

# OSLOMET

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## **Integration challenges: Immigrant women's experiences**

**The challenges immigrants women face during the integration process via Adult  
Education Center**

## **ABSTRACT**

Integration is a key process for both institutions and immigrants. Immigrants who already have a miserable past make efforts for a stable and calm life, and the institution's objective is to empower them to integrate into society as early as possible. Despite all these, immigrants face challenges in adapting to their new host country, integrating with the social system and society. In this study, we collect challenges faced by women during the integration process at the Adult Education Center (AEC), facilitated by institutions for language training. This study is a subpart of a broader research project, about the immigrant's women's experience of health, work, and disability pensions. This study is based on qualitative data collected during my two months fieldwork at the AEC as participant observant by conducting informal interviews with the participant and my personal first hand observations.

Later, I discuss how AEC facilitates the core domain component of integration into society in the framework proposed by Alastair Ager and Alison Strang. This study also correlates between observed challenges faced by immigrant women with these core domain components.

The study adopts a thematic analysis and the experiences of the participants as discussed with regards to previous challenges, their own sense of improvements during the training and what this means for their integration as well as remaining challenges. Based on the findings of the study, schooling, communication, social & family obligations and better mental health emerges as the most important aspect in terms of integration into the society.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Bobby suddenly collapsed on the floor of the classroom. The teacher consoled her; whereas the whole class looked at her with pity. Bobby regretted and crying while sitting on the floor and had hands on her forehead. The atmosphere of the class suddenly became stressful. Everyone was showing sympathy towards her. She had just lost her appointment with the doctor. She received the SMS for her doctor appointment (Female doctor). She was waiting for this appointment for a long time as she was very much in need to visit the doctor. But the SMS was in Norwegian and she was not able to understand it. In the classroom (around 12 pm) when she asked the teacher to translate/explain the message to her, she got to know that she already missed her appointment at 10 am. After realizing the situation she collapsed on the ground and started crying. She said while crying,

*“I missed my doctor appointment and now I had to pay 250 nok for not showing up” .*

Above incidence is an example of how the linguistic incompetence of immigrant women and their everyday struggle during the integration process are related. Getting an appoint-



ment from a doctor for a typical citizen in Norway is not a struggle. He/she can easily book, cancel or reschedule. However, for immigrant women with poor language skills, getting access to facilities as vital as a doctor's appointment can be such a struggle. The incidence also shows the consequent emotional and psychological trauma faced by immigrant women when they don't succeed in availing these basic facilities like health care or doctor appointment. This incident depicts the necessity of social institutes and the role of language proficiency for integration.

By this project I have explored the experiences and challenges of the immigrant women, who are attending the Adult education centre (AEC) for learning Norwegian language, to get integrated in the Norwegian society. I am also going to discuss the role of AEC to facilitate the core domain component of integration into society in the framework proposed by Alastair Ager and Alison Strang ( Ager and Strang, 2008 ).

## **1.1 Integration**

Integration is the process by which immigrants are accepted into society, both as individuals and as groups ( Penninx, 2003 ) There are two parties involved in the process of integration: the immigrants themselves and the receiving society or country. The characteristics, adaption and efforts of immigrants interact with the receiving society and their institutions. It is the interaction between the two that determines the direction and the ultimate outcome of the integration process ( Penninx, 2003 ).

Immigration to Norway began in the end of 1960's, since then it has continued. Immigrants come to Norway for a variety of reasons like seeking asylum, employment, education, family reunification etc. As soon as the immigrants enter the country, they begin their

quest of acquiring a place in the society. They start integrating themselves to fulfill not only their physical needs like housing, but also their social and cultural needs. Therefore it is important to conduct more study on the integration process of these immigrants.

Recent trends show that an increasing proportion of women among immigrants and in the labor market ( Thorud, 2018 ). Therefore, I chose to study only the first generation immigrant women's experience. For women coming from Asia, Middle east and war-zone countries have different upbringings and mental status in comparison to western society like Norway. They come from a society that has rigid religious and social norms, where women rights are substantially less than male. These women find difficulty in adapting to these cultural shifts and face huge challenges in integrating into society. This thesis focuses on collecting and analyzing these women's experiences.

Language is the first barrier immigrants women face in the host country. Therefore, I chose Adult Education Center (AEC) as a research venue since many newly arrived immigrant women come to learn the Norwegian language course. This venue is a government authorized center that provides language courses along with work practices with aspirations to get out of work quickly. In the class, they get an introduction of Norwegian society values through examples and scenarios used to explain Norwegian language constructs. Women discuss their experience and express their opinions which provide the most suitable venue to study their integration challenges.

Overall this project is a part of a broader research project, about the immigrant's women's experience of health, work, and I focus on the study of the women's experience with social participation and getting work in Norway. In this project, we also try to understand the interplay between immigrant women's experience in the integration process via language courses and society's institutions.

Methodologically, the project forms a qualitative study focusing on participatory observation, in-depth interviews and loose conversation with the participants, key informants interviews, focus group discussion.

## **1.2 Background with literature review**

For newly arrived asylum seekers, Norwegian authorities had introduced a compulsory two-year introduction program. Newly arrived refers to those immigrants to a municipality who have been a resident for less than two years when the decision is made concerning participation in the introduction program ( NIN, 2020 ). The introduction programme became national law in 2004. According to this programme, all eligible participants receive a monthly financial benefit which is called an introduction grant. Upon receiving these grants, participants must attend the full-time introduction program. If they miss any of the class without a legitimate reason, their monthly grant can be reduced.

This introduction program is right and obligatory for the asylum seekers. Program consists of Norwegian language courses, computer courses, and Social studies. Each participant has its own Case worker, who designs specific courses according to participant needs and requirements.

An adult education center is a school for adults. They work as a subsidiary of the state in assisting integration of immigrants into the society. The introduction programme is conducted at Adult Education Centre. Their vision is “Adult learning-key to participation” ( “Oslo VO Skullerud”, 2018 ). To fulfill their vision they provide courses and training to the immigrants. They provide services like Norwegian language courses, job training, further study opportunities to those who are not able to complete their studies from the

home countries or those who do not have any official documents about their qualifications. When they learn Norsk in the class, they also learn about the structure of the host society.

The purpose of the introduction programme is to enhance the opportunities for the labor market participation. Those groups of new arrivals in Norway have to rapidly find work or enter education or training. The aim of labor market participation is represented by the main aim of the program “to strengthen opportunities for newcomers to participate in the labor market and society, and enhance their economic independence” (Introduksjonsloven (the Introductory Act) 2003, §1)

For the proper integration into society, immigrants need some work to fulfill their needs. Work and education are both crucial to ensure participation in society and economic independence ( Fylkesmannen, 2017 ). Employment creates the sense of independence and stability in the individual. For the immigrants, employment is considered as key to integration. According to Ager A. and Stange A. framework ( Ager and Strang, 2008 ) for the integration,

*“Employment has consistently been identified as a factor influencing many relevant issues, including promoting economic independence, planning for the future, meeting members of the host society, providing an opportunity to develop language skills, restoring self-esteem and encouraging self-reliance.”*

However, getting employment in the host country, for the newly arrived immigrant women is not that easy. They have to go through the different selection criteria. Therefore, non-western immigrants have to put extra effort to perforate the way to Norwegian workforce. Often they choose a language course with work practice to achieve their goal. These courses help them to prepare their CV and make the connection to get work practice. Once they get a chance for the work practice, integration becomes positive and easier.

When employees have had the opportunity to show that they can do a good job, the risk of hiring minority employees is diminished. As a consequence, the earnings of minorities may improve in the longer term ( Brekke and Mastekaasa, 2008 ).

There are still some challenges immigrants meet during their integration process at AEC. The term “challenges” , applied to the obstacles and hindrances immigrants women meet in their way to integration into society. These challenges are affecting the participant women’s performance in the classroom and thus the language learning process. The delay in language learning also delays the employment opportunity for the participant women.

In the second part of this thesis, I am going to discuss the challenges and facilities provided by institutions in correlation with the Ager A. and Stange A. framework ( Ager and Strang, 2008 ) for the integration. Ager A. and Stange A. framework specify ten core domains that shape understandings of the concept of integration, which are defined in the next chapter “Theoretical Framework” . The framework accommodates common elements in existing attempts to define and measure integration.

We can conclude that to explore the services provided to the immigrant’s women and their needs. Few good surveys have been done that attempt to map immigrant’s women’s view of their own participation in society and work. Therefore, it is important to gather the knowledge about what hinders occupational participation and what can be done to solve or reduce such obstacles among this community group (IMDI, 2009). From this study, I tried to explore an in-depth understanding of the situation of non-western immigrant’s women and their experiences to get integrated into society.

## 1.3 Research Question

We can observe from previous research that culture, social and structural conditions are likely to affect these women's health and employment participation. The study evinces the following research problems for the study at hand related to women from the non-western minorities background. For this study, I am going to explore

**“The challenges immigrants women face during the integration program and their impact on the core domain of integration.”**

### Objective

This study attempt to address the following key research objectives:

- To gain knowledge about the interaction between immigrants women strategies and facilities provided by the social institution for their integration.
- The role of the social institution for promoting immigrant women in Norwegian mainstream.
- What are challenges immigrant women face to integrate into society, financial, socially and with family?
- How their cultural background of immigrant women influences the integration process?
- Are the institutions working on the core domain of integration?
- What are the impact challenges over the domain of integration?

## **Thesis Structure**

In the following chapter, firstly, I would explain the theoretical framework used for analysis. The third chapter will be on methodology and ethics, where a brief explanation of the methodology used for data collection from fieldwork will be provided; this would be followed by describing the limitations of the study and ethical considerations taken during the fieldwork. Following chapters contain the results obtained at the fieldwork, discussing the results with the core domain of integration and conclusion.

## Chapter 2

### Theoretical Framework

Throughout the 19th century and well into the 20th, Norway was a net exporter of people. About one third of the population emigrated before world war I, mostly to North America - at a rate among the highest in Europe. After 1945 this flow reduced to trickle and since the late 1960s, Norway has been a net importer of people ( “Immigration, Assimilation, and National Identity”, 2015 ). Since then Norway has been actively working for the integration of immigrants.

Alongside the rapid growth of the ethnic minority population, debates about integration, immigration policy, multiculturalism and national identity have flourished in Norway, and have, as in many other European countries, become a central political issue since the end of the cold war (Eriksen, 2013). As it was stated in my thesis that, in Integration two parties are involved : the Immigrant themselves and the receiving society or country. The interaction between these two determine the outcome of the integration process. Integration can only be “freely” chosen and successfully pursued by non-dominant groups when the dominant



society is open and inclusive in its orientation towards cultural diversity ( Berry et al., 1997).

The integration strategy required non-dominant group to adopt the basic values of the larger society, while at the same time the dominant group must be prepared to adapt national institutions( e.g. education, health, labour) to better meet the needs of all groups now living together in the plural society( Berry et al., 1997 ). But, Immigration becomes a challenge to traditional communities that may feel their culture and stability are being threatened, involving an obvious potential for political polarization (). Thus the problem of acculturation arises. In culturally heterogeneous societies people are confronted with acculturation issues( Simon B. 2004, 141). John W. Berry's Social- Psychological model( Berry et al., 1997 ) explains the acculturation and how societies become culturally plural due to immigration. According to this model Berry explains the four different strategies of acculturation: Integration occurs when the individual maintains balance between cultural integrity and the participation in the majority group of the society. Assimilation occurs when the individuals do not want to maintain their cultural identity and adapt to a new identity of the majority group of the new country. Separation is defined as when the individual wants to retain his or her own cultural identity and avoids interaction with the dominant group of the society. It is opposite to assimilation. Marginalization happens when there is a lack of both in- and out-group relations, which leads to neither maintenance of their cultural identity nor participation in the new society of the dominant group ( Berry et al., 1997 ). Alastair Ager and Aliston Strang's conceptual framework of Integration ( Ager and Strang, 2008 ) has also been a suitable approach for my thesis. This framework represents the steps of integration and resettlement of immigrants in a more explanatory way. According to Alastair Ager and Aliston Strang's Framework of Integration: Key domains of integration are proposed related to four overall themes: achievement

and access across the sectors of employment, housing, education and health; assumptions and practice regarding citizenship and rights; processes of social connection within and between groups within the community; and structural barriers to such connection related to language, culture and the local environment.

The framework specifies ten core domains that shape understandings of the concept of integration. The domains cover achievement and access across the sectors of employment, housing, education and health; assumptions and practice regarding citizenship and rights; processes of social connection within and between groups in the community; and barriers to such connection, particularly stemming from lack of linguistic and cultural competences and from fear and instability. The framework accommodates common elements in existing attempts to define and measure integration, reflects perceptions of key issues determining local integration for refugees and non-refugees in two refugee-impacted settings, and was considered coherent and of utility by a range of policy-makers and service providers ( Ager and Strang, 2008 ).

Following are the different domains presented by the Ager and strange:

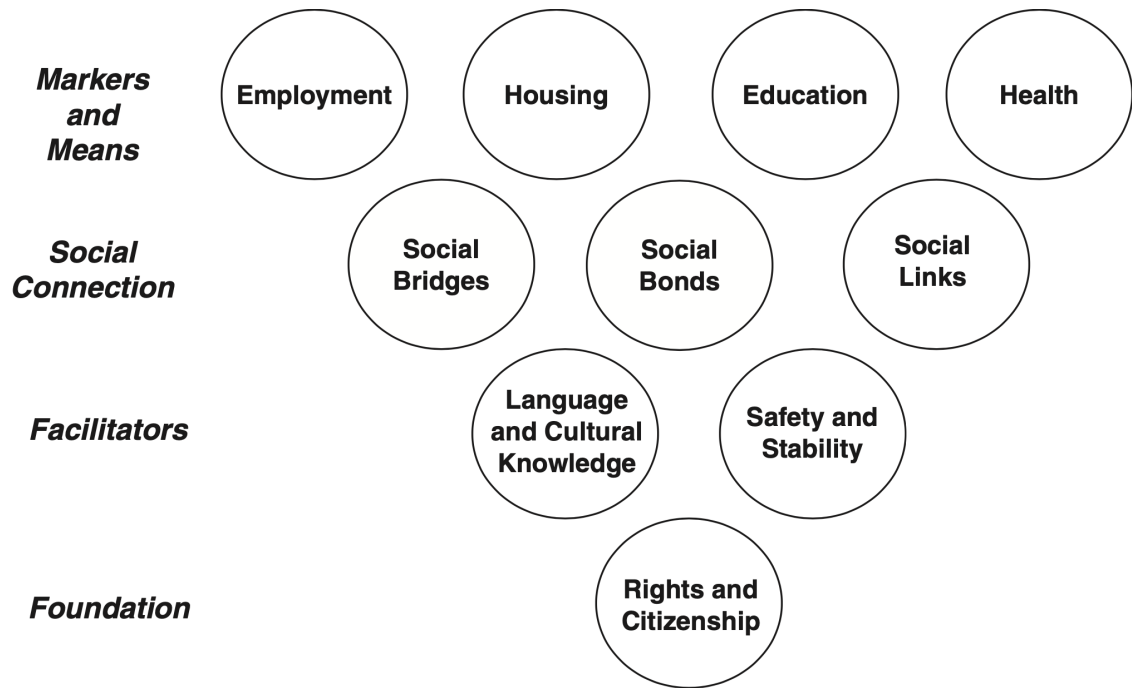


Figure 2.1: A Conceptual Framework Defining Core Domains of Integration (Ager and Strang, 2008)

## 2.1 Markers And Means

Employment, Housing, education and Health are potential means for refugees to achieve Integration in the society. However it is problematic to see achievement in these areas purely as a marker of integration ( Ager and Strang, 2008 ). In this thesis, it's very relevant to see how refugees are working to achieve this means and marker or they are not aware of it all.

**Employment:** Employment has consistently been identified as a factor influencing many

relevant issues, including promoting economic independence, planning for the future, meeting members of the host society, providing opportunity to develop language skills, restoring self-esteem and encouraging self-reliance ( Brochmann, None Brochmann, 2015 Brochmann, None . Ager A. and Strange A. have considered the importance of employment for the integration . They have mentioned in the paper that the ‘resettle programme’ should include vocational training and further education for the immigrant, so that employability of refugees can be fostered.

**Housing:** Authors argue in this paper that a home is the place, which gives a sense of safety, stability and security to the individual. Housing conditions and neighborhood affects one’s physical and emotional wellbeing. Therefore for better development and integration of the refugee, better housing conditions are necessary.

**Education:** Authors say that education provides skills and competence for the future employment. In addition to that schools give opportunity to the refugee’s children and their parents to meet with host society.

**Health:** Authors say that good health is important for the refugees for their active engagement in society. Better health provision for the special health condition of the refugees is necessary.

## **2.2 Social Connection**

Social connection works as a mediator between the foundation and markers of this framework. Social connection is important for refugees to feel belongingness into the new country. Ager A. and Strange A has further divide the social connection into following 3

forms:

**Social Bond:** The bond between the family and co-ethnic is called social bond. Social bond enabled refugees to share cultural practices and maintain familiar patterns of relationships. These connections play a vital role for refugee settlement.

**Social Bridge:** social connection between individuals and other communities is called social bridge. These relationships are necessary for the social harmony in the society and for social inclusion of the refugees.

**Social Links:** It's defined as social connection with the structures of the state. Social link is necessary to achieve genuine equality of access to services .

To provide better access to the services and connecting the refugees with the relevant services, Ager A. and Strange A proposed the role of facilitators.

## 2.3 Facilitator

To remove the barriers and facilitate the local integration of the refugees, language and cultural knowledge; and safety and security, were identified as a discrete domain.

**language and cultural knowledge:** Ager A. and Strange A argues that cultural competence are perceived to be necessary to effectively integrate within the wider community. Being able to speak the main language of the host community is, for example, consistently identified as central to the integration process.

**Safety And Stability:** Sense of personal safety is important for the integration. Refugees feel integrated , when they feel physically safe in the area.

Community stability is potentially an important facilitator of integration. Continued mobility in the wider community decreases the sense of belonging in the community thus the integration as well.

Further, to better understand the standards and expectations of the integration, Ager A. and Strange A have proposed “ Citizenship and Rights” as a foundation domain.

## **2.4 Foundation**

**Citizenship and Rights:** Ager A. and Strange A have mentioned ‘Citizenship and Rights’ as a necessary foundation for a shared understanding of what integration is and how it may be measured. According to the paper, in a ‘integrated community’ refugees should have the same rights as the people among which they are living. Equal rights give sense of nationhood and belonging to the refugees. citizenship shapes core understandings of the rights accorded, and responsibilities expected, of refugees.

Even though the framework specifies ten discrete domains, they all are interdependent. Like housing is dependent on safety and security. Similarly employment is dependent upon education, language and rights. This framework provides the core domain of integration to measure the level of integration into the society. Therefore multiple dimensions of this theory is very relevant to analysing the process of integration of my participants at AEC.

# Chapter 3

## Methodology and Ethics

This research investigates the complex shade of the socioeconomic process and studies the relationship between individuals and society at AEC (research venue). Qualitative methods of data collection and analysis are the best suited for this research. Participatory observation, informal conversation, and group conversation methods were used for data collection. The data was gathered during 3 months of fieldwork at the adult education center. The whole data collection process included the following steps:

### 3.1 Choosing the Field

This thesis dictates the narratives and strategies used by first-generation immigrant women. The participating immigrant women are proactive and want to play a constructive role in Norwegian society. As an indispensable constraint of the research, a place with proactive but nonintegrated immigrant women was chosen. The adult education center was consid-

ered the perfect venue for the research. Adult education centers provide a highly interesting venue for the study of integration strategies and the narratives of minority women. These are the only prominent facilitators to provide social and language skills, to immigrant women removing the biggest barrier in their societal integration. These centers provide the participant with an opportunity to learn the Norwegian language with work practice. The participants attending language classes in school have some aspirations and dreams about their future which they want to fulfill. From this research project, an understanding of the relationship between these immigrants' women and societal institutions are being understood.

## **3.2 Entering the Field**

Considering all the objectives of the research it was decided that an Adult Education center would be the best place for data gathering. A clearance certificate from the NSD was acquired to conduct the research. As Oslo Metropolitan University reflects the research work of the researcher's master thesis, authorization was requested from the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD). NSD is a center for research data that helps research scholars and students with their research nationally and internationally concerning methods of collecting data, interview guide, informed consent form, recruiting informants, data analysis, informant's privacy, and ethical consideration. In the first step, I applied for approval from the NSD and at the same time started approaching different Adult education centers for fieldwork. Finding an appropriate and suitable venue for the research was hard and tedious. The study was started by approaching different adult education centers for the research. Many of them were skeptical about the research and its outcome. One of the schools thought it would be extra work for the teacher in the classroom and many such



other reasons were provided. The search for the venue finished once I got in touch with one of the adult education centers, situated out of Oslo city. Fortunately, at the same time approval from the NSD to conduct the research was also received. This whole process took almost 3 months. I and my Supervisor went for a meeting with the Principal and class teacher of one of the classes of the adult education center. They were happy to be a part of this project. And agreed to participate in the study. After meeting they accepted the research proposal. One classroom with around 10 students, out of which 8 were women was provided for conducting the study. As the study is based on immigrant's women therefore I focused on immigrant women only. I received the permission to be present in the classroom and observe the participants.

### **3.3 Data Collection**

Once I received permission for the research in the AEC the data collection was started using a participant observation method. Participant observation is when the researcher gains access to research information through working and/or living within a community or groups. Then the information is collected and afterwards interpreted ( Crang and Cook, 2007 ). According to Fangen ( Fangen, 2012 ), participant observation involves two types of simultaneous action: “You interact with others while observing how they act” (p. 29). In order to gain usage of such a method, building good relations with the participants is essential. Thus, during the fieldwork, I tried to connect with immigrant women and then started observing them . During such a conversation, if any relevant data for the study came up, the same was recorded in a notebook or computer. All of this material was safely stored as not to be accessible to anyone except me.

Along with participatory Observation, informal Interviews were also conducted. This depended on the person, the time they had available, and how well we are connected. The data collected was either handwritten in a notebook, or in a computer and some time memorized , which later was written in the notebook. According to the situation I was in, I decided on the form of data collection. It was, for instance, not always natural for me to pull out a notebook or computer while having lunch and hence I would use my memory instead.

The conversation with the teacher and students was always very informal. I mostly just let the conversation go where the informants wanted to take it. This type of data collection, however, happened mainly, and only when I met with people I knew would only have time for that one meeting. Another way of gathering data was through a mixture of informal interviews and loose conversations. Whenever I met new women participants, I would tell her about the research and then start a conversation with her. However, the participants often did not understand how I wanted to conduct her research and thought that I wished to write about their story. They would become very excited about it and start telling about themselves. I therefore always had a few questions on hand to get the conversation started. From there on it mostly flowed freely and let the participants guide the discussion. However, some of the participants thought that I was from some government organization and was working as a spy. Hence, some of the women were very much skeptical about my presence. They always tried to avoid having a conversation with me.

Since I am from South Asia, my skin tone and age were similar to most of the informants and it made it easier for them to connect on a friendship level. I got easily blended in the classroom and social settings. I also became very close to some of the informants and they started sharing their personal problems with me. Maybe this was so because I was not from their community and was not there to judge them.

### **3.4 Position and Gender:**

When doing participant observation, the researcher becomes a big part of the method, and our age, gender, and personality in many ways decides what type of data and access one is able to get ( Zemach and Cohen, 1986 ). My position in the classroom was primarily as an observer. Since I am also an immigrant in Norway and have very primitive knowledge of Norwegian language, this helped me to easily blend among the students. They started treating me as one of their classmates and we soon became friends. My role in the classroom was converted into a helper. Whenever the participants found them stuck in the study they would ask for help from me. My help was asked even for fixing mobile phones or for searching on the ipad. I started helping them with the class work, reading, writing, etc. During the breaks, we would go together to the shops to buy food. We sat together and had lunch. Thus, my conversations with the women were very informal but I always tried to remind them that I was there for research purposes. The primary focus was always on the research topic. But during my research period in AEC, I also observed the behavior of female women towards male classmates.

### **3.5 Key Informants**

All the informants were women, but there were two men who were also involved in the research mentioned in my thesis. These men were not directly my informants but they were indirect informants of the immigrant women narrative. I would introduce these men later in my thesis. Participants for this study are the participants of a particular class of the adult education center. And the research is confined to only first-generation non-western women with minority backgrounds. The reason behind choosing women with

minority backgrounds as a research subject is that they are one of the main representatives of immigrants in Norway. There was no fixed consideration about the age group of the participants and hence I have studied all women in the classroom. A brief introduction of the immigrant women( with Anonymized name), who were the key informants is given below:

**Bobby:** Bobby was a 42 yrs old Middle east woman. She came to Norway a year before. She is a widow and had two teenage children.

**Sajia:** Sajia is a 34yr old woman from the Middle East. She came to Norway around 3yrs ago. She is a single mother of a 3yr old child.

**Farheen:** Farheen came to Norway around 6 month ago for a family reunion. She is also from the Middle East. She has 5 children.

**Nikhat:** Nikhat is a 30 yr old woman from the Middle east. She had 6 children. She has one sick child therefore she is not able to come to school on a daily basis. It, therefore, took some time to get to know her

**Ashima:** she is in her forties. Single woman and came from East Africa.

**Mervat:** she is a 30 yr old married woman from the Middle East. She has 5 girl children.

**Kashish:** Kashish is a 50 yr old woman from south Asia. She came to Norway 30 yr ago. She has 4 children. 2 children are married and one son is working and one son is studying now.

### **3.6 Language**

Most of the informants I met in AEC spoke Arabic, Urdu, and had little knowledge of Norwegian. My knowledge in Urdu and Norwegian helped me to communicate with the informants. As I was on the premises of AEC, informants were here for learning Norwegian language and therefore I also tried to stick on the Norwegian language for conversation.

Bobby was my key informant and bridge between me and the rest of the class. She helped me with Arabic and Pashto speaking informants as well. In some cases, where informants are not able to express themselves, I took the help of some translators (their spouses, male classmates, Bobby, and the class- teacher). The students seemed more enthusiastic about the conversation when allowed to use their native language. When the conversation began in their native language they used more natural ways to express themselves. For example, they made more gestures and hand movements, talked more loudly, used more distinct body language, and sometimes began laughing or crying.

During one to one conversation with informants, I and the class teacher used a translator to have a clear understanding of questions and answers. This situation also led me to get a clear insight into the problem of the language barrier. Language barriers were a problem for the respondents and their outreach.

They used different strategies for tackling this problem. As such, the use of language has become an important part of this thesis. None of the participant could speak English; however few of them are having a very basic knowledge of English. Therefore all the quotes I have used in my thesis are a direct translation or rephrases version of the informants.

### **3.7 Limitation**

The very limitation of the study was the size of the classroom. As I received permission to do the study in only one of the classrooms of the AEC therefore the research was limited to the specific class only. I was not allowed to do the research on any other class. The main focus of the study was only immigrant women. There are only 6-7 women in the classroom, thus the sample size for the research was also limited to 6-7 only.

Another limitation was faced when one day I went to computer class with another teacher. The teacher allowed me to sit in the class, but become very skeptical about my presence in the classroom. She went to meet the principle of the school and enquired about me . Then Rector asked me to do my research during the language class only. Therefore, I was not able to do the research during the class of different subjects. Thus I was not able to see the challenges women are facing in different subjects. Participants only shared their experiences in different subjects with me only during the language class.

The time frame was also one of the limitations during the research work. As I was already late for the fieldwork, I got approximately only 2.5 months' time for data collection. In this time frame, I had to get in touch with the participants and had to gather the data. There were some students in the class like Nikhat who were not able to attend the class regularly. It becomes very difficult to get in touch with these students and collect data from them.

The language was my fourth barrier during fieldwork. As most of the key informants were Arabic speaking women and they have only an elementary knowledge of Norwegian. The lack of knowledge of common language limited my access to some of the information. It created hindrances in obtaining in-depth information on some of the challenges faced by those immigrant women.

Another limitation faced was the inability to recall or rewrite the whole conversation taking place during the lunch and informal conversations with the informants. During such times it becomes very difficult to take notes about it. And after sometime when I wrote about it, due to limitations of the human mind it became difficult to recall all the statements of the informants as it is.

### **3.8 Ethical Consideration**

Ethics is an accumulation of values and principles that address questions of what is good or bad in human affairs. Ethics search for reasons for acting or refraining from acting; for approving or not approving conduct; for believing or denying something about virtuous or vicious conduct or good or evil rules ( Sigona, 2005 ). In social research ethical issues arise at every step. I tried to follow the ethical consideration right from the beginning to the end of the research study. These ethical issues have already been dealt with in their relevant segment. But here I am giving brief detail about it. The ethics followed during the research process are:

- **No harm to participants:** In the research, I dealt with one of the very sensitive issues and minority groups of Norwegian society. The participants of my study are already marginalized in society. They are struggling every day to get integrated into society. They are stressed, tired, and sometimes feel lost in the host society. By understanding their situation, I tried not to harm any person mentally or physically through my query. All data collected from the informants is done only when the informant was willing to give time for the conversations. I tried not to disturb them during their study in the classroom or their daily routine.

- **Informed consent:** When people invite you into their lives and become part of your research, it is important to always have their best interest in mind, follow sufficient ethical guidelines and get their informed consent ( Bringslid, 2017 ). In every step of using research methods, I tried to include these ethics. As I became friends with my informants and spent time with them. In such settings, it might be easy for them to forget that I was primarily a researcher. Sometimes they ended in discussing sensitive things that are relevant to the research. During such times I always asked for their permission to include these things in her thesis.
- **Privacy and Family Life:** The whole research process revolves around immigrant women’s personal, social, or family life. I have tried to maintain the dignity and integrity of the participant during the whole process. Therefore I choose to anonymize all informants as well as a research site. All the names of the informants, age, and origin of the country are anonymized. Even though some of the informants want me to write about their narratives in my thesis, I have chosen to anonymize them, as some of the information shared in this thesis is very sensitive for the informants.
- **Approval for the Research:** As the research topic deals with one section of the society, therefore before starting the fieldwork I had to seek formal approval from the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD). Acquiring the authorization from the NSD was essential to know that all the requirements for the research work were fulfilled and can move to the next step (See Appendix 1). After getting approval from the NSD, I approached the principal of an adult education center and the class teacher of the relevant class. I sent them my research proposal and had a meeting with them. They informed the students that their participation in the study was voluntary and if they want they can deny participating anytime. Once I got the green signal from the teacher and the participants, she presented herself and her project to



the fellow students. Then participants decided themselves as part of a project.

## **Summary**

In the first part of this section, I have tried to describe the way I chose the venue for my fieldwork and how I ended up at one of the Adult education centers in the vicinity of Oslo city. After that, I have explained the methodology of participatory Observation and informal interviews. These methods I used for data collection. In this part, I also briefly illustrated my position during the fieldwork and key informants. Giving the introduction about the key informants in this section makes it easier for the reader to understand the position of the informants. In the last part of this section, I discussed the limitations and ethical considerations during the study.

# Chapter 4

## Women with Migration experience

### Research objective

The main objective of my study is

**“The challenges immigrants women face during the integration process via Norwegian training course”**

In this section, I present my observations and findings from one of the classrooms at the Adult education centre (AEC) in Norway.

#### **Scope of the study : What “Challenges” refers to**

The term “*challenges*” , applied to the obstacles and hindrances immigrants women meet in their way to integration into society. In this chapter, I am going to present the individual challenges that I observed about immigrant women face in the Norwegian language classroom.

During my fieldwork at the school, I gained insight into these challenges through two ways. First, the participants shared their challenges verbally during informal interviews. Second, I identified by “participant observations”. These challenges create hindrance, and complicates the participants’ study plan during the class and after the class. As a result of these challenges, women I spoke to had experienced being left behind in the class, or not able to learn the language properly in the given timeframe of the two year introductory programme.

## **4.1 Background**

### **Adult education centre (AEC)**

In the previous chapter, I explained how I gathered the data by participant observation at the Adult education centre (AEC). The AEC is a school for adults. They work as a subsidiary of the state in assisting integration of immigrants into the society. They provide services like Norwegian language courses, job training, further study opportunities to those who are not able to complete their studies from the home countries or those who do not have any official documents about their qualifications.

In a country like Norway, Language is one of the main tools to integrate into the society. For better and proper social and economical integration, competency of local language is always required. The lack of language competency creates the barrier between the immigrants and host society. Insufficient knowledge of the local language not only restricts the social integration of the immigrant but also limits the job opportunities for the immigrants. AEC is the institute where migrants receives language training and work practice.

## **Key informants**

Before diving into details, let's look into key informants. During the data collection, I was part of the small class in the Adult education centre. They belong to the Alfa class in the Adult Education Centre. The Alfa class represents the class of the students who have none or elementary literacy level. The whole class consists of 9 students. Among these 9 students, 7 students are immigrant women who are my main focus group. Some participants have very elementary knowledge of Norwegian language, whereas some are not even able to read and write. The participants of my thesis are mainly asylum seekers. They all came to Norway six months to two years ago. The age group is between 29-55 year. All participants are having kids except one(Ashima). To hide the actual identity of the participants, the name and age are modified and anonymized. The individual details is presented below:

Participant Name	Age(years)	Literacy level(Class)	Marital Status	No. of Children	Reason to come to Norway	Time Spend in Norway
Bobby	42	Illiterate	widow	2 teenage	Family re-union	2 yrs
Sajia	34	literate upto 4	separated	1 (3yrs)	asylum	2yrs
Farheen	29	Illiterate	married	5 children	Family reunion/ asylum	6 month
Mervat	30	illiterate	married	5 children	asylum	1 yr
Nikhat	30	Not known	married	6 children	asylum	1 yr
Ashima	~ 45	Literate upto some level	single	none	asylum	6 month
Kashish	55	Below 3	married	3 adult children	Family re-union	30 yrs

Table 1: Participants detail

I spent **2 months** attending classes with the participants at the research venue. In the remainder of the chapter, I discuss challenges that I observed during the research work at the AEC.

## 4.2 Challenge 1: Struggle in adapting schooling system

### Never Been to School

As shown in table 1, most of the participants came to Norway as asylum seekers. They all participated in the introduction programme. These programs are developed and planned to help the immigrant women in developing skills that enable them professionally, becoming financially independent and participating in social life. Even though the aim of the school is to make the integration process easier for the immigrant women, my material makes clear that following the programme itself is challenging for many women with migration experience. Many participants came from backgrounds where they never been to any kind of school. Attending regular language class from 8:30 till 15:30 i.e. the whole day and giving attention becomes a challenge. During this whole time they have to learn through all modes of linguistic discipline i.e. reading, writing, speaking and listening which demands continuous use of cognitive skills. This creates the stress and nervousness in the participant behaviour. I observed this when interacting with Bobby, who had never been to school and whose newness to the classroom was evident on my first visit to the school. Bobby was unaccustomed to school rhythm and discipline and now she had to be in school every day. Bobby continuously struggled to learn how to read and write. I was able to clearly observe her nervousness and anxiety in the classroom. When the teacher gave her a task to write their name in Norwegian, she was hardly able to write the whole alphabet correctly organized. During one of the interactions Bobby mentioned:

*“I haven’t been to school before. Now they want me to read and write both. How can I make them understand how hard it is for me? Sometimes I don’t even understand what the teacher is saying. A different subject is having a different teacher. They all are having*

*their own dialect. The general instruction from both the teachers sounds different for me.”*

From the above quote, we can observe Bobby who has never been in any class has found it difficult to give feedback that is not able to follow the class.

Similarly, Farheen, who had just joined the classes, said:

*“In my home country, girls were not allowed to go to school. Therefore I never ever went to school or thought about it. Now after coming to Norway I was sent to school to study. I hardly understand anything. I can’t even read or write. That’s why I only sit in the class looking towards the books.”*

I observed clearly that during the whole class, she just sits there and stares at her book, hardly any eye-contact with other participants. She struggles to put effort in learning. Even the teacher becomes a little hesitant to ask her any question and give her any task. Teacher was conscious that she was new in the class and she had to first become familiar with the classroom system.

Farheen who struggled similarly, also portrayed embarrassment by being with participants for being not able to read and write in the class. When I looked into her, I felt Farheen was trying to make herself invisible in the classroom. She wanted to escape from being questioned by the teacher.

From the above example, it is clear that they are motivated to learn new things but they find it difficult to understand the instructions, and interact in the classroom. The participants are facing challenges due to not accustomed with classroom mode of learning and lack experience from their home country.

### **Stress related to Exam**

Since participants had difficulties following the class, I observed they feel stressed for the exam. The migrant women feel stress and strain if any oral assignments are given to them in the class. I observed that many participants also had fear of being exposed that they didn't understand fully in the class.

One day, when the principal was coming to the classroom to evaluate the learning process of the student, Bobby was shaking due to stress and anxiety. According to Bobby:

*“I am very scared. I haven't slept the whole night. I hope I will make no mistakes while I am reading a book in front of the principal.”*

However, once the principal came, the situation became less tense. to the classroom. Principal had a nice talk with many students. The Principal made an effort to motivate students too when students were reading the chapter. On the other hand, Bobby was reading her book using one hand as a pointer to the book while another hand was biting nails to avoid her nervousness. Even though she smiled a few times when she got stuck somewhere while reading the text in the oral exam.

I observed that some students were avoiding interacting with teachers. Immigrant women require extra time to become familiar with the school system and learning. Since the course duration is just two years to become competent and eligible for the labour market, shortage of the duration with these challenges makes learning quite difficult.

Overall I observed that participants had stress related to the exam or evaluation. The form varies from participant to participants. Some participants didn't like interactive evaluation while others felt stressed in preparing for the exam.



## 4.3 Challenge 2: Communication barriers

### Linguistic skills

I observed that lack of language skill creates hindrance in communication not only in regular life activities of the immigrants, but also greatly affecting their student life. Teacher primarily explains norwegian language constructs like grammar, meaning etc in simple language but still in Norwegian. Teachers do so to deliberately avoid using language according to the pedagogy they follow. Students struggle to grasp it. Teachers were aware about it so they used body language heavily and some time Arabic i.e. native language of some of the participants.

Lack of language competency becomes more visible when students have to go through “utviklings samtale” (development meeting) with the teacher and along with the case leader. Fortunately, The class teacher offered me to be part of this meeting, to know more about my participants. To reduce the language related communication gap between participants and teachers, the institute facilitates a translator for the meeting. During the meeting, the teacher asks questions through a translator and the participants reply through a translator. In this meeting, it was clearly visible that the participant is not comfortable interacting through the translator. For example, a student like Mervat, who is very introverted, was not comfortable answering or even asking questions through the translator. In most of the questions, she only shook her head as a gesture to give an answer. When the teacher asked if she wanted to say anything or anything she was wondering, then she only nodded her head in an express “no” . This shows the lack of linguistic skill creates communication gaps as they are not able to communicate directly and are not comfortable with translators. Similar case also happened with Farheen. Translator service is used by

all the students.

In summary, since they lack basic linguistic skill, the learning curve becomes high at the beginning and creates challenges for them.

### **Communicating to public services**

Many participants shared their personal experience which indicates that lack of linguistic skill not only created challenges in their classrooms but also in dealing with public services. Many participants have come to Norway recently only a few months back. All the participants are from third world countries and hardly had knowledge about the nordic public service works. They face problems in interacting with the social institutions.

For example, Whenever Bobby had some meetings with UDI and NAV regarding her residency application or bank details, she had to inform beforehand that she needed a translator for the meeting. If the translator is not available, then she has to postpone the appointments timing with the NAV. Since Bobby is not directly communicating, she found it difficult to understand what documentation is required. These all multiple visits to UDI and NAV affect her presence in classrooms and studies as well. Even she said,

*“I feel embarrassed when I go to NAV and am not able to communicate anything with the case leader” .*

Another example of linguistic competence struggle was when Bobby missed the doctor’s appointment. Once in the class, she received an SMS for a doctor appointment . Bobby had been waiting for this appointment for a long time as she was very much in need to visit the doctor. But the SMS was in Norwegian and Bobby was not able to understand it. In the classroom(around 12pm) when Bobby asked the teacher to translate/explain messages for

her then she got to know that she already missed her appointment at 10 am. After realizing the situation, she collapsed on the ground and started crying. She started saying that now she has missed her appointment and still she has to pay 250 NOK for not showing up for the appointment.

From these instances, I observe that lack of communication skill makes it difficult to interact with public services and leads to several disadvantages.

### **Digital skills**

In Norway, everyday life activities like shopping, interacting with public services are heavily digitized. I observed some participants struggled to operate and use technical devices. They didn't know how to use the computer and even more what benefit then can take from it. They required help constantly from the teacher and who kept helping them. They face similar problems in operating all modern equipment and gadgets. For example, operating a mobile phone, using shopping cards in shops, using tablet devices studies seems difficult for them.

When these devices are operated in Norwegian language, the struggles get doubled. Especially in the classroom, they weren't able to understand the message shown on the screen and continuously getting stuck with these equipment/ gadgets. Like one-day Sajia's got stuck with her mobile. There was no network on her cell phone and she was not able to fix it by herself. She came to me asking for help. When I asked to restart her cell phone she was unable to do so. I taught her to restart her cell phone and once restated her cell phone started functioning. They are not familiar with smartphones and fixing trivial problems becomes a challenge for them.

All these incidences lead to the conclusion that the participant women have many problems

related to language and digital incompetency ( Czapka and Sagbakken, 2016 ). Language skills are essential in acquiring other general learning such as common social skills and understanding of the host country. Good language skills not only help them assimilate the job market but also affect their education, wellbeing, nuptials, societal amalgamation and contribution.

Apart from the illiteracy, the picture may be added nuance in that I observed in the classroom that participants like Sajia and Mervat perform better in the classroom. They put extra effort into learning fast. But due to their family obligation they are not able to show the rapid growth as expected by the teacher and the case leader. Therefore I am going to discuss family obligations as the next challenge.

## **4.4 Challenge 3: Spare time for family obligations**

### **Demand from children**

During the research in the school I observed that the struggle of immigrant women is not only limited to learning language or going to school but also in integrating themselves socially and culturally into the Norwegian society. Even though these women are going for job practice and school for learning, still they have primary responsibility for household chores. In the case of Mervat, she spoke that she had the whole responsibility of children and home. Mervat becomes so tired after the whole day that she is not able to spare 30 minute for her study. During the meeting with the case leader and teacher, the teacher asked Mervat about how much time she spent doing her own homework. Mervat replied:

*“I don’t get any time to do it. I am only learning from school.”*

Then the teacher insisted that we don't have so much time to teach and it's important that she must spend at least 30 minutes doing homework and revision. Mervat accepted it by saying,

*“I do not get any time during the day for myself or my study. I get so tired after the whole day of work that I fall asleep with my kids around 8:30 pm. I was unable to give 30 minutes for myself. I cannot spare 30 min for studies”*

After a little more persistence by the teacher, Mervat agreed to give 20 minutes per day for self-study.

Similar case is also observed with Nikhat. She said to me that even though she had one critically ill child and had to compromise with her studies and social network to take care of her sick children. But Nikhat is happy and satisfied with the help she is getting. Due to the health situation of her child, she has special exemptions from the course. Therefore I don't get enough opportunity to talk with Nikhat. But I observed that she looks happy whenever she comes to class and meets her friend Mervat. During my short chat with the Nikhat , she says:

*“Even though it's hard to adjust in the new country, but I am very happy that my child is getting good medical care. . . . .I will be always grateful to the Norway”*

Above quotation shows that Nikhat is having a hard time taking care of the child and adjusting to the new society but she takes this situation as a part of her motherhood.

This situation is the same for almost all of the participants. In one instance, the teacher asked the participant to tell their daily routine in Norwegian. They all mentioned that they go shopping for food, pick children from the daycare, cook food for them, do laundry,

make bed for the kids; help them sleep and so on. This shows that workload from children varies from participants to participants, but didn't get enough concession from school. Absorbing this load becomes a challenge for them.

### **Not enough support from Husband**

The participants were also dealt with male-dominated culture in their houses. Male-dominated culture can best be understood as a social system empowering and giving control to men rather than women. It is based on ideas that find it correct that men and women are different and men hold a higher authority than females. The supremacy in the family is held by the eldest male irrespective of his age.

When the teacher asked,

*“Do you get any help from your partners?”*

Then they replied, it is not common in their culture. Males are not supposed to help in household work. Then the teacher tried to explain to them about Norwegian culture. Teachers ask them to divide work with their partners. So they can also get some time for themselves.

This situation is also discussed during the personal meeting with Mervat. When she talked about her tiredness, the teacher asked her, *“Is she getting any help from her husband?”*

In reply to this question she said yes in a very low voice. The teacher and case worker both tried to convince her to take help from her husband. Case worker asked Mervat, if she wanted, to do one counseling session with Mervat and her Husband to discuss this issue. Mervat replied with hesitation that it's not required right now.

This shows that they are hesitant to break the social setup that they have. They are aware of their right in the family and can demand to share the household work, but they simply refused to bring in the platform where it can be resolved.

Overall, the above situation shows that they do not only feel uncomfortable getting help from their male partner for household work but also hesitant to get help from school to discuss or resolve with their husband. Overwork for household works creates challenges in following their study.

### **Being single mother**

Sajia, who was unmarried and had one three year old child. Even though being a single mother, immigrant women can spend more time studying, but at the same time they have to struggle a lot for compiling the daily routine as they do not get any help from others. Sajia in the meeting with the case worker said:

*“I wanted to have some relaxation for my school timing. I wanted to come a bit late to the school. As I am a single mother, I have to drop my Kid to the Kindergarten. Kindergarten starts at 7:30am and My school starts at 8:30am. I have pain in my foot. I am not able to walk fast. Therefore I want some relaxation in my school arriving time”*

In reply to this Sajia’s request , case worker said to her that:

*“The 2 year introduction programme is too tight so they cannot tolerate that pupils being late or absent from the class unless they are having serious sickness. She has to get a certificate from the doctor, then only they will consider her request.”*

## **Assisting children**

During the research work in the center, I contacted four women, who had more than three children. They all faced different problems with them. Like Mervat has special permission for having half-day free on Friday, so she can help her children with their home works.

I observed that my participant who has multiple children, faces challenges in dealing with cases where both the children and the mother are going through the integration process at the same time. In this case mother has to work harder, one for integrating herself and to assist her child's integration. We can easily understand this situation by the Farheen case. Farheen, who just arrived six months ago, struggles a lot to fulfill the demand of her five kids. She was saying:

*“In my home country, I don't go to work and study. I also get help from my extended family to take care of my children and household work. Here I am all alone with dual responsibility. Everything is very new for me and my children. The culture, work, and social life. My children still want to have traditional warm meals for breakfast and lunch. Which is nearly impossible for me to make every day before I came to school. My oldest son understands my situation. He helps me in my household chores but my younger children are more stubborn. They don't eat bread. I become so frustrated to fulfill all their demands.”*

This shows that participants face challenges in dealing with their children's behavior coming from the culture originating from their home country. Their children are also going through an integration program but it poses a challenge till they are substantially integrated with society norms.

She became emotional after saying all this. The above discourse from Farheen, gives us the insight of the challenges and struggles faced by immigrant women due to family obligation



( Berger, 2013 ). To fulfill these obligations, my participant puts in lots of efforts. They become tired at the end of the day. Therefore participants are not able to give sufficient time for the self study after the classroom.

However, sometimes this family obligation also affects them in the classroom. During my data collection in the classroom, One day, after the break, Mervat came to the classroom with her child. Everyone in the classroom was surprised and happy to see Mervat's child. Everyone pampered her. Once the teacher came again after the break, she saw mervat with the child and asked about her. Mervat told the teacher that she got a call from the barnehagen that her child is sick. Therefore Mervat went to pick her child from the barnehage during the break and bring her to the class afterwards. During the class Mervat was a little distracted by her child. She gave her some crayons for the drawing. But still Mervat's daughter keeps seeking attention from her mother. After the end of the day, the teacher told Mervat that , when a child is sick, they are not allowed to go to kindergarten or school. Because a sick child can infect others as well. Therefore next time Mervat should not bring her daughter along when she is sick. However, the next day Mervat came to school. She was very restless and sleepy. She keeps yawning and sleeping during the class. During the break she ask me:

*“Do you have headache medicine, as I haven't slept properly last night. I am tired and sleepy today. My child has been in fever the whole night. I have to take care of her. . .”*

From the above narrative of Mervat we can conclude that having a sick child at home adds more responsibility in immigrant women's lives. However , these family obligations become more challenging , when they come together with the social obligations. In the next section I am going to discuss the social obligation faced by my participation inside and outside of the classroom and how it is impacting the learning process.

## 4.5 Challenge 4: Breaking social obligations

For the integration, cultural and social assimilation of the immigrant and receiving society is important. It is important for both the immigrant and host society to adopt and understand each other's culture. The best way to learn about each other's culture is by their food cuisine. Bobby often brings traditional lunch for everyone to be friends. It's in Bobby's culture to offer food or invite people to dinner with whom they want to be socially connected. But due to language and cultural differences, Bobby faces difficulty in explaining the dishes. She tried to explain about the food she prepared in broken norwegian language. Bobby once started using body language to explain the way she cooked. After that everyone started talking about the traditional foods. Bobby's initiative works as an ice breaker for many of her classmates. It helped to reduce the communication barrier but it brought another challenge. In their culture they are obliged to invite for dinner whom they want to connect with as a respect. Bobby also shared one experience of her:

*“Once I invited my class for dinner in my house but the teacher didn't know anything about the cuisine such as which dish goes better with another dish. I was not able to explain it Norwegian. I serve the food and let the teacher explore by herself. That was the hardest part on my side.”*

Above narrative shows that participants are compelled to follow social obligations because they think this could be a way to begin making social relations with each other. But due to communication issues, they feel not able to fulfill social obligations.

### **Absence of gender segregation**

I observed that the participants are having many social and cultural stigma from their

society. It is quite normal in their religious belief to strictly maintain social distance from male persons. Such isolation is visible not only in their day to day life but predominantly also in the classroom where they have both male and female students.

The sitting arrangement of the classroom was L- shaped. But all the female students always sit on one side of the classroom after leaving two or three benches beside the male classmates. They avoid handshaking or talking with the male students. They never talk to their male classmates unless and until necessary except Bobby and Ashima. Ashima has a slight mental issue and she is not able to communicate to most of the classmates, but it seems to me that she does not have a gender issue. Whereas Bobby doesn't care about these norms. She is socially quite open. This nature of Bobby is not welcomed by her rest of the female classmates. Some of the classmates don't talk with her so much.

Social distancing from male person has its role in medical treatments too. They like to visit only female doctors. In one such incident, in computer class, Bobby said she will not join the class after the break as she has an appointment for the massage therapist (physiotherapy) for her back pain. In response to this, Sajia replied in a sarcastic way not to go to male therapists as it is prohibited in their religion. The computer teacher interrupted the conversation between the two and told Sajia that:

*“In Norway we don't follow these norms. There is no difference between male and female doctors. Bobby can visit anyone. We should not discuss these kinds of things and be open minded” .*

Gender based segregation is not acceptable in Norwegian society. It creates big challenges and hinders their integration.

## **Religious norms**

Bobby also gets bullied in school as she does not follow the religious norms and social norms of society, like not wearing a hijab and talking with men in the school. The intensity of this is so concentrated that some of the students from the other classes, who belong to the same religion as Bobby confronted her and mobbed her for not following the norms. Bobby complained about this mobbing incident to the school management and the school management took very strict action towards the offenders. But some of the classmates were still reluctant to do so and did not want to be friends with Bobby. They feared that being friends with Bobby would result in their being bullied too.

The open and friendly nature of Bobby, creates a negative perception among the classmates. They saw Bobby as not a follower of the norms. Bobby used to bring traditional lunch for everyone in the classroom. But some of the classmates did not touch her food as they thought Bobby did not follow the religious way of cooking food. Bobby felt desolation after hearing all this. She tried to convince her classmate that she follows religion but doesn't want to follow the unwanted restriction imposed by the religion. But still Bobby's situation was miserable in the class.

This incidence shows two things. First, religious norms are taken seriously by the groups, and second, participants who revolutionize get a heavy penalty. This is a major challenge because the source is not coming from individuals but from the group. Norwegian society teaches to respect individual belief and religion. But the action of social boycott from the group created a major challenge in culturally integrating with society and Norwegian values.

## **Remarriage stigma**

Another incidence I observed with Bobby who is a widow woman; and doesn't have a husband to take command of her life. But Bobby's children took over her. They call themselves "master of the house". Bobby has to follow her children's order. She cannot go shopping or visit friends without informing them. These happen once we went to shop something in the mall, and we met her son in the mall. He started confronting her, why is she in the shopping mall instead of being in the school? Even after being younger in age her son considered it correct to question each and every action of Bobby.

Once Bobby even mentioned her desire to get remarried. Her children had grown up and were independent, and she often felt lonely. When she told this to her sons, they got furious. According to them, it is totally unacceptable in their culture and their mother cannot do so. Their society will laugh at them. Bobby tried to explain to them that they are living in Norway, and it is not taboo here to get remarried. Then also her son denied supporting her. These are some of the examples of Immigrant women's life controlled by male dominating society. This is a complete contrast within Norweigan society which believes in equalaterian. This incident clearly demonstrates that although immigrants move from their country of origin to a new country, still they find it very hard to let go of the customs and traditions of their home country. For women this male dominance continues all through their lives; from father, to husband, and then from husbands to sons. They can never express themselves, or live their lives as per their wish.

These narratives clearly show how religious norms impose social distancing from male persons creating a hindrance in the journey of migrant women towards integration into Norwegian society.

## **4.6 Challenge 5: Structural hindrances**

It has been observed that the participation of my study faced structural challenges while interacting with the social institutions like NAV (the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration), UDI (the Norwegian Directorate of immigration) and using other public services like transport, banks or health centers. They said services work very differently from Immigrants' home countries. Even some of the institutions like NAV and UDI do not even exist. Dealing with them and understanding the concept of these institutions are difficult for the participant. Situation becomes more difficult when the working language of these institutions is norwegian. The absence of doctor appointment by Bobby is one of the examples of structural hindrances. Bobby missed her appointment because the SMS she received was in Norwegian language. In addition to this she has to pay the doctor's fees even though Bobby hasn't taken the consultancy. This kind of health system is completely new for Bobby. This makes it difficult for Bobby to get benefits and acquire knowledge of facilities provided for immigrants.

Similarly when Bobby has some meeting with UDI and NAV regarding her residency and bank details, she has to ask a translator for the meeting. And if she was unable to have a translator with her then she has to take another appointment with the NAV. These all multiple visits to UDI and NAV affect her presence in class rooms and studies as well.

## **4.7 Challenge 6: Health related issues**

### **Sickness**

Health and wellbeing is important for being socially active ( Dalgard and Thapa, 2007 ).

Person with good physical and mental well being is an asset for society. Good health helps individuals to be active and attentive in society. The simple common flu can distract the person's attention.

Health issues are one of the main factors affecting the participation of the immigrant women in the classroom. These health issues are related to the women themselves or in few cases related to their loved ones like spouse, children or extended family.

### **Fatigue**

Majority of my participants have talked about living with pain. Pain not only affects Women physically but also concerned with the quality of life. They cannot concentrate on studies or socialise. Like in the case of Mervat. She has five children . Mervat often complains about suffering from headache in the classroom. She gets tired with the work involved with the kids. Mervat has to wake up early in the morning to get all the children for school and make lunch for them. At the same time Mervat also has to get ready for her school . This all situation makes her overtired and triggers a headache. Even though I have seen many times in the class she was yawning and sleeping on the desk during break times. When I asked about it then Mervat said that:

*“I was awake for the whole night as one of my kids was sick. Now I am having a headache”*

.

Similar experience is shared by Bobby, Sajia and Nikhat as well. Bobby said that

*“Being a single Mother I also had to deal with all the household things, school, children and other works related to their stay in Norway. This makes her tired form both mentally and physically. Which come out as a form of headache and body pain.”*

Sajia also claimed the same experience. Sajia always complains about the headache and pain in the foot. Whereas Nikhat is not able to attend the class everyday because one of her kids is suffering from a chronic health condition. Being not mentally and physically fit poses challenges to attend class and thus the integration process.

### **Fighting from Depression**

Few participants of my study have revealed that they are coming to the school, only to get treated from depression and loneliness. In the school they meet other students and teachers , to whom they can talk and share their problem. The participants have talked about the mental pain as well. This mental pain or stress they are facing due to depression, loneliness and lack of social network. They are coming to school to create their own social network. In one of the sessions with Kashish, she said that after leaving 30 years in Norway, Kashish started taking school as she was suffering from migraine because of loneliness. Even Though she is married and having 3 grown up children she still feels left out and depressed. According to Kashish

*“if you are a homemaker you can meet people only on weekends or special occasions as everyone else is busy on weekdays” .*

This shows Kashish feels alone on weekdays. She finds that people in her circle are mostly having jobs and find no one to socially interact with them. This also shows that Kashish has pain due to lack of social life. Kashish wants to do something for herself. Therefore she contacted NAV to get some work again. NAV sent her to the adult education centre for learning language. She works in the school canteen for two days to get some work practice as well. In the canteen and school Kashish meets people everyday, which helps her to treat depression. Kashish is much happier now and frequency of migraine is also less.



Similarly, Ashima is a patient of chronic depression due to loneliness. Ashima is living alone in Norway and knows only native language. According to the teacher Ashima was in class for only being socialised and learning with others. But this idea is not working for Ashima. Therefore Ashima must have to stop coming to school. She is left behind in the integration process.

Sickness is inherent to human beings and poses a challenge to every participant at a different level ( Meadows et al., 2001 ). From the above illustration we can see that the health related challenges are affecting the learning process of participants. Some of the participants are struggling to be in class, because of their own or their children's health issues. Whereas few participants are coming to school as a therapy of their sickness.

# Chapter 5

## Discussion

In the previous chapter, I presented my observation and findings from the research venue. According to my observations, immigrant women face various challenges while learning norwegian in Adult education centres. The challenges that I covered are mostly related to the struggle to adapt to the schooling system, communication struggle, family obligations pressure , social obligation, structural hindrance and health related issues.

In this chapter, I am going to discuss the impact of these challenges and impact participant's on the core domain of integration provided by Alastair Ager and Alison Strang (Fig. 2.1). In addition to this, I am also going to discuss how the adult education centre (AEC) facilitates the core integration component of this framework.

## 5.1 Rights and Citizenship

“Rights and Citizenship” refers to nationhood across societies and nation’s sense of identity

### AEC facilitation

AEC facilitates educating the participants about “Rights and Citizenship” in two ways. First, they have a dedicated course. Second through day to day examples in the Norwegian course. During the language training, many topics are centred around exploring the terms related to rights, obligation and duty in norwegian society.

### Observations

During my data collection at the classroom, I observed that my participants are listening, learning, familiarizing and even practicing their rights in the classroom. Everyday, they are coming to school to learn and participate in the introduction programme. However, when it comes to understanding and following “rights and citizenship” , they are challenged by multiple aspects. First challenge related to understanding school systems (see **challenge 1**), especially girl education is not as common in their home country. Farheen once said:

*“In my home country, girls were not allowed to go to school. Therefore I never ever went to school or thought about it. . . .”*

However, this favorable condition creates learning challenges in their life. Like Farheen said:

*“.....after coming to Norway I was sent to school to study. I hardly understand anything. I can’t even read or write. That’s why I only sit in the class looking towards the books.”*

These statements from Farheen shows that going to school for learning is a new experience for them. Even though the curriculum was designed for primary level i.e. no reading skill required, following the school curriculum becomes difficult for participants. However my participants said that they are happy and enjoying their life in the new journey of integrating through the course. They also said that they are happy to live together with the family.

Another challenge to this integration component is social stigma (**see challenge 4**). Bobby feels more independent and relaxed in comparison to her home country. Bobby stopped wearing Hijab after coming to Norway. According to Bobby:

*“.....there are many restrictions for women in my home country. We cannot go out without a Hijab or acquire any job. Even visiting male doctor for the sickness is also prohibited” .*

In Norway, Bobby doesn't have to follow any of these restrictions here. Norway society believes in freedom of society. There is no restriction on costume for anyone including women. Women are encouraged to be independent, they use public services freely. She has rights to wear any kind of clothes she wants to wear or can visit any doctor irrespective of gender. However, this kind of freedom was not very appreciated by her other female classmates. They criticised her. Sajia openly criticized Bobby for visiting male doctor for Physiotherapy. However Sajia understands that this is normal in Norway, when one of the teachers from the school counseled Sajia.

Above situation shows that participants have acquired many different rights after coming to Norway. However the roots of their old norms and rituals are so deep in their mind that it will take a long time for them to accept this new normal.

## **5.2 Safety and Stability**

### **AEC facilitation**

Students that attend AEC courses get financial assistance from NAV. AEC aims to empower participants so that they can work like other citizens. Overall their goal is that students can become independent and become stable financially and socially thus can feel safe.

### **Observations**

Safety is one of the basic human needs. Safe feeling is the first requirement of the human mind to create stability. Once humans started to feel safe with the environment they started to feel belonging there. For the people like my participants, who mostly came from war zones, safety of life and stability are the foremost concerns. The majority of my participants moved to Norway in search of safety and stability for themselves and their family. After reaching Norway they found peace and care from the society. Once participants are ensured about their safety (Life) and security they start to think about employment and education.

We know the case of Nikhat. Nikhat has one critically ill child. She came to Norway from a war-torn country. Nikhat's first priority is to take care of her child. She compromised with her studies and social network to take care of her sick children. But Nikhat is having no regrets about it. She is very happy that her child is getting good medical care. In her Home country Nikhat was struggling to get the proper medical care for her child due to war. After seeking asylum in Norway, she is feeling grateful to this country and its social system. Nikhat wants to pay back this help by becoming a tax payer in society .

Therefore whenever nikhat's child feels good, Nikhat comes to the class. She wants to learn norwegian to integrate into society.

Similarly, According to the narrative of Farheen, girls' education is not common in her home country. That means it's not safe for girls to go to school. But here in Norway she feels safe to come to school, even though she has trouble reading and understanding the bus number. Still she takes the bus and comes to school everyday.

They are many participants, who are single mothers. they all are taking care of their children and house single handed. Which is not common in their home country. In their home country they always dependent upon their partner and extended family to support them. Whereas here they are handling everything alone and according to Norwegian standards. These all women can do because they can feel safe and secure here. They are not afraid of being alone. They are not afraid of going out in the evening and getting looted or harassed.

However, I observed, there are many scenarios in participants' lives where they feel unsafe or insecure. For example, they felt insecure when visiting the male doctor. In other words, the social pattern that they are bringing from their culture often gives them a pseudo sense of insecurity (**see challenges 4**). Going to NAV centre or UDI for their residency status or visiting the police station for verification had indimetiating experience for them. Simply talking with the shopkeeper in the grocery store or if the teacher asked a simple question in the classroom are examples where they feel insecure to get exposed of illiteracy. In all this situation participants become anxious and worried. They get scared of making mistakes. Due to lack of language proficiency they feel embarrassed to communicate with the native people. Lack of knowledge of social institutes such as NAV making them little afraid to interact as explained in **challenge 5**.

The feeling of embarrassment creates the unsafe environment around the participants.

They choose not to enter this unsafe environment. Therefore participants choose to be with the same group of people who are like them or using the same language as they are. Within these groups participants don't feel odd. They feel comfortable to talk and share their problems within this group. Even participants choose to live around the same neighbourhood where they have the majority of the same people like them. If not so, then participants make sure to spend the weekend within the group. This way participants try to avoid the interaction with the native people and participants' own insecurity.

Lack of communication skill as described in **challenge 2**, making them insecure that they others won't be able understand them.

In the other way this insecurity creates hindrance in participants' learning process. Participants avoid being a part of the majority group. Thus we can say, safety and security plays a vital role in participants' effort towards integration.

### **5.3 Language and cultural knowledge**

In previous chapters of this thesis, I have already discussed the importance of language competency for integration. Language proficiency is desired for both immigrants and receiving society. To understand each other's needs and expectations. Ager A. & Strang A. mention in their theory, "With a 'two-way' understanding of integration, the issue of language competence is also, however, a challenge for receiving communities, especially providers of essential services such as health care" (P.182).

#### **AEC facilitation**

AEC facilitates my participants to learn language along with the other subjects like com-

puter, maths and life sciences. For teaching they use modern equipment like tablets, computers, overhead projectors, DVDs. By this AEC helps the participants to become familiar with digital technologies as well. Apart from teaching, AEC provides a platform to the participant to become familiar with different cultures and norms of the society. Also give opportunity to the participants to show their cultures. Multicultural environment of AEC, teaches the participant to respect and accept the different people from different races.

### **Observation**

In lack of language competence, host society struggles to provide the key information related to immigration, rights and obligation, health, and safety, to the immigrants. This is one of most prominent factors which creates maximum hindrance during the initial phase of integration. In challenge “Communicating to public service” We have seen this scenario in the case of Bobby’s missed Doctor appointment. Bobby missed her appointment only because she was not able to read the SMS in Norwegian.

However host societies try to provide all key information in translated form to the immigrant. But the translated version is not as effective as verbal communication. According to participant experience, these translated versions are too lengthy and difficult to understand that they tried to avoid reading it. Sometimes it was not translated as well as the original one. Therefore they prefer oral information instead of written information. In that way participation can ask the question, when they have any doubt about the understanding the information.

Another problem I have already discussed in the **challenge 2**, section is how language incompetence creates the insecurity among the participants. Participants get scared when teachers ask them to read a sentence. In the classroom participants are scared of making mistakes. But outside of the classroom participants are scared of being judged or show up



foolish. Participants felt embarrassed to visit the NAV or UDI multiple times because due to lack of literacy they were not able to do the documentation. Even though the government provides them Translator , they feel intrusive to take help from them.

However, this insecurity motivated the participants to learn faster and embarrassment became lesser and lesser, once they started to communicate in Norwegian. Usage of tablet and computer for the learning process, making participants more sound in the digital competency (see digital skill incompetency in **challenge 2**). A few participants like Mervat and Sajia, who assist their kids in their assignments from kid's school make them learn faster.

Apart from the need for language competence for the integration, I observed that cultural knowledge is also important for the integration. The cultural knowledge of both the society host and the immigrants. It plays a vital role in the integration process. For proper integration of the immigrants it is important that host society accept and respect the immigrants' culture and give them space to practice their culture. Whereas for immigrants it is important to adapt the culture of the host society.

I have seen in the classroom that participants are struggling and trying to adapt the culture of the norwegian society. Their children are going to norwegian schools and they are bringing up their children according to norwegian norms. But sometimes they feel despair to handle all this. Like in Farheen's quote under challenges "Assisting children" .

The quotes explain the pains that participants and their family going through the integration. The participants learn themselves a new culture and teach it to their children at the same time. Putting their old gender role beside, the man of the house, helping their partner in the household chores. The participants, who have only had a homemaker role previously, coming to school everyday and preparing themselves for the job market. They

are adapting and exploring to new food habits while introducing their food culture to the society (see **challenge 3**).

However, during the process of the culture exchange, sometimes participants faced resistance from their own community as well. The mobbing case with Bobby under the challenge “Religious Norms” is the best example of this resistance (see **challenge 4**). The mobbing incident shows that the participants are not ready to give up their own culture while learning the new lifestyle. They wanted to find the middle way to achieve the integration. The adult education centre is providing the perfect venue for them to do this. At AEC participants meet many students and teachers from different cultures, living and earning in Norway. From the experience of others, here participants can easily learn how to be tolerant and retain their own culture while adapting the new culture.

## **5.4 Social Connection**

### **AEC facilitation**

I have observed that the Adult education centre is providing the platform to the participant to create the social connection. For my participant who just came to Norway and didn't know the language or have any social network, the AEC works as a learning centre cum social connection facilitator.

### **Observations**

Aristotle the legendary Greek philosopher said, “Man is by nature a social animal; an individual who is unsocial naturally and not accidentally is either beneath our notice or more than human. Society is something that precedes the individual”

Many previous studies have shown that in lack of social networks individuals become depressed and prone to mental illness. Individuals need social connection to feel alive and functional. Social connection is the most important domain of integration. Although immigrants have learnt language, got a job and obtained the citizenship of the host country, if the person is socially not connected with the host society, his integration can not be completed.

Alastair Ager and Alison Strang have divided the social connection in three parts: Social bridge, social bond and social link. According to their theory: “social bonds describe connections that link members of a group, and social bridges connections between such groups, social links refer to the connection between individuals and structures of the state, such as government services” . (p.181)

Regarding the above theory, I have observed that the Adult education centre is providing the most meaningful platform to the participant to create the social connection. For my participant who just came to Norway and didn't know the language or have any social network, the AEC works as a learning centre cum social connection facilitator. The participants like Kashish, who are living in Norway for many years, choose AEC for making new connections and bonds.

During my data collection in the AEC, I found that the class teacher and a case worker were the primary connection of my participant. Over the time, the teacher converted into a friend, advisor and even translator for my participant. They invite teachers for dinner and outings. If participants have any query regarding travelling, any app like reuter or ticketing services, without any hesitation they contact the teacher. Even when one of my participants lost her mother, the teacher was the first person who consoled her, making the situation easier for her.

For some participants like Bobby and Kashish, who want to do jobs practice along with the learning classes, the teacher works as a social link. Along with the participant , the teacher visits the workplaces and introduces them to the employers. However, getting the job practice is still the challenge for the participant. The lack of previous job experience and language proficiency , make the participant eligibility lesser for the job. Entering the job market with elementary language knowledge is still challenging for the participants. Structural hindrance as described in **challenge 5** are factors to speed up their integration process.

My participants are mainly the first generation immigrant. They do not have any family and friends in Norway. They do not have any family support. Due to unemployment my participants are having a limited social network as well. This limited social network, creates the social inactiveness and loneliness among the participants. This loneliness Further develops stress, migraine and other mental illnesses like schizophrenia to my participant (see **challenge 6**). Sometimes this mental illness like schizophrenia creates both physical and mental disability in the participants. This kind of disability makes their eligibility for the job market way more lesser than expected.

## **5.5 Means And Markers**

### **AEC facilitation**

AEC makes participants aware about “health” related rights and educates them about how health systems work in Norway and how to use them. AEC directly helps them “education” by providing language and vocation training. AEC helps in “employment” by helping in making resumes and offering job practice courses.

## Observations

At AEC I have observed that participants are learning from the basic i.e. norwegian alphabet, words, numbers. Along With this basic teaching , the teacher is also teaching participants about their rights and duties. Teacher is providing them all necessary information related to day to day life and enriching participants' social skills. But the challenges such family obligation (see **challenge 3**) are making it difficult to swiftly get education.

AEC offers the participants language courses with the job practice. Under these courses participants go for the job training two times a week and rest of the three days they learn in the classroom. AEC also helps participants to write their job application and find a practice place for them. Some participants like Kashish and Bobby are taking this opportunity to get familiar with the norwegian job market and to extend their social network as well. But due to lack of language proficiency participants have to compromise with the heavy job like working in the canteen or as a grass cutter.

During the data collection it has been observed that participants are quite aware of their health issue and they are following up with the doctors. But due to the challenge like “Absence of gender segregation” (see **challenge 4**) creating little barriers to use the system freely. Also lack of language incompetence creates difficulties for the participant to communicate with the doctors.

During the class, participants also share their experience about home management (see **challenge 1**). About how they are managing home and finances. If participants need any guidance, the teacher helps them. Like in the challenge “social stigma” , the teacher tries to give advice or counselling to the couple, so the participant can spare some time for her studies as well (see **challenge 6**).

# Chapter 6

## Conclusion

This qualitative study is focused on the challenges immigrants women are facing during the integration process via Norwegian training course. For the research, the data was collected by the participatory observation technique.

The finding from the research venue shows that AEC offers the courses to the participants to learn norwegian language and other disciplinary subjects like Mathematics, computer and life science. Along with teaching , AEC provides a platform to the participants to create social networks and bonds with others. In the multicultural environment of the AEC, participants learn about different cultures and their values. In this discussion, I outline how AEC facilitates the core domain of integration components provided by Alastair Ager and Alison Strang's Framework.

I collected the data about hindrances, obstacles and resistance in integration faced by participants at the course. After analysing the data, I categorized the challenges faced by the participants into six categories namely adapting to school, communication barriers, family

obligations, social stigma, structural hindrance and health related issues. These challenges are further divided into subcategories. I correlated these challenges with the core domain of integration components mentioned earlier. This gives insight about the impact of the integration process on participants and how they are handling it. We can observe that with AEC facilitates on all integration domains , however some challenges are inherent but they are always ways to deal with it.

# Appendix

Det innsendte meldeskjemaet med referansekode 313802 er nå vurdert av NSD.

Følgende vurdering er gitt:

Det er vår vurdering at behandlingen vil være i samsvar med personvernlovgivningen, så fremt den gjennomføres i tråd med det som er dokumentert i meldeskjemaet med vedlegg, samt i meldingsdialogen mellom innmelder og NSD, den 02.01.19. Behandlingen kan starte.

## MELD ENDRINGER

Dersom behandlingen av personopplysninger endrer seg, kan det være nødvendig å melde dette til NSD ved å oppdatere meldeskjemaet. På våre nettsider informerer vi om hvilke endringer som må meldes. Vent på svar før endringen gjennomføres.

## TYPE OPPLYSNINGER OG VARIGHET

Prosjektet vil behandle særlige kategorier av personopplysninger frem til 15.05.19.

## LOVLIG GRUNNLAG

Prosjektet vil innhente samtykke fra de registrerte til behandlingen av personopplysninger.



Vår vurdering er at prosjektet legger opp til et samtykke i samsvar med kravene i art. 4 nr. 11 og art. 7, ved at det er en frivillig, spesifikk, informert og utvetydig bekreftelse, som kan dokumenteres, og som den registrerte kan trekke tilbake.

Lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen vil dermed være den registrertes uttrykkelige samtykke, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 a), jf. art. 9 nr. 2 bokstav a, jf. personopplysningsloven § 10, jf. § 9 (2).

#### PERSONVERNPRINSIPPER

NSD finner at den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger vil følge prinsippene i personvernforordningen:

- om lovlighet, rettferdighet og åpenhet (art. 5.1 a), ved at de registrerte får tilfredsstillende informasjon om og samtykker til behandlingen
- formålsbegrensning (art. 5.1 b), ved at personopplysninger samles inn for spesifikke, uttrykkelig angitte og berettigede formål, og ikke viderebehandles til nye uforenlige formål
- dataminimering (art. 5.1 c), ved at det kun behandles opplysninger som er adekvate, relevante og nødvendige for formålet med prosjektet
- lagringsbegrensning (art. 5.1 e), ved at personopplysningene ikke lagres lengre enn nødvendig for å oppfylle formålet

#### DE REGISTRERTES RETTIGHETER

De registrerte vil ha følgende rettigheter i prosjektet: åpenhet (art. 12), informasjon (art. 13), innsyn (art. 15), retting (art. 16), sletting (art. 17), begrensning (art. 18), underretning (art. 19), dataportabilitet (art. 20). Rettighetene etter art. 15–20 gjelder så lenge den

registrerte er mulig å identifisere i datamaterialet.

NSD vurderer at informasjonen som de registrerte vil motta oppfyller lovens krav til form og innhold, jf. art. 12.1 og art. 13.

Vi minner om at hvis en registrert tar kontakt om sine rettigheter, har behandlingsansvarlig institusjon plikt til å svare innen en måned.

#### FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER

NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene i personvernforordningen om riktighet (art. 5.1 d), integritet og konfidensialitet (art. 5.1. f) og sikkerhet (art. 32)

For å forsikre dere om at kravene oppfylles, må prosjektansvarlig følge interne retningslinjer/rådføre dere med behandlingsansvarlig institusjon.

#### OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET

NSD vil følge opp ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Lykke til med prosjektet!

Kontaktperson hos NSD: spesialrådgiver Kjersti Haugstvedt

Tlf. Personverntjenester: 55 58 21 17 (tast 1)

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