties like WeConnect and governmental agencies, but are also directed at DC students, in the hope that they are the ones that feel empowered by this research and gain eye opening insights in the struggles they and their peers face in the Netherlands.

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## 8 Appendices

### Appendix 1. participant demographics

Participant number	Origin	Gender (M/F)	Education type (MBO, HBO, WO)	Location of school	Years in the Netherlands
P1	Curacao	F	WO	Amsterdam	7
P2	Aruba/Curacao	F	WO	Utrecht	6
P3	Curacao	M	WO	Maastricht	3
P4	Aruba	F	WO	Leiden	4
P5	Curacao	M	WO	Leiden	4.5
P6	Curacao	F	WO	Maastricht	4
P7	Curacao	M	WO	Groningen	4
P8	Curacao	M	WO	Amsterdam	3
P9	Curacao	M	HBO	Amsterdam	3
P10	Bonaire/Curacao/ Netherlands/Suriname	M	HBO	Rotterdam	5
P11	Curacao	F	HBO	The Hague	6
P12	Curacao	F	HBO	Nijmegen	2

## Appendix 2. interview guide

Achterliggende onderwerpen om te behandelen:

- Wat is belonging
- Waar en hoe speelt belonging een rol
- Ervaringen met buitengesloten worden/microaggressions
- herdenkingsjaar

Introductie:

Ik ben nu bezig met een onderzoek voor de stage voor mijn master. Voor dit onderzoek zijn we op zoek naar manieren om het studiesucces en mentale welzijn van Nederlands Caribische studenten te verbeteren. We hebben in februari al een mental health workshop gehad en hierin heeft onze doelgroep dingen besproken als racisme en moeite met je plek vinden in Nederland. Dit zijn onderdelen die te maken hebben met het zogenoemde “sense of belonging”: een gevoel van verbondenheid, hier komen we straks nog even op terug.

Voordat we verder gaan wil ik je vragen of je het goed vindt als ik dit interview opneem om te analyseren. Alle informatie wordt vertrouwelijk behandeld. Wat even goed is om te benoemen is dat dit interview vrijwillig is. Dit betekent dat je iets niet hoeft te beantwoorden als je dat niet wilt en dat je op ieder moment dit interview kan beëindigen zonder een reden te hoeven geven.

Zijn er voordat we beginnen nog dingen waar je vragen over hebt?

## Deel 1: intro + building rapport

1. kan je misschien een korte introductie geven door te zeggen wie je bent, waar je vandaan komt, wanneer je naar Nederland bent gekomen en waar je naar school gaat

## Deel 2: Wat is “belonging”

Er is geen universele betekenis van belonging maar er zijn wel een paar verschillende omschrijvingen van deze term. Zo kan het worden gezien als het zijn van een belangrijk onderdeel van een systeem, het thuis voelen in een bepaalde omgeving, of letterlijk vertaald het gevoel dat je ergens hoort. Het is dus een heel subjectief concept dat voor iedereen een andere betekenis kan hebben.

2. Zodra ik het heb over dingen als: “je thuis voelen” of “op je gemak zijn” of “erbij horen”, wat schiet je allemaal te binnen?
3. Vervolg vraag op 2: Alles dat je net hebt opgenoemd (herhaal antwoord van 2), wat zijn de dingen die allemaal voor jou een impact kunnen hebben hierop?
4. Als we het hebben over (concepten van vraag 2), voel je dat hier verschillen zijn tussen Nederland en (geboorteland), zo ja, welke verschillen
5. En ook overeenkomsten?

## Deel 3: waar(om) speelt belonging een rol:

We hebben net gekeken naar wat het gevoel van erbij horen en je thuis voelen een beetje inhoudt.

6. Kan je vertellen op welke plekken of situaties in Nederland je dit gevoel het meest voelt?
7. kan je dit gevoel iets gedetailleerder beschrijven?
8. Vervolg vraag op 7: waardoor wordt (antwoord op 7) mogelijk gemaakt? Zijn het bijvoorbeeld de mensen binnen deze plekken of komt het door iets anders?

## Deel 4: persoonlijke ervaringen met dingen die “sense of belonging” bedreigen.

We hebben nu net gekeken naar waar belonging zich afspeelt en bij wie, maar het is ook belangrijk om te kijken naar plekken waar dit gevoel niet aanwezig is. Ik ga een paar lastige vragen stellen dus neem even rustig de tijd om hierover na te denken.

9. Kun je je specifieke momenten herinneren dat je je buitengesloten voelde, of een moment dat je je niet thuis voelde? Dus als we kijken naar alles wat we bij eerdere vragen hebben behandeld, waren er momenten waar dit niet het geval was?
10. Eventuele vervolgvraag 9 indien niet benoemd: waardoor had je dat gevoel?
11. Hoe voelde je je toen?
12. Hoe ging je hiermee om?
13. Zijn er dingen die je achteraf anders had gedaan in deze situatie? Zo ja, welke?
14. Is er iets dat destijds geholpen kon hebben, dus iets dat je nodig had bijvoorbeeld maar niet zelf kon regelen?
15. Hoe is jouw sense of belonging beïnvloedt door deze gebeurtenis(sen)?
16. Er zijn natuurlijk heel wat uitdagingen aanwezig als we het hebben over uitsluiting. De dingen die je opnoemde, racisme, seksisme, en andere vormen van discriminatie. Wat denk je dat er allemaal voor nodig is om deze uitdagingen op te lossen?
17. Vervolg vraag 19: door wie moet dit uitgevoerd worden?

Dankjewel dat je dit wilde delen. Ik ben me ervan bewust dat dit niet het makkelijkste onderwerp is om te bespreken.

18. alle dingen die we zojuist hebben besproken, zowel de goede als slechte dingen, hoe denk je dat jouw mede-Caribische studenten dit (belonging) ervaren? hoe staat het met hun "gevoel van verbondenheid"?

Deel 5: herdenkingsjaar

We zitten dit jaar in het herdenkingsjaar van het slavernijverleden. Vanuit de overheid is er steeds meer en meer belang gekomen voor het aankaarten van de gevolgen van het slavernijverleden.

19. Om te beginnen hiermee ben ik benieuwd of je iets hebt meegekregen van het herdenkingsjaar, of dat je hierover nog niks hebt gehoord.

In dit herdenkingsjaar heeft de koning bijvoorbeeld excuses aangeboden voor het slavernijverleden, er worden educatieve activiteiten georganiseerd en nog een aantal andere dingen om structureel aandacht te kunnen geven aan het slavernijverleden.

Eventuele vervolgvraag:

20. Alle onderwerpen die we inmiddels hebben besproken, dus je thuis voelen, erbij horen, geëxcludeerd worden, in hoeverre voel je dat zo'n herdenkingsjaar een rol speelt in jouw bewustwording van deze onderwerpen?
21. In hoeverre wordt de bespreekbaarheid van deze onderwerpen beïnvloed door het herdenkingsjaar?

Einde:

Nou dan komen we langzaam bij het einde.

22. Voordat we afsluiten vroeg ik me af of er dingen zijn die je nog kwijt wilt, dingen die we nog niet besproken hebben?

Dan wil ik je heel erg bedanken voor je deelname.

23. Ik ga de opname van dit interview transcriberen, zal ik dit transcript naar je opsturen, zodat je deze kan doornemen en kijken of alles klopt?

Dan nog een klein dingetje:

24. We zijn voor dit onderzoek nog op zoek naar meer Nederlands Caribische studenten in Nederland, ken jij misschien nog meer mensen die mee willen doen aan dit onderzoek?



## Interview guide English

1. Could you please give a short introduction of who you are, where you were born, when you arrived in the Netherlands and maybe something about your education.

### Part 2: What is “belonging”

So, there is no universal definition that fully covers what a sense of belonging actually is, but there are a few vague descriptions of this. Some see it as being part of a system, some see it as feeling like you are at home, and others describe it literally as having the feeling that you belong in a certain place. So it is a very subjective thing that has a different meaning for everyone.

2. When I say things like: a sense of belonging, feeling at home, being a part of something, what can you tell me what comes to mind?
3. What are the things that influences (answer to question 2)
4. So when we talk about (answer to 2), are there any differences in this here in the Netherlands compared to your home country?
5. and similarities?

### Part 3: where and why does belonging happen?

So, we just took a look at what sense of belonging and feeling at home kinda entails.

6. Can you tell me at which places or in which situations in the Netherlands you have felt these things?
7. Can you describe this feeling for me?
8. What allows this feeling to occur? Is it for instance the people around you that play a role or is it maybe something else?

### Part 4: Personal experiences with things that threaten “sense of belonging”

Okay, so far we’ve taken a look at what feeling at home means and where and why this happens. It is, however, also important to reflect on places and situations where this feeling does not occur. I am about to ask a few questions that might be difficult, so please take the time to think about the answer.

9. Can you remember specific moments that you felt excluded, or a moment where you strongly felt like you weren’t at home. basically everything we have covered so far, do you remember a situation where all of these things were not the case?
10. What caused this feeling?
11. How did you feel at that moment?
12. How did you deal with the situation?
13. Looking back, are there any things that you would have done differently?
14. Looking back again, were there any external things that could have helped you in that situation?
15. How has your sense of belonging been influenced by this/these event(s)
16. There are quite a few challenges when it comes to exclusion, racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination, what do you think is needed to properly deal with these challenges?
17. Who needs to execute these improvements?

Thank you for sharing this. I am aware that this might not be the easiest topic to talk about

18. all the things that we just spoke about, both the good things and bad things, how do you think your fellow caribbean students experience this? What can you tell me about their sense of belonging?

**part 5: slavery memorial year.**

This year is the slavery memorial year. The government has an increased importance in addressing the consequences of the history of slavery.

19. First of all, are you aware of the memorial year? Have you heard anything about it?

So, for instance, in this memorial year, the king has apologized for the history of slavery, furthermore educational activities are organized along with some other things to structurally give attention to the events that have happened in the past.

20. What I am curious about, all the topics that we have spoken about so far, feeling at home, being included or excluded etc. In what way does the memorial year play a role in your personal awareness of these topics
21. Do you feel like it becomes easier to talk about these topics because of the memorial year? If so, why?

End:

Okay so we're slowly coming towards the end.

22. Before we finish, are there any more things that you would like to discuss, maybe even something we have not talked about yet?

I would like to thank you for participating.

23. I will transcribe this interview. Would you like a copy of the transcript, so that you can review it to see if everything is okay?

Then 1 more small thing.

24. We are still looking for more Dutch Caribbean students in the Netherlands to interview, students that would like to share their experiences as well. Do you maybe know anyone that would like to participate in this study as well?

Appendix 3. Flyers containing the themes of the workshops of WeConnect

# Atam'aki

ATAM'AKI: A CELEBRATION OF CARIBBEAN IDENTITY. THIS EVENT IS ALL ABOUT GETTING TOGETHER ON CARNAVAL SUNDAY WITH OUR CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY. WE'LL TALK ABOUT IDENTITY, OURSELVES AND CELEBRATE OUR CULTURE.

**11 februari '24**

14:30-17:00  
KICK OFF  
WHO AM I?  
KULTURA  
KARNAVAL  
WEA DI SOPI

HET KABINET VAN DE GEVOLMAGTIGDE  
MINISTER VAN CURAÇAO  
Prinsengracht 63-65 Den Haag

**Free Entry**

**SECOND EDITION**

# Atam'aki

Aki, Hulanda, wat betekent het voor mij en wat is het?

ATAM'AKI: LET'S TALK ABOUT HOW IT IS TO LIVE ABROAD, ESPECIALLY THE NETHERLANDS. HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN YOUR CARIBBEAN IDENTITY? THIS EVENT IS ALL ABOUT GETTING TOGETHER WITH OUR CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY. WE'LL DISCUSS WHERE YOU STAND WITH YOURSELF & YOUR IDENTITY IN THE HERE AND NOW.

**13 April '24**

14:30-17:30  
SECOND EDITION  
HULANDA, SERIO?

FOR CARIBBEAN STUDENTS & YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

THE SOCIAL HUB THE HAGUE  
Hoefkade 9, 2526 BN Den Haag

**Free Entry**

# Atam'aki

**THIRD EDITION**

Transforming your mindset geared toward succes

ATAM'AKI: IN THE FIRST AND SECOND EDITION WE TALKED ABOUT: YOUR CARIBBEAN IDENTITY, THE OBSTACLES OF LIVING ABROAD AND HOW TO MAINTAIN YOUR IDENTITY. THIS TIME WE WANT TO TAKE IT A STEP FURTHER. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE STRUGGLE? WHAT CYCLES DO WE NEED TO BREAK? WHAT PRACTICAL AND TRANSFORMATIVE TOOLS, TIPS AND TRICKS ARE THERE FOR US CARIBBEAN STUDENTS? THIS EVENT IS ALL ABOUT STRENGTHENING INDIVIDUAL RESILIENCE THROUGH OUR COLLECTIVE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY GATHERING.

**Sat. 1 juni '24**

14:30-17:30  
THIRD EDITION  
LANDA OF HOGA?

FOR CARIBBEAN STUDENTS & YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

THE SOCIAL HUB THE HAGUE  
Hoefkade 9, 2526 BN Den Haag

**Free Entry**

AANMELDEN: EVENTBRITE

**FREE ENTRY**

WeConnect presents:

# Empowering my Caribbean identity

FOR CARIBBEAN STUDENTS & YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

We all deal with moments that we feel different or excluded, but we don't really talk about how these affect our sense of belonging and wellbeing. Let's change that!

This event will hand you tools, inspiration and motivation to empower your journey in The Netherlands.

**JUNE 28TH, 2024**

Doors open : 16.30  
Event : 17.00 - 19.00  
Drinks : 19.00 - 20.00  
Location : The Social Hub,  
Hoefkade 9, Den Haag

PRE-REGISTRATION REQUIRED :

JOIN THIS INTERACTIVE EVENT & SHARE YOUR STORIES!

## Appendix 4. Codebook

Code	Description of category	Subcode	Example
Conceptualizing belonging	This code entails all the descriptions of what “sense of belonging” actually means for the participants	-	“For me, it means, like you said, being, finding your group, feeling like there's a spot in the region you are in for yourself. Like for me, it's Groningen, feeling like, okay, I see myself living here in the long term, like let's say 15, 20 plus years. I can build a family here if I want to or, you know, and they would be, they would also feel belong here”
Barriers for belonging	Words and sentences that allude that the sense of belonging is being threatened	Competencies	“When I moved here, I felt shy because I'm like, okay, um, I don't know what to expect. Uh, the unknown of, uh, having to navigate so many different social interactions without any, like, reference really on what is a good person, what is a bad person, what are people you need to have, people you should get rid of. It was very hard”
		Motivations	“I don't want to be a part of it”
		Opportunities	“But there's no people to have a community here”
		Perceptions	“But I do not think I could ever fully feel Dutch because I grew up in such a different culture. Ehm, for the most of my life, and the language even, like I still don't feel fully comfortable with it”
Promoters of belonging	This code covers the factors that promote the sense of belonging of participants or decrease the effect of the barriers	Competencies	“About a culture, yeah, you just learn stuff, you know, as life goes on, you just learn stuff, try to take nothing personally. So it wasn't like it was very difficult for me to catch on to certain stuff and know how to conduct myself in society”
		Motivations	“We literally upended all our roots to move to another country. So of course we are

			open to change and adaptation”
		Opportunities	yeah, being able to just sit in the common area at school and talk to people and, you know, ehm, share our stories and our cultures and things like that”
		Perceptions	“With my friends from Curacao, I would say something like this and they understand immediately”
Coping mechanism	This code exemplifies how participants cope with the struggles that come with having a threatened sense of belonging	Reaction to microaggression	“I just got in myself like, hey, um, try to understand where they're coming from, where the other person is coming from, and just try not to have leave it have an impact on you. It's sometimes hard like not to think about it”
		Struggling to fit in	“Because I just know that I don't do it and I don't need to be in that group to, you know, fit”.
		Struggling with school	“Because it didn't went that well, I took whatever I learned from that first year and adapted to my second year”
		Struggling with mental health	“When I'm, uh, I'm feeling still down or whatnot, I feel someone, I want to talk to someone, I pick up the phone and I call a family member from Curacao and we talk”
Recommendations	This code describes things that participants mention that DC students would like to see happen in the future	Fixing microaggressions	“So yeah, I think awareness is the key here”
		Providing support for DC students	“A sense of belonging is something that needs to be addressed”

Slavery history	Things that were mentioned regarding the slavery history and other colonial activities of the Dutch Kingdom	Consequences of slavery	"If you listen to the songs that we still sing to this day, you can hear what actually happened"
		Healing	"Oh yeah, that's I feel like until I die, still nothing, still there's need, there will be work that needs to be done"
		Opinions on actions taken by the Dutch government	"We all just think that the apology for the slavery history has come too late"
Microaggressions	This code covers the experiences that participants had with microaggressions	Institutional microaggressions	"A few teachers use the "n-word"
		Microassault	"A couple of years ago, ehm, an international student called me a monkey. And, uh, at a house party"
		Microinsults	"I've also been told so many times, like after saying I'm from Aruba, people being like, oh yeah, you're that girl from Curacao, right?"
		Microinvalidations	"I've had instances where, you know, I confide with my, confide in them with my struggles, and I'm not understood or I'm invalidated"

# Information for participants

Voor Nederlands: zie onderaan

**Study: Exploring the sense of belonging of Dutch Caribbean students in the Netherlands.**

Thank you for being interested in participating in this study. Through this letter, we would like to inform you on the goal of this study and provide information on what participation entails. If you have any questions that are not answered by this letter, feel free to contact one of the researchers. This research is executed by Athena Institute and Stichting WeConnect.

## 1. Aim of this study

Previous reports have shown that Dutch Caribbean (DC) students face multiple barriers (language differences, financial problems, discrimination, etc.) when moving to the Netherlands to pursue tertiary education. These barriers affect both study performances and mental health of DC students. This effect is one of the main reasons that Stichting WeConnect continues to look for ways to improve the difficult situations that DC students find themselves in. Current literature shows that a sense of belonging (a feeling of being included or to feel at home) plays a significant role in study performances, mental health status, and even psychological help seeking behaviour of students. Therefore, Examining the barriers and facilitators of DC students' sense of belonging will be of great importance.

In this research, we are looking for insights on the sense of belonging of DC students in European Netherlands. We aim to find stories, experiences, and reflections on the sense of belonging. With these findings, we want to provide a series of suggestions on what can be done to improve the sense of belonging of DC students.

## 2. Who is eligible for participation?

We are looking for current students who have completed their secondary education on Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao, Saba, St. Eustatius or St. Maarten and have moved to the Netherlands to pursue postsecondary education (MBO, HBO or WO level). We seek students studying across the Netherlands

## 3. What does participation entail?

In this study, participants will be interviewed on themes related to their sense of belonging. The interview will take about 1 hour – 1 hour and 15 minutes and will be conducted by a master's student of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Interviews will be conducted in English, or Dutch if this is preferred by the participant.

#### **4. Potential risks and benefits**

Risk: The interview will cover topics that might be difficult to talk about such as personal experiences with discrimination and exclusions. These topics can be triggering for some participants. To minimize potential harm, Stichting WeConnect has a list of (culturally sensitive) counsellors that speak the local languages of the Islands. This information will be shared with the participant if the participant has a need for aftercare.

Benefit: participants' insights will contribute to providing proper support focused on the overall well-being and study success of DC students in European Netherlands.

#### **5. What are my rights?**

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. This means that the participant can choose not to respond to a question if this is preferred. Moreover, the participant is free to stop participation at any point, without having to provide a reason. Once a participant decides to terminate participation, all data collected to that point will be deleted. If a participant wishes to receive updates regarding the study, they can mention this to one of the researchers.

#### **6. How is my data used and stored?**

Some personal details such as name and email address are known to the researchers. This information will only be used to schedule an interview appointment and not for anything else. All interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Transcripts will be stored on a secured SurfDrive property of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Recordings of the interviews will be deleted after being transcribed. Transcripts will be anonymised and only the researchers will know which transcript belongs to which participant. Moreover, only the researchers will have access to these anonymised transcripts. Once the study is completed, the results will be untraceable to individual participants. The transcripts will be stored for 5 years and the researcher may use the anonymised transcripts as data for future research projects.

By signing the "Informed Consent" form, you agree that your data is collected, processed, and stored in the abovementioned ways.

#### **7. Any questions?**

If you have any questions before, during, or after participation, feel free to send an email to:

Research intern: Jelano Hendriksma: [j.n.j.hendriksma@student.vu.nl](mailto:j.n.j.hendriksma@student.vu.nl)

Main researcher: Durwin Lynch: [d.lynch@vu.nl](mailto:d.lynch@vu.nl)



# Informatie voor deelnemers

## Onderzoek: Exploring the sense of belonging of Dutch Caribbean students in the Netherlands.

Bedankt voor uw interesse om mee te doen aan dit onderzoek. Via deze brief willen we u informeren over het doel van dit onderzoek en over wat deelname inhoudt. Mocht u na het lezen van deze brief nog vragen hebben, neem dan gerust contact op met een van de onderzoekers.

Dit onderzoek wordt uitgevoerd door het Athena Instituut en Stichting WeConnect.

### 1. Doel van het onderzoek

Voorgaande rapporten hebben laten zien dat Nederlands Caribische (NC) studenten tegen meerdere barrières aanlopen (taalverschillen, financiële problemen, discriminatie, etc.) wanneer zij naar Nederland toe gaan om tertiair onderwijs te volgen. Deze barrières beïnvloeden zowel de schoolprestaties als het mentale welzijn van deze studenten. Dit effect is een van de voornaamste redenen dat Stichting WeConnect blijft zoeken naar manieren om NC studenten te helpen tijdens hun studietijd. Huidige literatuur toont aan dat een gevoel van verbondenheid (Engels: a sense of belonging) een cruciale rol speelt in studiesucces, mentaal welzijn en psychologisch hulpzoekend gedrag van studenten. Het identificeren van de barrières en promotors van dit gevoel van verbondenheid is daarom van groot belang.

In dit onderzoek zijn we op zoek naar verhalen, ervaringen en reflecties over het gevoel van verbondenheid van NC studenten in Nederland. Met deze bevindingen willen we aanbevelingen doen over wat er moet veranderen om het gevoel van verbondenheid voor NC studenten te verbeteren

### 2. Wie kan meedoen?

We zijn op zoek naar huidige studenten die secundair onderwijs hebben afgerond op Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Saba, Sint Eustatius of Sint Maarten, die naar Nederland zijn verhuisd om tertiair onderwijs te volgen (MBO, HBO of WO niveau). We zijn op zoek naar studenten verspreid over heel Nederland.

### 3. Wat houdt deelname in?

In dit onderzoek zullen deelnemers worden geïnterviewd over thema's die te maken hebben met het gevoel van verbondenheid. Het interview zal ongeveer 1 uur – 1 uur en 15 minuten duren en zal worden afgenomen door een masters student van de Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. De interviews zullen in het Engels gedaan worden, tenzij de deelnemer aangeeft dit liever in het Nederlands te doen.

### 4. Potentiële risico's en voordelen

Risico: In het interview worden onderwerpen behandeld die voor de deelnemers gevoelig kunnen liggen zoals ervaringen met discriminatie en buitengesloten worden. Deze onderwerpen kunnen een schokkend effect hebben op de deelnemer. Om potentiële schade te minimaliseren, heeft Stichting WeConnect een lijst van (cultuursensitieve) hulpverleners die ook de lokale talen spreken. Indien de deelnemer er behoefte aan heeft delen wij deze informatie als vorm van nazorg.

Voordeel: De inzichten van de deelnemer zullen bijdragen aan het voorzien van support die gericht is op het verbeteren van het algemeen welzijn en studiesucces van NC studenten in Nederland

### **5. Wat zijn mijn rechten?**

Deelname aan dit onderzoek is volledig vrijwillig. Dit houdt in dat de deelnemer kan besluiten om een vraag niet te beantwoorden als dit gewenst is. Verder kan de deelnemer op ieder moment besluiten om te stoppen met deelnemen, zonder hier een reden voor te hoeven geven. In dat geval zal alle tot dusver verkregen data verwijderd worden. Als een deelnemer behoefte heeft om updates te krijgen over het onderzoek na deelname, kunnen zij dit laten weten aan een van de onderzoekers.

### **6. hoe wordt mijn data gebruikt en opgeslagen?**

Sommige persoonlijke gegevens zoals naam en e-mailadres zijn bekend bij de onderzoekers. Deze gegevens worden uitsluitend gebruikt om een interview afspraak in te plannen en voor niets anders. Alle interviews worden opgenomen en getranscribeerd. De transcripten worden opgeslagen in een beveiligde SurfDrive van de Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Opnames worden direct verwijderd nadat deze getranscribeerd zijn. De transcripten worden geanonimiseerd en alleen de onderzoekers zullen weten welk transcript bij welke deelnemer hoort. Alleen de onderzoekers zullen toegang hebben tot de transcripten. Zodra het onderzoek afgerond is zullen de resultaten onherleidbaar zijn aan individuele deelnemers. De transcripten zullen voor 5 jaar bewaard worden en onderzoekers kunnen de geanonimiseerde transcripten gebruiken als data voor toekomstige onderzoeksprojecten.

Door het "geïnformeerde toestemming"-blad te tekenen geef je toestemming dat data op de eerder genoemde manieren wordt verzameld, verwerkt en bewaard.

### **7. Verdere vragen?**

Mocht u vragen hebben voor, tijdens of na uw deelname, neem gerust contact op met een van de onderzoekers:

Onderzoek stagiair: Jelano Hendriksma: [j.n.j.hendriksma@student.vu.nl](mailto:j.n.j.hendriksma@student.vu.nl)

Hoofdonderzoeker: Durwin Lynch: [d.lynch@vu.nl](mailto:d.lynch@vu.nl)

## Informed consent

Voor Nederlands: zie onderaan

**Study title:** Exploring the sense of belonging of Dutch Caribbean students in European Netherlands

**Study goal:** To develop a series of recommendations on what needs to be done to strengthen the sense of belonging of Dutch Caribbean students in European Netherlands.

**Main researcher:** Durwin Lynch ([d.lynch@vu.nl](mailto:d.lynch@vu.nl))

**Research intern:** Jelano Hendriksma ([j.n.j.hendriksma@student.vu.nl](mailto:j.n.j.hendriksma@student.vu.nl))

By signing this form, I confirm that:

- I have read and fully understand the information sheet of this study;
- I have received sufficient time to decide to participate in this study;
- I am aware that the interviews will cover topics that might be difficult to talk about such as personal experiences with discrimination and exclusion;
- I am aware that personal details such as name and email address will not be shared with third parties;
- I understand that my participation is voluntary;
- I understand that I am free to not respond to a question if I do not want to respond;
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any point, without having to provide a reason to do so;
- I give permission to (audio) record the interview;
- I agree that the data from the interview will be collected, processed, and stored as described in the information sheet I have received;
- I have had the opportunity to ask extra question, and all my questions have been answered;

### Respondent

Name:

Signature:

Date + location:

# Geïnformeerde toestemming

**Onderzoek:** Exploring the sense of belonging of Dutch Caribbean students in European Netherlands.

**Onderzoeksdoel:** Het opstellen van aanbevelingen omtrent wat er gedaan moet worden om ervoor te zorgen dat het gevoel van verbondenheid vergroot wordt voor Nederlands Caribische studenten in Nederland.

Hoofdonderzoeker: Durwin Lynch ([d.lynch@vu.nl](mailto:d.lynch@vu.nl))

Onderzoek stagiair: Jelano Hendriksma ([j.n.j.hendriksma@student.vu.nl](mailto:j.n.j.hendriksma@student.vu.nl))

Door dit formulier te ondertekenen bevestig ik dat:

- Ik de informatiebrief heb gelezen en volledig begrijp;
- Ik genoeg tijd heb gehad om te bepalen of ik deelneem aan dit onderzoek of niet;
- Ik ervan bewust ben dat tijdens het interview onderwerpen worden besproken die potentieel gevoelig kunnen zijn zoals persoonlijke ervaringen met discriminatie en buitengesloten worden;
- Ik me ervan bewust ben dat persoonlijke gegevens zoals naam en e-mailadres niet met derden worden gedeeld;
- Ik begrijp dat mijn deelname vrijwillig is;
- Ik begrijp dat ik ervoor kan kiezen om een vraag niet te beantwoorden als ik dit niet wil;
- Ik begrijp dat ik op ieder moment mijn deelname stop kan zetten, zonder dat ik hier een reden voor hoef te geven;
- Ik mijn toestemming geef om de audio van het interview op te laten nemen;
- Ik toestemming geef om de data uit het interview te laten verzamelen, verwerken en bewaren zoals omschreven staat in de informatiebrief die ik heb ontvangen;
- Ik heb de mogelijkheid gehad om vragen te stellen over het onderzoek en mijn deelname en al mijn eventuele vragen zijn beantwoord;

## Respondent.

Naam:

Handtekening:

Datum + locatie:

## Appendix 7. Data management plan

### 0. General information

#### 0.1 Document version & date

Version 1.0

Date: 26/06/2024

#### 0.2 Project title

Exploring the sense of belonging of Dutch Caribbean Students in the Netherlands

#### 0.3 Project summary

The aim of this study is to provide recommendations to WeConnect on how sense of belonging of Dutch Caribbean students can be promoted.

#### 0.4 At which VU Faculty is this project situated?

- Faculty of Science (BETA)

#### 0.5 Your contact details

Name: Jelano Hendriksma

Email: j.n.j.hendriksma@student.vu.nl

University: Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Faculty/Institute: Faculty of Science

Department/research group: Athena Institute

#### 0.6 List other people involved, including those at partner organisations in the project (if applicable)

Athena Institute (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

Stichting WeConnect (commissionair)

#### 0.7 Funding organisation & grant number (if applicable)

-

## **0.8 Project code (if applicable)**

-

## **0.9 Consulted data management expert(s)**

-

## **1. Data description**

### **1.1 Will you collect and/or process personal data in this project?**

- Yes

### **1.2 Will you use existing data? If yes, what is their source?**

-

### **1.3 Will you collect or produce new data? If yes, please describe how.**

Yes, in this study, 12 semi-structured interviews will be conducted. Interviews will be audio recorded via laptop and phone.

### **1.4 Describe the population/participants/subjects that will be studied**

The participants will be students that were raised in the Dutch Caribbean, have completed secondary education there, and have moved to European Netherlands to pursue postsecondary education.

### **1.5 Do you process any of the following (personal) data?**

- Contact details
- Name

### **1.6 Do you process the personal data based on informed consent?**

- Yes, using digital consent
- Yes, through a physical form

**1.7 On what legal ground will the data processing take place if it is not based on informed consent?**

- Not applicable, I use informed consent

**1.8 Does the data collection include any of the following types of personal data?**

- Race or ethnic origin

**1.9 If your research involves special categories of personal data (previous question) and you will not use explicit informed consent, what is the legal ground for the exemption?**

-

**1.10 What kinds of outputs will you produce in this project? Please describe these data assets.**

**Raw data**

Data asset: interview recording

Format: .mp3

Estimated size: 3-5 GB

**Processed data**

Data asset: interview transcripts

Format: PDF

Estimated Size: 1 MB per transcript

**Analysed data**

Data asset: coded transcripts

Format: Atlas.ti

Estimated size: 1.2 MB per transcript

**Research documentation**

Data description: final report

Format: PDF

Estimated size: 1.5 MB

**1.11 How much digital data storage will your project require?**

- 0 - 50 GB

**1.12 Will you collect physical data? If yes, please describe these.**

-

**1.13 Will you take measures to ensure data quality? Please describe these, if applicable.**

-

## **2. Legal and ethical requirements, codes of conduct**

**2.1 What legislation applies to your research project? Please tick the relevant boxes for your project.**

- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)/ Algemene Verordening Gegevensbescherming (AVG)

**2.3 Do you require approval of an ethical committee for this project? If yes, please indicate which ethical committee and whether you have obtained approval for this project.**

- No

**2.4 Will you work with data for which intellectual property and/ or confidentiality are an issue? If yes, please describe.**

- No

**2.5 Do you plan on generating a marketable product from your research project? if yes, please describe**

- No



### 3. Storage and back-up during the research process

**3.1 What measures will you take to secure and protect data during the research process? Please describe, for each separate data asset you described for question 1.10, how you will ensure data security, where the data assets are stored & backed up, and who has authorization to access the asset.**

#### **Raw data:**

Data asset: interview recordings

Storage: SurfDrive (owned by Athena Institute)

Back up: Microsoft OneDrive (VU student account)

Security measures: Password protected. Recordings will also be deleted after transcription

Access: research team

#### **Processed data**

Data asset: interview transcripts

Storage: VU Surfdrive

Back up: Microsoft OneDrive ( VU student account)

Security: anonymisation of personal data + password protected

Access: research team

#### **Analysed data**

Data asset: coded transcripts

Storage: Atlas.ti

Back up: Surfdrive

Security: password protected

Access: research team

#### **Research documentation**

Data asset: final report

Storage: Formdesk + Urkund/Original

Back up: Microsoft OneDrive (VU student account)

Security: restricted access or password protected

Access: research team + assessors

**3.3 Which tools are used in the collection, processing or storage of data during research?**

- Microsoft Teams
- Zoom
- OneDrive
- Other (please specify below)
- SURFDrive
- Atlas.Ti

**3.5 Is it necessary to transfer the (physical or digital) data assets to other locations or research partners? If yes, please describe how you secure the file transfer.**

- No

**3.7 Do you transfer personal data outside of the European Economic Area (EEA)? If Yes, please provide additional information**

- No

#### **4. Data archiving and publishing**

**4.1 Which data assets will be archived and which will be published?**

interview transcripts and informed consent forms will be archived in SURFdrive.

**4.2 Where will you archive your data assets?**

VU SURFdrive

**4.4 For how long will the data be available in the archive?**

5 Years

**4.6 Where will you publish your data assets?**

-

**4.8 How will you ensure your dataset gets a persistent identifier (e.g. a DOI-code)?**

-

**4.9 Will you register your datasets in an online registry other than PURE? If yes, where?**

-

**4.10 Are there restrictions to data publishing? If yes, please specify the reasons and list the data assets you do not wish to share publicly.**

-

**4.12 When will you share the data? If not immediately after completion of the project, please specify the reasons.**

Directly after completion

**4.13 Please indicate the license and/ or terms of use under which you share your data.**

-

## **5. Documentation**

**5.1 What documentation will accompany the data?**

Codebook  
Interview guide  
Interview transcripts

**5.2 What metadata will accompany the data?**

Codebook  
Interview guide  
Interview transcripts

**5.3 What methods, software or hardware are needed to access and use your data?**

The data is stored in SURFdrive. A password is needed to gain access.

## 6. Data management responsibilities and resources

### 6.1 Who will be responsible for management of the data assets during the project? Please specify their name, position, role in the project, and faculty/ institution/ group.

Name: Jelano Hendriksma

Role in project: intern

Function: Master student MPA

Email: j.n.j.hendriksma@student.vu.nl

University: Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Faculty/Institute: Faculty of Science

Department/Group: Athena Institute

### 6.2 Who will be responsible for management of the data assets after completion of the project (e.g. the project lead/ dedicated data manager/ department head)? Please specify their name, position, role in the project, and faculty/ institution/ group.

Name: Durwin Lynch

Role in project: VU supervisor/On-site supervisor

Function: Program Coordinator Master MPA at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam; University lecturer; PhD candidate

Email: d.lynch@vu.nl

University: Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Faculty/Institute: Faculty of Science

Department/Research Group: Athena Institute

### 6.3 For data that are only available upon request, what methods will be used to handle requests for access and how will data be made available to those requesting access?

For future research projects, data will only be made available after being fully anonymised

### 6.4 What resources (for example financial and time) will be dedicated to research data management? Please estimate their cost.

-

## Appendix 8. Overview of the barriers and promoters of belonging for DC students

<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Promoters</b>
Negative past experiences	(Ethnic) diversity
“gray identity area”	Interaction with people with similar (life) experiences
Accumulation of small complications is detrimental for DC students	
Distance between DC students and Dutch people	
Lack of community and/or support systems	
Pressure to succeed	
Microaggressions	

### Behind the scenes:

#### Stagiaire Jelano Hendriksma: “Geraakt door verhalen van studenten”

Jelano Hendriksma loopt deze maanden stage bij de Vrije Universiteit en bij ons. Hij volgt de masteropleiding MPA aan de Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam. MPA staat voor Management, Policy Analysis and Entrepreneurship in the Health & Life Sciences. Een update van hem!

#### Interviews

In februari ben ik begonnen met mijn onderzoek. Doel was om te kijken wat er allemaal voor zorgt dat Caribisch-Nederlandse studenten zich wel of niet thuis voelen in Nederland. Inmiddels is het onderzoek afgerond en heeft het onderzoeksteam diepgaande verhalen verzameld over de ervaringen van studenten. We hebben gepraat over welke problemen zij hebben meegemaakt en over wat nodig is om ervoor te zorgen dat zij zich prettiger voelen in Nederland

#### In stilte

Ik vond het mooi om te horen hoe blij de deelnemers waren met dit onderzoek. Te lang moesten ze in stilte omgaan met hun problemen, en nu was er eindelijk een plek waar ze hun ervaringen konden delen. Ik was in het begin bang dat de deelnemers het oncomfortabel zouden vinden om over dit onderwerp te praten, maar het bleek dat de deelnemers graag wilden meewerken aan het onderzoek. Daarvoor ben ik ze dankbaar.

#### Steun

Nu zijn we achter de schermen bezig met het verder verwerken van de resultaten. We zijn vervolgstappen aan het bedenken waarmee we meer steun kunnen bieden aan studenten. Ik hoop ook dat dit onderzoek deuren opent naar meer onderzoek dat ervoor kan zorgen dat Caribisch-Nederlandse studenten een geweldige studietijd in Nederland kunnen hebben.

**Exploring the sense of belonging of Dutch Caribbean students in European Netherlands**

Lets talk about your experiences with exclusion and inclusion

**Participant criteria:**

- Completed middle school in Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Sint Eustaquio, or St. Maarten.
- Moved to the Netherlands after completion of middle school
- Is currently enrolled in tertiary education in the Netherlands (BSc, MSc, PhD)

**Interested in participating? Scan the QR code to go to the registration form**

**Questions?** If you have any questions regarding the study, feel free to contact the research team by sending an email to [j.h.hendriksma@studart.vu.nl](mailto:j.h.hendriksma@studart.vu.nl)

