



Prototyping process. (Image: SCDH)

Design for Dignity: Applying Privacy in Refugee Shelters

“Design for Dignity” aims to improve the quality of everyday life and mental well-being of asylum seekers living in asylum centres in Switzerland by providing practical improvements to mitigate their lack of personal privacy in shared living environments.

«Design for Dignity» hat sich zum Ziel gesetzt, die Lebensqualität und das psychische Wohlbefinden von Asylsuchenden in Schweizer Asylzentren zu verbessern, indem es mit adaptierbaren, leichten, ästhetischen räumlichen Modulen eine praktische Lösung für den Mangel an Privatsphäre in Gemeinschaftsunterkünften bietet. Entwickelt werden Ansätze, die Stress reduzieren und den Geflüchteten ein grösseres Gefühl der Autonomie und Würde ermöglichen, während gleichzeitig die Arbeit des Personals in den Asylzentren vereinfacht wird.

Introduction: “Design for Dignity” addresses the urgent need for privacy and well-being in shared living environments, particularly in asylum centres, where residents often have a lack of personal space. Through creating an adaptable, lightweight, easy-to-install, modular privacy system, this project aims to foster a sense of autonomy and dignity while also supporting the mental health of residents and improving the working conditions for facility staff. Beyond the humanitarian context, this system opens possible pathways for broader applications in youth hostels, hospitals and temporary housing structures where flexibility and comfort are essential.

Methods: This project follows a human-centred, research-based design process. Material research was conducted to identify sustainable, locally produced options ensuring feasibility in asylum-centre environments. Iterative prototyping was developed in close collaboration with the Swiss Center for Design and Health SCDH, utilising their material library, workshop facilities and Living Lab for testing. Prototypes were evaluated together with experts from the migration, integration and service design sectors. A comprehensive business model and production strategy were developed in parallel, balancing social value with long-term scalability and economic feasibility.

Results: The project has achieved several key outcomes in its development phase. Five prototype concepts were created and tested, leading to the selection of two promising design directions for further refinement and pilot production. Collaboration with the SCDH, cantonal-level partners and design researchers enabled robust feedback to be integrated in the concept and facilitated expanding the network of potential users. “Design for Dignity” will proceed with pilot implementation, impact measurement and commercialisation in the Gebert Rüt Stiftung VALIDATE phase. By combining social innovation with practical design, this project contributes to a more humane and adaptable approach to shared living environments, promoting dignity as a fundamental design principle.

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