

Labour Market Integration of Newly Arrived Refugees in Norway: a Systematic Scoping Review on Policies and Outcomes

Norma HL. Wong, PhD.

Centre for Intercultural Communication,
VID Specialized University, Norway
norma.wong@vid.no

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Abstract

As one of the Scandinavian welfare states, Norway is an interesting case study for policy reaction to refugees that has received much attention recently. Its comprehensive introduction programme, based on the principle of universality and social investment, is designed to pro-actively assist refugees overcome language and cultural barriers with the aim to integrate them into its knowledge base labour market. With high level of transparency in its public sector, as well as detailed documentation and registered data at both national and municipal levels, the Norwegian experience in the background of the recent surge in refugee settlement, offers valuable knowledge and experience on policy measures that focuses on helping refugees establish themselves economically. While the Nordic experience has not been in the centre of attention amongst international policy researchers, Norwegian scholars have in recent years produced a rich body of studies and reports about a variety of aspects of the Norwegian policies on refugees and its outcomes, at both national and regional levels. However, the wealth of knowledge may not be easily accessible by the English-speaking academic world because most of them are written in Norwegian. The purpose of this article is to bridge this gap, and to shed light on the current trend and gaps in research on this topic in both languages.

This paper reports on the summary of findings from a systematic scoping review of literature in both English and Norwegian published in the past four years in the topic of labour market integration of refugees in Norway. During the process, two reviewers were involved, over 200 articles are located and screened; 87 relevant literature are identified, with only 18 in English and the rest in Norwegian. The article offers a detailed summary of the main themes and findings that emerged from this young and fragmented body of literature, including key features of the introduction programme, local adaptations of policies and their outcomes, policies focused on women, collaboration with civil society, and how these have achieved or failed in bringing more economic integration.

Keywords: forced migration; integration; newly arrived; refugees; Norway; systematic review; scoping review

Introduction to the Norwegian refugee settlement policy in its social and historical context

The recent wave of refugee settlement in Europe following the civil war in Syria since 2014 has posed challenges to governments in the region. The number of refugee settlement has been a record high for many countries, pushing the limits of capacity these governments to both handle asylum seeking cases, and to arrange for temporary or permanent settlement of the newly arrived. The topic of refugee or immigrant has drawn attention to how governments respond to the situation. In particular, with regard to the welfare state, policy and migration studies researchers are interested in how the influx of forced migrants within a short period of time would impact on national policy of integration, and the effectiveness of such integration policies. In Norway, over 38 000 refugees have settled through either asylum seeking or the UN resettlement process during 2015 to 2019 (SSB 2021)¹. Although much lower than the neighbouring Nordic countries such as Sweden, this number is the highest for Norway since it first accepted refugees in the 1970s².

The Nordic and Norwegian socio-political context

The Norwegian integration policy for refugee is anchored in the Introduction Act (2003), a policy framework with the main purpose of preparing newly settled refugees to enter the labour market and on the path towards financial self-sufficiency³. The programme applies to all recently settled refugees from Syria with only few exceptions. It comprises language training, social knowledge, work practice, life skills, and opportunities to take the necessary primary or secondary education, and skills qualification. The purpose and goal of the programme is to give each participant a tailored programme that fits their needs in the integration process, such that they are prepared to enter the labour market⁴. This emphasis on labour market integration, either through obtaining work, or enrolling into education that would prepare the individual for professional work, is tightly tied to the welfare state model of Norway which depends on an overall high employment rate (Valenta and Bunar, 2010; Brochmann and Hageland 2011).

Over the years since the Introduction Act was first launched, it has undergone several reforms. Amid the changes in measures, researchers have pointed out the underlying shifts in that attitudes and approaches of the policy makers. One of the most prominent is the increase in emphasis on “activation”, where non-participation is penalized, and participants are incentivized to demonstrate willingness to work. This shift was criticised as a move towards neoliberalism and away from the welfare state ideal (Djuve and Kavli 2015). The outcomes of this process have so far varied greatly amongst municipalities, and only a few has reached the target of having over 70% of participants into employment or further education within two years of completing the programme⁵ (SSB, 2019). Nonetheless, from the latest report in 2019 commissioned by the Nordic Council, Norway performs the best in the labour market integration of women immigrants compared to Denmark and Sweden, and the employment of young adult male in the long-term perspective (Hernes et al., 2019).

From the perspective of policy study in refugee integration, the Norwegian experience presents rich materials to learn from and for cross-country comparison. Following the increasing academic interest

¹ Statistics Norway, Statbank 08377, accessed on 8th July 2021

² See Pettersen, S.V. and Østby, L (2013) Immigrants in Norway, Sweden and Denmark. *Samfunnspeilet* 5, (p.76-83) for a more detailed description of the waves of refugees into Norway since the 1970s.

³ See Introduction Act §1 “Purpose of the Act” <https://lovdata.no/dokument/NLO/lov/2003-07-04-80>

⁴ See Introduction Act §6 “Individual Plan” <https://lovdata.no/dokument/NLO/lov/2003-07-04-80>

⁵ Statistics from SSB report «Flyktninger i og utenfor arbeidsmarkedet 2017» (Olsen, B, 2019) <https://www.ssb.no/arbeid-og-lonn/artikler-og-publikasjoner/attachment/375933?ts=16894c09a88>

in the experiences of refugees, many new studies has emerged, bringing in fresh perspectives as well as new information and evidence. This literature review is conducted at the beginning of a three- year research project on the labour market integration of newly arrived refugees in Norway⁶, between August to December of 2019. The ambition of this review is to create a basis of knowledge for an international and multidisciplinary research team for the project. A separate report on the full descriptive statistics from this review has been published in the form a report by VID Specialized University in June 2020⁷.

Through a systematic literature review on the labour market integration of recently arrived refugees in Norway, this paper would address the following two questions:

1. How does systematic review serve as a method to learn about a specific policy and social context?
2. What can we learn from the Norwegian experience as an example of the Nordic model for refugee integration? What are the key features, strengths, and weakness of such a model?

Method: systemic scoping review

In contrast to the traditional literature review that depends very much on the researchers' breadth and depth of knowledge about a field, a systematic literature review emphasizes a well-documented, unbiased, transparent process. Stemmed from the evidence-based practice movement in the medical field in the 18th century, the systematic review method has been adapted to a wide range of disciplines (Grant et al. 2009). In social and political studies, this practice is comparatively new. One pioneering institute is the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-centre) based in University College London from the UK, who has been for the last twenty years developing a method particularly suited for the purpose of informing decision making in public policy⁸. Another research institute The Joanna Brigg Institute based in the University of Adelaide has also in recent years been developing and promoting the standardized procedures and tools for over a dozen types of systematic reviews and evidence synthesis methods suited to different purposes and disciplines⁹.

The Scoping Review

The scoping review is one type of systematic review often used for a relative quick overview of a field. Compared to the full systematic review, a scoping review does not include the evidence appraisal process, but instead aim at showing the trends and patterns emerging from a well-defined body of literature. Colquhoun et al. (2014)'s definition of the scoping review best describes the nature of this review:

⁶ The project is titled *Between Ambition and Reality: labour market integration of newly arrived refugees in Norway*, «Mellom Ambisjon og Virkelighet: arbeidsmarkedtilkydning blant nylig ankommende flykniger i Rogaland, Norge». The project is funded by Universitetsfondet i Rogaland, and implemented by the Centre for Intercultural Communication at VID Specialized University, Stavanger, in 2019 – 2023. For more information, please see project website: www.maviproject.no

⁷ See Wong, Norma (2020) *A scoping review of literature on labour market integration of newly arrived refugees in Norway. Report from a systematic literature search*. VID Rapport 2020/6. <https://vid.brage.unit.no/vid-xmlui/handle/11250/2659638>

⁸ See EPPI centre website for more detail and the method and tools they have developed particularly for the purpose of informing policy makers <https://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/>

⁹ See JBI Collaboration website for more detail <https://jbi.global/> .

“[It is] a form of knowledge synthesis that addresses an exploratory research question aimed at mapping key concepts, types of evidence, and gaps in research related to a defined area or field by systematically searching, selecting and synthesising existing knowledge.” (Colquhoun et. al. 2014, p.1292)

With the aim to produce a knowledge foundation of the research programme, the scoping review method is selected to map out the latest studies on the subject, and produce a synthesis of evidence from recent literature in both Norwegian and English. The review process is based on the five-step framework for a scoping review by Arksey and O’Malley (2005):

- 1) Identify research question;
- 2) identify relevant literature;
- 3) study selection;
- 4) chart data; and
- 5) collage and summarize.

With the above five steps as the framework, this systematic review is based on the question:

What studies have been done about newly arrived immigrant’s integration experience related to labour market in Norway in the past five years (2015- August 2019)?

The review includes two main parts: first, mapping of the recent literature which offers evidence about the experience of newly arrived refugees or other immigrants in their process of labour market integration. It includes literature which are published between 2015 and August 2019, with the aim to offer an overview of scholarly work in both English and Norwegian. Second, using the literature identified in the first part, it offers a synthesis of the key findings from them.

The process of systematic scoping review

1) **Keyword search and search strings in two languages**

In identifying relevant literature, what makes this exercise unique is that two languages are involved in the search. When conducting systematic search, English speaking researchers working in the foreign context face the issue of language, where the local academic circle is difficult to access. This review therefore attempts to address this by conducting a parallel process by two researchers where literature is searched in both Norwegian and English keywords and search strings in different databases. Families of words equivalent to the key concepts: “labour market integration”, “recently arrived refugees”, and “Norway” are explored and combined to formulate the best search strings in two the languages respectively. The search was conducted mainly in two databases: 1) ORIA, which is commonly used in higher education institutes in Norway, and 2) Academic Search Elite. Over 200 articles are yielded from the search process¹⁰.

2) **Identifying literature and study selection**

In order to reduce bias by an individual researcher, two researchers from the team have been involved in the process of scanning titles and abstract, and in deciding the final selection of literature for the review based on a set of exclusion criteria. These criteria include:

- i. The subject: refugees and other migrants
- ii. Date: published in or after 2015
- iii. Evidence: directly about experience of labour market or economic integration

¹⁰ See full report (Wong, 2020) for a more detailed documentation of the process the review.
<https://vid.brage.unit.no/vid-xmlui/handle/11250/2659638>

- iv. Context: Norway
- v. Type of publication: peer-reviewed journal articles, postgraduate theses, reports from research institutes, books

After this process, 87 articles are selected for mapping in this review. For the purpose of transparency, all excluded articles are marked with the reason for their exclusion in the database.

The researchers have decided to include studies relevant to labour market integration amongst migrants, and not only refugees. This is because we believe that when refugees finished the introduction programme, in the majority of cases within two or three years, they will face similar situations when entering the job market as other migrants do. One can argue about the uniqueness of the situation faced by Syrians refugees who arrived during the peak of the wave (2015-2018). There are fundamental differences between forced migrants or refugees and labour migrants, with obvious additional disadvantages against refugees which are caused by experiences of trauma, multiple kinds of disruptions, continual mental burden due to uncertainty of one's legality of status. However, to exclude literature which does not address the situation faced by this particular wave of refugees would greatly limit the evidence to be synthesized; it would also miss out on important insight and knowledge about the challenges that will likely be shared and faced by this target population.

3) Charting data

The following information are extracted from each of the selected article.

- **Title, Author, Year of publication**
- **Language:** Norwegian or English
- **Publisher:** name of academic journal, university, research institute, municipality, publisher
- **Types of publication:** Journal article, book chapter, post graduate thesis, official report
- **Level of analysis:** international, national, or municipal or lower
- **Main topics:** the topic(s) that the study's expressed objective to investigate, or are directly relevant to. In the mapping process, the researchers have identified 11 neutral topics, 7 topics that focused on the potential obstacles, 2 on enabling factors. Each article is marked with one or more topics that reflect their key findings¹¹.
- **Research methods:** interviews / focus groups, observation, desk search
- **Data sources:** interviews with refugees, interviews with employees of organizations who work for the Introduction programme, register data, official documents, and publications
- **Time period of original data:** before or after 2015. The year is marked as significant because those after 2015 would give evidence about the newly arrived group of refugees, which is the focus on the MAVI project.

Descriptive statistics highlights¹²

After the selection process, 87 publications have been included from a wide range of sources. These include 18 English and 69 Norwegian publications, amongst which are 57 journal articles from 28 journals. The selection also includes 17 postgraduate theses from eleven different higher education

¹¹ See appendix p.vi. in the full report for a full list of the topics identified

¹² For detail of the description statistics, please see Wong (2020) *A scoping review of literature on labour market integration of newly arrived refugees in Norway: Report from a systematic literature search*. VID Rapport 2020/5 <https://vid.brage.unit.no/vid-xmlui/handle/11250/2659638>

institutions, twelve reports from eleven research institutes, and three book/book chapter. In this paper, we will highlight the following findings from the full report on descriptive statistics.

A case for including local language search in systematic review

In this review, only one-fifth of literature found and included is in English. The majority is published in Norwegian and would have been missed in an English only search. There is also a small but potentially significant difference in interests between the literature published in the two languages. While English publications are naturally more likely to be about policies at a national level and in international comparisons, Norwegian publications comprise more studies at the municipal level. In the case of this review, this is relevant especially in the context of Norway where there are large variations in geography, economics, demographics, number of settlements and local adaptations of the national measures between municipality.

The review shows academic interests, trends, and gaps

The selected literature shows that researchers are predominantly interested in the Introduction Programme. Studies have been conducted on the implementation and administration of the programme, and the different measures including language learning and practice, work practice, and method of settlement. This reflects the strong emphasis in general on the central role played by the state in assisting refugees' integration into the labour market in Norway.

At the same time, the review also shows increasing interest in the impact of civil society and personal networks (12% of the selected literature) and female migrants' experience of integration (11%). In addition, there are some research efforts in the areas of physical health and psychological conditions of refugees and immigrants (7%), as well as the experience of skilled and unskilled workers (5%).

An interesting gap in the literature identified from the review is that only a minority of studies involve interviews from the refugees themselves. Amongst studies about the introduction programmes and its measures, only a quarter have included such qualitative data. In contrast, this source of data is more common amongst studies on the experiences of women refugees, and about the role of civil society and communities.

Synthesis of evidence

Based on the charted data, a thematic analysis is conducted on the selected body of literature for further synthesis of evidence and knowledge. For each article included in the review, its most important findings are extracted from the abstract or summary of the paper or study, or from a quick scan of the articles. The papers are not studied in-depth, nor are they appraised for their quality because the purpose of a scoping review is to only to map the range of emerging evidence and debates in the literature in a relative short period of time, instead of an attempt to draw concrete conclusions from the evidence. Therefore, this synthesis is to offer a summary of what has been studied, what debates are there, what do we know and not know, with regard to the labour market integration of newly arrived refugees in Norway. From the analysis, three main themes are identified and summarized to give an overview of the situation and process of labour market integration of the newly arrived refugees in Norway.

Outcomes of the different measures in the introduction programme

As shown from the descriptive statistics, most of the recent literature has focused on studying the introduction programme, the way it is implemented, and its effectiveness. Some of these studies focus

on specific measures, or one or a few municipalities, and some of them covers the whole range of measures or are evaluations of the overall effectiveness introduction programme nationally. They have produced critical and nuanced analyses over five topics emerged under this main theme. The measures at the centre of debates are about the settlement/housing policy, language course, internship/assisted work programme/work practice, and collaboration with the nation's work and welfare department (NAV). The last group of literature offer insights into the overall design and implementation of the programme.

Work practice

One of the most debated and studied measures in the introduction programme is about work practice. The purpose of this measure is to offer the opportunities for the participants to gain work experiences in an area they would like to build their career in, usually from entry-level jobs. In return for offering the job training, their salary is subsidized by the municipality. Studies in the selected literature cover various aspects of this measures.

First, it is affirmed in a report commissioned by the Nordic Council in 2019 comparing the effectiveness of integration policy in the three Nordic countries, that education and subsidized work are measures which are especially helpful in increasing labour market integration. (Hernes et al., 2019). However, there is also evidence that work practice does not necessary serve the purpose of integration. For instance, from interviews with refugees who participated in the introduction programme, Naz (2016) argues that the majority of work practices, such as positions in supermarkets where the main task is putting goods on store shelves, are not effective nor helpful in gaining much experiences. Using the care sector as a case, Eide et al. (2017) points out that work practice programmes that give participants early entry in labour markets often do not offer opportunities to increase qualifications during work, and this is not beneficial for the long term integration in the labour market.

Other literature points to more nuanced success factors in design and implementation of work practice. They argue that the effectiveness of this measure also depends on how it is organized, and the preparation and follow up afterward. In a study that is based on interviews and focus group discussion with the managers at the work practice programme, Maximova- Mentzoni (2019) finds that the success of assisted employment programme depends also on the wider system, organization at the group and individual levels. Her study points especially to the role of the program advisor in maintaining connection with employers and following up with participants, while being a job specialist. Another report that compares the effectiveness of introduction programme amongst three local municipalities Nordre Land, Vågå, and Sel, Bjerck (2017) calls for better mapping of personal resources of refugees.

One of main issues underlying the work practice measure is how the municipality could maintain their relationship with employers in the business sector as partners. The literature also echoes the continuous controversy in other Nordic countries as well over the concept of subsidized employment of immigrants, in that employers are taking advantage of the subsidies they bring, but fail to offer the opportunity and environment where the participants could gain useful or meaningful experience in the field for their future career.

Settlement policy

The key debate the on topic of settlement is about how much intervention the state has in where the newly arrived should be settled, which marks the main difference among the three Nordic countries (Borevi and Bengtsson 2015). Studies are centred on how the settlement decisions are implemented, how it impacts on the integration process and experience of refugees (Henningesen and Sørholt, 2018), and how the outcomes compare (Hernes et al., 2019). In Norway, currently it is mainly steered dispersed settlement based on negotiation between municipalities and the state. This is the opposite

to the Swedish settlement policy which allows for voluntary movement without restrictions (Andersen 2018; Hernes et al. 2019). From the Nordic Council report, there is evidence of strong correlation between male refugees who settle in capitals and getting employed in all three countries. It is also shown that steered disperse settlement does not especially help employment (Hernes et al., 2019).

The settlement policy of Norway is also an area of interest for the field of state-municipality politics due to the process of negotiation between the State's demand, and the willingness of individual municipalities to receive settlements. For instance, Steen (2016) examines the mechanism between central government and municipality on refugee settlement, and reveals the decision-making power of framing by the local authorities and its impact on the number settled. Researchers are also interested in the political aspects of non-western immigrant settlement, and found its correlations with the municipality's financial situation, population density, as well as the political affiliation of the mayor (Kampevoll and Martinussen, 2018).

Shifting away from the settlement politics debate, researchers also show interest in best practices in local communities which creates a welcoming environment for refugees and immigrants conducive to making a living (Munkejord, 2015; Solbakken and Handeland, 2019). Sørholt (2017) points to successful holistic integration policies in rural regions that recognize the value of immigrants and meet their needs. In return, better integration with the local communities results in better employment outcomes, despite the slower economic activities in the rural areas.

Language course and training

There is a general consensus about the importance of language course, and that the acquisition of language is the most significant element in the introduction programme, as well as in the process of labour market integration (Sørum et al. 2017; Kaupang 2015). As such, there is little question about the dominant role of language course in the Introduction programme. The debate in the literature is instead about the connection between labour market integration and language course as compared to language training at work placement; however there has not been systematic study or strong evidence on this matter (Djuve et al. 2017).

Despite the prominence of language capability, in the Nordic council report, language courses are shown to be negatively correlated to employment, pointing to a more complex relationship than previously assumed (Hernes, 2019). Interestingly, in an international comparison of the US, Canada, Sweden and Norway, Capps et al. (2015) suggests that language barriers could be a reason for the lower employment rate among refugees in the two Nordic states.

Collaboration with NAV

NAV is the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration, an important institution in Norway that implement policies concerning employment, including unemployment and disability benefits, job seeking, job training, and assisted employment schemes. It is a state agency with branches operating in local municipalities. After the Introduction programme, former participants who have not been able to secure employment will be transferred to NAV for further assistance. However, studies suggest that this collaboration with NAV has not been highly effective in helping refugees securing employment pointing to some fundamental and structural problems both with the institution and with other agencies (Fossestøl et al. 2016; Djuve et al. 2017; Svendsen et al. 2017). One of the reasons suggested by Tronstad (2016) is related to the state-vs-municipality relationship mentioned above: that the ineffectiveness could be attributed to the fact that municipalities do not have the statutory power to demand NAV measures to be in their programme.

Overall performance of the programme and factors behind variations in outcomes

In addition to evaluation of specific measures, some reports also point to observations on the overall design and implementation. Djuve et. al (2017) points out the large variation in outcomes between municipalities and the high flexibility in how individual municipality organize and implement the introduction programme. Tronstad (2016) also suggests that policies should not be viewed in isolation but in a system. The overall effectiveness of the introduction programme, as shown in the regional variations, is to large extent a reflection of policy system that facilitate high quality programme. For example, if local staff lack competence, then there is a need for stronger legal requirements for their positions and tasks, and other support measures. In addition, according to the report, municipalities should have more power to require measures they need from other public organs, and that measures should be financed by reimbursement (Tronstad, 2016). Blom's (2015) study based on register data of refugees who have completed the introduction programme between 2007-2011 points to environmental factors or social-economic context such as local unemployment and population that contributes to the regional variation of the programme effectiveness. His analysis shows that municipalities with low unemployment rates, of population between 2000 and 10000, and the presence of higher education institutions performs the best.

Regional adaptation of the policy and the significant role of civil society/communities

Studies which have municipalities as their unit of analysis tend to explore the role of different actors, the institutions and resources in the local context. In particular, the concept of two-way integration and everyday integration, especially how it is being implemented in practical and localized situations appears to be a recurring theme. A couple of studies examines the role of the venue where activities are organized to increase interactions between refugees and local residents (Nilsen, 2016; Moseng, 2018) Specifically, Moseng's (2018) study in Trondheim makes the argument that such a venue does not serve as a natural meeting place, but instead creates artificial integration which encourage bonding rather than bridging social capital. In a study at Ålgard Municipality, Tune (2018) concludes that integration happens through interpersonal relationships in everyday experiences. The study involves observing a mix of volunteer work and everyday integration, both organized and self-initiated through social media and informal social meetings, to find out ways that volunteers were attracted to participate in integration process. The main finding is that volunteers are motivated by values, interests and learning opportunity, and that food also play a significant role. In addition, the study also finds that decentralized asylum reception centres, instead of the model where one specific building is used for the purpose of reception, is beneficial for the newly arrived to establish connections and personal relationship in the local community. Another local example from the municipality of Kristiansand shows how local music communities such as a choral group could impact on the process of integration (Balsnes 2016). With relation to civil society, Hauge (2018) examines the role of religion in the process of integration. Although using a small sample of only eight participants, the author shows the possibility of religion dialogues that help create a "diversified 'we'", indicating the potential capacity of communities in the integration process.

The cross-sector collaboration between local communities and municipal government has in recent years become a common practice in Norway, and has emerged as an important topic about labour market integration of immigrants. It is generally agreed that collaboration leads to better outcomes and more effective measures. The most important form of collaboration with relation to labour market integration of newly arrived refugees, is for businesses to offer places for work practice. However, from the studies in the review, this collaboration still needs more experimentations, and it remains unclear how this collaboration could be made sustainable and effective in the long run. In Vaagland (2018), a comparison between the city of Trondheim and Bergen identifies the micro, meso and macro level of collaboration between municipalities and businesses that offer work practices and internships. The

study also shows that the recent wave of settled refugees have accelerated such collaboration, but it remains unsystematic. An action research project conducted in three municipalities, Tønsberg, Hamar and Flora in, published in 2016, report on an attempt to establish a framework for collaboration between municipalities and other actors through workshops. From all three municipalities, the workshops are seen as important part of policy making. The report urges for more support and incentive for businesses to offer practice places (Hegna 2016). Looking into employment in particular, the study by Amundsen (2017) also points to the importance of personal network outside of refugee circles, and resilient characters in the process of refugees looking for work. On the other hand, it raises the point that employers in Norway need to be educated about and acknowledge the value of informal skills brought by the immigrants.

In summary, studies at the municipal levels in generally point to a more holistic, everyday approach to integration, and they also direct and directly point to the different roles that civil society play in the process of labour market integration. This point reinforces the notion that refugee integration is one of the arenas where civil society has a strong input into policy making, and that integration, in particular labour market integration, needs the engagement of other sectors in society, and is not only dependent on the migrant themselves and/or the public sector. These studies echo an emerging consensus in the field of refugee integration that personal network and civil society play a significant role in the process of integration. In addition to measuring the effectiveness of policies that offers basic needs and enhances human capital in the introduction programme, it appears that equally important is the possibilities of establishing inter-personal relationship with the local community and native population, as well as through more systematic collaboration between the municipality and business sector.

Women refugees' experience of labour market integration

According to the Nordic Council report (Hernes 2019), Norway has the highest rate of employment for women and lowest gender gap amongst the newly arrived refugees when compared to Sweden and Denmark. The report attributes this to the individual plan regardless of family income, which appears to work well for female refugees in Norway (Hernes, 2019). Nonetheless, a common thread in the literature is to seek for explanations for the perpetuation of the gender gap in the outcomes of the labour market integration amongst migrants and refugees. These studies do not particularly focus on refugee women, but they nonetheless illuminate the barriers that will likely faced by them as they enter the workforce. It is also interesting to note that this group of literature display a high level of diversity, including a wide range of perspectives, different sub-sets of women population, type of data, as well as research methods.

Kavli and Nicolaisen (2016) uses register data to show the extend that migrant women are marginalized in the labour market between 2009-2012, but the impact of such marginalization differs amongst different country groups. This finding is echoed in a study by Smaradottir (2016) shows evidence that Somalia women in Norway are faced with situation where speaking Norwegian are never good enough for work purpose because of their "otherness".

Drange and Orupabo's (2018) study on talent programmes for minority women with higher education in Norway. In particular, Drange's research points to the lack of concrete measures that help women build up networks for professional advancement. It makes a strong argument that it takes more than personal competence or human capital for migrant women to close the migrant and gender gap when entering the labour market. Similarly, Afriyie (2018)'s research also examines the additional challenges faced by minority women in leadership position in Norway.

Mard's study (2015) shows evidence of the effect of frontline or street-level bureaucrat as they are in the important role as advisor to immigrants on their path of labour market integration. In particular, the study shows that the street level bureaucrats do not necessarily apply personal definition of gender equality, as informed by the values underlying Norwegian society and official documents, to their work with the newly arrived women refugees. This finding brings to light the role and impact of frontline or street-level bureaucrats in the process, and a potential window where the introduction programme could be further improved.

With relation to gendered roles, a study by Saadati and Hanssen (2015) based on interviews with Iranian women refugees in Norway shows how their mental and physical health is worsen due to gendered-related expectations, as well as limited social networks. Another interesting work in the selection is Grønseth (2018) ethnographic study on one Tamil family's ritual explores the social and cultural dimension of womanhood and being a widow in the community. Früh et al. (2016)'s study on immigrant mothers with special need children also brings to light the specific difficulties they face when trying to find jobs in Norway.

Other themes: waiting time and potential discrimination at societal and institutional levels

There are also other relevant themes that emerge from the literature but are more scattered, and are difficult to be summarized under specific themes. These include the emotional burden of the long waiting time and paper work and the potential discrimination that exist Norwegian society which hinder the process of labour market integration.

A national study looking into the physical and mental health of immigrants in Norway between 1990-2015 shows that, amongst other findings, refugees has a higher death risk than work migrants, and those who have stayed longer in Norway are shown to have poorer health. The authors attribute this difference in health to the "post migration stress" that may have long term negative effects (Syse et al. 2018). The study by Bendixsen (2015) on the topic of waiting time during the asylum-seeking process particularly shows the negative psychological effects from prolonged uncertainty amongst refugees and asylum seekers living in the Palestinian camp in Oslo. While there is limited research on this specific topic in Norway, the costs of waiting time is a documented issue in refugee studies in other countries¹³.

There is also a stream of literature examining the experiences and extent of discrimination of first- and second-generation migrants in the Norwegian labour market, such as the stereotypes of low-skilled "immigrant jobs" and the social structure that perpetuate them (Midbøen and Liden 2016; Friberg and Midbøen, 2018). While not directly about the experiences of the recently arrived wave of refugees, the findings from these studies shed light on the possible context that they would share as migrants. Interestingly, Skarpenes's (2018) cases studies at industrial sites shows that when compared to France and the US, cases from Norway show a stronger egalitarian model between migrants and local, but the cultural divide is more visible between the working and upper class.

¹³ See for example Hvidtfeldt, C., Schultz-Nielsen, M. L., Tekin, E., & Fosgerau, M. (2018). An estimate of the effect of waiting time in the Danish asylum system on post-resettlement employment among refugees: Separating the pure delay effect from the effects of the conditions under which refugees are waiting. *PLoS ONE*, 13, e0206737. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0206737.

Conclusion and discussion

What have been achieved through this exercise?

In summary, this systematic literature review covers a cross-section of academic work on the specific topic of labour market integration of newly arrived refugees in Norway at a critical period between 2015 and 2019. It produces a comprehensive, multi-dimensional map that covers literature of both Norwegian and English, quantitative and qualitative studies of different aspects of labour market integration, and at different levels of analysis. The review identifies three main themes of the subject area which have received the most attention from researchers, while also covers a variety of other relevant and important topics.

The descriptive statistics shows that when it comes to understanding policies at municipal levels, a large proportion of studies could be written in the local language and not in English. It makes the case for multi-lingual approach for reviews of this type. It is also evidence from the statistics that researchers are predominantly centred on the integration policy, and are interested in the implementation and effectiveness of various measures within the introduction programme. However, the review also shows growing interests in the experience of women refugees and immigrants, as well as the role of civil society and communities through the integration process. This review also points to some potential knowledge gaps. Amongst others, it is shown that there are much room for research that reflects the voices of the refugees themselves.

In addition, this systematic review process results in a database of literature that provides a foundation for the research team in an on-going research programme on a relatively narrow topic that requires local knowledge, in which the researchers are from multiple disciplines and country backgrounds. The database can be used as a starting point for team members to search for relevant literature based on specific themes, topics, source of information, research methods, level of analysis, and types of publications. This paper would also serve as a documentation of the academic landscape on this specific subject area during a defined time-period.

Summary on knowledge synthesis

In terms of the synthesis of knowledge from the literature included in this review, three main themes have emerged. First, from the body of included literature, we have summarized the main debates about four key measures under the introduction programme: 1) the effectiveness and implementation of work practice; 2) the political aspects of settlement policy; 3) the widely recognised language course; and 4) the cooperation with NAV. While these measures may seem comprehensive and generous, the literature points out issues in their implementation that hinder their effectiveness in leading to labour market integration.

The second group of literature are those conducted at the municipal level. There are strong indications from the literature that the local community and civil society, as well as the business sector play an important role in the process of labour market integration. It is also shown that more work is needed in finding out a systematic and sustainable framework to maintain a good cross sector collaboration on this matter.

Third, the selected literature includes a rich body of work on the matter of women's experience in the process of labour market integration. This body of work display an exceptionally wide variety of research methods, perspectives, types of data, and has shed light on the array of social and institutional challenges faced by different segments of migrant women when they enter the workforce.

Lastly, the review also include literature that address a number of other relevant topics. These include the costs of waiting and uncertainty and other psychological stress faced by migrants and refugees, and evidence of the discrimination against immigrants in the labour market.

The method of systematic literature review and social science: advantages and limitations

Advantages of the scoping review method

The method of systematic scoping review has several advantages. When applied to policy study or research on a defined field, it ensures an unbiased, comprehensive summary of the knowledge and insight available from the existing literature, within a specific time-period, and in different contexts. Much like reviews in the field of medicine, the systematic review framework (PICO, population-intervention-context-outcome) works well in mapping the existing literature within a defined time-period and topic. A synthesis of the findings could offer a quick overview of the field as demonstrated in this paper.

There are a few major reports in the past few years that evaluates the whole introduction programme. However, the merit of this research is that the findings from smaller-scale research with a more local or narrow focus are also included. The aggregate of their findings yields interesting results. Because of the exhaustive nature, this kind of review results in statistics that a traditional review cannot claim to show. Such statistics creates a map that objectively display the landscape the literature, revealing trends and potential knowledge gap of the specific topic.

In contrast, traditional literature review is more flexible in its process and format, such that new information and studies could be considered at a later stage. The researcher is also at liberty to discuss in greater or lesser detail about certain literature to emphasize on specific points, and produce a more coherent and focused narrative about the literature. However, in comparison to the systematic review method, traditional literature reviews can be subjected to bias in the selection of literature and extraction of information. It depends to a large extent the skills, knowledge, and often intuition of individual researchers to offer a summary of the field to the readers.

Limitations of this review

While this exercise reflects the extent of knowledge in the selected studies, the variation in practice and measures in each municipality makes it difficult to compare and synthesize the outcomes in greater detail. The research question is broad, unlike other systematic reviews that focus on one specific intervention. This results in evidence which are scattered across different local context and measures, with varying perspectives and levels of analysis. This is a useful exercise to form the basis of knowledge for a large-scale project that involves international researchers, but not a focused academic inquiry about the effectiveness of specific measures or intervention.

Another caveat of this review is that it involves no elaborate process of quality appraisal of the literature included in the process. The inclusion is based mainly on a title and abstract scan, and the discussion by two researchers on the team. As such the literature also comprise non- peer reviewed articles including reports and postgraduate theses. This is a strategic choice because of two reasons, first because the research project is about an emerging topic that is gaining a lot of new research interests. There are a lot of fresh evidence ready for peer reviewed publication, but are nonetheless produced through vigorous academic inquiry, and published by reputable academic and research institutes in Norway. Second, the purpose of this review is to map out the landscape that reflects existing research interest, the trends, and potential knowledge gaps. By excluding other types of

literature and considering only peer-reviewed journal articles would limit the scope of this review and in reaching the purpose of offering meaningful summary of the state of the art.

It is worth noting that the cut-off date for publications is due to the time the review was conducted. The requirement of the systematic literature review, mainly the careful documentation and the collaboration of at least two researchers, means that the process is relatively rigid. While this is necessary for the principle of transparency and objectiveness, it becomes costly to add in new literature at a later stage. As such, the result is a cross section of literature at a narrowly defined period. However, it would be interesting to use this review as a baseline study of the development of the academic landscape on this specific topic that form the basis of another review some years later.

Lastly, there are also a proportion of the literature included in the review, that is which are published between 2015 and August 2019, which presents evidence or findings from before the 2015 -2017 wave of refugees. Therefore, it could be argued that these findings are irrelevant to the research question of this particular review. However, the team decided to include them nonetheless in the knowledge synthesis to reflect the breadth of topics. In the same line of argument to the discussion above concerning migrants and refugees experience, the findings from these studies also offer background information, contexts and insights that are valuable to our understanding of experience of the target population.

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