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**The Integration of Refugees in Norway: Reflection from the
Eritrean Refugees in Two Municipalities**

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to all the refugees who lost their lives during the dangerous journeys while seeking safety.

Acknowledgements

Working on this study has been tiresome and frustrating at times. But it has also been a wonderful learning experience, more than anything else because of all the people with whom I came in touch on this journey. Therefore, I would like to use this opportunity to thank some of them.

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Dawit W. Manna

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Abstract

The influx of refugees into Europe, Scandinavia, and Norway and the challenges that came along on how to integrate them into the host communities has been at the front-and-center of public and media debates in recent years. As part of that, this study initiated to explore the integration of Eritrean refugees in two municipalities in Norway and identify the challenges they have had during the process. To accomplish this objective; the study adopted a qualitative approach. Accordingly, an in-depth interview with the Eritrean refugees, local people, refugee guides and key informants has been carried out. Besides, focus group discussions were conducted with two groups of Eritrean refugees from the two Municipalities.

The study revealed that the refugees have several barriers that hinder them from achieving the expected progress in the integration program. The main obstacles identified by the Eritrean refugees in their integration process include: inadequate personal efforts, language, cultural differences, inability to find employment, health issues, separation from their families and friends, traumas they experienced during their journeys, views expressed by right-wing politicians and the role of the media outlets, has been identified by the refugees as obstacles for their integration. However, from the response of the study participants, the author is fairly convinced that by far the most important barrier among those mentioned is the insufficient personal initiative on the part of individual refugees. Having said that, other studies about barriers to integration shows gaps in the literature, and therefore, each of the barriers identified in this research needs to be studied further.

Keywords: integration, refugees, immigration, barriers, Eritreans, Norway, Municipalities

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

EMN	European Migration Network
ETMU	Ethnic Relations and International Migration
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IMDi	The Directorate of Integration and Diversity
IMER	International Migration and Ethnic Relations Research Unit “the City” munucipality
ISF	Institute for Social search
NMR	Nordic Migration Research
NSD	Norwegian Centre for Research Data
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
SSB	Statistics Norway
UDI	Norwegian Directorate of Immigration
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
ECRE	European Council on Refugees and Exiles
VOX	NasjonaltFagorganforKompetansepolitikk
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
SFO	Skolefritidsordning

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The inflow of refugees to Norway, Scandinavia and Europe and the ensuing challenges of their integration into the host societies have been at the center of public and media debates in recent years, and especially after the start of the middle east turmoil and in particular after the Syrian crisis. Thus, the motivation behind this study was to explore the integration process of the refugees from Eritrea in two Municipalities in western Norway and to find out the challenges of those refugees during their integration efforts into the Norwegian socio-economic system. Consequently, the study attempts to shed some light on the phenomenon from the perspective of the Eritrean refugees, the refugee guides, key informants, as well as residents of the two Municipalities.

The integration of refugees is a dynamic and all-inclusive endeavor that requires a two-way process, and if any effort is to have the desirable and lasting effects, it takes an active participation from all sides. Primarily, as various findings revealed, on one hand, refugees are expected to have the readiness to adapt to the host society while at the same time, there should be the corresponding willingness on the part of the local communities and institutions to welcome the refugees without requiring them to miss out their cultural identity (Favell, 2001; Ager & Stang, 2008; UNHCR, 2005).

As demographic archives show, in the 1970s, immigrants and refugees were below 1.5% of the Norwegian population, and almost half of them were from neighboring countries of Scandinavia (Liebig, 2009). Similarly, after World War II, immigration to Norway was nonexistent except Norwegian-American returnees and few from eastern and central Europe. Outside of Northern Europe, the first 400 immigrants came from Asia and Africa in 1967 (Brochmann & Hagelund, 2012). However, nowadays, according to statistics Norway (SSB, 2016) and the Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi, 2016), 16% of Norway's population has an immigration background. More than half of the immigrants are from the OECD countries (Liebig, 2009) out of these; people with refugee background are 3.6% of the population and 28% of all the

immigrants (IMDi, 2016). Most of them are from Syria, Eritrea, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran.

Although, there have been fluctuations in of the number of people asking for asylum in Norway, in recent years it has been increasing dramatically so much especially since the crisis in the Middle East, notably Syria (IMDi, 2016). Thus, due to the increase in the number of immigrants and refugees, the welfare state is facing challenges to integrating them into the Norwegian socio-economic system (Ipsos, 2015). Similarly, as Brochmann and Hagelund (2011) discovered, the combination of demand for high skills and compressed pays that characterize the Scandinavian job market makes low-skill labor relatively expensive which in turn negatively affected refugee integration into the job market. Besides, the universal welfare system of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden have been under stress because of the added service provision to the refugees and immigrants since the date they arrive (Brochmann & Hagelund, 2011; p. 13).

Therefore, the study seeks to answer the central research question: *“What are the main integration barriers for the refugees from Eritrean to integrate into the two municipalities in western Norway?”* Hence, the study explores the relationship of the refugees and policy implementers, the social interaction of the refugees and local people and find out the barriers of integration from the refugees, residents, key informants and refugee guides perspectives. Explicitly, the study has research questions targeting the Eritrean refugees, refugee guides, key informants, and inhabitants of the host municipality.

Hence, the study seeks to answer **four** specific research questions:

- How did the Eritrean refugees experience being part of the integration program?
- What are the administrative challenges of refugee guides while working with the refugees?
- How do the local people see the refugees from Eritrea and their integration in the municipality?
- What are the main barriers of integration for the refugees from Eritrea?

In this study, qualitative approach has been adopted to explore the research questions appropriately. Accordingly, an in-depth interview with the Eritrean refugees, local people, refugee guides and key informants has been carried out. In addition, a focus group discussion

with two groups of Eritrean refugees from the two Municipalities has been conducted. In most instances, the primary qualitative data was substantiated with secondary sources gathered from pertinent documents and archival records.

1.2 Statement of Research Problem

Integration of refugees into the host countries has been an issue at the center of public and media debate in Europe, Scandinavia, and Norway nowadays. According to OECD (2015), the escalation of the arrival of refugees in Europe has created a challenge for the host countries; owing to the complexity of nature and the driving forces for such exodus, for the situation to get better soon is a glimmer (Ipsos, 2016).

According udi.no (2016) in 2015, a total of 31, 415 people asked for asylum in Norway and out of this number, 2,947 were Eritreans. Due to the current rate of [refugee] flow through the Mediterranean Sea; the number may probably increase in the coming years (udi, 2016). Thus, integration of refugees is a big challenge as immigration has grown dramatically in the Scandinavian countries since the past ten years and Norway has among the highest rate per capita in Europe (IMDi, 2016). Along similar lines, due to the increasing rate of unemployment in Norway; which is 11.5% from November 2014- November 2015 (ssb.no, 2015) and the global decrease of oil prices; the integration of refugees is increasingly becoming a challenge for the welfare state and the taxpayers.

Such concerns have repeatedly been raised by Norwegian politicians and media outlets for some time now. In fact, as Vermes quotes Prime Minister and leader of the conservative party Erna Solberg, integration of refugees will continue to be one of the greatest challenges for Norway up to 2040 (Vermes, 2015). This argument cannot be refuted, as data collected by Statistics Norway in 2015 revealed that out of all the participants of the integration program in 2013, only 36% were employed, 12% were working and studying, and 14% were studying after completion of the integration program. However, the national target introduced in 2010 says at least 70% of refugees should be in employment or education after the end of the introduction program. Hence, there are still challenges in the integration of refugees in Norway, and the results of the integration program are behind the expected targets ssb.no (2015).

To deal with these challenges, in December 2015, all the major political parties in Norway: Labor Party, Conservative Party, the Progress Party, Central Party, Christian Democratic Party and the Liberal Party agreed to strengthen integration which consists of sixty-four (64) points (Larsen, 2015). The implication is that there has been ineffectiveness with the integration policy while lacking the willingness to strengthen it. Similarly, most Norwegians believe that integration of refugees is ineffective, especially in Northern Norway, where criticism tends to be even higher (Ipsos-mmi.no, 2016). Given all the evidence, it is little wonder that there has been a consensus among the major Political Parties in Norway on the ineffectiveness of the program in spite of their different views regarding the integration of refugees.

Moreover, earlier studies also showed that there had been challenges in the overall integration of refugees despite the government's expenses for the refugee's integration; which is 551,500 NOK for each refugee paid to the host municipality over an extended period of 5 years (OECD, 2009). Therefore, conducting research on the integration program and find out the barriers to the successful integration of the Eritrean refugees is timely and of paramount importance.

1.3 Objectives of The Study

The purpose of the study was to illuminate and find out the challenges of Eritrean refugees during the integration program in two western municipalities in Norway. Specifically, the study was carried out to identify the likely problems hindering the refugees from integrating and moving forward in their lives concerning their financial independence, political and other social participation in their respective municipalities and the wider realm of the Norwegian society.

The specific objectives of the study were:

- To explore the experience of the Eritrean refugees during the integration program
- To probe the administrative challenges of the refugee guides while working with the Eritrean refugees and disclose the barriers of integration
- To explore the social relationship of the refugees and the local people in the two municipalities and to identify the challenges of integration in the process
- To shed some light to the barriers of integration from the perspective of study participants

1.4 Scope of The Study

The study focused on refugees from Eritrea who have participated in the introduction program. Eritrean refugees who have been in Norway for 1 to 9 years from two different municipalities in the western part of Norway. Besides, the study included the opinion and views of the local people, key informants and refugee guides in those two municipalities. Furthermore, the study focused on Eritrean refugees from the two municipalities [the selection of the two municipalities is further elaborated in the methodology section]. The reason for including only refugees from Eritrea was due to the common language of the researcher and the refugees. And the choice of the two municipalities was made for comparative purposes, as the two have different socio-demographics such as “the City” municipality is characterized by a heterogenous community with more than 275,000 inhabitants and is inhabited by people who came from more than 200 countries. On the other hand, “the Periphery” municipality is relatively a homogenous society with less than 8.000 inhabitants and is dominated by Norwegian and few others. In addition, a qualitative method of study was adopted to solicit information as best as possible.

1.5 Significance of The Study

The lessons learned from the study can make valuable contributions for all municipalities in Norway and particularly the two municipalities in which the study took place. Besides, the study is also expected to serve as a reference material to researchers and future students who will be involved on related topics in the future.

Similarly, there have been plenty of studies about the integration of refugees. However, in this study, my focus on the barriers to integration for the refugees from Eritrea, to my knowledge is the first of its kind. Hence, the study is substantial in the quest to fill the gap in the literature about barriers to integration. Likewise, the study will be significant for those who are interested to find out about the obstacles in the integration of refugees, as it may apply to refugees who came from Eritrea. Equally important, the study benefited the researcher personally to become an independent researcher in the future.

1.6 Organization of The Thesis

The information in this study is organized and presented under eight (8) chapters. **Chapter one** includes the introduction to the research, statement of the research problem, scope of the study, objectives of the research, research questions, the significance of the study and organization of the thesis.

In **Chapter Two** literature review about the integration of refugees, the barriers to integration and dimensions of integration, immigrants and refugees in Norway and where they come from are part of this chapter.

In Chapter three, an outline of the theoretical framework and operationalization of the variables is provided.

Chapter Four explains the methodological approaches adopted in the study. The research approach used in the study, the research design, study area, sampling method and sample size, unit of analysis are explained. Moreover, the issue of validity, reliability, generalizability, ethical issues and the limitation of the study are addressed.

Chapter Five provides background information about the Eritrean refugees, the overview of the introduction program, stakeholders in the integration of refugees and the integration policy of Norway.

Chapter Six and Seven presents the findings and discussion of the study while **Chapter Eight** deals with the conclusion part of the study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, a review of relevant literature on the integration of refugees and migrants will be presented. A literature on the Concept of Integration of refugees will be discussed based on recent articles and research papers. The discussion will touch upon the different views among experts regarding the integration of refugees and migrants; dimensions of integration; barriers to integration. Moreover, the discussion will specifically focus on integration in the context of the Integration, Policy of the Scandinavian countries and the Welfare System. Besides, definition of concepts and statistical data about the Refugees and Immigrants in Norway will be given.

2.2 Integration of Refugees and Migrants - Overview

Research concerning to integration of refugees started in the 1920s and 1930s (Heckmann, 2006). And, a significant amount of literature has been published since then regarding refugees' integration into the host societies. Especially after the rise of exodus in the last two decades, migration scholars have produced a burgeoning literature covering the challenges and the way hosting countries have been dealing with the incoming refugees and migrants. Likewise, in Europe, much work addressing refugee integration has been written, including the 1951 Geneva Convention with particular attention to social rights of refugees with such issues as employment, social welfare, education and housing (Ager & Strang, 2008).

However, it remains that very few themes are as challenging and confusing when it comes as to what integration can mean or its implementation. As Heckmann (2006) points out, there is confusion about the concept of integration in the area of migration research. As Robinson, Schmid and Siles (2002) put it, it is even a "chaotic" concept, used by many yet understood differently by most (cf. Ager & Strang, 2008). Consequently, despite having many definitions (or due to that fact), the concept of integration today is used differently in different contexts and continues to be controversial (Haglund and Loga, 2009). The debates and divergent views and approaches in academia and policy areas today also reflect this fact.

Part of the reason that drives debates integration of refugees and migrants to this day is, besides the topic is a relatively new phenomenon, there is also no consensus over who is a refugee or not.

Another contributing element is also, as Ager and Strang (2008) shared, integration outcomes and the means by which they are to be achieved tend to be diverse in different countries. For example, the lack of consensus among experts and policy makers on whether refugees and migrants represented an economic burden or an opportunity for the hosting nations is a matter remains to be resolved (Parsons, 2016). For example, Yann et al. (2012) mentions, whereas sociologists have been studying the cultural integration patterns of immigrants, economists traditionally have been mainly interested in assessing the direct impact of immigration flows on market outcome (especially on the labor market) or on fiscal transfers and public goods provision (Yann et al., 2012).

On the other hand, nationalists argue, saying that refugees cause harm to their host nations, mainly by draining state resources. As the Parsons (2016) points out, this position is typically underpinned by ambivalence towards alien cultures, and its promoters might refer to threats to national and cultural identity, and to community safety, posed by some unknown group of people. Moreover, while the nationalist argument relies substantially on economic arguments, proponents of humanitarian stance also argue from a moral duty. Interestingly enough, as Parsons observed, where two sides differ is that whereas the nationalist position unambiguously refers refugees as a burden on host countries; the humanitarian stance is willing to accept the burden from a perceived moral obligation. However, the common assumption in both camps is that refugees present an "economic burden" (Parsons, 2016). Political scientists also have their line of argument. According to them, immigrants' integration patterns can significantly alter the design and the political economy of public policies, such as welfare institutions, in the host society (Yann et al., 2012; Parsons, 2016).

Consequently, there is no agreement on the definition of integration of refugees and there is no accepted definition in the international law (Crisp, 2004, as cited in UNHCR, 2013; Phil Cole, 2015). Therefore, there is no single, generally accepted definition, theory or model of immigrant and refugee integration. However, as Castles et al. also argues, given the different circumstance of countries, it is also unrealistic to expect a "one-size-fits-all" kind of definition. Therefore, the concept of integration continues to be controversial and hotly debated' (Castles et al., 2001, as cited in, Ager and Strang, 2008).

2.3 Who Is a Refugee?

So, just who is a refugee? A refugee, according to the UN Convention on Refugees (1951), is someone who;

due to a well-established fear of being persecuted for reasons of religion, race, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, nationality, is in a different country other than the country of his origin, and owing to such fear, is unable to or, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.

Similarly, according to the European Council on Refugees and exiles, refugees are people fleeing for their lives to escape war or a natural disaster situation. Examples of mass refugees include the Balkans war, The Rwandan genocide, World War II and now, the Syrian crises (UDI, n.d.). Similarly, in Norway, according to the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, for a refugee to get protection and a residence permit in Norway:

He / she must have a reasonable fear of maltreatment on account of his/her ethnic, origin, skin color, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political view and engagement, or faces a risk of death punishment, trouble or other brutal treatments if he/she return to his home country (UDI, n.d).

2.4 The United Nations Convention on Refugees

As Phil Cole (2015) argues, the root of the problem for those intractable debates and divergent views on the refugee and migrant issues might have its origin in the loophole the 1967 Protocols, and the 1951 Refugee Convention leaves out. Moreover, another loophole Cole points out has to do with the status of the UN Convention on International Law. When it comes to the protection of refugees, only countries that ratified the Convention have an obligation. This means that those fleeing have no right whatsoever in countries that are not signatories to the Convention.

The problem has come to light with the arrival of huge numbers of refugees and migrants in Europe in the past few years, and it has exposed the loopholes and weakness with the UN Convention on Refugees definition. The vast majority of the people who arrived in Europe recently did not leave their country because of fear of persecution owing to the above reasons

stipulated in the definition of the UN Geneva Convention on refugees. Instead, they are simply fleeing the violence. In other words, they are fleeing not because they were under threat for personal reasons but because their home is no longer safe, perhaps it has become a war zone. This makes those persons unqualified for refugee status. In fact, as Cole noted, UNHCR itself addresses the same people as 'persons of concern' instead of the Convention definition (Phil Cole, 2015; UNHCR, 2005).

Moreover, another ambiguity that has made the UN Convention on refugees be controversial is the fact that it states for any person to be considered a refugee is, if and when they cross over their country's borders; otherwise, they are considered an internally displaced people. That means, as far as the Convention is concerned, one is only a refugee once a state has granted him/her that status. Therefore, as Cole argues, if there is anything the current crisis has brought to light is that the UN Refugee Convention [1951] and the right and obligations which flow from it are inadequate and need to be fundamentally revised (Phil Cole, 2015).

2.5 Concept and Definition of Refugee Integration

The term 'integration' [of refugees and migrants] has been defined in some ways that reflect any country's sense of identity, its cultural understandings, and history. Moreover, this sense of identity as a nation incorporates certain values; and these are values that considerably form the way that concept such as integration is approached (Ager and Strang, 2008).

According to Qureshi and Hagen (1996), *to integrate* means to join, unite or put together into a unit while the unified parts keep their original character. The term is often used concerning the relationship between the minority and the majority population in society. *"For the minority, this means the right to preserve qualities from one culture and give up other characteristics, or adopt qualities from the new culture"* (Qureshi and Hagen 1996, as cited in, Larsen, 2010/20). In this sense, as Ager and Strang (2008) indicated, integration does not imply "insertion" of one group amidst another" (Ager & Strang, 2008), rather, integration is a two-way process. The phrase "two-way" points to the significance of integration to be seen as a course of both sides accommodation, and thus the need to consider ways of social connection between refugees and those other members

of the communities among whom they settle (Ager & Strang, 2008). Similarly, Qureshi (1999, as cited in, Larsen, 2010/2) describe integration as a dynamic process, a reciprocal action between society and diverse social strata, groups, and individuals. Ideally, integration means that everyone gets the same chance to influence their environment, and at the same time maintain their identity and integrity (Qureshi 1999, as cited in, Larsen, 2010/2). Similarly, Bosswick & Heckmann (2016) also recognized the dynamic and multi-layered two-way development that involves efforts from every stakeholder, including a preparedness on the part of refugee to adapt to the host society without having to forego their own cultural identity, and a corresponding readiness on the part of host communities and public institutions to welcome refugees and meet the needs of a diverse population.

One reason that makes concept of integration to put in context and far less to talk about is that integration tends to comprise an interconnected legal, economic, social and cultural aspects; all of which are important for refugees' capacity to integrate successfully as fully included members of society (UNHCR, 2005, p.14; Baneke 1999, as cited in, Ager & Strang, 2008; Bosswick & Heckmann, 2016)

On a broader perspective, Favell (2001) believes that integration ought to include basic legal and social protection, naturalization and citizenship (residence permit rights); against discrimination laws to protect the new comers; the equal opportunity as the citizens of the host country; positive action; the creation of associational structure for immigrants and minorities; the redistribution of socio-economic funds for minorities and immigrants in the disadvantaged areas; policy on public housing; multicultural education policy; policies on law and order; cultural funding for ethnic associations or religious organizations; policies and laws on tolerating cultural practices; culture and culture courses of the host societies.

To Heckmann and Bosswick (2006), integration is much about the difference between participation in the main institutions of the host country and identifying with those institutions. From this stand, the authors recognized four different types of integration: *structural identification* (attainment of rights and access to main institutions within the host society, such as labor market, housing, welfare state institutions and full political participation); *cultural integration* (fulfillment of the competencies of the dominant

culture and the hosting society; *interactive integration* (the newcomer identification of him/her self with social system of the receiving community) and *identification integration* (the recognition of the new comers within the primary associations and community networks of the host society). In other words, as Heckmann and Bosswick seem to believe, integration relates both to the conditions for and the actual participation of refugees in all aspects of life of the host country as well as to refugees' own sense of belonging and membership of [European] societies' (cited in, ECRE 1999b; Heckmann and Bosswick, 2006).

On the other hand, Carrera et al., 2006, as cited in, Larsen, 2010/2), criticized the term 'integration'; they argue that the current understanding of the term fails to agree with the goals of social inclusion and non-discrimination. Instead, this concept of integration is only one-way, and it has become a juridical, policy-oriented and institutional tool for control. It also covers the actual processes of incorporation and assimilation by entailing a state philosophy determining who is *included* and who is *excluded*. According to Carrera et al., 2006, as cited in, Larsen, 2010/2), 'Integration' should rather be replaced by the concept *social inclusion* since this latter term covers important processes of unequal treatment, discrimination and inclusion tackling exclusion (Carrera et al., 2006, p. 19, as cited in, Larsen, 2010/2).

Researchers and experts on refugee integration now reasonably agree that, "a refugee can be considered integrated if he/she can achieve public outcomes through employment, housing, education the same as the receiving community; socially connected with the host community and functions of the receiving country; has a good enough language capacity and knowledge of the culture of the host community; enough feeling of security and stability (Agar & Strang, 2005, p.5; Ager et al., 2002). Similarly, the European Commission relates integration to its outcomes and the two processes that are critical to improving immigrant's outcomes are the abolition of inequalities and the acquisitions of competency. In this case, inequalities refer to the areas of education, economic life, security of residence, support for family life, anti-discrimination and social citizenship whereas attainment of competence refers to the newcomers to engage in a learning process in the host country throughout their life (European Commission, 2007; UNHCR, 2013).

On the other hand, when talking about integration, it can be quite one thing to look at it from the hosting side and another from the refugees and migrants. For refugees and immigrants, integration represents a process of acquiring rights and obligations, learning a new culture, gaining access to positions and social status, building personal relationships with the members of the receiving community and forming of belonging to, and identification with that society (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006). From the side of the hosting community, integration means opening up institutions and granting equal opportunity to the newcomers and as Bosswick & Heckmann, (2006) attest, in the process, the host society has more power and prestige than the new comers.

In this study, the author has chosen to adopt Ager and Strang (2004, 2008) and Favell, 2001 definition of integration of refugees; which states:

The integration of refugees is a dynamic and all-inclusive endeavor that requires a two-way process, and if any effort is to have the desirable and lasting effects, it takes an active participation from all sides. Primarily, as various findings revealed, on one hand, refugees are expected to have the readiness to adapt to the host society while at the same time, there should be the corresponding willingness on the part of the local communities and institutions to welcome the refugees without requiring them to miss out their cultural identity (Favell, 2001; Ager & Stang, 2008).

2.6 Dimensions of Integration

According to Hagelund and Loga (2009), there are three domains of integration of refugees: economic integration (participation in the labor market), political integration (turnout), and social integration (networking and participation in the organization. Ager and Strang (2004, p, 3) in their part identify ten (10) aspects of integration that may be considered a break-down of Hagelund and Loga (2009). Those variables include market integration (which translates into employment, housing, education, and health), Social connection (social bridges, social bonds, and social links), Facilitators (language and cultural knowledge, safety and stability), and Foundations (Rights and Citizenship). Agar and Strang consider these ten variables as general aspects that can impact integration process of refugees in their hosting community.

Experts identify three major dimensions of refugee integration to their new host countries, namely: Socio-cultural, economic, and legal. What follows is a brief discussion each of those three main dimensions.

2.6.1 Socio-Cultural Dimension of Integration

The social and cultural aspect of integration refers to the ability of the refugees to adopt and adjust to the new environment of the host community, such as the new culture, values, climate, and language and the willingness and readiness of the host community to accommodate the newcomers “refugees” without prejudice and hatred as well as assisting them to contribute to the wellbeing of and social life of the host community (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006; UNHCR, 2013). Bosswick and Heckmann (2006, p,11) define social integration as the inclusion and approval of newcomers into the main institutions, relationships, and positions of a host society”.

2.6.2 The Economic Dimension of Integration

The economic aspect of integration is the ability of the refugees to join the workforce, become financially independent and therefore less dependent on the welfare system of the host country and contribute to the wellbeing and economy (UNHCR, 2013, p, 15). As a matter of fact, in the European commission's "Handbook" for integration, employment is considered as the major aspect of the integration of the newcomers in a hosting country. For this reason, it is emphasized that early start of employment of the newcomers should be facilitated for refugee’s success in the job market (European Commission, 2007, p, 51).

Besides, the recognition of the immigrants' qualifications from their home countries as well as granting residence permits to refugees and immigrants are recognized to play a role in encouraging them to integrate into the host community (European Commission, 2007). Many refugees cannot produce proof of previous qualifications and even when they can, as ECRE (199b) research makes clear, employers may not recognize, leaving refugees and migrants with no choice except to be underemployed¹.

¹ Underemployment - defines as when a person has to work on a job for which he is over-qualified

Refugees and migrants also regard being employed as being integrated. For example, ECRE (1999a) quotes one refugee as saying, "To me integration is work, if we work we are integrated" (as cited in, Ager & Strang, 2008). This makes sense because, for example, as Thread Gold and Court (2005) indicate, those who are unemployed have a high possibility of not integrating into the host society.

The role of employment even seems to go more than economic self-sufficiency. Employment has been proven as a factor influencing many important issues, including better planning for the future, promoting economic independence, meeting members of the host society, providing an opportunity to develop language skills, restoring self-esteem and encouraging self-reliance (Africa Educational Trust, 1998; Tomlinson and Egan, 2002, as cited in, Ager & Strang, 2008; Bloch 1999; Luhmann, 2000b, p.302)

2.6.3 The Legal and Political Aspects of Integration

According to UNHCR (2013), the legal aspect of integration is defined as the rights and privileges of refugees to get into the host country once they get the refugee status and its associated "the right to live." These legal and political dimensions of integration include freedom of movement and ability to travel with legal travel documents, access to education and work in par with the citizens of the host country, access to medical help and more. (UNHCR, 2005; Baneke 1999, as cited in, Ager & Strang, 2008; Favell, 2001; Bosswick & Heckmann, 2016).

Besides, recognizing family reunion for those who left their families back home is another part of legal integration (UNHCR, 2013; Hedetoft, 2006; Punterwold 2002; as cited in, Larsen, 2010/2).

2.7 Barriers to the Integration of Refugees

There is plenty of literature regarding the integration of refugees and the challenges they face in the host communities during their integration process. Moreover, the list of barriers to the integration of refugees and migrants to the host communities is seemingly inexhaustible. In this section, I will try to discuss of those obstacles identified by some authors and researchers.

Kanu (2008) categorized the obstacles to integration of refugees into the host communities into three broad categories: *Academic* - poor educational background and inability to peruse in the institutions of the host country; *Economic* - poor economic background and difficulty in finding employment in the host community and *Phycological challenge* - due to post-migration stress, separation from family and close ones and other factors.

According to the findings by Kaupang (2015), she identified the inability to find employment, difficulty to learn the Norwegian language, especially for the adult as the main challenges refugees and immigrants have in Norway. Kaupang also mentions that poor educational background of the refugees [partly due to incompatibleness to the job market in Norway] as another challenge for the refugees. Similarly, other researchers confirmed inability to get employed due to poor language and educational background to be as one of the most obstacles for the integration of refugees (Bratsberg & Røed, 2016; Søholt, Tronstad & Vestby, 2015). For example, in Norway, according to Vestby et al., (2015), due to high labor cost in Norway, employers, especially of the small and medium companies, are hesitant to recruit immigrants and refugee foreign educational certificates and poor Norwegian language skills (Vestby et al., 2015).

Further, another study disclosed job and job-related issues as the main barrier to the integration of immigrants and refugees (Krahn, Derwing, Mulder & Wilkinson, 2000). The authors revealed that refugees and immigrants had more difficulty finding employment compared to the general population. Moreover, if and when they are employed, they are likely to work temporary and part-time jobs. Mestheneos and Ioannidi (2002) also recognized inability to get employment as being exacerbated by the lack of access to information thereby acting as a barrier to integration into the host municipality. Moreover, downward occupational mobility or to be underemployed found as a common aspect with immigrants and refugees (Krahn et al., 2000).

Mestheneos & Ioannidi (2002) noted, idleness of refugees in the reception camps and longer periods of processing cases; the cultural difference between the refugees and the host community, over-generosity and enforced dependency by welfare states to the refugees as further contributing in hampering their integration into the host society. Likewise, another study on the Scandinavian welfare societies highlighted the family as the main barrier to integration for its members (Olwig, 2011). According to their findings, some children of immigrants and refugee

families of Pakistani and Afghani origin in Norway for example, have challenges to live up to their family's desires and expectations. Their families have high expectations of their children sometimes they force them to study their mother language, and in some cases, they force them to study. Moreover, in some cases, for example, with the families of Pakistani origin, they force their children to get married from Pakistan, and also make them spend some years in Pakistan to embrace the culture, values, and religion, despite they are born in Norway (Olwig, 2011).

Another study by Mestheneos and Ioannidi (2002) shows that negative views, racism, and exclusion about the refugees and immigrants by residents and institutions of the host community as major obstacles to a successful integration of the newcomers to the host society. The authors disclosed institutional racism is widespread, however, hidden, as many refer to such phenomenon "a glass wall." Ager and Strang (2004) revealed from their field study that safety, stability, language and cultural understanding of the host community as either the barriers or facilitators to integration for the refugees in the host community.

On the other hand, Poul Collier and Alexander Betts in their recent book, "Refugee: Transforming a Broken Refugee System" (2017) criticize the European countries in their strategies of dealing with the refugees and their integration strategy. The problem with refugees and integration, as the authors argue is, interrelated to the policies of host countries (Collier & Betts, 2017).

Overall, from the above analysis, some of the major obstacles mentioned as contributing in obstructing successful integration of refugees and migrants to host societies include: Poor language skills and educational background; problems with host countries policies and strategies for refugees integration; implicit racism and exclusion by local people; unwillingness of employers and companies to recruit refugees and immigrants, exacerbated by incompatibility of skills to the job market; cultural differences; enforced dependency by welfare states; difficulty with access to relevant information; staying for prolonged periods in refugee processing camp. Consequently, as the various authors and researchers indicated above, the refugees and immigrants suffer from lack of employment; disproportionately higher unemployment (compared to the local population); under-employment; downward occupational mobility and being temporary and part-time jobs; economic and physiological challenges as caused by separation from family and friends.

2.8 Integration in The Context of The Scandinavian Welfare System

Scandinavia as a context provides fundamental similarities in history, politics, and culture (Hedetoft 2006, Punterwold 2002; as cited in, Larsen, 2010/2). Given the socio-political, historical and cultural similarities between Scandinavian countries, it helps to look into the integration of immigrants for the sake of comparison in those countries (Pettersen, Silje Vatne & Lars Østby, 2011). The Scandinavian countries have had a common Nordic labor market since 1954 (Fischer and Straubhaar, 1996), while the entire Nordic region has been part of the open European labor market within the EU/EEA area, since 1994. What is more, it should be kept in mind that immigration to Scandinavia began with the gradual opening of country borders, which initially happened within the Nordic countries and then the EU. This means citizens from the Nordic countries, for more than 50 years, have been able to work and live in another Nordic country without any constraints, and that this privilege has been extended to all EU/EEA citizens in large part (Norwegian Directorate of Immigration 2013). Moreover, in addition to the national policies on labor migration, refugees, and family reunification from countries outside the EU is also part of the picture. In this regard, there are many similarities between the Scandinavian countries in these areas, but also differences (Pettersen, Silje Vatne of Lars Østby, 2011).

According to Esping Andersen (1990, as cited. Larsen, 2010/2), Scandinavian countries adhere to the same social democratic welfare regime. Moreover, in this generous regime, the aim is equal opportunities and equal status for everyone, and there is a universalistic ideology that is provided for by state intervention in the form of, for example, taxation and fees (Larsen, 2010/2). For example, as Larsen indicates, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway were in 2007 among the five countries that contributed the highest percentages of their GDPs to social expenditures (Larsen, 2010/2). In fact, Norway and Denmark have similar histories when it comes to immigration: The guest workers immigrated during the 1960s and early 1970s, family reunion boosted after the immigration stop in 1973–75, asylum applicants increased in the 1980s and had decreased through the 1990s (Hedetoft 2006; Punterwold, 2002; as cited in, Larsen, 2010/2).

About 50 percent of all immigrants in Scandinavia are from countries in Africa, Asia or Latin America. This mainly relates to new migrant workers followed by refugees, as well as the families of these two groups. Moreover, the second largest group of immigrants are from EU countries outside the Nordic region, and this is currently dominated by labor immigrants from Eastern Europe. From the rest of Europe, Large number of immigrants arrived from the rest of

Europe and the Balkans during the unrest in the 1990s, while immigrants from North America, Australia, and New Zealand make up the smallest groups (Pettersen, Silje Vatne & Lars Østby, 2011).

Until the 1970s, employment was the main reason for immigration. Then starting in the 1970s, immigrants who were escaping from war or persecution (from countries including Vietnam, Chile, Iran former Yugoslavia, Iraq, and Somalia) started to come. Moreover, Since the eastward expansion of the EU in 2004, labor migration, particularly from Poland and the Baltic states, has characterized the immigration situation in the Scandinavian countries, in addition to continued family immigration and immigration due to flight (Pettersen, Silje Vatne & Lars Østby, 2011).

2.8.1 Integration Policies Among Scandinavian Countries

Generally, despite similarities in the general immigration picture, there are major disparities between the Scandinavian countries regarding immigrant numbers. Generally speaking, Denmark has a more stringent policy in this area than the other two countries, while Sweden has the most liberal immigration and integration policy in Scandinavia. Norway falls somewhere in between. For example, Sweden has taken in much more refugees from the former Yugoslavia and Iraq than Norway and Denmark, also about population size. Sweden has currently about three times as many immigrants as Norway and Denmark (1.43 versus 0.55 and 0.44million). (Pettersen, Silje Vatne & Lars Østby, 2011).

Sweden has a significant level of immigration, primarily due to them taking in large numbers who are in need of protection. Denmark, on the other hand, has had comparably limited and a restrictive immigration policy since the beginning of the new millennium. While in the case of Norway, high immigration level is particularly linked to the low unemployment, high wages, the need for labor in some industries in the country and problems in the labor market in many other countries. Of the three Nordic countries, Denmark maintains a more stringent immigration policy (Pettersen, Silje Vatne & Lars Østby, 2011).

2.9 Defining of Concepts

2.9.1 Eritrean Refugees in Norway

Despite having a small number of population, recently Eritrea has been, as IMDi report shows, one of the highest contributors of refugees in Norway (IMDi, 2016; ssb, 2016). The first group of asylum from Eritrea came to Norway in the late 1970s, and more arrived in 1980s (IMDi, 2009).

Back then, Eritrea was under Ethiopian occupation and was at war for its independence. Unfortunately, the phenomenon of Eritreans leaving their country did not change much even after the country won its independence in 1991. Since the country's independence, the government in Eritrea slowly turned authoritarian, depriving people almost all the basic rights. As a result, many of the regime critics, including senior members of the government, ministers and others, have been imprisoned (Ohchr.org, 2016) and many ordinary citizens have increasingly become subject to state repression and gross violation of human rights with impunity (UN-COIE, 2014; 2015). As the situation in the country worsened in recent years, the number of Eritrean refugees increased dramatically (IMDi, 2016).

In this study, the phrase "Eritrean Refugees in Norway," shall refer to Eritrean refugees who are beneficiaries of the introduction after its amendment in 2005 and who are settled in the two municipalities which are the focus of the current study.

2.9.2 Municipality

The municipality is the lowest administrative area in Norway. The municipality performs tasks that are decided by the parliament or the government (Snl, 2016). The municipalities have important tasks and responsibilities at the local level, such as: running kindergartens, primary school, school care (SFO), special education for the disabled, health and social services, primary care, home care and home nursing, retirement and nursing homes, social help (Snl, 2016). Furthermore, local roads, water, sewage and sanitation, local environmental protection, fire protection fall under the responsibility of the municipalities (Snl, 2016). In addition, administration of churches and cemeteries, youth clubs and public libraries operate under the municipalities.

Another important task of the municipality has to do with implementing the integration of refugees (Introduction Act, 2005). As stated in the "Introduction Act", municipalities which agree to settle refugees have the obligation to implement the introduction program and integrate the refugees who are assigned into the municipality.

Hence, Throughout the document, the term "municipality" shall refer to the administrative area in Norway, where the refugee's resettlements and the implementation of the integration policy take place.

2.9.3 Norway's Integration Policy

The integration policy of Norway “The Introduction Act” ²was amended by the Norwegian parliament in 2005 and it has been effective since September 1, 2005. According to the Act (2005), the main purpose of the integration policy is to help refugees and asylum seekers in participating in work and social life and to make them financially independent. The Act explains the duties and rights of the individual refugee participating in the introduction program and the host municipalities. According to the policy, all the refugees, between the age of 16 and 55 have the right and obligation to participate in Norwegian language training, social studies with some introductory payment for a period of two years and with some exception to three years (IMDi, 2016).

Hence throughout the document, “integration policy of Norway” refers to the “Introduction Act” of the country which was amended in 2005.

2.10 Immigrants and Refugees in Norway

According to UNHCR (2015), by the beginning of 2015, there were more than 56 million refugees and internally displaced people in the world. Similarly, the situation affected European countries and Norway broadly more than any time than the previous years and they received the highest number of refugees in one year in their history (Meld. St. 30).

As demographic archive shows, In the 1970s, immigrants and refugees were below 1.5% of the Norwegian population, and almost half of them were from neighboring countries of Scandinavia (Liebig, 2009). After World War II, immigration to Norway was nonexistent with the exception of Norwegian-American returnees and few from eastern and central Europe. Outside of Northern Europe, the first 400 immigrants came from Asia and Africa in 1967 (Brochmann & Hagelund, 2012). However, nowadays, according to Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi, 2016), currently more than 16.3% of Norway's population has an immigration background. More than half of the immigrants are from OECD countries (Liebig, 2009) Out of these; people with refugee background are 3.6% of the population and 28% of all the immigrants (IMDi, 2016). Most of them are from Syria, Eritrea, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran.

²<http://app.uio.no/ub/ujur/oversatte-lover/data/lov-20030704-080-eng.pdf>

At the beginning of 2016, there were around 700,000 immigrants and 150,000 born in Norway from Immigrants parents in Norway. The immigrants and refugees came from 223 different countries. The majority came from Europe 55% as work immigrants, Asia 28%, most as a family reunion, Africa 12%, majority as refugees, South America 3% and North America 1%. In the past decade, the highest three refugee contributing countries to Norway were Somalia, Iraq, and Eritrea. However, recently, especially since 2015 Syrians were the largest in number. 2015 was the highest record of refugees in Norway (31,145), and it was the same trend in other European and Scandinavian countries also. In Sweden, there were 162,450 refugee arrivals, Denmark 20,935, and Finland 32,345. The future arrival of refugees in Norway is unpredictable, and many factors influence the situation.

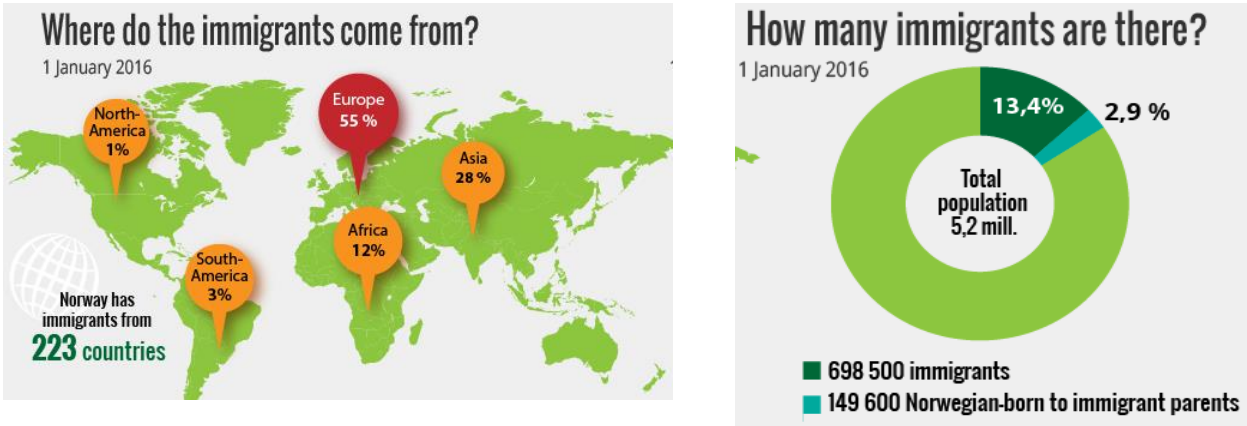


Figure 2.1: Where do the immigrants in Norway come from? And Percentage of Immigrants in Norway

Source: Ssb.no, 2017

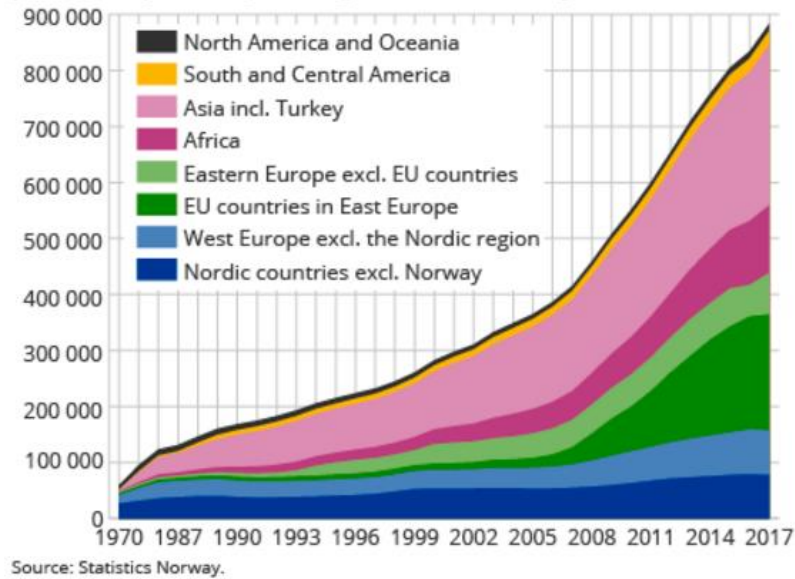


Figure 2.2: Immigrants and Norwegian-born to Immigrant Parents, by country of origin from 1 January 2017
Source: Ssb.no, 2017

2.11 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed relevant literature on the integration of refugees and migrants. Furthermore, the Concept of Integration of refugees was discussed. The discussion was based upon the different views among experts regarding the integration of refugees and migrants. Besides dimensions of integration and barriers to the integration of refugees are spelled out. Additionally, a discussion was provided about the Policy of the Scandinavian countries in relation to the integration of refugees and the Welfare System. In addition, a definition of concepts and statistical data about the Refugees and Immigrants in Norway was given.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

This study aims to explore the obstacles of the Eritrean refugees to integrate into the Norwegian society. Hence, Ager and Strang (2004, 2008) “Integration Framework” and Lipsky’s (1980) “Street-level Bureaucracy Theory” have been found as relevant theories to explain the phenomenon. So, this chapter highlights the theories and their relevance to the study. Similarly, the operationalization of the variables is provided.

Lastly, a theoretical framework has been developed to analyze the independent factors that influence the effective integration of refugees in the two municipalities which are the focus of this study.

3.2 Street Level Bureaucracy Theory

According to Lipsky (2010), street-level bureaucrats are bureaucrats that meet citizens at the interface between citizens and governments. They are the refugee guides in all the administrative areas of a state. The role of street-level bureaucrats is vital in the integration of refugees. Whatever the refugees get from the hosting municipality is implemented through the street level bureaucrats.

Street-level bureaucracy theory is concerned with the relationships between the refugee guides and their "clients," which in the context of the present study are the “refugees”. It is mainly focused on the interaction of street-level bureaucrats and the refugees and how especially the former deal with their clients. And this makes street-level bureaucracy theory which is commonly used in organizational studies very relevant to the current study. Therefore, it is necessary to assess the relationship of refugees, and street-level bureaucrats as refugees depend on street-level bureaucrats during the integration program and after.

As Djupvik (2012) observed, refugee guides implement policies in a way that affects the lives of those who are the target of such policy greatly. Besides, depending on various factors (such as hosting government's political will, allocation of resources and the like), specific policies designed and implemented solely targeting refugees can impact the lives of refugees positively

or otherwise. For example, one such policy practice practiced by street level bureaucrats is '*creaming*.' This refers to how the refugee guides, faced with many clients than they can handle, how sometimes they tend to make decisions in dealing with specific cases of clients. For instance, a refugee guide may decide based on bureaucratic criteria to give priority to a refugee who is considered as being capable of succeeding in their lives as it is a success story for the refugee guides as well (Guttormsen & Hoigaard, 1977, as cited in Djupvik, 2012). Ironically, such bias can happen even though there are formal requirements to give equal opportunity to all the clients (Lipsky, 2010). On the other hand, *creaming* can be an individual objective of the refugee guides at the front offices too (Djupvik, 2012). As Lipsky (2010, p, 107) revealed when all clients have equal opportunity but not all can be given the opportunity at the same time, then the personal goal of the street-level bureaucrats or the municipality's success is given precedence.

'*Categorization*' is another policy practice observed among street level bureaucrats. *Categorization* has to do with assigning of clients into certain bureaucratic and professional categorization (Prottas, 1979, as cited in Djupvik, 2012; Lipsky, 2010). It is a strategy used by street-level bureaucrats to simplify their work when dealing with clients (Lipsky, 2010). However, as Djupvik (2012) points out, the problem with *the categorization* of clients is that it has the danger of imposing the street level bureaucratic stereotyping of the clients.

On the other hand, as Spicker (2011) observed, during the implementation of the integration policy, sometimes, there can be *stigmatization* of clients [by the refugee guides]. One such form of stigmatization that street-level bureaucrats can subtly exercise on their clients is '*rubber stamping*.' This concept refers to refugee guides using earlier reports from other street level bureaucrats about a client and bases their decision and treatment of the client on such report (Lipsky, 1980). And, as Spicker makes it clear, in a welfare state, stigma harms the beneficiary and can undermine his/ her self-esteem (Spicker, 2011).

'*Referral*' is also another common trait of policy implementers. It entails bureaucrat's referring to clients between the offices of street-level bureaucrats. While such *referrals* are most often carried out with the intent of providing further assistance to the "client", however, it is not without its downside. Refugee guides have the influence when they refer and notably among negatives of street-level bureaucrats to their clients are its psychological costs. As Lipsky (2010)

observed, during the implementation of policies, refugee guides can impose psychological pressures on their clients (Lipsky, 2010).

Therefore, Street Level Bureaucracy Theory is very important to explore as language problems, cultural differences and socioeconomic background of the refugees could leave psychological impacts on the refugees as they continue to deal with the policy implementers during the integration process.

3.2.1 Relevance of Street-Level Bureaucracy Theory to The Study

Refugees at municipality level who were beneficiaries of the introduction program are analyzed as service recipients by focusing on their experience with the refugee guides in the offices. According to Lipsky (2010), clients of street level bureaucrats or refugees, are unnecessarily and coldly understood as being in a non-voluntary position. If ‘client’ refugee has a low income and few or no alternatives other than to seek help from the welfare agencies that may provide him with monetary support, the client may also be in a non-voluntary. The less fortunate the person, the more he or she is likely to be the non-voluntary client of street-level bureaucrats.

Another experience of refugees with street-level bureaucrats is that refugees see themselves as *stigmatized*. Stigmatization can happen between refugees and refugee guides and between refugees and the local residents. Such phenomenon also calls for attention on how the local residents in the municipality see the refugees as new settlers in their municipality.

3.3 Integration Framework

Ager and Strang (2004, 2008) Integration Framework has been adopted for the present study, and it incorporates ten key indicators for integration which are categorized under four domains.

The **first group** consists of employment, housing, education and health which are considered as ‘*markers*’ and ‘*means*’ to an effective integration of refugees (Agar & Strang, 2004). Taken together, these four indicators have been widely recognized as critical areas in the integration process. Further, while they can serve as “*markers*” to demonstrate progress towards integration, as the authors claim, they can also serve as “*means*” in that they aid in the attainment of other domains of integration. In other words, they are ‘*markers*’ due to this reason that their attainment

indicates positive integration outcome, and they are ‘*means*’ because they become a vehicle for deeper integration of refugees. Owing to their central role, therefore, employment, housing, education, and health are thus widely acknowledged by numerous stakeholders to be key facets of integration refugees and migrants into a new society (Ager & Strang, 2004).

The **second group** in Ager and Strang (2004) Integration Framework is ‘***Social Connection***’ which refers to the importance of relationships to the understanding of the integration process. While the four domains outlined above under “*markers and means*” are considered, as Ager and Strang refer to them, the ‘*public face*’ of integration, however, they do not fully explain what integration really means as experienced by refugees in their day-to-day lives (Ager and Strang, 2004). Rather, *social connection* is considered to play important role in driving the processing of integration at a local level (Ager & Strang, 2008). ***Social Connection*** branches into three domains:

Social bonds (refugee’s connections within own community and culture defined by, for example, ethnic, national or religious identity). By interviewing refugees, Ager & Strang (2008) learned that refugees valued proximity to a family because they believed that they could share cultural practices and maintain familiar patterns of relationships and that they could feel settled. Likewise, the ability to connect with ‘like-ethnic groups’ was considered to lead to effective integration (e.g. Hale 2000, cited in, Ager & Strang, 2008). Further, having a relationship with a like ethnic group was also associated with health benefits, as those who didn't have a connection with a like-ethnic community around suffer a risk of depression four times as high compared to those who had access to their own community (Ager & Strang, 2008). At the same time, having own community organizations was considered to give ‘voice for refugees’ through serving as contact points for isolated individuals (Duke et al. 1999, cited in, Ager & Strang, 2008).

Social bridges (refers to having network with members of other communities). Having to network some kind of relationship with members of other communities generally, translates into a social harmony which creates the possibility to take part in different activities together with people from the other communities. For example, both refugees and host communities expressed participating in activities including college classes, religious worship, sports, political activities and community groups identified by Ager and Strang (2008), which they took as one evidence of integration happening. Besides, kindness from the settled community was important in

persuading refugees that their presence was not resented and thus making them feel secure. On the other hand, perceived coldness or aloofness weakened other successful aspects of integration (Ager & Strang, 2008).

Social links (ability to connect with institutions, including local and central government services). This is related how the newcomers adopt the institutions of the host community. *Social links* differ from both *social bonds* and *social bridges* in that it refers to the connections between individuals and the structures of the state, government services for example. In this regard, both refugees and the wider communities are expected to do extra efforts in order to help refugees to deal with existing barriers (such as their struggle with speaking the language; lack of familiarity with their surroundings) so that they can enjoy equal access and treatment to different services.

Moreover, Ager and Strang (2008) observed that attention is usually given on specific initiatives to improve the accessibility of relevant services, while there is also recognition that there are many structural barriers to effective connection. According to the authors, recognizing such barriers and finding ways to help refugees to 'connect' to relevant services can be a major task but one that serves as means to facilitate refugee's integration process (Ager & Strang, 2008).

3.4 Conceptual Framework of Integration

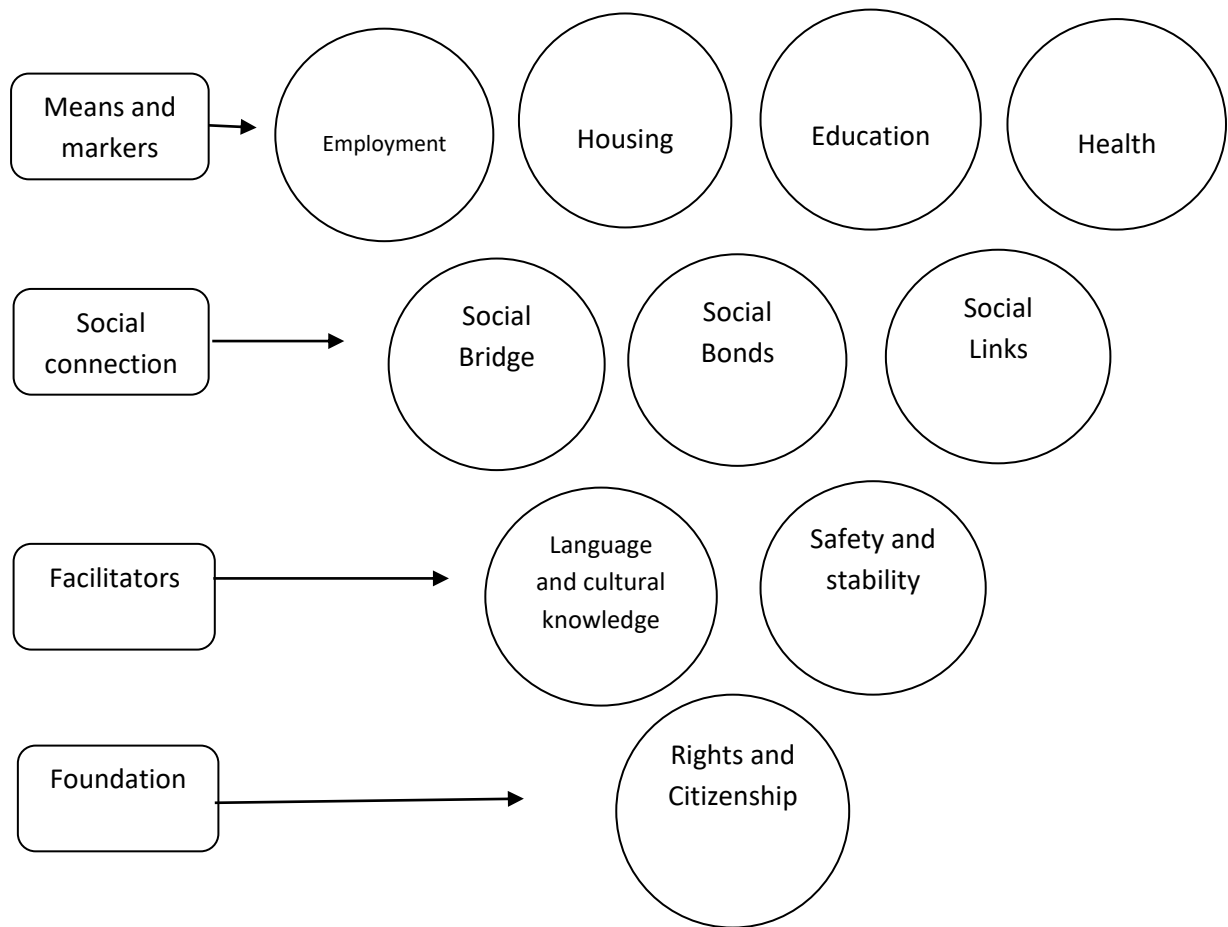


Figure 3.1: Conceptual Framework of Integration

Source: Ager and Stang, 2004

The **third group** of indicators in Ager and Strang (2004) integration framework are *facilitators* and has two domains, namely: **language** and **cultural knowledge** and the other ‘**safety and stability**’ (Ager & Strang, 2004; 2008). As Ager and Strang (2008) mention, more important than the ability to speak the local language, *cultural competence* which is related to knowledge of their host country’s’ local procedures, customs and facilities of the non-refugees was more helpful in their integration. And at the same time, albeit to less extent, cultural competence of non-refugees of the refugee's culture and customs, were found to be consistent in the integration process (Ager & Strang, 2004; 2008).

'Foundation' is the fourth and last group of Ager and Strang (2004) refugee integration framework, under which there is the **'right and citizenship'** indicator. The 'right and citizenship' indicator forms the foundation for integration because of having rights and the possibility of becoming a citizen, at the same time, represents expectations and obligations on the part of refugees.

3.4.1 Relevance of The Framework and Its Application to the Present Study

Almost all countries nowadays are, to a certain level are culturally diverse. Nevertheless, the influx of asylum seekers from “culturally distant” countries sometimes invokes apprehension among certain segments of a hosting country. Sometimes, it creates problems between the newcomers and the local residents as it puzzles hosting communities to what extent the diversity of culture should be tolerated and how such diversity of culture should be accommodated (Kukathas, 2004).

Likewise, refugees themselves might be reluctant to embrace a new culture, values, and the change in the way they have to live. As Kukathas (2004) observed, some refugees might have a strong view about what is good and bad and be reluctant to adjust their behavior and their mindset as some could be open-minded and tolerant to the values and norms of the host society. Else, the whole thing may simply overwhelm some of them.

The author has found Ager and Strang (2004, 2008) Integration Framework to be relevant to look into the current research problem, i.e. the barrier to integration for the Eritrean refugees from who have been settled in two municipalities. More importantly, as Ager and Strang discovered, an ability to find job, housing, education, and easy access to health are thus widely acknowledged by diverse stakeholders to be the most important aspects of integration into a new society. However, while it may not be possible to expect all the indicators discussed in Ager & Strang (2004; 2008). Integration Framework would be directly applicable in their entirety in the case of the Eritrean refugees in the two municipalities in Norway, but still it should be fairly clear that due to the complex inter-linkages among various socio-political and economic factors, it can be safely claimed that at least some of those indicators would have some impact. Therefore, since these are core to the indicators in any integration process, the choice of Ager & Strang (2004; 2008). Integration Framework is thus appropriate for the present study. The

significance and role of the four main indicators from Ager & Strang Integration Frameworks have been briefly discussed as follows:

- **Employment:** According to Ager and Strang (2004), employment helps refugees to become economically self-reliant, increases their self-esteem, gives them the opportunity to develop their language skills, enhance their network with other members of the municipality. Since at some of the Eritrean refugees involved in some kind of employment, employment as an indicator is relevant to the present study.
- **Housing:** For refugees, finding a house to stay is connected not only with overall physical and emotional wellbeing but also whether they can feel 'at home' (Glover et al. 2001; Dutch Refugee Council/ECRE 2001; cited in, Ager & Strang, 2008). Depending on the neighborhood they live, the housing also can affect the relationship of refugees with the local people and in finding other opportunities, like learning from established members of the community (Ager & Strang, 2008). Therefore, housing is also relevant as an indicator for the simple fact that no one can have normal life without having one.
- **Education:** Provides refugees with competence and can make their chances to find employment better and prepare them to play active roles in the society to which they wish to become part of (Ager & Strang, 2008). And since many among the Eritrean refugees who have been interviewed for this study have taken language classes and other classes, it will be helpful to see how much their studies and learning helped them to integrate.
- **Health:** The importance of having good health cannot be overemphasized because having good health can mean having an active life and being a contributing member of society or not. Ager and Strang (2008) mentioned that refugees' health can be affected because sometimes, they may not be able to communicate with healthcare professionals clearly or they may lack the relevant information on health services. In light of the dangerous journeys and traumatic experiences that the refugees had to experience, find out about health-related issues and how it impacts their day-to-day lives would be important.

3.5 Operationalization of Concepts

Independent Variable

Dependent Variable

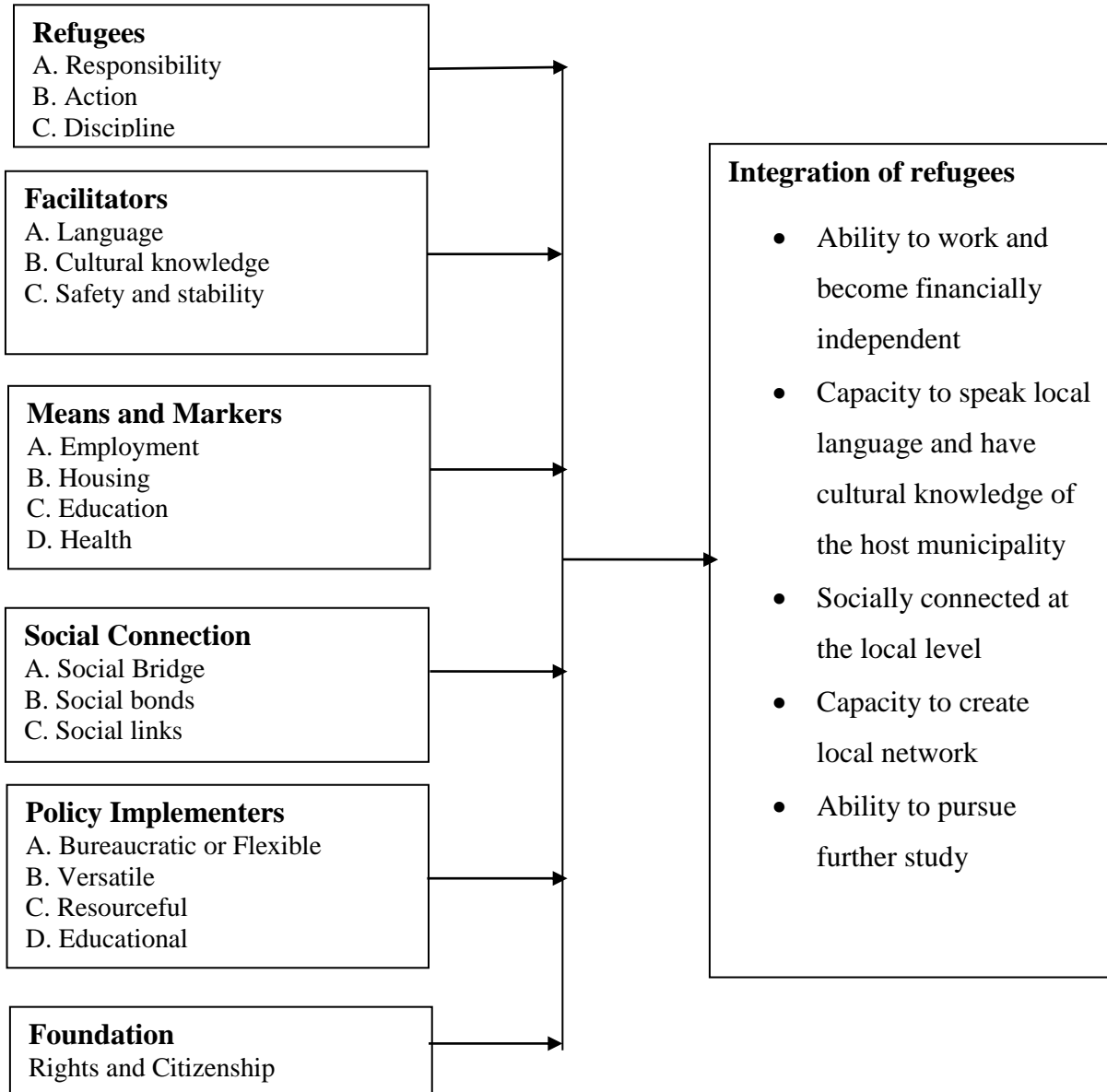


Figure 3.2: Analytical Framework of the Study

Source: Authors' design - adopted from Agar and Strang's Integration Theory & Lipsky's street level bureaucracy theory

Creswell (2012) defines operationalization as the process of defining variables or concepts into measurable terms and linking them with their empirical gauges. In this study, the concepts will be unpacked into measurable terms from the presumption that:

Integration of refugees primarily depends on, on one hand, the refugees' initiative and readiness to integrate and on the other hand, the willingness of the local people to include the refugees into the social life of the community. Besides, ability of the refugees to speak the local language and knowledge of the culture and values of the host municipality and country, competence and experience of the refugee guides, potential for employment, easy access to healthcare, education and housing opportunity, residence renewal, and citizenship. all these will play a significant role in successful the integration the refugees would be.

3.5.1 Dependent Variable

The dependent variable is a variable which is affected by the independent variable (Creswell, 2012). In this case, the dependent variable of the study is "*integration of refugees.*" It is operationalized in terms of: Ability of the refugees to join the job market after the end of the introduction program, ability of the refugees to express themselves in Norwegian language, ability of the refugees to create local networks and take part in the different local voluntary activities, capacity of refugees to pursue their studies in higher educational institutions in Norway.

3.5.2 Independent Variable

Creswell (2014) defines the independent variable as variables that influence the outcome of the dependent variable. Hereafter, in this study, the independent variables are those that affect the integration of refugees in the municipalities under the study. Therefore, based on the assumption that "*integration of refugees depends on the refugees: initiative and desire to integrate, social interaction of the refugees and the local people and the desire of the locals to include the refugees in the social life of the community, ability of the refugees to speak the local language and knowledge of the culture and values of the host municipality and country, competence and experience of the refugees guides, ability to be employed, and easy access to healthcare, education and housing, and residence renewal and citizenship*"

Six main variables constitute the independent variable of the study.

I. Policy Implementers

Refugee guides who work at the municipalities have an impact on the success of the integration program of the refugees (Winter, 2003). Refugee guides are always developing daily routines because of limited information and time about their ‘client’ refugees in order to respond to the demands daily activities (Lipsky, 2010). Because of this, the actions of the refugee guides can have negative consequences for the refugees. Besides, the experience, education level, and exposure of refugee guides to other cultures play a significant role for an effective integration of refugees. The presumption is that *“if refugee guides are versatile, skillful, experienced, cooperative, adaptable and resourceful, the higher will be the success of the integration policy.*

II. The Eritrean Refugees

The Eritrean refugees will be operationalized in terms of their responsibility to integrate into the Norwegian society and their daily routines and actions in relation to integration. The assumption is that *“If the Eritrean refugees take full responsibility to integrate, take a daily action and plans that can lead them to integrate into the Norwegian community, have the needed discipline to stick with their daily routine, then the greater will be the success of their integration in their host municipality.’*

III. Social Connection with The Community

Residents of the host municipality’s perception towards refugees can impact the integration either positively or negatively. Excluding and precluding refugees directly and indirectly in daily and social life is one of the barriers to integration (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006; UNHCR, 2013a). This concept will be operationalised in relation to willingness and readiness of the locals to include the refugees in different activities of the municipality such as voluntary organization, sports clubs, churches, and other socio-political activities. The presumption is that, given refugees willingness to associate themselves with the local people, *‘the greater the readiness of the local residents to include the refugees and the refugees desire to participate, the better will be the integration of refugees in the community.*

IV Measure and Markers

According to Agar and Strang (2004), employment, housing, education, and healthcare are considered the means and markers of integration.

The assumption is: *“the easier it is to get employment, housing, education and healthcare facilities, the better is the integration of the refugees.”*

V Facilitators

Language and cultural knowledge of the host municipality on one hand and safety and stability in the community on the other hand are considered as the main facilitators for the integration of refugees (Agar & Strang, 2004). In this case, the presumption is that: *“the more the language and cultural knowledge of the community, the better the integration; and the higher the safety and stability, the better the integration of the refugees in the municipality.”*

VI Foundation

Rights and Citizenships are the foundations for the integration of refugees (Agar & Strang, 2004). The assumption is that: *“The shorter the length of the processing time for the asylum application and family reunions, the better is the integration of the refugees and on the flip side of that, the tighter on the acquisition of the citizenship, the lower will be the integration of the refugees.”*

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided the explanation about the used theories in the study and their relevance to the study. The study found Ager and Strang (2004, 2008) “Integration Framework” and Lipsky’s (1980) “Street-level Bureaucracy Theory” as relevant theories to explain the phenomenon. Besides, the chapter included the operationalization of the variables of the study. Lastly, a theoretical framework has been developed to analyze the independent factors that influence the effective integration of refugees in the two municipalities which are the focus of this study.

Chapter Four: Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the explanation of the methodological approaches adopted during the data collection process as well as the justification for the chosen approaches is provided. The chapter covers the research approach, research design and study area, target population, sampling methods, sample size, data collection and data analysis. In addition, the main challenges encountered before and during the data collection as well as the strategies adopted to overcome those challenges have been presented. Moreover, the quality of the study and ethical considerations undertaken by the author during the data collections phase are thoroughly discussed. The study took the form of a qualitative research study. It has relied on data generated from interviews with refugees from Eritrean, local residents, key informants and refugee guides in two Municipalities. Furthermore, focus group discussions were conducted with the Eritrean refugees in the two Municipalities.

4.2 Research Approach

The research approach is a plan and all the procedures in research that explain the steps from broad assumptions to specific methods of data collection methods, data analysis and interpretation (Creswell, 2014, p.3). There are three types of research approaches, qualitative, quantitative and mixed method approaches. The qualitative research approach is suitable for exploring and understanding a phenomenon thoroughly from the individuals or groups of individuals. Quantitative research approach, by contrast, is for testing theories by examining the relationship of variables. In the case of mixed method research approach involves collecting both qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell, 2014, p. 4).

As Creswell (2012, p. 206) points out, "The purpose of qualitative research is to have an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon in its natural settings." To explore the challenges of the Eritrean refugees to integrate into their host community, the present study took the form of a qualitative research study. Employing a qualitative approach during data collection provided the chance to interview the refugees, refugee guides, key informants, and local residents in their area of

residence; share their experience about the integration program as well as discuss the barriers to integration for the Eritrean refugees. To accomplish the job, the researcher conducted interviews and focus group discussions with the Eritrean refugees and open-ended one-on-one interviews with the local residents, key informants and refugee guides in the two Municipalities. Previously, other researchers such as Ager and Strang (2004; 2008) also opted for a similar approach in their studies. Further, the qualitative approach helped the researcher to understand a great deal the refugees and the challenges they have had in integrating into the Norwegian socio-economic system.

4.3 Study Area

The study was carried out in two municipalities, namely "the City" Municipality and "the Periphery" Municipality; both in Hordaland county, in Norway. Those two municipalities are among the 428 Municipalities in the country. "The City" municipality is a city and municipality on the west coast of Norway. It is a large municipality with a population of about 275,512 and immigrants account 16.3 % of the total population (Ssb.no, 2015). While "the Periphery" municipality is a small municipality in the Nordhordaland District of Hordaland County, with a population of around 7,500 and only 8.1 % of its population have immigrants background (imdi.no, 2015). Creswell (2012) points out that in qualitative research, it is paramount to select sites purposefully to understand the phenomenon exhaustively. The criteria are whether the site is well-off in information (Patton, 1990, as cited in Creswell, 2012). In this study, the author has chosen "the City" Municipality because of its size, diversity, and its rich information. On the other hand, "the Periphery" municipality was selected as it is a small municipality and therefore, offers an opportunity to contrast two different demographics of the municipalities. Besides, time and budget constraints of the researcher were also considered in the research site selection process.

4.4 The Target Population

The participants for the study were selected from the two Municipalities, and they were refugees from Eritrean, refugee guides, local residents and key informants from organizations which are involved in assisting refugees in the integration program in those two Municipalities. A question might arise as to why the author selected only refugees from Eritrean to participate in the

research. The reason for doing so was because of the common language factor “Tigrigna” between the refugees and the researcher which allowed both the refugees and the author to converse freely and in detail. As Creswell (2012) pointed out in qualitative research approach, it is acceptable for the researcher to select respondents purposefully to get a comprehensive and deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

4.5 Sampling Method

In qualitative research, the purpose is not to generalize from a sample to a population, but to make an in-depth exploration of a phenomenon. Hence, to deeply understand the phenomenon, the qualitative researcher should select respondents and sites purposefully (Creswell, 2012, p.206). In the present study, the researcher selected study participants and research sites purposefully. Besides, the researcher found it imperative to select respondents purposefully for those who considered as having relevant knowledge on the subject under study. However, while the data collection was in progress, snowball sampling was used to include respondents who have had the knowledge and experience of the integration program. Hence, respondents were added to the study with recommendations from the first participants in the study. There were four groups of respondents from each Municipality; a group of refugees, refugee guides, key informants, and the local residents. The first group of respondents of each Municipality consisted of refugees, who had participated and were beneficiaries of the integration program; they participated in the one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions. The researcher conducted an in-depth interview with the refugees about the integration program, their practical challenges during the integration, their experience with the refugee guides and their views about the local people in the Municipality.

The second groups of respondents were local residents from the host Municipalities. To include their perspective about the resettlement of refugees in their Municipality and their view about the integration of the refugees was crucial for the study. The third group of the study participants were the refugee guides from the two municipalities. The fourth group are from organizations which involved in assisting in the integration of refugees. Therefore, the four groups, namely: the refugees as the newcomers, beneficiaries, and participants of the integration program; the local residents as a host Municipalities and the refugee guides as refugee assistants during the

integration at the Municipality and key informants as external contributors to the integration process were vital for the study.

4.6 Sample Size

In qualitative research, it is common to study few individuals or few cases. The overall aim of the researcher is to provide an in-depth information about the phenomenon. In this regard, the sample size in qualitative research is much less than in quantitative research (Mason, 2010). However, doing so does not affect the research outcome, because, as Creswell (2012) confirms, the depth of the study decreases with the addition of each new respondents and sites. In qualitative research, an emphasis is placed on making sure that the sample size is enough to ensure coverage of all opinions and perceptions; but at the same time, it should not be too large, so that to avoid repetition and excessiveness of data (Mason, 2010).

Generally, in most qualitative studies, sample size should abide by the principle of “saturation” (Glasser & Strauss, 1967, as cited in Mason, 2010). Saturation is the situation where the researcher stops collecting data when gathering new data will not bring new insight (Creswell, 2014). More specifically, Creswell (2014, p. 189) points out that sample size depends on the qualitative design of the study and for a grounded qualitative research he suggested from twenty to thirty.

In the present study, the sample size was twenty-five (25). This number is different from the initially proposed sample size, which was twenty-eight (28). At the outset, it was the purpose of the study to include unaccompanied minors³(refugees between the ages of sixteen – eighteen) in the study. However, they were excluded from the study due to the recommendation from UDI.⁴ For this reason, the author was forced to scale down the sample size of the study participants.

³ <https://www.udi.no/en/word-definitions/unaccompanied-minor-asylum-seekers/>

⁴ <https://www.udi.no/en/about-the-udi/about-the-udi-and-the-immigration-administration/who-does-what-in-the-immigration-administration/>

Table 4.1: Sample Size

"THE CITY" MUNICIPALITY			"THE PERIPHERY" MUNICIPALITY		Total
S/No.	Category	Respondents	Category	Respondents	
1	Refugees (M)	3	Refugees (M)	3	6
2	Refugees (F)	3	Refugees (F)	3	6
3	Refugee guides	2	Refugee guides	2	4
4	Residents	3	Residents	3	6
5	Key Informants	2	Key Informants	1	3
	Total	13	Total	12	25

4.7 Data Collection Method

According to Yin (2014), there are six different sources of evidence for social science researchers. These include archival records, documents interviews, direct observation, participant observation and physical artifacts. The study found interviews, focus group discussion, direct observation, and documents relevant to collect the needed data. Yin (2009) also points out that no single source of information is complete and preferable to the other, on the contrary, they are complementary and good study depends on multiple sources of evidence. For this reason, the compilation and analysis of the study is heavily informed by various data collection methods.

Besides Creswell (2012; p. 205) emphasizes on five steps a researcher should follow during qualitative data collection period. First and foremost, a researcher should identify respondents and sites with purposeful sampling, places, and people that can help him accomplish his purpose or understand the phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). With these insights in mind, the current research site and the respondents of the study were selected purposefully. Secondly, for an in-depth interview and research, a qualitative researcher needs not only securing permission but also greater access to the people and sites (Creswell, 2012). In this case, access to the study area and study participants was secured by permission from Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). Thirdly, a qualitative researcher should follow few open-ended questions in order not to

hinder the views of the respondents (Creswell, 2012). To fulfill that all the interview questions and focus group discussion were open-ended questions. It was preferred such research design with the belief that it would enable the author to generate rich data that would make it possible to have a broad description of the issue by the study participants.

Besides, a qualitative researcher should record information on self-designed protocols that help him to organize the data reported by the respondents to a particular question (Creswell, 2012). To do so, the researcher did the necessary preparation before the start of the one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions. All the interviews and focus group discussions were thus audio taped with a SONY recorder and notes were taken during the process. Likewise, the researcher summarized the interviews and focus group discussion at the end of each session.

A qualitative researcher should administer procedure of qualitative data collection with sensitivity to the challenges and ethical issues of gathering information directly (Creswell, 2012). As part of social science research ethics protocol, the study abided by the standards of NSD. Names of respondents and other identifying information have thus been kept anonymous, and no participant of the study is identifiable. All direct personal data such as names and references numbers will be deleted after the end of the study. Furthermore, all indirect identifiable data and digital audio files will also be deleted.

4.7.1 Interviews

As Creswell (2012) wrote, an interview in qualitative research is a conversation between a researcher and the participant with a guided, open-ended questions and recording the responses. In other words, as Kvale and Brinkmann put it, a qualitative research interview is a method of collecting in-depth data from the respondent and understand the phenomenon from the respondent's point of view (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). It is a guided conversation rather than structured queries. The open-ended interview is likely to be fluid rather than rigid (Rubin & Rubin, 2011 as cited in Yin, 2014). In the same way, Yin (2014) also advises that a qualitative researcher should satisfy the needs of his line of inquiry and at the same time asking friendly questions in his open-ended questions. As already alluded to, the one-on-one interview and focus group discussions were the primary source of information for the study. There was an individual

one-on-one interview with the refugees, refugee guides, key informants, and local residents. Besides, there was focus group interview with the refugees in both the Municipalities. The research questions were similar for both groups of refugees, refugee guides, and the local residents in the two Municipalities. During the interview and focus group discussions, handwritten notes were taken, and the interview, as well as focus group discussion, were tape-recorded.

The researcher contacted the participants one week before the start of data collection process. First and foremost, the researcher explained the purpose of the study as simple as possible as most of the refugees were not familiar with the academic research. Once they gave their consent to participate in the research, additional information about the ethical issues such as confidentiality and anonymity of the study was explained to them. All in all, the researcher did twenty-five interviews in both Municipalities, and all the interviews were tape-recorded. During the initial contact, three refugees were ready to be interviewed but refused for the recording. And, the researcher excluded them and replaced them with other informants.

4.7.2 Key Informant Interviews

While the primary data collection was in progress, the researcher learned that there were different formal and informal organizations involved in the integration of refugees. And the author decided that it was relevant to seek their opinions and perspectives about the barriers of integration about the Eritrean refugees. Therefore, the author proceeded to conduct an interview with a representative from KIA⁵(Kristen InterkulturalArbeid) as well as another religious organization called “Salt Integration”⁶. During the interview, the role, and contributions of both the organizations and the main challenges Eritrean refugees face during the integration process

⁵ KIA is a Christian Intercultural Association is one of the largest organizations in Norway working independently in the integration of refugees. KIA collaborates with a slogan of 'A warmer Norway, ' and its primary mission is to create understanding among Norwegians about the situation of asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrants. Besides, KIA works to build bridges among the local residents and the refugees by involving in the integrating refugees by arranging different activities. In every arrangement and gathering of the locals and the refugees, KIA works to ensure that 50% of the participants should be Norwegians

⁶ Salt integration - Salt is a diaconal service, which promotes integration of refugees through practical help, a warm and welcoming community.

were discussed in detail.

4.7.3 Direct Observation

Direct observation is a form of qualitative data collection method in which the researcher is capable of assuming different roles in the process (Spadley, 1980, as cited in, Creswell, 2012). Furthermore, Yin (2014) also says that case study takes place in a real world setting and this creates the opportunity for direct observation and points out that some significant environmental situations are available for observation (Yin, 2014, p. 113).

During the process of data collection, there were some occasions that created opportunities for direct interaction between refugees and the local residents, such as those during Christmas time. In order, not to affect the actions of the refugees and the local people, the researcher's participation was unstructured and informal. For example, in 'the City' Municipality, the researcher attended an occasion which was arranged by voluntary organization and the refugees. At the event, a group of Eritrean and Norwegian volunteers prepared different types of cuisines from their respective cultures and served everyone who was present for the occasion from the Municipality, including refugees from other countries. Besides, they encouraged everybody to mix up while taking their seats. The aim of the event was to promote understandings between the local residents and the refugees and bring them closer. During the event, the author mingled in the crowd casually and therefore had the opportunity to participate in all the activities that were going on. It includes in arranging tables and chairs, serving coffee and cleaning at the end of the program, which all created for him to observe all the interactions among the participants closely but also how they behaved towards one another. The researcher richly benefited from such participations as it helped him, not only glean for relevant information but also, more importantly, to make sense of all the data collected through interviews and focus group discussions.

4.7.4 Focus Group Discussion

Focus group discussion is a non-directive interviewing of a group of people to gather a different viewpoint about a particular phenomenon (Kale & Brinkmann, 2009). Somewhat in a different tone, Creswell (2014), defines focus group interview as a process of gathering data through

interviews from a group of people to get a shared understanding or experience of respondents. Furthermore, Creswell adds that focus group interview is useful when the conversation among the interviewees can bring the best information about the phenomenon and they have similar experience, and they are ready to communicate with each other (Creswell, 2012).

During the data collection stage, the researcher conducted two focus group interviews with the refugees in the two Municipalities, each group consisting of six persons. Those focus group discussions created the opportunity whereby the participants were able to share their experiences with the author about the integration program in Norway and their experience with the refugee guides, as well as the main challenges they had to face. The author also utilized open-ended questions to solicit shared understanding of the refugees regarding the integration program, their experience with the refugee guides, their opinion about the local residents, and their challenges during the process of integration.

The Focus group discussion in "the City" Municipality took place in the center of the municipality in a relatively quiet coffee shop. Six refugees participated in the discussion, and it lasted for more than ninety minutes. Whereas the FGD at "the Periphery" Municipality was conducted inside a house of an Eritrean refugee and lasted for about two hours. Although the FGD was no different from the discussion carried out in the "City Municipality," the later was slightly different in that it was with the Eritrean traditional foods and coffee ceremonies and felt lively. I was thrilled by their hospitality and I thanked them.

4.7.5 Documentary Sources

The primary source of secondary data for the study was the review of documents. The study has been looking into different sources of data such as documents, data files and other written reports from various organizations, institutions, departments, and ministries.

Secondary data is very useful because, as Creswell (2012; p, 223) puts it, documents are ready for analysis without transcription. However, any serious researcher needs to be very vigilant and careful in discriminating sources of secondary data and only include what's relevant. To emphasize, the importance of documents as a source of data, Yin (2014) points out that systematic search for the relevant documents is paramount in any data collection plan. However,

he warns that documents should be used carefully, and it is crucial to consider that it was written for a specific purpose and a particular audience.

The present study has used documents in the form of reports from different organizations and departments in which their work relates to refugees and immigrants directly and indirectly. Some of the governmental and non-governmental bodies whose documents were consulted as a secondary source in this research include Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) and The Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi). Besides, secondary sources from Institute for Social Research, The Royal Norwegian Ministry of Justice and the Police, Statistics Norway (Immigration) and Norwegian contact point for European Migration Network (EMN) and Nordic migration research were used. Besides, the study has been looking at secondary sources from different institutions such as Ethnic Relations and International Migration (ETMU), International Migration and Ethnic Relations Research Unit (IMER), Institute for Social Research (ISF), Municipalities under the study and more.

4.7.6 Data Collection Instruments

As noted earlier, the study used a qualitative research method to illuminate the barriers to integration of the Eritrean refugees living in two different Municipalities. Therefore, the researcher chose semi-structured interview guidelines to gather data from the refugees, local residents, key informants as well as from policy implementers.

4.7.7 Semi-Structured Interview Guidelines

The aim of the interviews and focus group discussions were to illuminate the challenges of the Eritrean refugees during the integration program in the two Municipalities in the western part of Norway. Therefore, to interrogate the views, opinions, and experiences of the Eritrean refugees, local residents, key informants, and refugee guides conducting semi-structured interviews were found to be fitting for the study. A semi-structured interview was adopted because it allows respondents to express their views freely. A semi-structured interview is an intermediate position between structured and unstructured interviews, in which the difference between them involves two basic considerations: the extent to which one tries to prevent differences, or to what extent

you want the respondent to talk freely (Brymann, 2015). For the present study, the questions were prepared before starting collecting data and were framed in an open-ended and general fashion to give the author a degree of flexibility to follow and guide the interview.

Overall, four different types of interview guidelines were prepared. The interview guide for Eritrean refugee's focus was about their experience and challenges as being part of the integration program in the host municipality. Another one was concerning their experience with the refugee guides and their views about the residents in their respective Municipalities. Similarly, interview guidelines for the refugee guides were focused on the experience of the refugee guides, their opinion about the locals toward refugees, the strategies they use to deal with the refugees and the practical administrative challenges they had while working with the Eritrean refugees. Besides, there were interview guidelines for the local residents, which included their perception towards the resettlement of the refugees in their Municipality, their contribution to the integration program and their views about the challenges of the integration program. Moreover, interview guidelines for the key informants focused on their experience with the Eritrean refugees as external contributors to the integration process, their contribution, and their view about the refugees the challenge they face during the integration process.

Table 4.2: Data Collection Methods Used in the Study

No	Data Collection Method	Type of Data Collected
1	Direct Observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of interaction between the local residents, and the refugees was observed in its own setting during different occasions • Provided insight into how the locals and the refugees interact in various organized social events
2	Interviews: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the refugees • With the local people • With the refugee guides • Key Informants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience of the Eritrean refugees during the integration program • Barriers of the integration program from the perspectives of all the participants of the study • Local resident's perception towards the refugees and the integration program • External contributors' opinions and views about the integration program
3	Focus Group Discussion (with the refugees)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed perceptions, opinions, experiences and feelings of participants about the integration program and the challenges they had was gathered
4	Documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different sources of secondary data such as documents, reports, data files and other written reports from various organizations, institutions, departments, and ministries are collected

4.8 Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis requires the capacity to understand the collected data thoroughly and make analysis and meaning out of it (Creswell, 2007). Yin also reminds that analysis of case study is the least advanced part in a qualitative research and much depends on the researchers'

own way of empirical thinking, with enough presentation of evidence and careful consideration of alternative interpretations (Yin, 2014; p.133). The Data gathered from the refugees, refugee guides, key informants and local residents in the form of one-to-one interviews and focus group interviews was analyzed in the form of content analysis to make interpretation out of the collected data. The procedure involves coding, which refers to the categorization of long interviews into short, manageable categories. Additionally, apart from relying on field notes and summaries of the interviews and focus group discussions, the researcher summarized the data generated through interviews and focus group discussions.

Besides, as Kvale and Brinkmann indicate, the strength of an opinion can be indicated with a scale of numbers (Kvale & Brinkmann (2009, p. 203). In a similar way, but, using a broader concept, Creswell defines the interpretation of an interview consists of researchers' views, comparing the findings with the literature, proposing limitation and future research (Creswell, 2012). The collected qualitative data was organized thematically, and similarities and differences of views of the study participants were identified. Besides, the researcher carried out a comprehensive review of documents to supplement the primary data. Correspondingly, during the reporting, similar opinion from other participants of the study to a direct quote is included in the footnote.

4.9 The Issue of Validity, Reliability, And Generalizability

4.9.1 Validity

Validity in qualitative research is the use of enough measures and procedures that reflect all the variables of the study (Creswell, 2014). Along similar lines, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) defines construct validity in social science as to whether the methods and procedures find out what aims to find at the beginning of the study. To ensure the validity of research, the study took up some measures:

- The use of well-established data collection procedure and familiarity with the site and participants of the study (Shenton, 2004). In the present study, to ensure that objective, interviews with the Eritrean refugees, refugee guides, key informants and local residents were conducted. Besides, observation, focus group interview with the refugees and

different secondary documents were used as a source of evidence. On top of that, the researcher familiarized himself in advance with the area of the study and the Eritrean refugees in the two Municipalities.

- In social science study, it is important to have a database that serves as multiple evidences (Yin, 2009). Hence, the study used triangulation methods of data gathering; which involves interviews with the refugees, refugee guides, key informants, and local residents. Besides, direct observation of the researcher and focus group interview with the refugees was conducted. Furthermore, different documents were included as a source of evidence. Moreover, the study included all categories of refugees.
- Use of different way to ensure the honesty of the interviewee during the interview and focus group discussions (Shenton, 2004). To attain this, each participant was given the opportunity to withdraw from the interview and focus group discussion at any stage of the data collection process. Thus, data was collected only from those who were willing to participate voluntarily. Therefore, three refugees who were skeptical about the recording of the audio were removed from the sample, and the researcher replaced them with other respondents.

4.9.2 Generalizability

Generalizability refers to the situation where, whether the findings of a certain study can be transferred to some other similar situations (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 324). As the present study was restricted only in two Municipalities in the western part of Norway, the findings might not reflect the actual challenges of Eritrean refugees in other Municipalities in Norway. Even though Eritrean refugees have similar socio-economic background and experience, different other local contexts can affect the integration of refugees in every Municipality. Along similar lines, Shenton (2004) points out that the findings of the qualitative research are the outcome of a smaller number of participants and a restricted area; hence, it is challenging to show the findings of the study are transferable to other similar situations and populations.

4.9.3 Reliability

Reliability is related to the repeatability of a study with the same methods and the same participants by other researchers (Yin, 2014). Along similar lines, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p. 245) confirms reliability is the consistency and trustworthiness of research findings. It denotes

whether the finding from a certain study can be repeated at other times by other researcher using the same methods and procedures. To ensure the reliability of the research, Shenton (2004) emphasizes it is important for a researcher to give and report all the procedures and methods in detail so that future researchers can repeat the study. Further, he added in-depth inclusion of all the methods and techniques could allow the reader to the extent correct procedures have been followed (Shenton, 2004, p. 71). To ensure the reliability of the study, the researcher has attempted to be as transparent as possible in all the research design that has informed the compilation of this study, from the beginning until to the final reporting.

4.10 Ethical Considerations

Considering ethical matters and related issue is preeminent in any research endeavor. In the case of the present study, the researcher confirmed to all the participants of the study that they would not be negatively affected in any way by participating in the study. All in all, the study completely abided by the regulations of NSD (Norwegian Centre for Research Data). Furthermore, participation in the interview and focus group discussion was voluntary, and all the participants had the opportunity to withdraw at any time during the data collection process. More importantly, during the reporting, there is anonymity for all the participants of the study and the Municipalities. Neither the research participants nor the Municipalities are referred using their actual names, but rather pseudonyms. Code names were adopted for the two research sites. Similarly, all participants who was quoted in the present this document has been assigned a code name.

4.11 Limitations of The Study

As in any research, the present study also has some limitations. In qualitative research, the researcher's bias cannot be underestimated whether during designing the interview questions, conducting the interview or the focus group interviews. For example, Patton indicates, as the design of qualitative research, research questions and reporting are carried out by humans, it is almost impossible to ensure absolute objectivity, and the researcher's bias is imminent (Patton, as cited in, Shenton, 2004). However, for the findings of the study to reflect the views of the participants in the study, the researcher identified all possible bias that could arise throughout the study, and precautions were taken in advance.

Another challenge of the study was the “*duty of confidentiality*” in the Municipalities about the integration program. To some extent it was reflected during the interviews with the refugee guides especially in “the City” Municipality.

Furthermore, refugee's previous experience of intimidation, torture, trauma, as well as their cultural beliefs might have affected the degree of openness during the interview and focus group discussions. Likewise, another limitation of the study was the language aspect. The interview and focus group discussion with the Eritrean refugees was conducted in “Tigrigna”.⁷ However, during the reporting, the finding of the study is reported in English. To avoid misinterpretations and errors during the interviews and focus group discussions, a SONY tape recorder was used. Furthermore, an advanced dictionary of English-Tigrigna was used for additional clarification. Another limitation of the study could come from making generalizations on the challenges of Eritrean refugees during integration beyond the two Municipalities under consideration as refugees in other regions might have other local problems during integration into the Norwegian society at the Municipality level.

4.12 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the methodological aspect of the study; the procedures from data collection to data analysis. Furthermore, the chapter pointed out that qualitative approach was suitable for the study and presented the justifications for it. The main focal point of the study was to find out the barriers to the integration of Eritrean refugees in two Municipalities in the western part of Norway; factors that hinder the Eritrean refugees from integrating into the socio-economic system of the host community. Hence, the study explored the phenomenon from Eritrean refugees, refugee advisors, key informants, and local residents in the two municipalities. The primary sources of data for the study were a one-on-one interview with the refugees, residents, key informants, and refugee guides who have immediate work contacts with the subjects in focus. Moreover, there was a focus group discussion with the refugees from the two Municipalities. Different secondary sources from research centers, integration partners and from the web were used. Furthermore, the researcher familiarized himself in advance with the area of the study and the participants of the study. Also, only voluntary respondents were included in the

⁷<https://www.ethnologue.com/language/tir>(*Tigrigna* is a mother tongue of the majority of the Eritrean refugees)

study, and they had the right to withdraw at any stage of the data collection procedure if he/ she wished. Likewise, the study took ethical issues carefully and abided by the standards of Norwegian centre for research Data (NSD). Finally, needless to say, the researcher is transparent with all the methods and procedures used throughout the study in order to maximize the reliability of the study.

Chapter Five: Context

5.1 Introduction

In recent years, Eritrea has attracted world media attention due to the alarming exodus and refugee problem. In spite of the small population size, Eritrea has been one of the primary sources of refugees. Given this fact, this chapter will attempt to give a general picture of the situation in the country.

Accordingly, this chapter will provide information about Eritrea; the post-independence Eritrea; about the people and culture; the possible causes driving young people out of the country today as well as the risks they take and the problems they face to seek safety and protection in Europe and elsewhere. And therefore, the information presented under this section of the study is expected to give information about the Eritrean refugees who came all the way from Eritrea to Europe. Besides, this chapter also includes a context on the overview of Immigration Policy of Norway and the Integration program provided to the refugees once they get the right to live in Norway and the stakeholder in the integration process.

5.2 Eritrea

Eritrea, a former Italian colony (1890-1941), is located in the Horn of Africa. Sudan borders it to the North-west, Ethiopia to the South-west, Djibouti to South-east and the Red Sea on the East. The total land mass of the country is approximately 125,320 km², with a 1,200-km coastline along the Red Sea. Asmara is the capital city of Eritrea and located in the center of the country, about 110 kilometers from the Red Sea coast (Russell, F.F., 1959; Hirt, 2016; Marialibera, 2011/2012).

5.2.1 The People

Eritrea is inhabited by nine linguistically defined ethnic groups: Tigrinya, Tigre, Bilen, Rashaida, Hidareb, Kunama, Saho, Nara, and Afar (Michael, 2014). The bulk of the population lives in the central highlands. The Tigrigna ethnic group, who are mostly Coptic Orthodox Christians but also some Catholics and Protestants, are predominantly live in the central highlands of the country. The Tigrigna ethnic group constitutes about 50% of the total population, and they are the biggest ethnic group (Michael, 2014). The second largest ethnic group is the Tigre, they are

found mostly in the eastern and western lowland of the country. Religiously, the Tigre ethnic group follows Islam, and they make up about 40% of the total population. And the rest of the ethnic groups constitute about 10 percent together, and they live in different parts (Michael, 2014).

5.2.2 Economy

Eritrea is one of the least developed countries in the World (Hirt, 2008). Most of the people of Eritrea, more than 80% depend on subsistence agriculture. Livestock herding is also a major part of the livelihood system of Eritreans.

However, recent estimates by World Bank show that the Eritrean economy is picking up, mainly from investments in the mining sector. Since 2007, there is a sign that the economy is getting in a better shape since the aftermath of the 1998-2000 border conflict. The mining sector has become the most important to the country and the government is promoting its mining industry actively and with remarkable competence. Eritrea has an extensive amount of resources such as copper, gold, granite, marble, salt, potash and possibly oil and natural gas. The oil industry has potential as well, as significant oil deposits are believed to lie under the Red Sea (Kaplan, 2016; World Bank Country Report⁸).

5.2.3 Government and Politics

There is only one political party in Eritrea, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), formerly the Eritrea People's Liberation Front (EPLF) that saw Eritrea's independence from Ethiopia, has been in control of the country since the country won its independence in 1991. Parliament ratified a constitution in May 1997. However, it remains unimplemented. In 2001, several senior members of PFDJ party were arrested after a fallout with country's President Isaias Afewerki, about the political future and process of the country. And the political process of the country stalled since then (Hirt, 2008, 2010; Dorman, 2003).

5.2.4 Eritrea after Independence

Eritrea fought the 30 years' war and won its independence from Ethiopia in 1991 without much outside help. The victory demonstrated the sheer organizational skills, resilience, and tenacity of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), now ruling the country under the name People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) (Kaplan, 2016; Hirt, 2008, 2010).

⁸ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/eritrea/overview>

Following the independence, in November 1991, the Provisional Government of Eritrea, formerly the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), introduced a mandatory National Service (NS) (Proclamation 18/1991) for both genders, between the ages of 18 to 40 18 months in total. The Eritrean authorities perceive NS as an instrument of social change, economic development, socialization, nation-building, and more importantly for transmitting the social and political values developed during the 30 years of the war for liberation, to the present and future generations (Hirt, 2010; 2013; 2016b; Daniel & Meron, 2011; Kaplan, 2016; Kibreab, 2009a).

Initially, this service included six months of military training and 12 months of work on reconstruction and development projects (Hirt, 2010, 2013, 2016; Daniel & Meron, 2011; Kibreab, 2009b). Most of the youth were ready to fulfill their “national duty,” but then they expected to return to a civilian lifestyle (Hirt, 2013). During the early years of independence (1991–1997), most observers were convinced of a bright future of the country (Hirt, 2016b). In fact, as Kibreab (2009a) noted, until May 1998, the first four cohorts in the service were demobilized after eighteen months as required by law (Kibreab, 2009b). However, in early 1998, a [new] national development campaign was announced, and all those who had already finished and out of the NS were remobilized (Daniel & Meron, 2011; Alexandra Magnolia Dias, 2008). Soon, the program of development campaign was interrupted when Eritrea and Ethiopia again went to war in May 1998, following seven years of good diplomatic relations, allegedly, over a border dispute (Humphris, 2013; Hirt, 2008; Kaplan, 2016). While the 1998 – 2000 war is often referred to as a border war, causal factors also included disputes concerning the conditions of Ethiopian access to the sea, as well as different expectations regarding bilateral trade and currency arrangements (Daniel & Meron, 2011; Alexandra Magnolia Dias, 2008).

The "border conflict" was officially resolved by a series of international agreements and binding judgments given between 2000 and 2009 (Hirt, 2010; Hirt, et al., 2013; Humphris, 2013). In 2002, an International court of arbitration for the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC) decided on the border dispute between the two countries and awarded Eritrea “Badme”, which was the epicenter in the territorial dispute between the two countries. However, Ethiopia refused to accept the ruling despite signing to abide by it [the ruling] to this day, and the verdict remains unimplemented and with Ethiopia still occupying parts of the Eritrean territory (Hirt, 2010; Hirt, et al., 2013; Humphries, 2013; Kaplan, 2016). And Eritrea remains, under what the

government calls "no peace, no war" situation (Hirt, 2010; Hirt, et al., 2013; Humphris, 2013; Kaplan, 2016). However, critiques argue the “no peace, no war” situation has been used by the Eritrean government to justify the indefinite term of national service (Hirt, 2008; 2010; Kibreab, 2009b; Kaplan, 2016).

In May 2002, the Government of Eritrea again announced the so-called "Warsay Yikealo"⁹ Development Campaign (WYDC). The WYDC is an extension of the NS and were envisaged as an instrument for creating a cohesive national identity by molding a new generation of Eritreans with the legacy of the thirty years' war (Kibreab, 2009b; Hirt, 2008, 2010). According to different observers, the introduction of the WYDC meant de facto that the NS was no longer limited to 18 months and became open-ended (Hirt, 2010; Hirt, et al., 2013; Humphris, 2013). In fact, some argue that the WYDC is a new strategy of permanent military mobilization justified by the destruction caused by the “border war” and the stalemate in Ethiopian–Eritrean relations (Bozzini 2011, p. 96; Hirt, 2010). Depending on their qualifications, men have been required to work for companies belonging to the party or the military from 18 to at least 50 years of age while earning only pocket money. The same applies to women if up to 27 years old. The work includes serving as a teacher, medical personnel, performing manual tasks in construction and agriculture, in administration depending on their qualifications. And the government determines the location, meaning that families are often permanently torn apart (Hirt & Mohammad 2013; Hirt, 2010; Kibreab 2009b).

According to Hirt (2013), the WYDC campaign represents extreme interference in the private lives of people and has a substantial impact on the fabric of the society, rendering individuals unable to follow long-established role expectations. Consequently, since the introduction of the indefinite NS, members of the younger generation have experienced a severe conflict of functions in attempting to fulfill their national obligation and to live a meaningful life while realizing personal educational and career ambitions (Hirt, 2013). Today [in Eritrea], avoiding indefinite military service is possible only if one lives as a draft dodger; bribes military

⁹ development campaign. 'Yikealo,' means 'for whom all is possible' and denotes the experienced elderly and refers to the fighters from the war for independence; while 'warsay,' means the 'inheritor' or 'follower' and relates to the younger generation. The younger is supposed to internalize and practice the values of dedication, self-sacrifice, and hard work to the nation by following the footsteps of the independence fighters in the form of unlimited and unpaid service.

commanders; works as a government spy or else flees the country (Hirt, 2013; Daniel & Meron, 2011).

However, the use of the NS and the WYDC as post-conflict reconstruction strategy is legitimate as well as the goals the government expected to achieve and is, therefore, is consistent with most governments that have universal policies of conscription (Kibreab, 2009b). The problem with the Eritrean version is, however, it has been an open-ended, and thus this has been one of the reasons driving the widespread evasions and desertions of conscripts (Kibreab, 2009b).

About the period after 2000, Hepner, for example, directly related the mass exodus of the population in last decade to the militarization, political repression, lack of educational and employment opportunities that has prevailed in Eritrea reducing citizenship to a “bare life” (Hepner, 2009).

The economic sanctions imposed on Eritrea in 2009 also made life harder for the ordinary citizens (Humphris, 2013; Hirt, 2010). Therefore, the combined effects contributed in earning Eritrea, despite its small population of about 3.5 million (leaving out the diaspora), as number one from Africa and second highest refugee-contributing country in the world in absolute terms (Hirt, 2016b; Hirt & Mohammad 2013; Hirt, 2010; Kibreab 2009b; Daniel & Meron, 2011).

5.2.5 Eritreans and Migration

During the first few years after independence, out-migration from Eritrea declined (Daniel & Meron, 2011; Hirt, 2013; Hirt & Saleh, 2013). However, the few years following Independence were soon to become an exception rather than the norm in the long tradition of Eritreans fleeing their country after a devastating border conflict with neighboring Ethiopia in 1998 (Hirt, 2010; Daniel & Meron, 2011; Kaplan, 2016). Soon after, thousands of Eritreans started to flee their country to seek residence in Europe and elsewhere and escape the unfavorable political and socio-economic situation that was caused by the war and (O’Kane & Redeker-Hepner, 2009; Kibreab, 1996; Daniel & Meron, 2011; Russell, 1959).

According to UNHCR figures, on average 5, 000 primarily young people currently flee (Eritrea) over the borders each month to Ethiopia and Sudan - the two countries are the largest hosts for Eritrean refugees. Eritreans have been seeking asylum in eastern Sudan for more than four

decades, and the region now hosts more than 100,000 of them (Humphris, 2013). UNHCR report puts the numbers in Ethiopia and Sudan to 130,000 and 125,000 in that order (Human Rights Watch, 2017; Humphris, 2013; Hirt, 2016b). Besides, some of them flee across the Red Sea to the Arabian Peninsula to Yemen (Ohchr.org, 2017).

Eritrean law requires those who wish to leave the country to hold an exit permit first. However, the authorities only issue selectively; severely punishing those caught trying to leave without one. When Eritreans succeed in leaving the country without permits, the authorities often punish their relatives. Some claim that border guards have shoot-to-kill orders against people leaving without permits. In this environment, the smuggling and trafficking of Eritreans to Sudan and Ethiopia flourished. In fact, the smuggling business of Eritreans thrived so much that it stretched from Eritrea all the way to Europe, Israel and elsewhere (Hirt, 2013; 2016; Kibreab, 2013; Humphris, 2013; Daniel & Meron, 2011).

5.2.6 The Push-Pull Factors for Eritreans To Flee Their Country

Among the chief causes for this massive human flight out of Eritrea have been claimed to be the organized forced labor instituted by the Eritrean government that is no different from a life of serfdom which doesn't allow the NS member and their families to lead a normal life (Hirt, 2016b; Humphris, 2013). Many have been conscripted into the Eritrean army for more than a decade while receiving no more than 300 Norwegian kroner "salary" a month (Bozzini, 2011; Hirt, 2016b; Humphris, 2013; Daniel & Meron, 2011; Kaplan, 2016). At the same time, Eritreans at home are in touch with friends and relatives who have either lived abroad for years or have only recently arrived and who frequently talk up their situation, creating a pull effect (Hirt, 2016b).

However, those who succeed crossing over to neighboring countries after taking high risks, again have to face protracted and seemingly indefinite stays in the refugee camps, denied moving freely and any prospects for employment or educational opportunities. Besides, the refugees have to live in constant fear of being kidnapped by human-trafficking gangs and criminals or when security forces catch them; they hand them to the security apparatus of Eritrea, where they would be sent to prison and be subjected to beatings and solitary confinement without trial because their flight is considered as treason. The danger of falling into the wrong hands is even higher for

those who continue their journey to Europe in the desert between Sudan, Libya, and Egypt (Daniel & Meron, 2011). The traffickers and criminals subject their victims to all kinds of crimes including, torture, rape, harvesting internal organs, until relatives pay the ransom demanded (Hirt, 2016b; Humphris, 2013; Human Rights Watch, 2017; Daniel & Meron, 2011).

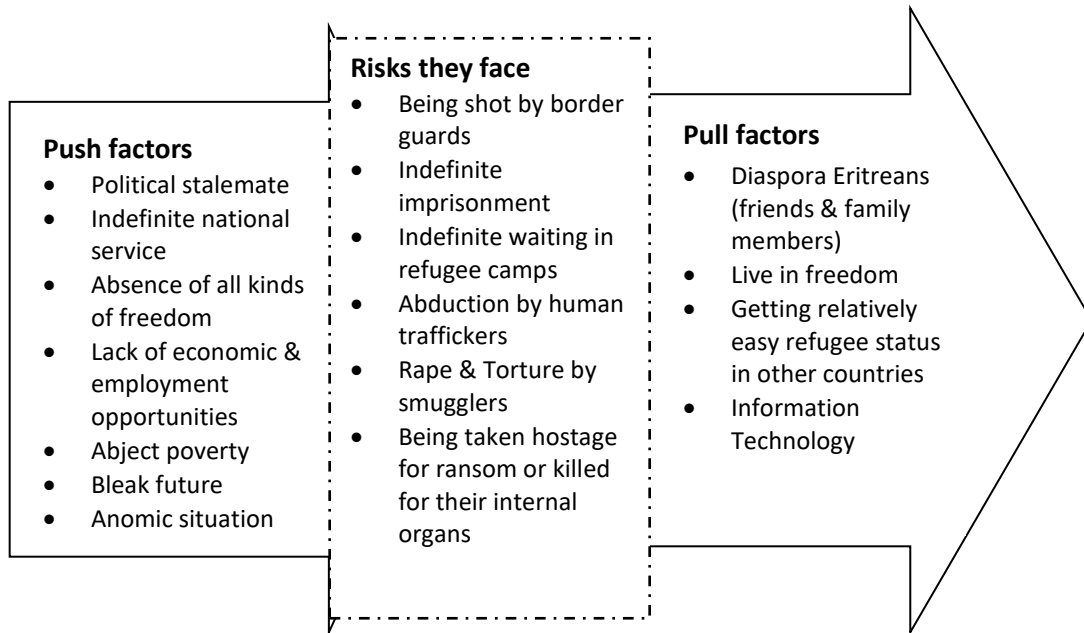


Figure 5.1. The Main Push-Pull Factors Compel Eritreans to Become Refugees

Source: Reconstructed from The Literature

5.2.7 Embarking on The Journey to Europe

After leaving from the refugee camps, the primary route traveled by Eritrean refugees to get to Europe is through the Sahara Desert and into to the war-torn Libya, where they often board unseaworthy vessels bound for Italy by crossing the Mediterranean Sea where they risk drowning in the sea (Humphris, 2013).



Figure 5.2: Eritrean Refugee Main Routes from Eritrea to Norway
Source: Developed from the literature

As a result, tens of thousands of Eritreans have been able to reach Europe in recent years (Hirt, 2016a). UNHCR reported that in the first seven months of 2016, 11,564 Eritreans arrived in Italy, representing 12 percent of arrivals there. In 2015, a full quarter among the migrants who made to Italy safely were Eritreans (Ohchr.org, 2017). In 2014, a total of 36,678 Eritreans sought refuge in 38 European countries, compared to 12,960 during the same period last year. Most asylum requests were presented in Sweden (9,531), Germany (9,362), Switzerland (5,652), the Netherlands (4,113) and Norway (3,568) (Ohchr.org, 2017).

However, as reflected in various reports, crossing the Mediterranean has taken thousands of lives, including pregnant women and newborns, after their boats capsized. For example, as UNHCR report shows, among the survivors from the Lampedusa tragedy off the coast of Italy, on October 3, 2013, in which 357 among the dead were Eritreans, had been registered as refugees in the camps in Ethiopia and Sudan (Mehari, 2010). In 2015, 2,692 migrants were

reported dead at sea along that route (Jones, Kingsley & Anderson, 2016). Again, Eritreans were in the majority when 880 people drowned in the last week of May 2016 alone.

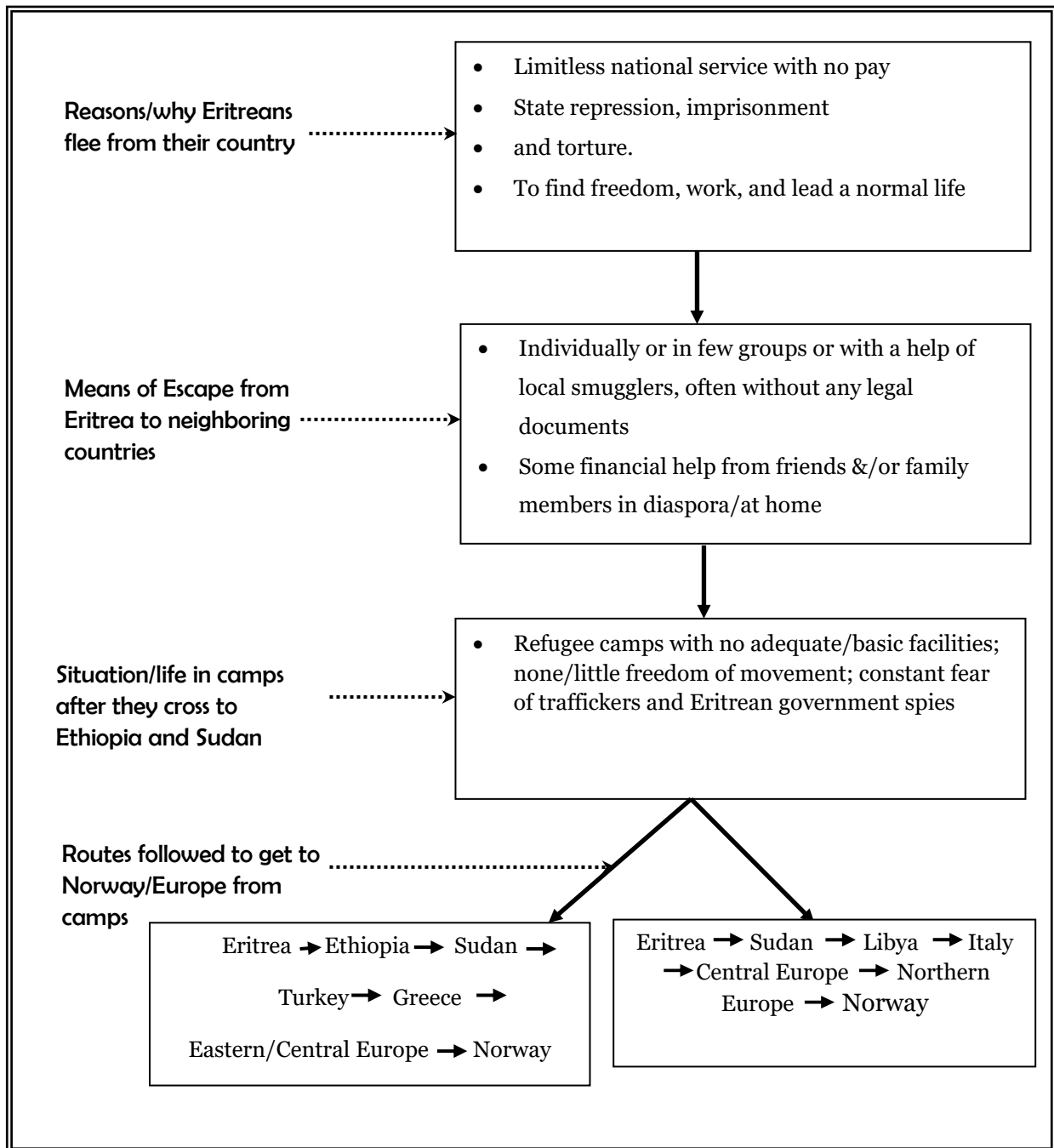


Figure 5.3: Schematic Representation of Reasons, Means and Routes of Escape by Eritrean Refugees to Reach Norway/Europe

Source: Authors reconstruction from the literature

5.2.8 Eritrean Refugees in Norway

Norway is one of the countries that hosts among the highest refugees from Eritrea. According to UDI (2017b), there are more than 35,000 Eritrean in Norway. For example, between 2007 to 2016 a total of 19,073 Eritrean refugees asked for political asylum in Norway. In 2015 alone, 2,947 Eritrean refugees arrived in Norway, making Eritreans the fourth highest in number in Norway.

Table 5.1: Arrival and number of Eritrean asylum seekers by year in Norway

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Eritrean Asylum seekers in Norway	789	1799	2667	1711	1256	1183	3258	2882	2942	586	19073

Source: Udi.no (2017a), Udi.no (2017b)

5.3 Immigration and Integration Policy in Norway - Overview

When World War II ended, immigration to Norway was nonexistent except Norwegian-American returnees and few from eastern and central Europe. Outside of Northern Europe, the first 400 immigrants came from Asia and Africa in 1967 (Brochmann & Hagelund, 2012). The first immigrants were Pakistanis, and from some Mediterranean countries, gradually their families joined them. According to Brochmann and Kjeldstadli (2008), the first male labor migrants who came as demand in the job market were considered as the first wave whereas their families are considered as the second wave of immigrants in Norway. And later on, a considerable number of refugees from Chile, Vietnam, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Somalia came to Norway due unrest in their respective countries (Brochmann & Hagelund, 2012, p.149).

The document, St. meld.nr. 39 (1973-1974) “About Immigration Policy” was the first parliamentary report of its kind in Norway and was the basis on the “subject” for the subsequent years (Brochmann, 2003). Since the 1970s, the number of refugees and labor immigrants gradually grew, the concern of the Norwegian people and politicians intensified and led to the toughening of and finally to the temporary immigration stop from 1 February 1975- to August 1976 (St.Mld.nr.39, 1973-1974). It was extended at different periods and became permanent in 1981. And the immigration policy had to be changed in response to the rise in unemployment

and other concerns which required a temporary stop and finally led to a halt in labor immigration 1981 (St.Mld.nr.39, 1973-74).

The same document, the white paper (St.mld.nr.39, 1973-1974) in which the government decided to stop labor immigrants also offered two options to refugees: assimilation or integration. The aim was to give refugees a chance to choose whether they want to keep part of their identity or to resemble and assimilate to the Norwegian (Brochmann & Hagelund, 2012, p.162). However, the following white paper (St.mld.nr. 74, 1979-80) focused on integration without the mention of assimilation, and it was inspired by Swedish multicultural immigration policy (Brochmann & Hagelund, 2012, p. 164). The understanding in St.mld.nr.74 was primarily formulated as an opposition to assimilation, focusing on the protection of cultural peculiarities (Andresen, 2005). However, St.meld.nr.39 (1987-88) “a room for difference” turned more towards the inclusion of immigrants in society through education.

Nevertheless, it was only during the 1980s and 1990s the refugee issue dominated the labor immigrants and became an issue of political debate, media, and research. Therefore, different measures were taken to limit the number of refugee arrivals, and public opinion and availability of job were the parameters (Brochmann & Hagelund, 2012). Due to these developments, the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) was established as a central organ to deal with all refugee cases, work permits, residence permits, family reunion and citizenship (Brochmann & Hagelund, 2012, p. 173).

Moreover, the 1990s was characterized as a decade of designing a unified refugee integration policy. The white paper (St.mld.nr.17, 1996-97) focused mainly on the active participation of the refugees and the residents at the local level for an effective integration. Further, cultural diversity was much hailed as a resource that had to be adequately addressed to make sure full use of it and the government focused on the values of equality, participation, and integration.

Similarly, the paper acknowledged the workplace as a point where real integration happens. According to Brochmann and Hagelund (2012), after the millennium, the 2000s has been beset by the tensions between the welfare state and entry control introduced throughout Europe. Refugees and immigrants have been considered as a problem and a solution for the welfare state. On the one hand, they were seen as recipients of welfare, thus considered “*consumers*”; while on

the other as a “*contributors*” of services, particularly within the health and care sectors (Brochmann & Hagelund, 2012, p. 187).

Eventually, however, those controversies and ups and downs led to the establishment of the “Introduction Act” in 2004. The “Introduction Act” represented a significant shift, and this is because, before that period, integration process had to be conducted through the same institutions that the rest of the society used. But that had to change with the establishment of the “Introduction Act.” The integration process of refugees has to be carried out by individual municipalities which suffered from significant disparities in the 1980s and 1990s (Djuve, 2011). The introduction program was established to avoid such weaknesses in the process. Until the new form of organization and means for integrating refugees were introduced (Act in 2004), the most favored approach for integration was by providing refugees a few hours of Norwegian language lessons (Djuve, 2011).

5.3.1 The Introduction Program in Norway

According to the White Paper¹⁰ nr:49 (2003-2004) which is the foundation of the Introduction Act;¹¹ , the Introduction Program is the most important instrument for the qualification of the newly arrived refugees and their families in the Norwegian society. The program provides refugees the basis for integration through language, cultural training, and other employment-related training and activities. The program starts immediately after a refugee is assigned into a municipality by IMDi. The Introduction program incorporates both the rights and obligation of the participants and it runs for two years duration. However, it can be extended to other members as well, for instance for refugees who arrive with inadequate or poor education level from their home country. And all participants receive a taxable introduction salary during the introduction program,

¹⁰<https://www.regjeringen.no/en/find-document/white-papers-/id1754/>

White Papers (Meld.St.) are written as a draft document when the government wants to bring issues to Parliament that do not need a decision. They are usually about specific matters that need execution/approval from parliament, therefore, are presented in the form of a report. The drafted document and the subsequent discussion about in the parliament usually is the basis of a draft resolution in the later stage (regjeringen.no)

¹¹<http://app.uio.no/ub/ujur/oversatte-lover/data/lov-20030704-080-eng.pdf>

According to the program, after an initial intensive Norwegian language training sessions, the participants are expected to be active in labor-related activity which is called "language internship." The course includes training both for communication and work. In the majority of municipalities, the program is three days of language training and two days' language internship per week. The primary objective of the language course is to give the participants the opportunity to practice their language skills and to familiarize them with the Norwegian work environment. To check on progress, providers of the language internships out to report back to the program advisor on a regular basis.

Furthermore, the introduction program provides participants an individual adopted plan, so that he/she could have a good chance to continue their career or study once the program is terminated. Besides, all municipalities that agreed to settle refugees are also required to give the introduction program to the participants. In other words, the program is a mandatory scheme for the integration of refugees and their families in the municipalities.

According to IMDi (2017), all refugees, immigrants, and foreigners who need to have the necessary communication skills in the Norwegian language between the ages of 16-55 years have the right and obligation to participate in the program. At the same time, those participants between the ages of 55-67 have the right to participate, but not the obligation. But, certain groups have neither the right nor the duty to take part in the Norwegian training and social studies. These are Students, impermanent workers, and Au-pairs¹², Nordic citizens¹³ and other individuals with a residence permit based on EFTA¹⁴ / EEA¹⁵ regulations.

During the program, participants can get a minimum of 600 hours of Norwegian language training and social studies for free; of which 50 hours are in social education. However, work immigrants have to pay for the program, and they are required to finish a 300-hours of Norwegian language and social study training if they want to apply for a permanent residence or Norwegian citizenship.

¹²https://www.aupairworld.com/en/au_pair/au_pair

¹³ Nordic citizens: The people of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden

¹⁴EFTA – European Free Trade Association: Consists of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland

¹⁵ EEA -European Economic Area: it includes EU countries and Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway

5.3.2 Who Does What in The Integration Process

The main aim of the Introduction Program is to assist participants to work or to aide them to pursue their studies as soon as possible. To accomplish this, a close cooperation of multiple stakeholders such as municipalities, agencies, the private sector, NGOs at the local and national level is paramount (IMDi, 2015).

According to IMDi (2015) Ratification of laws and Acts such as the “Introduction Act” are the responsibilities of the Norwegian parliament. Similarly, the task for processing applications for asylum, immigration, visas, and the different types of residency permits fall under the responsibility of the Directorate of Immigration (UDI) and is supervised by the Ministry of Justice and Public Security (JD). The Ministry of Justice and Public Security deals with the refugees, immigration and integration, civil protection and emergency preparedness, crime fighting and probation, courts, and legislative work (regjeringen.no, n.d). Besides, the JD Ministry supervises the Norwegian Immigration Appeals Board (UNE) and the Norwegian Directorate of Integration and Diversity, IMDi’s (Vox, 2016). The settlement of refugees and the implementation of the Integration policy of the government is the responsibility of IMDi’s working together with individual municipalities and government agencies (IMDi, 2015). Moreover, IMDi’s also provides expert assistance and resource for government bodies.

Language learning and social studies are among an essential aspect of the introduction program and “KOMPETANSE NORGE”¹⁶ follow the curriculum to ensure that the training is work related (Vox, 2016). Moreover, the agency provides advice for employers regarding the language requirement in the workplace and develops training for volunteers who cooperate and assist in the integration process. Additionally, “KOMPETANSE NORGE” administers grants for adult education, online training, and other organizations, develop basic skills training for adults. The provision of further training for the teacher and administrators of the adult education is also the responsibility of “KOMPETANSE NORGE” (Vox, 2016).

Another institution, the Public Welfare Agency which is the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration (NAV), is responsible for managing unemployment benefits, work assessment

¹⁶ <https://www.kompetansenorge.no/om-kompetanse-norge/>

allowance, sickness benefit, child benefits, cash for and pension in the entire country. Besides, about the integration program, according to Bakken and Pedersen, (2015) some of the responsibilities of NAV at the municipality are:

- Giving general information about labor and employment and welfare administration tools to program participants, teachers, and executives
- Collaborate with each beneficiary of the program
- Provide information and guidance to members about work, vocational and education opportunities
- Assist municipalities in the preparation of an individual plan for each participant
- Collaborate and participate in team meeting whenever there is a need for the welfare agency's knowledge and expertise
- Follow-up of the participants of the introduction program who participate in work-related measures under the auspices of the labor and welfare administration
- assist members in transition from the integration program to work or further study

Furthermore, overseeing and implementing the introduction program falls under the responsibility of the municipalities. Therefore, municipalities play the central role in the process of integrating refugees. (Bakken & Pedersen, 2015). Refugees that have been granted asylum in Norway are taken care of by municipalities with assistance from IMDi. The implementation of the introduction program through municipalities helped for better management of the program than before (IMDi, 2012). According to the "Act," municipalities have an obligation to offer the refugees they receive the introduction program. After the Introduction program is over, the municipalities are also expected to provide the refugees with additional skills that would help them get employment (Vox, 2012). However, municipalities have the freedom to manage the introduction program in any way they find it compelling. While the most traditional form of management of the introduction program is through separate refugee administration centers, aside from that, NAV has been given the role in overseeing the introduction program in 44 percent of the municipalities (Vox, 2012).

Overall, according to Bakken and Pedersen (2015), based on the "Introduction Act," municipalities have the following the responsibilities:

- To facilitate the introduction program in line with the Act's intentions and provisions for immigrants who need basic qualification such as mapping expertise, preparation of individual schedule, monitoring, issuance of certificate of participation, administration, and payment of the introduction benefit
- Coordinate various measures in the program
- Recording information about the participant's completion of the Introduction program in National Introduction Register (NIR)
- Providing training in the Norwegian language
- Appointment of municipal body which has the primary responsibility of implementing the introduction program
- Establishing interdisciplinary teams
- Providing participants with contact person
- Conducting meetings at the management level to evaluate, cooperate and set guidelines for the next year

Aside from that, the contact person and the adult education centers also play key roles when it comes to the introduction program in the municipality (Bakken & Pedersen, 2015). Adult education centers provide Norwegian language training and social studies (Bakken & Pedersen, 2015) and Contact persons have the responsibility of:

- Conducting survey of the participants, preparing the individual plan together with the member of the program, monitoring the participant and revise the individual plan throughout the program, following up participants in transition to work or education
- Coordinate and contact other local actors and employers concerning the integration program
- Provide information to the participants about the integration program, inform them about their rights and duties, make decisions and deal with some complaints of the participants if any.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter provided information about Eritrea; the post-independence Eritrea; about the people and culture of Eritrea; the possible causes driving young people out of the country today as well as the risks they take and the problems they face to seek safety and protection in Europe and elsewhere. Besides, this chapter also included a context on the Immigration Policy of Norway, the Integration program provided to the refugees once they get the right to live in Norway, about the stakeholders in the integration process.

Chapter Six: Findings and Discussion

Reflections of Eritrean Refugees from The Integration Program

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the finding and discussions from the interviews and focus group discussion with the Eritrean refugees in the two municipalities. The focus is their experience in the introduction program, as well as their views about the local people and refugee guides in relation to the integration program.

6.2 Presentation of The Participants

In this section, I present and discuss the socio-demographic information of the participants of the study such as their age, their duration of stay in Norway, marital status, and gender. Besides, their education and their number of dependents are discussed as they are likely to impact the integration ability of the refugees.

Table 6.1: Socio-demographic information of participants “the Periphery” Municipality

The Periphery Municipality							
Pseudonyms	Coding	Age (Years)	Sex	Educational Background	Duration of stay in Norway	Marital status	Current situation
ME	A-7	30	F	High school	5	Married	Studying
BT	A-8	24	F	High school	4	Single	Studying
RL	A-9	41	M	High school	3	Married	Intro. ¹⁷
KS	A-10	39	M	University	3	Single	Intro.
CY	A-11	22	M	High school	3	Single	Studying
DI	A-12	28	F	High school	3	Single	Studying

¹⁷ Intro: Refugees going to the introduction program

A total of twelve (12) Eritrean refugees were interviewed in the two municipalities, six women, and six men. The youngest one was 22 years old and the most aged 41. Some of them have lived in the municipality quite longer, and they have Norwegian citizenship while others are almost new and they are still in the introduction program.

Table 6.2: Socio-Demographic Information of Participants “the City” Municipality

The City Municipality							
Pseudonyms	Coding	Age (Years)	Gender	Education	Duration of stay in Norway	Marital status	Current situation
QA	A-1	32	F	University	4	Single	Student
ST	A-2	24	M	University	7	Married	working
JG	A-3	32	M	University	9	Single	Student
MH	A-4	38	M	University	9	Married	Working
FR	A-5	39	F	High school	4	Single	Working
PW	A-6	22	F	High school	2	Single	Student

Currently, all the participants of the study are either studying, working or in the introduction program. On the other hand, four of the respondents are married and have kids, and the rest of them are single.

6.2.1 Age

Out of all the participants in the study, 66.67% of them were aged between 22-33 years old while 33.3% were between 33-41 years old. The unaccompanied¹⁸ refugees from Eritrea, were excluded from the study as per the instructions from UDI.

According to Johnson and Neumark (1996), the productive age of a person is well-thought-out to be between 15 and 49. And it happens to be that more than 97% of the Eritrean refugees fall within that age range. Nevertheless, they had to escape from their country because, besides the

¹⁸<http://rfmsot.apps01.yorku.ca/unaccompanied-minors/>

unlimited national service, there is also a severe socio-economic and political situation in the country created as a result of a militarized system. And due to the fact that most of the refugees tend to be beyond their adolescence age; as a result, as it was highlighted in the interviews that they find it difficult to integrate into the Norwegian society. When I asked how their age is affecting their integration ability, one of the participants from “the City” municipality said,

When it comes to integration, I would say, your age matters. You know, it's not easy now to unlearn what we grew up with and just accept something new. So, we are finding it very challenging to integrate. I hope over time, it will get easier to integrate. But right now, I can't say I'm doing very well in the integration program. (Participant A-2)¹⁹

Similarly, several studies affirm that one's age plays a key role in the refugee's integration into the host society. The older the refugee, the more they have challenges to integrate and at the same time have more affiliation with their culture. On the other hand, refugees who arrive at young age can learn the language easily; participate in the education, participate in the social activities of the receiving community and would have greater chance of employment once they finish their study (Bleakley and Chin, 2010; Bohlmark, 2008, 2009; Henriksen, 2009; Myers, Gao, and Emeka, 2009, Lee and Edmonston, 2011; Åslund, Båhlmark and Skans, 2009 as cited in Anderson & Skardhamar, 2012). From the interviews and discussions, I discovered even though a significant proportion among the Eritrean refugees have a college degree, work experience or completed high school, however, due to the challenges they have to integrate, many of them remain either unemployed or underemployed for a number of years.

6.2.2 Marital Status and Children

Out of the Eritrean refugees participated in the study, 33.3 % are married, and three of them have kids. On the other hand, 66.7 % are unmarried. During the interview and focus group discussions, the participants highlighted their children impacts their integration capacity to a greater extent: As one participant *said*:

Unlike my wife and me, our children learned Norwegian language so quickly. For us, our focus is to teach them our culture and language. So, at home we don't allow them to talk Norwegian,

¹⁹ A-5, A-5, A-3, A-2, A-11, A-8, A-9, A-7 gave similar responses

we always speak to them in "Tigrigna." At the same time, we watch Eritrean TV and Eritrean Films. (Participant A-9)²⁰

As per the discussion in the focus group discussions and the interviews with the Eritrean refugees, it was highlighted that relatively it is easier for children to learn Norwegian language and adopt the new way of life in the Municipality than their parents. However, the children also cannot escape the contrast and the feelings of being torn apart between the life and pressure to speak and learn both Eritrean and Norwegian. The culture and languages of their country of origin at home and in the new life in the Municipality they find themselves in two different environments with different languages and cultures. Consequently, for many families, there is a continuous tension between the children and their parents. According to a study by Abebe, Lien, and Hjelde (2014), adolescent immigrants were found with higher mental health problems compared to the Norwegian adolescents. Likewise, Demaerschalk (2013) confirms that adolescents with immigrant background are overrepresented in the child welfare services in Norway.

6.3. Eritrean Refugee's Reflections About the Integration Program

6.3.1 Introduction

This section presents the findings and experiences of the Eritrean refugees in the two municipalities, "the City" and "the Periphery" municipalities and what they had to say regarding the integration program. In order to accomplish the job, I conducted one-on-one interviews and two focus group discussions while following the semi-structured interview questions. Besides, the discussion was broadened to explore their understanding and views about the refugee guides and the local people as well as the possible barriers to integration that may exist. Therefore, based on the discussions with the refugees from Eritrea, the main reflections and experiences of the Eritrean refugees are presented below.

²⁰ Similar response was given from A-7, A-2, and A-4

6.3.2 Eritrean Refugees Experiences During the Introduction Program

In the interview and discussions about introduction program, the stories of the refugees are a lot similar than one might expect. Despite the differences, they might have about their backgrounds, such as education, gender, age, their experiences in reaching to Norway; the challenges they face during integration make them fall into one basket, at least in the beginning. They all agreed in their discussion that as refugees, once they arrived in Norway, unlike their expectations, they felt completely out of place.

While ability to speak, the local language is, as Einarsen (2013) indicates, represents the first step towards a successful integration of a refugee into a host society, for the Eritrean refugees, the common challenge they mention was their inability to speak Norwegian language. From what I was able to understand, in this case, it was not merely the inability of speaking the language that struck the refugees rather the realization of how much role language played in limiting their life and made them feel helpless. As the integration framework of Ager and Strang (2004) highlights the ability of the refugees to speak the local languages strengthens the social connection between the refugees and the local residents, it builds trust among the local residents and the refugees, it helps the refugees seek information and help from the institutions of the host country.

As one of the participants from "the City" municipality put it, *"Imagine, you know what you want to say something, but you can't say it. Even if you have someone who can translate for you, it's never quite the same. Because first, the person who translates may not put your message across exactly as you feel. And secondly, you don't know what is being communicated. It's no different from someone spoon feeding you when you can do it yourself, except maybe you don't know how to eat using spoon. So, not being able to speak the language makes you feel quite suffocated"* (Participant A-11).²¹

Similarly, another one expressed, *"You know, a person is his or her story. And the way you can tell your story is through language. And when you don't speak the language then you feel like you are just an object"* (A-1).

²¹ A-12, A-8, A-9, A-7 also had similar impression

And all the participants related to those expressions from the two speakers. Listening to refugees talk about the challenges they still have even now after two years into the integration program, one cannot help to imagine how severe it was for those refugees during the first few weeks and months when they first arrived. As Ager and Strang (2008) noted, inability to speak the local language limits the social interaction between the refugees and the local people, therefore acts as a barrier to integration. It prevents the newcomers from participation in all aspects of life and institutions in the host country, and halts them from becoming economically self-reliant. It's no wonder that a study Ssb (2013) recognized language as the main aspect for the successful integration of the refugees into the Norwegian society

Indeed, some, from their own admission, have not progressed well as they should. As studies reveal there was high, failure rate of the refugee who took Norwegian exams, especially in the written tests (Einarsen, 2013). This pressed me to enquire further as to what could be some of the possible reasons for such lack of progress. I had to ask them why some of them were not able to make progress as would be expected after two years in the program, and especially when they understand how important learning the language is to their future life in Norway.

Some of them mentioned that because they had a poor educational background that in turn affected their progress in learning the Norwegian language; while others attributed the problem with lack of focus. For example, one of the participants mentioned that when they go to language classes, except during the actual classes, the rest of the time, they gather around, away from Norwegians and they speak in their local language. And during my discussion with the refugees, they acknowledged this kind of behavior as one of the main reasons that could be blamed for their lack of progress in learning the Norwegian language.

However, in other cases also, despite their efforts, they still didn't get at the level where they should have been. This is may be due to the fact that many of them had experienced a lot of trauma during their journey to get to Norway. Perhaps as the result of this, many feel loneliness and they seek to be with their friends and talk in their local language or isolate themselves altogether from everyone else. Still others mentioned that they often think and worry about their families back home and about their well-being and how and when they would be able to see meet them. In other words, they were not prioritizing learning the language.

On the other hand, all of them expressed their satisfaction and gratitude for the way the Norwegian government treated them, and especially about the introduction program. As one of them said, *“Everything we could need at this stage, they provided us. The Norwegian government has been doing all the best they could. If there is any lack of progress, for example in learning the language, mostly it has to do with us, the refugees themselves (Participant A-1).”*²²

With regards to how important the Introduction program is for the refugees to integrate? another participant in the focus group discussion from "the Periphery" Municipality said:

The two years Introduction Program gave us sufficient time to learn the Norwegian language and prepare ourselves for future opportunities. And learning the local language was one of the most important elements of the program which helped us to start our lives in Norway and also about the overall possibility of integrating into the Norwegian society. However, being able to speak the Norwegian language does not mean you are integrated into the society, it is only part of the overall program (Participant A-10).

Additionally, when I asked whether the two years Introduction Program was sufficient to get them started with their lives in Norway, one participant (A-7) gave me an interesting response. As she put it:

The length of the program is not as important as how you use the time. One can make progress far ahead in much less time if you take your own initiative, take a complete responsibility to integrate by using all possible means such as listening Norwegian radio, TV programs, reading books in Norwegian and newspaper even if you do not understand it well, learning on the internet, and above all by talking with the local people whenever you get the chance. On the other hand, you may spend two years in the program but if you have not been taking personal initiative; you may not make much progress. So, while the program is there, but I would say, a lot also depends on us (Participant A-7). Similarly, (McGonigal, 2011) underlines will power and the responsibility of an individual is the factor for his/ her success in every aspect of life. She added It is the willpower and responsibility that reminds you for the things you are supposed to do and pushes you to do even for the things you are not comfortable with It's interesting to see

²² A-2, A-4,A-5,A-6,A-8,A-12 gave similar response

that regardless of how the program is designed or for how long it runs, personal initiative and taking full responsibility on the part of the refugees is imperative.

Another important part of the integration process that the refugees found helpful was participating in different social activities as part of the Introduction program which is supposed to help the refugees to interact with the local people by participating in voluntary and social events. To highlight the importance of volunteering and attending in social events together with the local community, one participant of the study from “the Periphery” Municipality said:

We came from a completely different society with completely different culture. So, participating in different voluntary and community activities with some local people in the municipality helped us to begin to understand the Norwegian culture, and also about how the people live and more importantly to get a chance to speak with the locals and make friends and practice Norwegian language (Participant A-8).²³

The rest of the participants also agreed with these views and expressed similar ideas. As part of their integration framework, Ager and Strang (2008) also acknowledged voluntary organizations as the main feature for establishing social connections between refugees and local people as well as an integrated society.

Similarly, another participant in the focus group discussion (A-9), highlighted the importance of learning the language and culture through local activities and volunteering; he said, “*When you volunteer to participate in some activity, you get the chance to interact with other people, naturally. So, volunteering is a good opportunity to learn the language but also to integrate into the Norwegian society*”. Similarly, a study by Ikonen (2014) about the role of the voluntary organization in the inclusion and integration of refugees confirms such view. Ikonen noted volunteering was helpful for the refugees to integrate into the local community. As she found in her study, it helped the refugees to gain cultural knowledge of the community, assisted them to get cooperation from the locals, and strengthen the relationship and trust between the locals and the refugees.

²³ A-7, A-9, A-10, A-12 gave similar response

Overall, the impression of the Eritrean refugees in the municipalities was positive about the integration Program. Therefore, regardless of what progress one was able to achieve, they all recognized and appreciated the introduction program was very crucial. Especially given the limitations they had with the Norwegian language, and the challenges of not being familiar with the place and the culture and way of life of the local people, the Introduction Program had been very helpful to them.

6.4 Eritrean Refugees Affiliation to The Municipality in Which They Live

According to the integration framework of Ager and Strang (2008, p. 178), “belonging” and feeling of “home” is considered as the main aspect of a well-integrated society. During the focus group discussion, when the participants were asked to relate how they feel in their respective Municipalities, they had different opinions. One of the participants of the focus group discussion said, *"Sure, I do feel at home. Think about it, when you flee your home country, and you have nowhere else to go, and someone welcomes you to their home, you have no reason not to feel unwelcome, no matter what may be missing (Respondent A-11)²⁴.*

However, he was also aware of the challenges of adjusting to the new life. He added, *"In the beginning, as you might expect, life was challenging for me. Even though I was provided with all the basic needs, including financial assistance, since I had no idea what life is like in Norway, such as their culture, their way of life. Many things were strange to me. But gradually, and with the help of the Introduction Program, I began to feel some comfort (A-11)".*

And another participant (A-7) while he identified his feelings with the previous one (A-11), he was not sure whether he feels already at home in Norway; in his words:

I still can't say I feel at home here although not because I lack something I need, I still need to get used to many things here. Maybe partly, because we come from a society in which life finds meaning in the family and since most of us here are alone and live as singles, we miss our families and think about them. And of course, sometimes you also worry about them because of

²⁴ A-8 and A-12 gave similar response

the situation in Eritrea. All this is not very easy to handle and adds to the challenges we have here (Participant A-7).

Similarly, Ager and Strang (2008, p.178) in their study found that refugees appreciate closeness to their family and family members because it gives them the chance to share cultural and traditional practices and similar main pattern of relationships within their culture.

Another participant (A-9), emphasizing the difference between the Norwegian culture and Eritrean and sounding somewhat nostalgic; he said, *“Nothing can be the same as home. Everything around you are familiar so you feel comfortable. But when everything looks strange to you, even if it’s good or even better, you may not feel good. I think that’s being at home feels different”*. But he also appreciated the assistance he gets from his host Municipality. He noted, *“But I can’t fail to appreciate the efforts they do to make us feel at home here. However, because we are not used to the way they live, even the laws, sometimes, you get frustrated even though most of the time is for your own good (A-9)”*.

Similarly, the literature also indicates that those refugees who do not have family members or those who do not have like-ethnic community around them may suffer a high degree of depression than those who have (Ager & Strang, 2008).

As I was able to decipher from the discussions and interviews I had with all the refugees I talked to, they have changed in many ways and are embracing life in Norway. And since they are being provided with what they need to establish their lives, it would be only a matter of time before they get adjusted. Because, the challenge the Eritrean refugees they have is not about difference in values rather it’s the gap between life where they came from and what they find it to be in Norway. Therefore, they just need time to understand and get used to life in Norway. However, having said that, given where they came from and not to mention the difficulties they had to experience during their journey until they reach in Norway, and the differences between the two cultures, it might take some time before they can fully feel at home. But it’s comforting to hear that almost all of them seem to sense the magnitude of the challenge and that can be a good indication to step up their efforts and embrace integration more.

6.5 Relationship Between the Refugees and Their Guides

According to (Lipsky, 1980), street level bureaucrats are the people who meet citizens at the interface between citizens and the government and are the people who deliver the policies. He added these people are important because whatever the citizens are supposed to get from government depends on what the bureaucrats do with them. Hence, Refugee guides as bureaucrats have a direct contact with refugees and help them to integrate into all aspects of the Introduction Program in their respective Municipalities. The function of the refugee guide is the same in both “the City” and “the Periphery” Municipalities. After a refugee is first assigned in the Municipality, the refugee guides prepare his/her residence, helps them to establish their own home and assist them to build relationships and networks with the local people in their respective Municipalities. However, as Lipsky (1980) notes when bureaucrats confronted with multiple tasks and many clients; they assign them into some kind of category to manage their tasks which can possibly lead to simplification and prejudgment of a client.

When it comes the two Municipalities under consideration, there was one significant difference. In “the City” Municipality, every refugee had individual refugee guide assigned to him or her. But, in the “Periphery” Municipality it was a bit different in that there were three refugee guides for all the refugees together. Therefore, one may expect the kind of interaction and relationship that would develop between one refugee and his or her assistant in the “Periphery” to be different in some ways from the one in the “City Municipality”. Perhaps the following testimony from one participant from the “Periphery” Municipality may help to draw the contrast:

In our Municipality, there are three persons for all the refugees in the help desk. And they worked in turns. However, the problem, in this case was, for example, when I had to visit one day to talk about some personal issue that I had, and I met one of the three and talked about my case with that person. But the issue was something that needed follow up. And when I went back the next day to enquire, a different person was in the help desk. That means, I had to speak about the same thing with the other person as well. But my issue might not be something I would want to share with one person today and the other person another. So, instead I asked if I could see the person with who already knew about my issue. Then I had to speak about the same issue with that person too. Consequently, there were some misunderstandings and I had personal experience about such incidents. But this was mainly due to the arrangement they made in the

administration; otherwise, such things would not have happened if we had individual personal assistants (Participant A-7)²⁵

As Lipsky (2010) points out, bureaucrats use rubber stamping as a coping strategy when confronted with many clients, which means they depend on earlier decisions by other bureaucrats about a client and previous decisions may contain bias and different levels that can affect the client of the welfare organization.

Furthermore, as street level bureaucracy theory (2010) underlines, [sometimes] refugees may not be treated equally as the bureaucrats could only focus on those who have a comparative advantage regarding communication skills and those who have higher chance to succeed in the program.

However, sometimes there seemed to be differences when their personal assistants had to follow the program as planned, but then a refugee may not have been ready or comfortable to follow through. For example, with regards to assigning refugees to the language practice program, which was part of the integration program, one of the participants from “the City” Municipality mentioned two encounters where she thought her assistant’s guide were not that helpful:

For example, they send you to participate in some kind of activities. In general, they do consider our background, and they try to understand and make us participate where we can either gain experience or interact with other people and may learn Norwegian or even make friends. However, sometimes, because of lack of vacant posts or space, they send us to any open post instead of where we can learn more and enhance our skills something related to our previous experiences or interest where we could gain some more experience or learn something based on skills that we already have. So, in those cases, we waste time doing some activities that didn't interest us or simply useless. Similarly, in relation to the language practice, one or two months after you start the program, they send you for practice sessions, and there is no way that you can learn from those interactions. First, from my experiences, they sent me for the language practice after two months learning Norwegian language in the introduction program. But at that time, I didn't have even basic communication skills. So, when I went to the language internship program, I found it hard to interact with. But I still had to go because my personal assistant told

²⁵ A-9 and A-12 gave similar response

me if I didn't go, they would deduct from my financial support. In my opinion, that was counter-productive and time wasting. So, I found it a bit awkward and quite impractical (Participant A-1)²⁶

Referring to the street-level bureaucracy theory, Lipsky (2010), mentions that bureaucrats may create psychological burden during the implementation of a policy by putting the client in a situation that creates pressure and stress for him/ her. Furthermore, Lipsky (1980) points out, if clients have low income or do not have another alternative rather than expecting help from the welfare organization, they could end up being in a non-voluntary position and be obliged to do even for the things he/she is not comfortable with. Similarly, Djuve (2011) registered that the size of the social assistance benefit is calculated according the needs of the beneficiary but it may also be influenced by the discretionary judgment of the social worker. The latitude for discretion also includes the possibility to set conditions for the cash benefits (Djuve, 2011).

In a different tone, another participant, from “the City” municipality (A-6) had a different opinion with regards to the language internships and seemed to believe that the assistants had to follow the program as planned but moreover it was necessary that they exercised their authority and responsibility with the refugees. As he put it:

Regarding the language internship program, some pressure and pushing are needed and could be helpful for us as well. You see, we are comfort seekers, and we like to spend time with our friends or on social media as much as possible; in this case, we need some pressure to learn the new life in Norwegian society. Because, without that, you may start being less serious about the integration process. The same with other activities that we need to participate in. And we should not forget that we came to their place and it's “us” who have to learn their way of life and adapt to it as soon as possible. I think it is important we understand that” (Participant A-6).²⁷

As stated in the Introduction Act (2004) of Norway, participants of the introduction program from the age of 18 up to 55 have not only the right to the program but the obligation to follow the program as designed by the host municipality as well (Introduction Act, 2004).

²⁶ A-4, A-7 and A-11 had similar experience

²⁷ A-3, A-5, A-8, A-12 also gave similar response

Additionally, during the focus group discussion when I asked the participants whether they have been personally discriminated in any way, shape or form by their personal refugee guides or in their Municipality, unanimously said such treatment never occurred to them even to people they know. But one participant in the group from “the Periphery” municipality (A -11) talked about some misconceptions on the part of some refugees. He said:

Sometimes you hear some people complaining that they did not get the same treatment as others and interpret it as some people favored versus other people. But the truth is those who are proactive, who seek information to any issues they have; they get assistance or solution to any problem they share with their assistants. While other people, who just wait for things to happen by themselves as a miracle, they may not get the same kind or level of assistance and then they complain by saying this and that. But you can't call such things discrimination. First, we have to do our part. So, I think this kind of talk is just misconception (Participant A-11).²⁸

Implementation of a policy may cause stigmatization and discrimination to the clients, especially when a client is dependent on the welfare state (Lipsky, 1980; Spicker, 1984). However, from the interview and discussion that was not an issue with the Eritrean refugees. As far as relationship with their refugee guide is concerned and their experiences with them during the integration program, most of the participants highlighted that their assistants always treated them kindly. They said, generally they were accommodating and helpful.

6.6 The Refugees Impressions About the Local People in Their Municipality

According to the integration framework, a good social bridge and harmony between the host community and the refugees is a key aspect of integration (Ager & Strang, 2008). During the interviews and focus group discussions, the participants told me that during their first days and months, they thought that Norwegians were cold, unapproachable, and even xenophobic. But, as they were to find out later, they realized Norwegians are quite the opposite of what they thought. One of the refugees from “the Periphery” Municipality (A-10) had the following to say about his impression of the people in the municipality:

As far as I understand, generally Norwegians see us (the refugees) positively and they are comfortable with us and that's something that makes us feel welcomed. I can give examples to

²⁸ A-7, A-9, and A-12 gave similar opinion

illustrate what I mean. For example, Norwegians are comfortable to welcome us in their homes. I mean, what better evidence is there than to welcome a stranger to your house. Besides, this is something we value greatly in our own culture. And this is especially important to us because it's not always easy to find a place to rent. Not only that, many here amongst of us would tell you that at least one or two Norwegians showed them kindness or helped them in this way or that way. You know, maybe small favors but to us is very big thing. Some Norwegians and neighbors also invite us to their homes for a meal or coffee; others, especially the older people, they give us a ride around and show us or take us along with them to the Church or for shopping. And when you invite them to your place, they are also happy to come over". (Participant A-10)²⁹

Along similar lines, Ager and Strang (2008) also noticed the effect of a welcoming attitude on the part of the host communities towards refugees. As the authors indicated, recognition and being greeted by the local residents is highly valued, and even small acts of friendship have an enormous impact on the perception of the refugees about the locals and make them feel secure.

In contrast to previous speaker, one of the participants from “the Periphery” Municipality, had a slightly different observation about some of his Norwegian neighbors.

I agree that Norwegians are generally welcoming and nice people, but certainly there are always exceptions as we may expect. Even though they are few cases, some neighbors, they don't even bother to interact with you, except maybe say, “hi” once in a while, let alone to invite you to their homes or give you a ride. They give you the impression that they are not at ease that a refugee is in their neighborhood. But I think, this would be true in every society, not all people are the same or there are always exceptions. And so, I wouldn't say there are too many cases like that”, it's not good to generalize (A-11)³⁰.

Another respondent from “the City” Municipality had a different opinion and experience with the local people. According to him (Participant A-4)

I sense that some have a negative view towards refugees in general. The perception of some locals is that I feel, if you are a refugee, automatically they associate you with something bad or

²⁹ A-7, A-9, A-2, and A-12 had similar experience

³⁰ A-8 gave similar opinion

illegal, like for example, they think refugees engage in crime or we came here only to become recipients of welfare and burden (Participant A-4)³¹.

Again, the above perception of the speaker is confirmed by the findings of Ager and Strang (2008). From their field study, the authors learned that perceived unfriendliness by the host community weaken integration of refugees in the local society (Ager & Strang, 2008).

Further, another participant from “the Periphery” (A-10) Municipality shared his observation about the difference between young Norwegians and the older people, he said:

But I have a different observation about the younger Norwegians as compared to the older people. Generally speaking, but I could be wrong, but the young people are not keen or enthusiastic to associate or make acquaintances with refugees. There are some, but I would say those are exceptions, especially compared to the older people, it is rarely that they feel comfortable to approach you. They are distant. But of course, you can't expect them to behave like the older people also. I just don't understand why they are like that. Maybe this is because of lack of understanding or awareness. However, generally speaking, I would say Norwegians are welcoming and respect a guest (Participant A-10).

In the same way, a survey carried out by Ssb (2016)³² revealed, the above speaker’s observation does not seem very far from the true. According to the findings, the attitude of Norwegians toward immigrants and refugees, the skepticism about the refugees and immigrants was increasing from 2007-2016. More Norwegians, especially the younger generation think that immigrants and refugees are as a source of instability in Norwegian society. Similarly, the study showed the interaction of the Norwegians and the refugees is becoming narrower by comparing the data from 2007 to 2016.

³¹ A-5 and A-2 gave similar opinion

³²<http://www.ssb.no/en/innvhold/>

6.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented and conversed the finding from the interview and focus group discussions with the Eritrean refugees about their experience in the integration process. Unanimously, the participants highlighted learning the Norwegian language was their foremost barrier and challenge especially in the early years of their stay in Norway. When talking about the residents, the participants of the study underlined that even though Norwegian tend to be cold and slow when it comes to communication and social aspects, generally with a few exceptions; they consider them as respectful, accommodating and friendly. Furthermore, when stating about their refugee guides; the participants consider most of their guides are supportive and cooperative in their process of integration. However, they highlighted that a few of them are inconsiderate the experience and background of the refugees when communicating and dealing with them.

Additionally, from the interview with the refugee guides and the discussion of the personal experience of the refugees, I noted there is a difference between those who had earlier work experience out of Norway. They tend to be cooperative and understanding of the situation of the refugees. Besides, they were relatively open during the one-on-one interview when discussing the phenomenon and barriers to the integration.

Chapter Seven: Barriers to Integration for The Eritrean Refugee's

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the main barriers to integration as identified by the Eritrean refugees, local residents, refugee guides and the key informants in the two municipalities where the study was carried out. The study revealed that the insufficient personal initiative on the part of the Eritrean refugees as the primary barriers to the integration of the Eritrean refugees into the host Municipality. Furthermore, the study disclosed language and inability to communicate, cultural differences, inability to find employment, health, separation from family and friends, traumatic experiences, inadequate know-how in technology social media, right-wing politicians and some media outlets have been identified as barriers to the Eritrean refugees.

7.2 Refugees Lack of Own Initiative and Active Participation as A Barrier To Integration

Every individual should be responsible for the outcome of his/ her choice is a fundamental moral idea in Western societies (Cappelen, Sørensen, & Tungodden, 2015). From the study of the Eritrean refugees and their experience in integration program, I have been able to identify a number of barriers with varying degrees of impact to their integration. While it is not clear enough whether a single barrier applies equally to the lack of progress in their integration process, however, from the discussions and interviews I conducted with the refugees, lack of personal initiative and active participation seem to be a major contributor. This is because, lack of personal initiative and active participation, not only affects their progress in the introduction program directly but also seems to be linked with rest of the other barrier, as identified in the present study.

McGonigal (2011) wrote about willpower and how the results a person can achieve in any endeavor can be affected depending on his/ her will-power and responsibility. According to the author, will power and the responsibility of an individual is the determinant factor for his/ her success in every aspect of life. It is the willpower and accountability that reminds you your long-term benefit and pushes you to do the things you are not comfortable with (McGonigal, 2011).

By looking at the responses of some of the refugees gave, it is evident enough that the problem lies with the individual person. In other words, as McGonigal indicated, it is will-power and personal responsibility to integrate that seems to be missing. For example, the following response from one of the respondents from "the City" municipality clearly supports the above claim:

Everything we could need for our integration in the host municipality, they provided us. The Norwegian government has been doing all the best it could. If there is any lack of progress in the integration process, mostly it has to do with us [the refugees themselves]” (Participant A-6).³³

One refugee from the participants also made a point that connects the introduction salary they receive with the lack of enthusiasm some refugees have towards the integration program. To him, the salary they receive might be partly to blame for the problem:

When the government is providing you with everything, you need to live, including the monthly salary, at least some people would think they already get what they need. So why work hard and make more effort. Getting the money for free, instead of motivating can make some people lazy and less motivated. So, maybe there is some problem in the system also (A-11)³⁴

Similarly, Mestheneos and Ioannidi (2002) revealed that “*over-generosity of the welfare state and enforced dependency toward the refugees*” is a barrier for the refugees to take the initiative and become economically independent. In other cases, when you look for reasons why some of them would not have the necessary commitment and participation in the integration process, you find that they have something else they prioritize or commit most of their time and energy instead of the integration program. That means, they do not focus sufficiently on the integration program. One participant had the following to add:

Some of us are spending plenty of time in religious practices; there are people I know who are active multiple days in a week and participate in running the community churches. I am not against going to church or something like that, but sometimes, the church program is open-ended and can run for 5-6 hours at one time. Moreover, you can image the impact on their

³³ A-2, A-4, A-5,A-6,A-8,A-12 gave similar response

³⁴ Similar response was given by A-2, A-7, A-10 and A-12

progress in the integration process when such people have to spend that much time and for three or more days per week (A-6).³⁵

Similarly, due to the political situation that exists in Eritrea and there are groups with different political affiliations in the Diaspora. And therefore, people with all kinds of opinions spend hours and hours to argue or follow such arguments on social media. However, some of them are so deeply involved, and they have to participate in meetings inside and outside Norway, pal-talk seminars, and discussions, preparing brochures, sending and receiving e-mails, posting on social media. This was the situation with one of the refugees that I interviewed. He told me that he barely gets time to focus on the integration program. He further added:

Engaging in Eritrean politics is like a full-time job, and when I have the time, it's usually when I'm completely exhausted. However, for me, it is a national duty as well (A-11)

The observation of one of the refugee assistants also seems to confirm this lack of personal initiative on the part of the refugees. As the respondent noted:

In the local events we organize, most of the refugees do not show up as you would expect them to. Even those few who manage to come do not actively participate or interact with the locals (A-24).

Another respondent from the refugee's guides (A-23) highlighted another possible contributing factor for this lack of personal initiative and active participation in the integration process. According to her:

I think one of the problems is that Eritreans have vast networks amongst themselves and they spend most of their spare time with other people from their communities. And so, they spend a big part of their time with one another which may not be very helpful if they want to make progress with their integration (A-23).

Another problem that shows the lack of initiative of some of the refugees is whether they take their time seriously or not whenever there is a planned program or activity. However, as one of the refugee guides noticed,

³⁵A-7 and A-12 gave similar response

It seems to me, generally speaking, for example, compared to Norwegians, many among the Eritrean refugees do not appear to realize how important it is to be on time when you have something you must do. For example, when there is, language internships or appointment with their assistants. Because it shows how committed they are and is necessary for the success of the integration program" (A-13).

As I understood from the discussions and interviews with all the Eritrean refugees, they have still challenges, but changed in many ways and are accepting the way of life in Norway. However, having said that, given where they came from, the differences between the two cultures, it could take them some time before they can fully embrace the way of life in Norway. As they said, the challenges they have is related to the cultural difference and their upbringing, and they might need some time for them to change. However, it's encouraging to hear that almost all of them seem to understand the effects of their daily routines in their interaction and were stepping up their efforts for betterment.

7.3 Language as A Barrier to Integration

Having the ability to speak the host society's' main language is considered as one of the key tools for integration (Ager & Strang, 2008). Indeed, as Larson (2010/2) also mentions, understanding the host community's language and values, understanding the meaning behind actions and understanding of the host society's common logic are necessary conditions for participating in society (Larson, 2010/2). After I conducted the interviews and focus group discussions with the refugees from Eritrea; despite their age group or educational level differences, their stories were very similar when it came to language and its impact on their integration progress into the Norwegian society. When asked what they considered as the main barrier for them to integrate into Norwegian society, they all expressed that their inability to speak Norwegian language with the locals as one of the main challenges. As their reasoning went, even though many times they wanted to say a lot of things, but because of the language constraint, they often found themselves unable to express themselves.

Let alone those newly arrived refugees even the ones who were living in Norway for several years still face many challenges because of their inadequate skills in the Norwegian language. From the focus group discussions and interviews I conducted with the Eritrean refugees, as they

told me during the group discussion, they tend to be very self-conscious when they speak in Norwegian, like how they sound when they speak Norwegian and whether they would be misunderstood and laughed at. For example, one participant in the group discussion said:

I wish to pick up a conversation with the locals, ask them questions about themselves; tell them more about myself when they greet you. But first I lack the confidence and simply hesitate. But also, I get stuck as to what and how to say it when I try to speak. So, it is embarrassing (Participant A-2)³⁶

Indeed, challenges connected to refugees' inability to speak the language of the hosting community presents itself whether in discussing their issues with their guides, during shopping, going out, picking up a conversation with a neighbor or a stranger.

On a more serious note, inability to speak Norwegian language can mean isolation and thus can act as a social barrier. As one of the participants put it:

I used to have so many friends when I was in Eritrea and even in Sudan and Libya. Besides, I am considered as a sociable person or at times talkative even, by my family and friends. But, I have changed since I arrived in Norway. Now my tongue is tied until I can learn to speak the language. Consequently, especially in the beginning of my arrival here in Norway, I used to feel isolated, hopeless and even suffered from depression. I remember I used to stay indoors all the time and to spend many hours on the internet and social media. Besides, I think Norwegians are not enthusiastic about talking to other people like us. So, many people like me feel isolated (Participant A-6)³⁷

Besides having difficulties with Norwegian language, cultural differences between Norwegian and Eritrean societies also add to the problem. It was highlighted in the discussion that cultural differences between Norwegian society and Eritrean do not help in this case. For example, in Eritrean culture, the individual, especially as a child or young person, is not very much encouraged to express himself or herself or to be vocal about what they believed. In any conversation, in the presence of their parents or seniors, people are used to the idea of "being

³⁶ A-4, A-6 gave similar response

³⁷ A-7, A-8, A-12 also gave similar response

allowed" or else "asked" to speak either by their parents or anyone older than them. Moreover, this sort of mindset pervades, especially nowadays in the political and national sphere of the Eritrean society. So, it is not unusual people hesitate even to communicate their needs.

Along similar lines, Ager and Strang (2008, p. 18) mention about how refugees, having been brought up in a sort of hierarchical societies find it difficult to adjust when they suddenly find themselves living in among a more egalitarian society. As one participant in the focus group discussion shared:

We all know, in our culture, unlike in Norway, we are not often encouraged to express ourselves. So, part of our problem to integration, I think is because of our upbringing. In our culture, we are conservative and submissive; that is how it is there, we had a strict upbringing. As a child and adults, we were not expected to express our feelings and opinions. Furthermore, looking people in the eye, in particular for the elder ones is considered as disrespectful, and it is a taboo. Besides, daily physical punishment by our teachers, parents, and other family members for the majority of us was a normal thing. So, I see this as one problem for us to overcome our fears of communicating with the locals (Participant A-2)³⁸

The value of broader cultural knowledge is well appreciated in the role it plays in enabling integration processes and outcomes (Ager & Strang, 2008). And as might be expected, cultural differences could create misunderstanding with other people who are not familiar with that particular culture. And granted, this was exactly what happened between some Eritrean refugees and a refugee guide in the "City Municipality." During my interview with one of the refugee guides, he told me:

Most of the Eritrean refugees do not look at you when you talk to them; they simply look down or look away. It might mean different from their perspective, but it is not good when a person you are talking to does not look at you. It can even mean disrespect or carelessness. I doubt if they understand it that way though (Participant A-15)³⁹

³⁸ Similar responses from A-11, A-7, A-9, A-10, A-8, A-12

³⁹ Other two refugee consultants gave similar response A-13, A-16, and four local residents A-20, A-21, A-19, A-22

On the other hand, Norwegians also tend to be quite and docile. And the Eritrean refugees could not understand why Norwegians are like that despite growing up in freedom and in a society, which allows the individual to be themselves. So, this presented an unhappy coincidence, and bewildered the refugees when they arrived in Norway – they could not express themselves, and the local people did not encourage them to speak or understand them.

Participant (A-25) is a pastor and a leader of one church which assists for the integration of the refugees, and he had this to say:

What we found in our church programs is that there is interest from the refugees to interact with the Norwegians, but the Norwegians tend to be slow; they are slow in interacting with refugees. So, we found out that our church needs to make an initiative to bring together the refugees and the locals and build that bridge (A-25).

As Ager & Strang (2008) understood, creating social bridges (for example, by involving them together in religious worship, sports, political activities) between and among different communities supports social harmony as well as opening up opportunities for broadening cultural understanding. Somewhat in a different way, Qureshi (2005), talks about how cultural competence (acquiring knowledge about other cultures) and cultural sensitivity (understanding others on their own terms) can help us develop ‘Knowledge-Based Trust’ with people from different communities (Qureshi, 2005).

Therefore, the consequences of not being able to speak the Norwegian language is far greater than mere difficulties in expressing oneself communicating. It means being misunderstood, or unable to apply for a job and explore opportunities, not being able to make new friends. Many of the refugees believed that without having the ability to speak the Norwegian language, one would not think of moving forward with their lives in Norway.

7.4 Culture and Religion Difference as A Barrier to Integration

Cultural and religious differences are another issue that brings its own challenges to the Eritrean refugees in their efforts to integrate into their host municipality. Such problem presents as simple as dressing styles which can make them feel uncomfortable. Further, this can affect whether, for example, they could feel comfortable to go out in public places, to attend social events or mix

with other local people in the Municipality. And generally speaking, in this case, the challenge is even greater to refugees from the Islamic faith than refugees from the Christian faith. According to one of the study participants:

Norway is a country and a society built on Christian values and traditions. As an example, Christian holidays are observed but holidays in Islam are not observed. This means I cannot take break during Muslim holiday because they are not recognized in Norway. From my experience, one religion is feared and seen as a source of terrorism and other unfavorable aspects, while Christianity is a way of life here, and is normal. For example, my praying is not seen positively. And I have to be concerned where I pray or whether some people don't feel comfortable seeing me praying. So, as far as religion and culture are concerned, my Christian folks don't have the same problems as I do. But me, being a Muslim, I have more challenges here. I can't say I have been openly discriminated, but I know, I am not seen in the same way as my Christian countrymen. (Participant A-4)⁴⁰

Another challenge Eritrean refugees face is the inability to find a place for worship and praying. And Or if there is, it was not often that they would feel comfortable enough to go to a local church and mix with the locals. Besides, most Eritrean Christians are from the Orthodox faith, and so sometimes they find that some of the important holidays that they used to observe in Eritrea are either not recognized or not celebrated on the same day in Norway. And on such occasions, if they have work or school, they have to go even if it's a holiday for them. All these contribute to their feeling of isolation and being lost from their identity and culture to some degree. Nevertheless, one participant of the study had a different experience and perspective. In her words:

My brother, who has been living in Norway for more than 26 years encouraged me to attend Norwegian church programs instead of the Eritrean community church. In the beginning, I could not understand anything, and I was feeling frustrated. But he kept encouraging me, so I continued to attend the church programs. After some time, I

⁴⁰Participant A-4 is an Eritrean refugee and a Muslim.

started to attend in-house church programs (Huskirke)⁴¹ and this helped me to develop close relationships with some wonderful Norwegian friends who brought me a Bible in the Norwegian language. And they helped me a lot, including in my communications. That changed my life completely. I was even able to get a job as a substitute while I was still in the introduction program. And this motivated me in many ways in my life than I can imagine. So, thanks to the advice I received from my own brother and all the help from my Norwegian friends, now I have a certificate (fagbrev) and a full-time job. Besides, I bought a house two years ago. So, now I am living with my two beautiful children happily. If, like many of my brothers and sisters I were still going to the Eritrean community church and my communication is restricted to them; I would be nowhere regarding my Norwegian communication skills or what I have been able to achieve with my life (Participant A- 12).

According to Ager and Strang (2008), from the experience of most refugees, adjusting to a different culture is far from straightforward. Particularly, refugees who had experienced near family ties in the culture, found their isolation and the lack of a strong local community to be alienating and depressing.

7.5 Health as Barrier to Integration

As Ager and Strang (2008) learned during their research, having good health can mean having active life is one of the main factors whether an individual becomes a productive member of society or not or simply participating in different social activities. Many among the Eritrean refugees who took part in the study, highlighted the difficulty they have had in getting used to food in Norway. And since most of them had never had experience with other cultures foods or cuisine other than their country, many had difficulties getting used to what people consume in Norway.

As one Participant said:

One of the big things I discovered after I arrived in Norway was that the way people live in Norway and their lifestyle was very much different from home we live in

⁴¹Huskirken (Norwegian): a house church is a gathering of a small community where you can get better acquainted with GOD, other members of the group and yourself. In the program, there is room to ask questions and get help from the group members. A

Eritrea. And one of them is their food habit, how they shop, what they shop. We all know that in Eritrea food is scarce and you can't get everything you need all the time. In Norway, you can find almost everything you want. But one thing that I miss and can't find in the shops is food from Eritrea. To speak from my experience, during my first arrival in Norway, I was so happy that could get anything I wanted to eat or consume. But as you can see me now, in less than two years, I gained 27 kg. And I have big belly fat. As a result, I feel lazy and tired all the time (Participant A-9)⁴²

Along similar lines, another participant from “the Periphery” Municipality had to say:

I was more active in Eritrea, playing football regularly. Since I came here, I feel lazy and sluggish. Of course, I am not eating the foods I used to eat, and I am drinking sodas processed juices, ready and processed foods, ready pizzas and chocolates because they are easy and ready for consumption. As you know, we had different roles in Eritrea, so it is not easy to prepare Eritrean foods here in Norway, especially if one is a male (Participant A-11)⁴³

In the same way, according to the study conducted by SSB (2011 /2012)⁴⁴, immigrants are found to be sicker than the general population in Norway. Similarly, the study found out that fewer immigrants consider their health as good; majority reported health problems and as a serious issue. Further, women are found to be worse than men in health and health related issues.

7.6 Inability to Find Employment as A Barrier to Integration

Ager and Strang (2004, 2008) identified employment as one of the key domains of integration. Employment is a factor that affects many aspects of a refugee’s life. For example, employment can help refugees to be financially self-sufficient, provides the opportunity to meet with the locals, to pursue their studies and advance language

⁴² Similar experience as with A-9, regarding food and life change were also given by Participant A-9, A-4, and A-6

⁴³ Similar response was given by A-12, A-7, A-5 and A-6

⁴⁴ <http://www.ssb.no/helse/artikler-og-publikasjoner/daarligere-helse-blant-innvandrerne>

and other skills, helps to boost self-esteem (Africa Educational Trust,1998; Block, 1999, Tomlinson & Egan, 2002; as cited in Ager & Strand, 2008).

Participants of the focus group discussion highlighted that finding employment is one of the main problems that they have. A major contributor to this problem was that their prior educational level or the set of skills they brought with them was non-transferable and incompatible to the kind of jobs available in the job market in Norway. So, some of them, not being able to work in their profession, they work in non-skilled jobs, even this is if they are lucky. And others, realizing they couldn't get employment in their area of expertise; they have gone back to studying. For many, this is not easy, as they have families to support and so they juggle between part-time work and studying.

However, more importantly, being unemployed or underemployed can affect their integration as well. As quoted in (ECRE,1991), refugees consider themselves as being integrated when they are employed, "to me integration is work, if I work, I consider myself integrated" (as cited in, Ager& Strang, 2008). Thread Gold and Court (2005) seem to confirm such notion. The authors reported that those who are unemployed have a high possibility of not integrating into the host society. I also have learned from my own research that refugees indeed associate being employed with being integrated. Here is what one of the participants from my study told me:

Integration could have been much easier if finding a job had been easier here(A-11)⁴⁵.

Lack of work experience documents or certificates also certainly diminishes any chance they may have to find a job. One cause for this problem is that it is not common in Eritrea these days, like it is in Norway for example, to have a certificate for every job available in the market. Since the Eritrean economy is largely informal with poorly developed institutions, documenting work experience or job performance evaluation is uncommon practice or had been abandoned by the government for a long time now. Besides, the way people acquire skills and work experience mostly involve on the job training. So, obtaining performance evaluation and work

⁴⁵ Similar response was given by A-2, A-3, A-6, A8, A-9

experience related documents is never that easy even for those who had a formal job in Eritrea. University certificates are not issues when students graduate. For whatever reason, the certificate remains with the government while the person is assigned to national service.

Similarly, research from ECRE (1999b) and Africa Educational Trust (1998) revealed that many refugees fail to provide proof of their earlier work experiences; as a result, working a job that needs less or no requirement compared to the skills and experiences possessed by the refugee is common (Africa Education Trust, 1998, as cited in Ager & Strang, 2008). Ager and Strang (2008), similarly confirm that the main challenge for refugees in the host country is the non-recognition of previous experiences.

The situation is not much different when it comes to Eritrean refugee as well. Many among the Eritrean refugees, despite their several years of work experience and serving in different capacities, they end up either as welfare recipients or work in an area completely unrelated to their previous experience, so that they are able to support their families. However, to some of them, it is quite unpleasant. Similar findings elsewhere confirm the situation with Eritrean refugees. As one participant highlighted:

I worked as an auto mechanic for 12 years in Eritrea. I started as a beginner and an assistant in an auto mechanic shop and gradually became independent. By the time, I left Eritrea; I was one of the highly-paid mechanics in the city. Here, I was asked either to bring a certificate or I must start from the beginning to have a certificate. And many Eritreans who used to work in Eritrea be it as a mechanic, hairdresser, barber, builder, carpenter and so on have similar problem like mine here in Norway (Participant A-10)⁴⁶.

By understanding the importance of employment for the integration of the refugees, the Norwegian government started an initiative in 2015, Meld.St.30 (2015-2016),

⁴⁶ Similar response was given from A-1, A-12, A-2, A-9

“Fra mottak til arbeidsliv – en effektiv integreringspolitikk”⁴⁷. The documents stressed that the Norwegian welfare model depends on a high participation of labor; so, early employment of the refugees is paramount for their integration and the welfare state.

7.7 Separation from Family and Friends as A Barrier to Integration

As findings by Ager and Strang (2008, p, 177-178) reveals, social connection and support is seen to have played in driving the process of integration at a local level. From the focus group discussion and the interviews; often one thing that severely affects Eritrean refugees find hard to bear is the separation from their family members and close friends.

Here in Norway, we have everything; we can buy and eat whatever we want. But, in Eritrea, it is a different story. During my meal time, I always remember my siblings and my family constantly and worry about their well-being. I wish they were here with me (Participant A-5)⁴⁸

One of them described being separated from his family like an "open wound." According to Ager and Strang (2008) registered that refugees attached great importance to family links mainly because it marked for them the ultimate mark of 'belonging' and living in an integrated community. For this reason, many refugees who were interviewed by Ager and Strang, valued proximity to a family because they believed that it would enable them to share cultural practices and maintain a familiar pattern of relationships. And that such connection contributes greatly in the refugees feeling "settled" and integrated into the host community.

The most vulnerable are those who always seem carefree and nonchalant back home when they were with their family and friends. Now that they are alone, and separated from everything they knew before added with the realization that it may so many years before they are able to see their family members, makes them feel anxious.

⁴⁷ <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/meld.-st.-30-20152016/id2499847/sec1>

⁴⁸ A-5, A-6, A-11 and A-12 also gave similar response

They pointed out that even though they can maintain contact with their families back home through telephone or the internet, however, this can never heal and replace the sense of longing and separation that they feel. Another one from the participants said;

As a political refugee here, acknowledging that I cannot travel back home to see my family is painful (Participant A-10)⁴⁹

Similarly, other researchers also found that separation from family and friends affects the life of refugees in Australia negatively and sometimes even lead to mental health problems for refugees (Savic et al., 2013).

7.8 Age as A Barrier to Integration

In the focus group discussion, it was noted that, as far as integration of refugees is concerned, age plays a significant role. For example, it is more difficult for the older ones to learn the Norwegian language as compared to the younger ones. And as discussed above, we know how inability to speak the language affects integration into the society. So, in this case, age has a direct role.

As one of the participants of the focus group discussion from “the Periphery” Municipality stated:

When it comes to Integration, our children are like typical Norwegian children, whereas my wife and I are still Eritreans. When they try to speak to us in Norwegian, we have difficulty understanding them. So, we respond to them in our local language, Tigrigna⁵⁰(A-9)⁵¹

In my findings, almost all participants of the study mentioned learning the language as the biggest challenge to their integration efforts. And the challenge was greater in proportion among the older people. Furthermore, they also tend to be less educated or stopped school many years ago and served in the national service for many years. So, it's also difficult for them to read books and learn by themselves. Compared to the younger ones, they also have fewer friends to go around. They highlighted, their

⁴⁹ Similar responses from A-5 and A-12

⁵⁰ Tigrigna = A language spoken by one of Eritrea's majority ethnic groups, i.e. also, referred by the same name

⁵¹ A-7 and A-12 gave similar response

focus is more on finding employment so that they could support their children and/or their families back home. All these plays to their disadvantage towards integration in the Norwegian society, and therefore, they find it more difficult to adjust to the new life.

On the other hand, compared to the older ones, refugees that tend to be younger were relatively more educated, and most of them are pursuing their studies. Besides, the younger prioritizes learning as compared to working; they have more Norwegian friends, and they are more likely to spend time with more people.

Another older guy I spoke to from “the City” Municipality also told me about his himself and his family, highlighting how age influence learning the language:

My family joined me after I had been living alone in Norway for four years. Our son is now 13 years old and he became fluent in Norwegian after he had lived only one year and he knows so many things about Norway more than I do. Even though I have lived four years in Norway ahead of him, our son is way better than me, and whenever he speaks to me in Norwegian, I have difficulty understanding him sometimes. On the other side, my wife too is still struggling with the basics, and she needs a translator whenever to go to the public offices (Participant A-9)⁵²

Similarly, many studies affirm that one's age plays a key role in the refugee's integration into the host society. The older the refugee, the more they have challenges to integrate and at the same time have more affiliation with their own culture. Refugees who come to the host community at young age can learn the language easily, participate in the education, participate in the social activities of the receiving community, have greater chance of employment once they finish their study (Bleakley and Chin, 2010; Bohlmark, 2008, 2009; Henriksen, 2009; Myers, Gao and Emeka, 2009, Lee and Edmonston, 2011; Åslund, Båhlmark and Skans, 2009 as cited in Anderson & Skardhamar, 2012).

⁵² Unanimously, all participants of the study agreed that the younger the age, the better the integration

7.9 Trauma as Barrier to Integration

According to many documentary sources reviewed, good mental and physical health is considered as important for active participation of the immigrants and the refugees in their host community (Ager & Stang, 2008). Especially in the case of refugees from Eritrea, “as mentioned in chapter 4”, many of them had different kinds of trauma from smugglers and criminals throughout their journey all the way from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, Libya, the Mediterranean Sea. Similarly, some of them were imprisoned back in Eritrea and even somewhere else on their way; beaten; raped or rescued in the Mediterranean Sea after their boat capsized. Likewise, some refugees have lost their brother or sister or a close friend on the Journey. And those experiences continue to haunt them and affects them in their overall wellbeing as well as in their integration capacity in the Norwegian society. As they highlighted in the focus group discussion and the interviews, consequently, some of them tend to be less engaged with others and residents in the municipality.

My one and only brother and my uncle died in the Mediterranean Sea at “Lampedusa”⁵³ shipwreck tragedy in 2013. I was the one who sent them the money for the journey from Libya to Italy and I live with this sense of guiltiness ever since. The incident changed my attitude, personality, and my life (Participant A-9)

Besides, the participants underlined that there are many traumatized refugees from Eritrea. However, most of them do not seek help from their friends and the institutions in Norway; because they don't want other people to find out about what they experienced for fear of being stigmatized or simply rumors will go around about them. Therefore, at least for some of those with traumatic experiences, they think, the less the number of people who know, the more they can protect themselves from being stigmatized. And since in Eritrea it is not common for people to go to a psychiatrist and seek help, it cannot be easy for them to seek help in Norway. And even they somehow know and wish to do, but they would need someone to translate for them, which means someone from their community must know. Therefore, some prefer not to seek medical help at all. There are already certain labels and phrases

⁵³<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/03/lampedusa-boat-tragedy-italy-migrants>

the refugees as well as the Eritrean community at large use to refer to those individuals, for example, based, at their age, time of arrival in Europe, the behaviors they display, including for alleged trauma that some of them had to experience.

One of the refugees I interviewed told me as follows (A-8):

In Eritrea, it is uncommon to ask psychological help, but if you do, you will be stigmatized forever from the community. You will have difficulty to get accepted and have a normal life again, including finding a partner for marriage. Here, I feel it is normal, and I think about going to ask for help sometimes, but then, I would need a translator. So, I prefer to keep quiet (Participant A-8)⁵⁴.

Overall, when there is someone who experienced some kind of trauma, it's likely to affect their integration process negatively. For example, their language learning may not progress as well as their counterparts who didn't have such experience. Because such people tend to keep few company or go out less often to meet people, it is likely their language learning progress and integration ability to lag behind.

In the last 7 years, many things happened in my family back home, including recently the death of my mom. She was sick for almost two years but as a political refugee, I could not go back and see her before she passed away. I was not allowed to go legally but it would have been a huge risk for my life even I were to go anyway. So, the only thing I could do was pray for her recovery. So, now despite the security and relatively good life, I enjoy in Norway, the fact that my mom passed away before I could see her one more time is something that will continue to pain me for the rest of my life. (Participant A-8).

Similarly, other researchers Abebe and Hjelde (2014) found that trauma and mental health issues are the main problems of immigrants in many countries nowadays. The study revealed that people with immigrant backgrounds are found to be more affected by mental health issues than the general population (Abebe & Hjelde, 2014).

⁵⁴ Similar responses were given by A-5 and A-6

7.10 Politicians and Media as A Barrier to Integration

Another barrier the refugees spoke about and were worried was the far-right politicians and nationalist talk and the role of the media as purveyors of their often-unfriendly messages towards refugees and immigrants. Some politicians presented the refugees as a threat to the Norwegian society. One participant from the key respondents had to say:

When it comes to refugees, the right-wing politicians are over doing it. Norway should be known for its humane, including, and generous immigration culture. However, sustaining welfare must be balanced between the number of immigrants and refugees we take because we cannot have both. We must have a sustaining welfare system and a healthy number of immigrants and refugees (A-25).⁵⁵

As Richard (2016) argues, there are those who argue, possibly from a nationalist stance, that refugees cause harm to the receiving nations, mainly by draining state resources. Similarly, Eliran (2013) while examining Israel's response to Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers in the country shows how the rejection practices towards refugees emerge primarily as a result of a process of common identity construction which creates an image of these refugees as a "threat", thus marginalizing in the name of "national security".

Especially, in the Eritrean refugee's case, many of them live with various kinds of trauma already from what they experienced in their life as members of the national service and all the things they had to face during their journey. So, such nationalist talk cannot be helpful. Instead, it sabotages their efforts to integrate. Therefore, it plays both directly and indirectly in reminding refugees that they are not welcome which then can discourage them from making the necessary efforts to integrate. As one of the participants of the focus group discussion said:

I have been living in Norway for almost seven years and from my experience, there is a tendency in some media outlets and some politicians, especially the far-right (FRP)⁵⁶, they see the refugee as a threat to the Norwegian society and the Norwegian welfare state. Their tone is divisive and excluding, and they are pointing their finger at us "the refugees" most of the time. This is the worst thing to hear day in- day out for those of us trying to integrate and contribute to the

⁵⁵ A-25 is a pastor

⁵⁶FRP- Progress party: is a Norwegian political party, founded on 8 April 1973. The party belongs to the right side in Norwegian politics and describes itself as liberal Democratic Party. <https://snl.no/Fremskrittspartiet>

Society. Personally, it makes me so sick to see in their posts in social media all the time. For me, despite my efforts to integrate and become part of the society, however, I am continuously reminded that I am "outsider" by the far-right rhetoric. But it's also good to know that the intolerance of the refugees and immigrants is only in the minds of politicians not the majority of Norwegian people (Participant A-9)⁵⁷.

Similarly, another issue raised during the discussion is the delays in processing cases for family reunion. As one of the participants from "the Periphery" Municipality stated:

My family (my wife and two children) waited in Ethiopia for more than two years while I was in the introduction program for integration. I recall how difficult it was for me to be mentality engaged in the integration program because I was constantly worrying about my wife and our two children (A -9).

Likewise, the participants highlighted that the continuous change, tightening of the Immigration rules, renewal of residence permit has made their future uncertain. Regarding the impact of toughening of immigration rules in recent years, one participant from "the City" municipality had to say:

Withdrawal of the Norwegian citizenship from some refugees have made me to live in constant fear. I was active in two voluntary organizations [in "the City" Municipality] but now I stopped; so, that I will not be subjected to some personal questions from other locals in the organizations. Perhaps, today it is happening only to refugees and asylum seekers from other countries but next they may turn to Eritreans. So, I worry often about this (participant A-6).

Fleras and Kunz, (2001) emphasized that the medias' role in framing public policy and discourse about immigrants and refugees is huge. This is because, the media not only disseminates policy messages but it also can take a prejudiced position in the way it constructs and promotes specific issues (Fleras & Kunz, 2001, as cited in, Esses, Medianu, & Lawson, 2013). For example, media reports in Norway on immigrants from 2009 (Islam in Europe, 2010), found 71% of stories on immigration or integration to be problem-focused.

⁵⁷ Similar response from A-7 & A-12

As long as refugees and immigrants are seen to pose “threats” by some politicians and media outlets, some elements from the hosting society can easily find the justification for the need to protect themselves. Therefore, the media depictions of refugees and immigrants as potential threats to the host society, not only encourages dehumanization of immigrants and refugees but can also provide ready justifications for the dehumanization and consequent outcomes.

7.11 Technology and Social Media as A Barrier to Integration

In their study of the recently reviewed literature, Stransburger, Jordan and Donnerstain (2010) found out that there are worries about the Internet and social media on aggression, sexual behavior, eating disorder and poor performance in academic. During the focus group discussions and interviews with the refugees, one barrier commonly mentioned to their integration was dealing with technology and especially social media. First and foremost, most of them came from places where they didn't have the kind of facilities and technologies that they found in Norway including, mobile phones, the internet. In most cases, they never had to deal with any those gadgets or the array of services they have to deal with this time. Therefore, it is difficult for many of the refugees to avail themselves the possibilities that technology and social media can offer. And it is interesting to note that those very tools that help ordinary people to make their better and comfortable could turn out to be the means that separated refugees from the world around them. On the other hand, they highlighted that later on, as they started to get more and more familiar with the different social media tools, such as Youtube, Facebook, Viber. given their circumstances, it could be argued that in some ways it helped them to entertain themselves and to stay in touch with family and friends. On the other hand, it acted as an invisible wall around them from going out and meet the local residents in the Municipality. One of the participants of the focus group discussion had to say:

When I was in the introduction program, every day, together with some friends, we were spending many hours watching Eritrean and Ethiopian movies on YouTube.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ YouTube is an internet service for publishing videos.

Similarly, I was also spending many hours talking with my friends, family members using the free apps such as Viber⁵⁹, whatsapp⁶⁰(A-6)⁶¹.

So, generally, it can be said that technology and especially social media was not exploited as much as possible for all the possibilities it could be employed for due to the poor know-how the refugees had in the beginning. Instead, they used to spend a lot of the time watching Youtube and Facebook wasting their time unproductively. Because of this reason, social media cannot be said it was as useful as it could have been, especially during the first year of the introduction program.

7.12 Unrealistic Expectations as A Barrier to Integration

It is quite common to find among the refugees from Eritrea all sorts of misconceptions they had with regards to life in Norway and Europe. It was highlighted during the interviews that some of them thought when they arrive and work in Norway; they would get rich very quickly and live a happy and comfortable life. Besides all the other challenges, it also seemed that they did not give much thought to how much it would cost to live in Norway, and thus the amount one could manage to save in the end, i.e. after they get a job. So, it was not a pleasant surprise for many to discover that the reality was quite different in many ways. Moreover, when they slowly started to realize that life seemed a lot harder and many found it very difficult to adjust and cope up with life. And for many, that was something they had not prepared to confront. One of the participants of the study from “the City” Municipality said:

I came to Norway because everyone was talking about Norway since we were in Ethiopia, Sudan, Libya, and Italy until I reach Norway. Everyone was mentioning Norway as one of the best countries to live happy life. So, also hoped to work and

⁵⁹ Viber is a mobile VoIP voice app originally developed for iPhone. It uses proprietary signaling and speech coding, and can only communicate with other Viber phones. It was launched in 2010 and created by the Russian firm Sprit DSP.

⁶⁰Whatsapp is a free downloadable messenger app for smartphones. It uses the internet to talk, send messages, audio, and video

⁶¹ Majority of the participants of the focus group discussion gave similar response

pay all the money that my relatives paid for me to the smugglers for my journey all the way from Eritrea until Norway. But now, even that seems a remote possibility. (Participant A-6)⁶²

One part of the frustrations refugees and migrants experience once they get to Norway seems to originate from the imaginary exaggerated expectations they had before their arrival in Norway. As the mother of seven children from Syria who decided to return voluntarily from Norway to their earlier refugee camp in Lebanon said, “*When we first learned that we were coming to Norway, we considered it as if we were going to Heaven. We thought all our problems would end and our lives would be perfect from then on. However, since the day we set our foot into Norway, we haven’t even had a single night good sleep*”. The story of this family is one example of others who are returning on their own accord to where they came from.

According to the statistics Norway and IOM (2016), in 2015, 1167 people returned their home voluntarily with the help of International Organization for Migration (IOM) and those who decided to return voluntarily get financial and practical assistance. Similarly, 1456 people left Norway voluntarily in 2016; Majority of them were from Iraq, followed by Afghanistan and Iran. Furthermore, people decided to return voluntarily get financial incentive from UDI in Norway for some limited period (Gravdahl & Wilskow, 2016). A person can get 20,000 Kroner if he/she applies for return before a deadline expires; otherwise only 7, 000 kroner. Similarly, if a person can provide a valid passport, he/ she gets an extra money of 5,000 Kroner.

In hindsight, one would be tempted to say, "how come the refugees and migrants didn't know at all of what to expect about life in Norway before they arrived, or hadn't tried to find out, or if they did, how could they only know only about the good things"? And perhaps one could be forgiven to assume if the refugees had a prior knowledge of how things would turn out to be, they could have made a better decision or to arrive in Norway better prepared to cope up with whatever they find. However, owing to the conditions in which they were living and the way they arrived, this is almost too much leisurely for them to think in advance. In the first place, it would sound impractical to expect someone whose life was in danger or their live-hood completely destroyed to bother about what they could expect in the new place. Because there is

⁶² Similar response was given by A-7, A-5, and A-8

already a place to stay, which they are lacking right then. Everything else is not important at that point and would be relegated for later decisions. In their minds, they would say, "Once I get there, I will know what to do".

It is only when all of a sudden, they find themselves confronted with the uncanny reality and great challenges for which they are poorly equipped, from not having the required skills for the job market to the cold climate with inadequate sunlight, a totally different culture. All of a sudden, what they had before, however, ugly and cruel it were, may seem to be relatively better now than they thought before. In other words, where they used to see only the "bad in everything," now the bad takes secondary place, and they begin to see the "good things" as well. Now they would realize some good things they had that they either took for granted or didn't give much importance to. There was life around them. For example, being with their families in a familiar environment, the weather with which they were familiar and used, they had a language they could communicate with people around them, friends, their food, culture. However, right now, in this unfamiliar place, they find themselves consumed by loneliness despite all the things they have been provided with, the language is of no use; their food and culture is missing, the climate is fighting them, no family and friends are around. Also, without all these, what could they be?! Life loses meaning to them. And no wonder many felt utterly empty inside and deprived of happiness. That's why some of them have been willing to return to where they came from voluntarily, like the one Syrian family or in the worst scenarios, driven to commit suicide or others have fallen into crimes they could not imagine committing before.

7.13 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented all the possible barriers of integration from the interview and focus group discussions of all the participants of the study.

The main barrier identified an obstacle for the integration of refugees was the inadequate personal efforts from the refugees. Besides, language, cultural differences, inability to find employment, health issues, separation from their families and friends, traumas they experienced during their journeys, views expressed by right-wing politicians and the role of the media outlets, has been identified by the study participants as obstacles for their integration.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

8.1 Conclusion

The arrival of refugees in Europe, Scandinavia and Norway and the subsequent challenge of their integration into the host countries has been at the sparked a public debate in all arenas, especially with the start of the Middle East turmoil. As part of this wave, many young Eritreans have been coming to Norway in large numbers to escape from a limitless “national service” without pay, economic difficulties and lack of basic freedom in the country in all its forms.

The aim of the present study was to highlight the integration of the Eritrean refugees into the Norwegian society at the municipality level. Specifically, the study’s purpose was to identify some of the most important barriers dragging down the integration process of the refugees, as identified by them. To accomplish that and thereby also to answer the main research question raised in this study, i.e. *“What are the main integration barriers for the refugees from Eritrea to integrate into the two municipalities in western Norway?”*, the author conducted one-on-one interviews as well as focus group discussions with the refugees. Additionally, local residents, refugee guides, and external stakeholders were interviewed and consulted to share their views and experiences on the integration of the Eritrean refugees in the municipalities.

Theoretically, the study adopted the integration framework by Ager and Strang (2004, 2008) which was found to be relevant in explaining the barriers to the integration of refugees in the host society. Also, street-level bureaucracy theory (Lipsky, 1980) was employed due to the fact that, as Lipsky (1980) points out, whatever “clients” - refugees get from the government is implemented through street level bureaucrats. Therefore, street-level bureaucrats have tremendous influence in the process and it was important to assess their role and solicit their views and opinions. Besides, the views of the local residents, refugee’s guides and other stakeholders in the integration program was included. However, the main focus was the refugees themselves. Accordingly, the refugees were asked to reflect on the integration process and share their experiences in the municipalities they have been assigned to.

Thus, methodologically the study employed a qualitative research by carrying out an in-depth interview with the Eritrean refugees, local people, refugee guides and key informants. Moreover,

a focus group discussion with two groups of Eritrean refugees from the two Municipalities was conducted.

Sample-wise, a purposeful sampling, and snowball sampling techniques were chosen to identify potential participants for the study. With a fewer number of study participants, I have been able to give enough time and attention to listen their stories and reflections concerning the integration program and the challenges they have had along the way, and helped the participants to provide narratives in their own words as much as possible. In most instances, the primary qualitative data was substantiated with secondary sources gathered from pertinent documents and archival records.

The analysis of the one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions showed that insufficient personal initiative on the part of individual refugees was mentioned as main barriers to the integration of the Eritrean refugees. Other obstacles to integration that were mentioned included cultural differences between the Norwegians and the refugees from Eritrea, inability to speak the Norwegian language and failure to communicate with local residents in the municipalities, inability to find employment, health and health-related issues, separation from family and friends, trauma from bad experiences during their journey, social media, right-wing politicians, and some media outlets were identified as additional barriers for the Eritrean refugees in their efforts to integrate into the Norwegian socioeconomic system. Moreover, the study found that even though the refugees had preconceptions about Norwegians as a cold and unapproachable; the participants highlighted that many Norwegians in the Municipality level are supportive and willing to help the refugees to integrate into their communities.

Therefore, by identifying the key barriers to integration to the Eritrean refugees, the study is expected to fill the gaps in the literature and make contributions towards facilitating the integration process of the refugees in the two municipalities and elsewhere. Moreover, those findings made during this research can be expected to aid the work of the refugee guides, local residents and other stakeholders in their efforts with the integration process of the refugees.

However, the study was conducted in two Municipalities out of 428 Municipalities in Norway. Thus, the findings of the study cannot be generalized to represent barriers to integration in the

whole Norway or else in the Scandinavia, or Europe. It is likely that there are other local challenges that hinder refugees from integrating into their host Municipalities in Norway or other countries in Scandinavia or Europe. Even though Eritrean refugees have similar socio-economic background and experience, there might exist different other local contexts that can affect the integration of refugees in every host society. As Shenton (2004) emphasizes, the findings of the qualitative research are the outcome of a smaller number of participants and a restricted area, and it is a challenging to show the findings of the research are transferable to other similar situations and populations.

8.2 Further Scope of the Study

The study has been restricted due to lack of budget and time. However, it raises some rather interesting questions in the process. Some of the potential research questions for future researchers could be:

What would the study reveal if a similar research were to be conducted comparing and the integration of Eritrean refugees, say, those in Norway with other Eritrean refugees from Sweden or Holland or any other nearby country?

The findings of the study were a result of a limited number of participants as well as a restricted geographical area. The participants of the study were small and culturally homogenous; both the study areas are found in Hordaland county, and all the refugees were from Eritrea. So, a similar study with a larger representation of the Eritrean refugees from other Municipalities might reveal a bigger picture about the barriers to integration.

As it is mentioned earlier, those who came to Norway as refugees came with a different set of values and Norms. Norway is characterized by democracy, gender equality, freedom of expression and faith, tolerance and respect and contribution in the form of participation in different voluntary organizations and in the general welfare system of the society in general. Similarly, Norway has guidelines regarding rights and upbringing of the child; however, the refugees had a different background and had a different experience in their upbringings. Besides, they came from dictatorial regimes, some of them from tribal societies. At the same time, they are expected to embrace the Norwegian values immediately after their arrival. So, how these two

scenarios affect their willingness to integrate into the Norwegian society? This might give another perspective and insight with to barriers to integration.

8.3 Concluding remarks

The research has been able to identify several factors that contribute to the challenges of the Eritrean refugees that hamper them from integration with the residents of the host municipalities as well institutions of the state. Those obstacles included lack of sufficient personal initiative and efforts of the individual refugees; inability to communicate with the locals, cultural differences, inability to find employment, health issues, separation from their families and friends, traumas they experienced during their journeys, views expressed by right-wing politicians and the role of the media outlets that hinder them from achieving the expected progress in the integration program. While most of those identified factors are more or consistent with other research findings in the area of refugee integration, for example, unemployment, health, language problem (Ager & Strang, 2004; 2008). However, in Eritrean refugee's case from those two municipalities, lack of personal initiative was found to be the most important contributing factor to their slow progress in the integration process. Other less important but may uniquely apply in the case of those refugees, and Eritrean refugees in general are, the effect of the traumas they experienced, during and before they embarked on the journey to reach Europe seem to have significant effects in their lives and in impacting negatively their integration.

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Appendix A: Letter of Introduction from University of Bergen



UNI VERSITY OF BERGEN
Department of Administration and Organization Theory

To whom it may concern

Date
01.11.2016

Letter of introduction

This letter is to introduce Mr. Dawit W. Manna 20.10.1982. He is currently pursuing a MPhil degree in Public Administration at the Department of Administration and Organization Theory, University of Bergen, Norway.

Mr. Dawit W. Manna has completed one year of course work and is now doing research for his thesis on the topic:

“The Integration of Refugees in Norway: Reflection from the Eritrean Refugees in Two Municipalities”

As an important part of this exercise he has to interview various persons and collect relevant documents. I hope you may assist him in the research. The information provided to him is for academic purposes only. Any assistance given to him is highly appreciated.

Be assured that any information provided will be treated in the strictest confidentiality.

The thesis is supervised by Professor Marit S. ISkivenes.

Yours sincerely,

Denise Fewtrell Flatmark
Higher Executive Officer

This document has been electronically approved and therefore has no handwrittensignatures

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Appendix B: Information Letter

The Integration of Refugees in Norway: Reflection from Eritrean Refugees in Two Municipalities

Information letter to the participants of the study

Background and Purpose

I am a student at the University of Bergen, Department of Administration and Organization Theory. This Master Degree Thesis study is being carried out as part of the requirement for the fulfillment towards the degree of Masters of Philosophy in Public Administration.

The purpose of the survey is to explore what barriers exist to the integration of the refugees from Eritrea in two municipalities in western Norway. And the primary focus will be to study the experiences of the refugees from Eritrea during their integration into the Norwegian socio-economic system and to find out the challenges they had in the process. Therefore, to gain a better understanding, the study is conducting interviews with the Eritrean refugees, residents, key informants and refugee guides at the two municipalities under study. Besides, a focus group discussion is planned with the Eritrean refugees at the two municipalities

The nature of the study is qualitative research. Hence the participants and study sites have selected purposefully. Furthermore, the study will make use of secondary data from relevant documents and literature.

What does participation in the project imply?

I would like to talk to you about your experience in the integration program and the challenges you have had during the process. Each interview is expected to take approximately no more than 45minutes.

The interview will be audiotaped (with your prior permission!) so that I don't miss what you have to say and also to help me not to misquote you. And your interview and the information you

will provide will be kept confidential and solely be used for the purpose of the study. Only the researcher and his supervisor can have access to the data you provide. However, if you are uncomfortable, you can ask to turn it off at any stage during the interview. Besides, during the meeting, I will also try to take some notes whenever necessary.

What will happen to the information about you?

All personal data you provide such as your name, age, your address back home or current residence address and other details about you will be kept confidential. The views and opinions expressed by all participants will only be used only for the purpose of the study. However, where it is necessary to quote you directly, your name and other identifying information will be kept anonymous.

Moreover, the project is scheduled for completion by June 01, 2017. And from then on all your personal data such as names, age and reference numbers as well as any digital audio records, that can be identified directly or indirectly, will no longer be needed and therefore, will be destroyed completely.

Voluntary participation

Involvement in this study is entirely voluntary, and therefore, anyone of you has the right and freedom to withdraw your consent without the need to give any reason for your decision at any stage during the study. So, if anyone decides to retire, all the information you provided already will be destroyed and omitted from the final reporting.

Signing the form implies that you are confirming that have read and understood all the information on it and hence giving your consent to participate in the study.

Contact details

If you have any questions about the study or anything you need to know more about, please contact Dawit. W. Manna, E-mail: Dawit.Manna@student.uib.no; Tlf + 47 4058 7657.

The project is being conducted under the supervision of Marit Skivenes (Professor). You may contact my supervisor by E-Mail: Marit.Skivenes@uib.no ; Tlf+47 55 58 25 87 / +47 959 24 97

A notification has been sent to the Data Protection Official for Research - Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) about the present study.

Informed consent to participate in the study

I am clear about the purpose of this study, and I understand what is involved in being part of the study, and I am willing to participate

(Full Name in Block Letter and Signature and Date of the participant)

Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Guidelines

Semi-Structured Interview Guideline for Qualitative Interviews with the refugees from Eritrea

Thank You for Your participation in the study. First, shall we start with a little bit introduction about your background? Could you please tell me a bit about yourself? Such as your education level, your age, the number of years you have stayed in Norway?

Refugee's daily experience as being part of the integration program in the municipality

1. What does integration mean to you?
 2. Do you feel like part of the residents in the municipality? Do you feel as you are part of the community?
 3. Do you have contact with your neighbors/residents?
 4. Is it easy to make friendship in the municipality? Yes or no? Please, give some reasons for your answer.?
 5. Have you tried to find a paid job during/after the integration program? If yes: How was your experience?
 6. If you did not get an opportunity for a paid work, what do you do?
 7. Do you participate in the voluntary activities in the municipality? If no: why?
 8. Did you have challenges during the integration program? If yes, what were the main ones?
- ❖ **About the residents in the municipality**
9. How do you get to know your neighbors or residents?
 10. Tell me about the local people in the municipality? Are they approachable and easy to make friendship with them?
 11. Are the residents welcoming during a social gathering and other activities in the municipality?
 12. Have you experienced any hostility from the locals in the district? If yes, could you tell me about it, please?
 13. Is there anything else you would like to add concerning the residents?

❖ **About the refugee guides during the integration program**

14. When you arrived for the first time, did you get immediate help/ support from refugee consultants?
15. Whenever you seek information, whom do you go to first? Refugee guide/ friend, neighbor? Why?
16. Did the support you get from the refugee consultants stop at any time during your integration ever? If yes, how did influence you?
17. Overall, how was your experience with the refugee consultant?
18. Is there anything else you would like to add about the refugee consultants?

I. Semi-Structured Interview Guidelines for the refugee guides in the Two Municipalities

Thank You for Your willingness to participate in this interview. Shall I start with your background? Could you please tell me about yourself? Such as your age, education, work experience as refugee guide?

1. How long have you worked as a refugee guide and how many refugees are under your guidance presently?
2. How is it working with people who have a different background from your own? Do you find it challenging working with refugees? If yes, please give me some reasons?

About the Eritrean Refugees

3. Concerning the integration program, how do you see the Eritrean Refugees?
4. How do you see the refugees from Eritrea? Do they show readiness and initiatives to integrate?
5. Are there any administrative challenges you have faced while working with the refugees from Eritrea? And, what strategies do you use to overcome the challenges?

6. In your opinion, what do you think are the main challenges for Eritrean refugees to integrate into Norwegian society?
7. Have you experienced any hostility from the refugees during the integration program? If yes, could you tell me about it, please?

About the Local People

8. Do you think the local populations are open to diversity and welcoming to the refugees?
9. Do the residents and refugees have real interaction? If no: what do you say is the problem?
10. What more do you think can be accomplished through the integration of refugees with the residents? If yes: what are they? Is there anything else you would like to add concerning the Integration program?

II. Semi-Structured Interview Guidelines for residents in the two Municipalities

I appreciate your volunteering to take part in the discussion. Could you please tell me about yourself? Such as your work, your residence in the district?

Interview Guideline for the residents

1. How do you feel about the resettlement of the Eritrean refugees in your municipality?
2. Now that you are living here, do you think the residents are open to the increase in diversity?
3. Are you involved in any way in the integration program? If yes, in what ways?
4. How do you access the participation of Eritrean refugees in any social and other voluntary activities in your municipality?
5. What do you think are the main challenges for the refugees from Eritrea to integrate into the society?

6. Do you hold the opinion that the refugees are integrating well in the municipality? Yes/no? Please, give details. What do you think could have been done for a better integration of the refugees?
7. Is there anything else you would like to say about the Eritrean refugees in your municipality?

III. Semi-Structured Interview Guidelines for the key participants in the study

Thank you for your willingness to partake in this discussion. Could you please tell me about yourself? Is it also possible for you tell me a little bit about your organization and how you are involved with the integration program of refugees and since when?

Interview Guidelines for the Key informants

1. Can you tell me about your organization and its aim and role in the integration of the refugees?
2. How do you see the Eritrean refugees and the local people as far as refugee integration is concerned?
3. How does your organization contribute to the integration of the refugees? Could you tell me about it?
4. How do you assess the readiness and interaction of the Eritrean refugees and local people in the events your organization arranges?
5. Do you think that the refugees are integrating well? If not: what do you think could have been done for a better integration of the refugees?
6. What do you think are the main barriers for the refugees from Eritrea to integrate into the Norwegian society?
7. Is there anything else you would like to say in relation the integration of the refugees`?

IV. Semi-Structured Interview Guidelines for Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

(With the Refugees of the two Municipalities)

1. What does integration mean to you?
2. Do you consider yourself as being part of the residents in the municipality?
3. Do you feel at home in the city? If not, why?
4. How was your experience with the refugee guides during the integration program? Are they supportive and compassionate?
5. Has there been discrimination that you experienced personally and in any form from the refugee guides? If there has been, tell me about it, please?
6. How do you see the local residents toward the Eritrean refugees? Are they welcoming/supportive? Or anything else?
7. What were your main challenges during the integration program? And what do you think could have been done for an effective integration of refugees?
8. Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience in the integration program?