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Problematization of integration in Norwegian policymaking – integration through employment or volunteerism?

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ABSTRACT



Integration has become a buzzword in debates and discussions on immigration which also reflects upon Norwegian policymaking. In this article, we do a policy analysis of twenty-nine Norwegian governmental documents published between 1973 and 2021 and ask how the understanding of integration has changed during that time. We further ask how integration has been problematized in these documents. Our study is inspired by Bacchi's approach "What's the problem represented to be" which provides new insights on policymaking and its effects on the population. We find that integration has increasingly been put on a par with employment yet that in recent years policymakers have acknowledged that a focus on employment is too short-sighted. To cover more aspects of integration, the concept *everyday life integration* has been introduced where the voluntary sector is to play a central role both in terms of social integration and its ability to facilitate finding employment.

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Introduction

The concept of "integration" and approaches to study has recently been under increased scrutiny in academia (see e.g. among many others Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002; Sjørøsløv 2011; Korteweg 2017; Schinkel 2018; Rytter 2018a). The concept has been characterized "chaotic" (Samers 1998, 128) or "a conceptual quagmire" (Schinkel 2018, 2) as its understanding is highly contextual and among others informed by history, political ideas, and ideologies. In addition, it is used by both scholars, policymakers, and in

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several public discourses in different contexts and with varying underlying understandings. The concept is embedded into a wider socio-political context – usually framed by nation-states and their historical contexts and policies. In recent decades integration became more and more politicized and has been used as a governance tool by policymakers, as we will show here.

In this article, our aim is to investigate the political understanding of the term integration in Norway. We use Bacchi's "What's the problem represented to be" (WPR) approach to policy analysis (Bacchi 2009; Bacchi and Eveline 2010; Bacchi and Goodwin 2016) to study twenty-nine Norwegian policy documents published between 1973 and 2021. The WPR approach allows us to investigate how policies rather "give shape to 'problems'" (Bacchi 2009, x) instead of simply acknowledging that policies solve some kind of "social problems". Further, the WPR approach argues that policies contain implicit representations of the "problems" they address, and its goal is to scrutinize these representations (Bacchi 2009; Bacchi and Goodwin 2016). Accordingly, governing takes place through these problem representations, and Bacchi (2009) argues that it is important to reflect on where those representations come from and how they operate to shape "realities". We use the WPR approach to see how the political understanding of integration has changed in Norway during the past fifty years, and how integration has been problematized.

This article is structured into four sections: First, we present an overview over the Norwegian immigration history and its implications for the Norwegian welfare state model. Afterwards, we introduce the WPR approach in greater detail, including how we have applied it here. Thirdly, we provide an overview of the policy documents with a focus on how the conceptualization of integration has changed over time. Lastly, we discuss how integration has been problematized in the governmental documents.

Immigration to Norway since the 1960s

In the late 1960s, immigrants made up around 60,000 individuals, or 1.5 per cent, of Norway's population, with immigrants coming mainly from other Nordic countries, Western Europe or USA (Hellevik and Hellevik 2017). During the early 1970s, the first significant influx of immigrants from countries outside Europe or North America arrived in Norway, consisting mostly of labour immigrants coming from India, Pakistan, Turkey, and Morocco. Even though the numbers were relatively small, both researchers' and the media's interest in immigration grew among others fuelled by developments in the neighbouring countries Denmark and Sweden (Brochmann and Kjeldstadli 2014; Midtbøen 2017). In 1975, the Norwegian government declared an immigration stop aiming at preventing "unwanted, unskilled

immigration" (Brochmann 2014, 281) while still allowing admission of skilled workers and immigrants arriving as refugees, asylum seekers or through family reunification from countries such as Chile, Iran, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam, legitimized by both international and humanitarian obligations (Cappelen, Skjerpen, and Tønnessen 2012; Brochmann 2014; Brochmann and Kjeldstadli 2014; Hellevik and Hellevik 2017; Midtbøen 2017). One of the reasonings behind the immigration stop was "to give breathing space to improve the conditions for foreigners who already are in the country, and to create better conditions for future immigrants" (St.meld. nr. 107 (1975–1976), 21).

From the late 1980s onwards, Norway experienced a growth in anti-immigrant political parties similar to many other European countries, resulting in immigration for the first time influencing a municipal election in 1987 and political scientists becoming interested in immigration research (Midtbøen 2017). Hesstvedt, Bergh, and Karlsen (2021) show that immigration came to the forefront in parliamentary elections for the first time in 1989 when 8.1 per cent of electors named it the most important topic, setting a trend for the following decades.

In 1997, a liberalization of the rules for political asylum and refugees took place contributing to an increase in immigration to Norway (Cappelen, Skjerpen, and Tønnessen 2012), which in turn led up to a policy in which immigrants were settled all over the country without considering suitable work and education facilities (Brochmann and Hagelund 2011). By the turn of the millennium, 9/11 and the measures undertaken following the terrorist attacks, affected Norwegian policies on immigration. Under the Bondevik 2-government (2001–2005)¹ refugee and asylum policies were tightened (Midtbøen 2017), an approach that was continued by the subsequent government, Stoltenberg 2 (2005–2013),² indicating a similar take on immigration policies across party political divides.

The expansions of the European Union (EU) in 2004 and 2007 contributed to the largest immigration wave to Norway to date leading to a rapid growth of labour immigrants, especially from Poland and other East European countries (Brochmann and Kjeldstadli 2014; Midtbøen 2017). This made Norway one of the largest recipients of migrants from the new EU member states within the EU and European Economic Area (EEA) and, ironically as a non-EU member, Norway has thus been one of the countries with the highest rates of labour immigration from the new EU member states (Valenta and Strabac 2011; Cappelen, Skjerpen, and Tønnessen 2012; Brochmann 2014; Midtbøen 2017).

Currently, immigrants and Norwegian-born with immigrant parents constitute 18.9 per cent³ of Norway's population (Statistics Norway [SSB] 2021a), and 4.5 per cent of Norway's population has a refugee background (SSB 2021b). 54.3 per cent of all persons migrating to Norway in 2019 came

because of work or education, 11.31 per cent as refugees, and 33.32 per cent due to family reunification (SSB 2021c). This distribution has remained roughly the same over the past two decades.

Immigration challenging the welfare state?

Norway, like the other Nordic countries, has a traditionally strong welfare state. The Nordic welfare model is characterized by Esping-Andersen (1990) as a social democratic regime in which social rights are institutionalized serving the entire population, i.e. universalistic. Social democratic welfare regimes are considered to be the most advanced welfare systems, characterized by high labour force participation, active labour market policies, universal social benefits, high tax level and tax-funded welfare arrangements, active family policies, centralized public engagement (Esping-Andersen 1990), and a close interaction between the state and the voluntary sector, often referred to as the “consensus model” reflecting the mutual interaction between the authorities and the voluntary sector (Loga 2018). Voluntary associations may receive direct support from municipalities, including among others the use of municipal facilities and receiving financial support for instance in return for the implementation of public tasks, while voluntary associations may wish to influence public policymaking (Ibsen et al. 2021).

The relationship between the welfare state and immigration can be described as tense (Brochmann 2014), with immigration being depicted as one of the welfare state’s most pressing challenges (Skjelbostad and Hernes 2021). Reasons for this include the control of inflow on the one hand, and an integration policy on the other hand that has emphasized equal treatment and right to gain welfare rights for everyone to prevent social exclusion. Thus, immigrants have been recognized as both potential producers as well as potential consumers of welfare benefits (Brochmann 2014). Loga (2018) shows how the civil society in recent years is included in policy implementation in new ways, involving co-creation, active citizenship, and idea creation/innovation, both due to financial savings, but also to strengthen democratic legitimacy, inclusion, and participation.

With the expansion of the EU and increasing numbers of labour immigrants, new research issues emerged such as the consequences of immigration on the labour market and for Norway’s generous welfare policies, in addition to concerns regarding welfare export. Furthermore, at the beginning of the 2010s researchers sought to understand immigration policies on the premises of the state, realizing that there are economic consequences of immigration for the sustainability of the welfare state (Midtbøen 2017). Brochmann and Hagelund (2011), among others, pose the question whether such a generous universal redistribution system requires stricter border control in addition to arguing that immigrants should join the

labour force as soon as possible in order to not become a burden on the welfare state. These arguments point towards a dilemma in that the welfare state can only survive through high employment rates, while universal welfare contributes to attract and hold immigrants who have challenges in joining and/or staying in the labour force.

Methodology and analytical framework

Our understanding of policies and discourses is informed by the WPR approach (Bacchi and Bonham 2014; Bacchi and Goodwin 2016). We will here both present how we understand policies and show how our understanding of policies has guided our analysis.

What's the problem represented to be (WPR)

The WPR approach and its understanding of policies have its roots in Foucault-inspired poststructuralism (Bacchi 2009; Bacchi and Goodwin 2016; Foucault 2002). When we study policies related to integration, we understand policies as something that shape problem representations forming our “realities” (Bacchi 2009). Policies shape the organization of a society since they connect various actors with diverse power and resource relations and can play an unescapable role in shaping the society (Wedel et al. 2005). They may refer to “how order is maintained through politics, understood as the heterogeneous strategic relations that shape lives and worlds” (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, 5–6) and are usually associated with a programme developed to make changes (Bacchi 2009). Shore (2012) encourages researchers to not treat policies as given, but rather understand them as social and cultural constructs that need to be questioned, unpacked, and contextualized to understand their meanings. This follows the line of thought by Foucault (2002) who claims that to understand our society we must realize that society is created and influenced by discourses.

As researchers we play a part in this process, or as Bacchi and Goodwin (2016) write: we are “subjects” in the policy process and must contribute to the un-making and re-making of policies, open up for critical reflections and act *inside* the work of policy while we critically evaluate what is constituted by the policy and how this occurs. When we un- and re-make policies, we study how problem representations are elaborated in discourses. Following the WPR approach and Foucault, we understand discourses as the “socially produced forms of knowledge that set limits upon what is possible to think, write or speak about a ‘given social object or practice’” (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, 35). This means that our analytical focus is not on how people shape arguments – as it would be in critical discourse analysis – but rather on the deep-seated ways of thinking that underpin political practices.

According to Bacchi and Goodwin (2016), these deep-seated ways of thinking and problematizations shaped by policies can lead to producing – or making – “subjects” resulting in the categorization of people. This process of *subjectification* can have severe consequences for the *subjects* affecting their choices on how to live their lives (*lived effects*), as categorizations can affect what is possible for the *subjects* to become (*subjectification effects*). Therefore, policymaking can frame what is possible for the *subjects* to achieve and affects their “scope of action”.

Undertaking the WPR approach, we direct attention to how governmental practices and policymaking produce “problems”. Bacchi (2009) and Bacchi and Goodwin (2016) developed a tool consisting of six interrelated questions based on a poststructural understanding of politics being embedded into strategic practices and relations. In our critical analysis of the policy documents, we seek to use the documents to open up our reflections on integration in Norway. In line with Foucault’s (2002) understanding of discourse, we study both what is communicated and stated, but also what is not made visible. We question how “problems” in many ways are both obvious and expected to require some kind of “solving”. Thus, when a policy points towards actions needed to reach policy goals, it becomes visible what is seen as needing measures and what is experienced as problematic (Foucault 2002).

Implementing the WPR approach

For this study, our focus is limited to governmental (written) documents whose major advantage is that they are easily accessible, available for the public, follow established guidelines, and have a standard form (Fedreheim 2013). Policy texts come in many different forms, including speeches, interview transcripts, news articles, press releases, and so on. A key characteristic is that they are prescriptive and serve as a “form of proposal and a guide to conduct” (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, 18). We also follow the WPR approach’s recommendation of “working backwards” to find problem representations that need to be interrogated (Bacchi 2009, 3; Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, 20). Bacchi (2020) states that the society’s increasing desire for “problem-solving” may have a range of negative and potentially dangerous effects, and rather recommends “problem-questioning”. In line with that, we look back at older policies seeking to critical interrogate how problem representations have been shaped and how they dominate current policies (Bacchi 2020).

Our approach to “working backwards” starts in 2021 by studying the most recent governmental documents related to integration and then going back in time, searching for relevant documents related to integration and/or immigration. The strict and formal outline of public documents allows for a so-

called “snowballing method” as each document refers to its policy path and previous relevant documents. Simultaneously we also identified relevant documents outside policy paths by searches in governmental databases.

In [Table 1](#) we present an overview of the twenty-nine documents we have analysed, including translations and explanations of the various types of documents. We split the documents between us and compiled relevant paragraphs addressing integration into a shared data extraction sheet based on guidelines which we agreed to beforehand. Both authors analysed the data extraction sheet and commented and/or summarized in a separate column individually, before agreeing on common findings. To trace our comments, we used different text colours for each author. We first tried to identify problem representations (question 1 in Bacchi and Goodwin 2016) before we searched for the conceptual logics underpinning these representations (question 2). Afterwards we sought to identify the conditions allowing the realization of problem representations (question 3) and to interpret what is silenced in the problem representations (question 4). Questions 5 and 6 relate to possible effects and dominance of the problem representations, which we discuss as well. A full list of the analysed documents is available as digital appendix.

A challenge concerning this study’s reliability relates to the Norwegian language in the policy documents. Even though both authors are fluent in Norwegian, some meaning might get lost in translation to English. Further, one limitation with our process of working backwards is that our list is most likely not exhaustive, and we might have missed some policy documents. However, as we have analysed the most central policy documents, we believe that we have also captured the central ideas related to integration.

Table 1. Types and respective numbers of analysed governmental documents.

Norwegian title	English translation	Type of governmental document	Number analysed
Meld. St. X / St. meld. X	White papers	Government initiated paper to report/ discuss a certain topic	12
NOU X	Norwegian official reports	Government appointed committee report on specific topics	7
Lov X	Act	Act	2
Strategi	Strategy	Governmental strategy	2
Brosjyre	Leaflet	Governmental information	1
Erklæring	Declaration	Governmental declaration	1
Forskrift X	Regulations	Regulations made by an authority	1
Innst. X S / Innst. St. nr. X	Report to the Parliament	Standing committees’ reports to the Parliament	1
Prop. X S / St. prp. X	Propositions to the Parliament	Government initiated propositions to the Parliament	1
Rundskriv	Circulars	Ministries’ interpretations of laws and regulations	1

A change of ideas: the conceptualization of integration

In the following section, we will present a review of the analysed policy documents and the historical development based on the data extraction sheet. Policies regarding immigration to Norway go back to 1973 and when looking at the titles of the analysed documents, there seems to be a shift in focus over time, in line with the review on Norway's immigration history. While the earlier documents refer to "immigration" or "immigrants" in their titles, "integration" enters the stage in earnest in the early 2010s almost entirely replacing mentions of immigration or immigrants in the titles. However, also in early documents, policymakers were concerned about the incorporation of immigrants into the Norwegian society, as evident in e.g. the immigration stop in 1975. We will outline what we define as three different historical phases showing how early developments laid the foundation for today's integration policy, and how the understanding of integration has changed during the period we study. Following this historical review, we will address how integration has been problematized in Norwegian integration policies, and what is seen to be solutions to this problem.

Early phase: from assimilation to integration

Following the first immigration wave to Norway, NOU (1973: 17) *Immigration policy* addresses immigration explicitly with the emphasis on how to manage immigration of workers to Norway. Here, the term integration is introduced as a "much weaker form" of incorporation into society and as in contrast to assimilation. NOU (1986: 8) *Refugees' adaptation to the Norwegian society* continues this understanding and presents for the first time explicitly an "integration policy". This policy intends for the different minorities living in Norway to have "the opportunity to choose to what extent they want to keep their ethnic distinctiveness" (NOU 1986: 8, 22). Furthermore, it is made clear that this is a significant change from the assimilationist policies that were predominant until the 1970s.

In the following decades, and at a time when immigration laws and refugee and asylum policies were tightened, the policy documents we analysed are increasingly clear about the respective government's integration policy. Simultaneously, the sections on how to understand integration become more complex. In St.meld. nr. 17 (1996–1997) *On immigration and the multicultural Norway*, integration is described as both immigration policy's goals and means, but also as "the process involving immigrants becoming a part of society's social life (broadly speaking). This process is bidirectional and touches therefore both on the individual immigrant and the remaining population." (St.meld. nr. 17 (1996–1997), 10–11). The understanding also points out that immigrants can continue cultural and religious

characteristics “within certain limits” though clarifying that integration is to be understood in contrast to assimilation.

St.meld. nr. 17 (2000–2001) *Asylum and refugee policy in Norway* continues the approach in which equal opportunities and conditions for all individuals and groups are central such as when it comes to the educational system, housing, or work life. It reaffirms the notion that “there must be a mutual adaptation between the groups in the society” (St.meld. nr. 17 (2000–2001), 5). There is however no further clarification how that process should look like. It is further worth mentioning here that the document uses the same approach of “equal opportunities” as has been applied in NOU (1973: 17). This approach changes at a later point, as we will show.

Middle phase: the “integration era”

In the wake of 9/11 further restrictions on the intake of refugees and asylum seekers were agreed upon, while at the same time the expansions of the EU contributed to more labour immigrants. This is reflected in a change in wording in the analysed documents from 2011 onwards in that “immigration” or “immigrants” in the documents’ titles are replaced by “integration”, starting with NOU (2011: 14) *Better integration: Goals, strategies, measures*. Yet, already in St.meld. nr. 49 (2003–2004) *Diversity through inclusion and participation: Responsibility and freedom* there is a shift in how integration may look like, pointing out that there are “limits for tolerance” (St.meld. nr. 49 (2003–2004), 11). These “limits” pertain to the fact that the government is positive towards diversity and individual freedom, yet that policies are to ensure that everyone should follow common “laws of the game” encompassing laws and rules and respect society’s “values”. However NOU (2011: 14) claims to be the first document to have done “a comprehensive review of the integration policies and integration work in Norway” and the first to present “propositions on a holistic and coherent integration policy” (NOU 2011: 14, 11). On integration it states the following:

Integration of immigrants is specifically about qualification, education, employment, living conditions and social mobility; influence in democratic processes; participation in the civil society; and belonging, respect for differences and loyalty towards collective values. (NOU 2011: 14, 11f.)

The understanding of integration here is significantly more complex and comprehensive compared to earlier documents. While earlier documents address individual aspects such as employment or accommodation to be central for integration, NOU (2011: 14) binds together a variety of aspects for the first time. Thus, this document can also be seen as the first to operationalize the concept of integration and form a sort of action plan on how to achieve integration. Furthermore, the document proposes a change of

perspective from “same opportunities” to “same results” as the main challenge is seen to be “the differences that can be documented or experienced” (NOU 2011: 14, 13) in regards to (socioeconomic) differences between immigrants and the wider population. Meld. St. 6 (2012–2013) *A holistic integration policy – Diversity and community* follows this line of thought and is especially interested in as small social, economic and class differences as possible, providing the basis for a just society and a safe community. Therefore, “the government’s integration policy’s most important aim is to make sure that everyone living in Norway gets to use their resources and takes part in the community” (Meld. St. 6 (2012–2013), 7). This can be seen as a significant change in the approach to integration as a “problem” in that the focus shifts from access to same opportunities for new and established residents, to achieving similar outcomes when comparing new and established residents.

Two acts on integration

In addition to the policies named so far, two acts have been regulating Norway’s work on integration since 2003: the Introduction Act (Introduksjonsloven 2003) and the Integration Act (Integreringsloven 2021). The acts’ purposes, presented in Table 2, share a focus on economic independence and the need to learn the Norwegian language, culture, and social life.

Brochmann and Hagelund (2011) state that the Introduction Act (2003) marks a significant shift in Norway’s integration policy towards a more centralized approach and implementation. Central in both acts is the so-called Introduction Programme which was introduced in the Introduction Act and aims to provide basic Norwegian language training, teach basic knowledge about the Norwegian society, and prepare participants to join the labour market or further educational programmes. Both acts define the right and duty to participate in the Introduction Programme and regulate financial aids for participants.⁴ Compared to the Introduction Act (2003), the Integration Act (2021) introduced stricter demands and clearer expectations towards the individual participant in form of formal individual so-called integration plans and

Table 2. Comparison of the two acts’ purposes.

Introduction Act (2003)	Integration Act (2021)
The purpose of this act is to strengthen newly arrived immigrants’ possibilities to participate in the working and social life, and their economic independence. The act shall further arrange for asylum seekers to quickly receive knowledge of the Norwegian language, culture and social life. (Introduksjonsloven 2003, §1)	The purpose of this act is that immigrants shall be integrated early into the Norwegian society and become economically independent. The Act shall contribute to that immigrants gain good Norwegian language skills, knowledge about Norwegian social life, formal qualifications, and a lasting connection to working life. (Integreringsloven 2021, §1)

contracts. Beyond that, the Integration Act introduced a demand for “early” integration and “lasting connection to the labour market”. The Integration Act further clarifies and strengthens the role of the municipalities, putting them to a larger degree in charge of integration including the duty to draw up an integration plan and contract between the individual Integration Programme participant and the municipality of residence. This could indicate a shift from a more higher-level, national approach to integration happening on a local- and individual level. It also means, that municipalities are seen as responsible for integration outcomes. Skjelbostad and Hernes (2021) further claim that the Integration Act has been a direct outcome of the idea that newly arrived refugees’ participation in the labour market should be a governmental responsibility.

Additionally, the Introduction Act includes so-called “integration promoting measures” provided by the municipalities for people in reception centres, yet without specifying what is meant with these measures. The Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi) elaborates that those measures are roughly the same as the measures in the Introduction Programme, such as parental counselling, life skills, career counselling, assessment of prior learning and work experiences, and recognition of foreign higher education (IMDi 2021). IMDi’s recommendations comprise integration promoting measures provided by the voluntary sector and distinguishes those from the more standardized Introduction Programme measures (IMDi n.d.).

Current phase: integration as the individual’s or everyone’s responsibility?

The third phase introduces several changes in the approach to integration with an increased focus on, and stricter demands and expectations to refugees and asylum-seekers, supposedly as the result of the so-called “refugee crisis” in 2015.⁵

Meld. St. 30 (2015–2016) *From reception to working life – An effective integration policy* and the *Government’s objective for integration* (Barne- likestillings- og inkluderingsdepartementet 2015a) both present an individualized approach to integration, in particular with focus on refugees, in that they address primarily the individual’s responsibility to for instance “make use of the possibilities the Norwegian society provides” (Barne- likestillings- og inkluderingsdepartementet 2015a, 3). Furthermore, the white paper addresses “how integration policy and measures should be organised so that more newly arrived immigrants with refugee background enter the working force or education faster and become permanently attached to the labor market” (Meld. St. 30 (2015–2016), 7). Yet, the document also acknowledges that integration takes time, resources and demands specific measures for a refugee to successfully join the Norwegian labour market.

The government's Integration Strategy 2019–2022 *Integration through knowledge* (Integreringsstrategi 2018) sums up the most important measures and goals for the Norwegian integration policy: education and qualification, work, everyday life integration, and the right to live a free life. The overall aim is to increase participation in work and social life, especially for refugees and immigrant women as they to a greater degree find themselves outside of the labour market.

While Meld. St. 30 (2015–2016) and the Integration Strategy (2018) address primarily the individual immigrant's path towards integration, NOU (2017: 2) *Integration and trust: Long-term consequences of high immigration* discusses the economic consequences of (high) immigration to Norway, such as (lack of) education, (lack of) attachment to the labour market, the reception of social benefits, and living conditions of immigrants, again with a particular focus on asylum seekers and refugees.

Is the voluntary sector the future?

In addition to the strong focus on integration as the individual immigrant's responsibility as presented especially in the Integration act (2021), the voluntary sector (*frivillighet*) is increasingly promoted as important for integration from approximately 2015 onwards. The term *frivillighet* is often used synonymously in Norwegian to the terms *frivillig sektor* (Engl. *voluntary sector*), and *sivilsamfunn* (Engl. *civil society*) and refers to both organized and informal unpaid activities outside of one's home based on voluntary engagement. In this paper we use the terms *voluntary sector* and *volunteerism* synonymously to cover the concept *frivillighet*.

Meld. St. 30 (2015–2016) states that integration cannot succeed with public actors or through financial incentives alone, and the concept *everyday life integration* is introduced to cover the processes involved in getting to know the new everyday life revolving around school, work, and participation in the local society. Voluntary activities have been included as part of *everyday life integration* as they may create arenas for socializing and networking, but also language learning and learning cultural norms and democratic values. Around the same time, the Norwegian government published a letter to all municipalities encouraging to actively seek out cooperation with voluntary organizations (Barne- likestillings- og inkluderingsdepartementet 2015b). The letter acknowledges the pivotal role voluntary organizations have played in the reception and settlement of the refugees having arrived during the so-called "refugee crisis".

Though the voluntary sector has been present in earlier documents, the documents published after 2015 are in many ways more concrete in what they mean the voluntary sector can or should contribute to integration, signalling a turning point in the perception of the voluntary sector's role in integration. Generally, one can differentiate between two central ideas of how

the voluntary sector can contribute to integration, as described for instance in Meld. St. 10 (2018–2019) *Volunteerism – strong, independent, diverse: The governmental volunteerism policy*. On the one hand, the voluntary sector can serve as an *arena* providing a place to gather, share common interests, be social, and network. On the other hand, the voluntary sector is an *actor* offering activities and services for immigrants, such as providing information, guidance, and training. The former understanding refers to the fact that voluntary activities create spaces to gather and interact socially irrespective of the activities' original purposes. The latter refers to an understanding of the voluntary sector in the sense that there can be activities oriented to achieve a specific goal relevant to the whole society or a specific group. In Meld. St. 10 (2018–2019) this distinction is made explicitly, yet in most of the other documents the differentiation is either blurred or not present at all.

This attention to the voluntary sector and its role in integration has recently led to the governmental strategy *Everyday life integration: Strategy to strengthen the role of the voluntary sector in the integration field 2021–2024* (Hverdagsintegrering strategi 2021). This strategy is the first, and so far only, document addressing the intersection of voluntary sector and integration explicitly. Here, integration is understood as “a two-way process in which the authorities guarantee good opportunities and the individual immigrant has to show individual effort” while the aim for integration is for immigrants to participate “to a larger degree” in both social and work life (Hverdagsintegrering strategi 2021, 9). A governmental concern regarding the voluntary sector and immigration/ integration relates to social participation, such as the general underrepresentation of immigrants or persons with immigrant background in many voluntary areas. This is seen as problematic as voluntary organizations connect people and contribute to maintaining collective values (e.g. St.meld. nr. 17 (1996–1997), 84).

How is integration problematized?

We started this article by asking how the understanding of integration has changed during the past fifty years. In our review, we have shown that throughout the decades integration policies in Norway have been based on ideas of everyone having the same opportunities, rights, and duties to participate in society. The depicted means for integration throughout the decades have principally been employment and accommodation. Simultaneously, integration has also been presented as a bidirectional process, in that it was seen as the responsibility of the whole society and of the individual immigrant.

In the policy documents, integration was for the first time introduced as a comprehensive concept in NOU (2011: 14). Here, a multifaceted and broad understanding of integration was introduced, linking it to more aspects

than just employment and accommodation. Yet, the focus on employment persisted in the following years, and was even strengthened, with the aim to maintain the sustainability of the welfare model in Norway. Furthermore, economic self-dependency has been presented as the central path into the Norwegian society and to achieve integration. In addition, and especially from 2015 on, there is an increased shift towards putting more responsibility on the individual immigrant to become integrated. The Integration Act (2021) formalizes this responsibility in introducing concrete demands of the individual immigrant.

In addition to the focus on employment, we see that recently the voluntary sector has received growing attention. Integration is expected to take place to a greater degree in and through the voluntary sector, where activities can serve as both an arena and an actor for integration. This can be understood as a widening view on integration in Norwegian integration policies. In the light of the WPR approach, employment and accommodation seem to not be deemed sufficient anymore to be means and measure of integration. It furthermore may indicate if not a total shift away but an added layer to the sole focus on immigrants becoming (economically) self-dependent (Rytter 2018b; Frazier and van Riemsdijk 2021).

(Un)employment as a central problematization

Following Bacchi and Goodwin's (2016) approach to interrogate deep-seated presuppositions and assumptions underpinning policies, we see that Norway's integration policies have produced a problem revolving around immigrants not gaining economic independence and thus challenging the most important principle in the social democratic welfare regime: labour force participation. Going back to the governmental documents, one of the main reasonings behind focusing on employment is the fear of what unemployment, especially among immigrants, may do to the sustainability of the welfare state (cf. NOU 2011: 7; Brochmann and Hagelund 2011; Olwig and Pærregaard 2011; see also Brochmann and Djuve 2013). Brochmann (2014) shows that this is the result of the dilemma of the welfare state: it is the solution as it provides universal welfare, but it is also the problem as it relies on high employment rates which immigration may threaten. Even though Norway traditionally is one of the countries in Europe with the highest levels of work participation and lowest unemployment rate (Statista 2022), there is a gap between the immigrant and non-immigrant population (OECD 2022). In 2021, the overall unemployment rate in Norway was at 3.6 per cent making it the sixth lowest in Europe, in contrast to the overall EU rate of 6.5 per cent (Statista 2022). For the age group 20–66 years, 78.1 per cent of the Norwegian population excluding immigrants were employed, while the employment rate for immigrants was 65.4 per cent in 2021 (SSB

2021d). In comparison, the employment rate of foreign-born citizens across the EU in 2014 was 62.1 per cent (OECD 2022). Though the rates have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the trends have remained the same.

The aim of the Norwegian government has been to achieve similar results between immigrants and the population in general, as stated in for instance Meld. St. 6 (2012–2013). This approach also pertains to employment. However, Valenta and Bunar (2010) show that refugee integration policies in Norway, and Sweden, have failed in terms of levelling out initial inequalities between refugees and the rest of the population. One aim of the Introduction Programme is for 70 per cent of the participants to be either working or in education one year after finishing the programme (Guribye and Espersen 2019; SSB 2021e), yet in 2020 the rate was at 61 per cent (SSB 2021f). Policy initiatives, such as the “fast track” linked to the Introduction Programme, have not improved the results (Rambøll 2019; Fedreheim 2021). The fact that refugees are settled irrespective of their background, work experience and the receiving community’s labour market, in addition to the current trends in the Norwegian immigration policy resulting in increased numbers of refugees with complex health problems (UNHCR 2021; Norwegian Ministries 2022) would affect the premises with one would try to enter the labour market.

With reference to the WPR approach, we claim that policies have subjectified immigrants, and in particular refugees and asylum-seekers, as unemployed since the solution to achieve integration for many years has been mainly seen to be employment. Thus, there is a clear discrepancy between policy goals and reality in terms of employment. If immigrants are subjectified as unemployed, and policy making reflects this image, the same policies shape what is possible for its *subjects*, hence potentially limiting the scope of action of immigrants and creating an image that may be difficult to break away from. Yet, little attention is paid to immigrants’ circumstances and conditions. There is a large variety of reasons why people migrate to Norway, and their backgrounds and prerequisites differ significantly, as discussed earlier. Yet, there seems to be little to no reflection over the expectations and policy goals in policies, and who actually is targeted by these. Considering that around half of all immigrants coming to Norway each year are working or taking an education (SSB 2021c), the problematization of integration as a question of (un)employment tends to make “the others”, that is refugees and immigrants’ family members, the “problem” of integration, causing them in addition to be produced as responsible for this “problem”.

When more demands are put on immigrants to become integrated, policy development is in line with neoliberal logics in which immigrants are expected to prove themselves “deserving” of welfare benefits. Integration

is thus understood in terms of economic rationalities and valuations (Grace, Nawyn, and Okwako 2018; Rytter 2018b; Frazier and van Riemsdijk 2021). These factors play a role in subjectification processes of immigrants, though the newer documents show some tentative efforts of changing this perspective. We ask if the introduction of the voluntary sector as an integration actor and arena then reflects a policy realization that first, employment is not enough to become integrated, and second, that individualizing and formalizing integration does not contribute to reaching employment rate goals.

From integration through employment to integration through volunteerism?

The fact that Norwegian integration policies have for decades focussed on employment and its assumed decisive meaning for integration is for us a policy paradox. We have seen that the subjectification of immigrants as “unemployed” has caused discursive and subjectification effects, restricting both the mindsets related to immigration and immigrants’ possibilities in society. Additionally, when immigrants are subjectified as “unemployed”, it is evident that integration in terms of employment fails. This begs the question whether it indeed would be possible to integrate when unemployed, or to be employed yet not integrated. The resulting contradiction and paradox of employment as the only means and measure for integration became seemingly evident also for policy makers in the last decade when the voluntary sector is presented as a necessity for integration. The voluntary sector seems to kill two birds with one stone: Firstly, policy makers have acknowledged that employment is not enough to achieve societal participation and that the voluntary sector can contribute to immigrant’s integration in this regard. Secondly, the voluntary sector may (indirectly) provide resources to facilitate entering – and remaining part of – the Norwegian labour market. Thus, the voluntary sector serves both as a means and goal in the integration policies (Ager and Strang 2008).

The ascribed role of the voluntary sector in integration is not exclusive to a Norwegian setting but also present in the other Nordic countries (Agergaard and la Cour 2012; Aasen, Haug, and Lynnebakke 2017; Karlsdóttir et al. 2020) and in EU member states (European Commission 2016). In particular during, and in the wake of, the so-called “refugee crisis”, the voluntary sectors in Europe have received increasing attention. Their role in welcoming and accommodating the arriving refugees and their needs is mentioned to have been crucial in receiving the refugees in a safe manner (see among others Barne- likestillings- og inkluderingsdepartementet 2015b; Fleischmann 2019). Though studies on volunteering are challenging due to different understandings of the concept volunteering (Schwingel et al.

2016), generally studies point towards the beneficial role of voluntary arenas for immigrants in (high-income) countries, such as the contribution to building social and human capital (Handy and Greenspan 2009). Sveen and her colleagues (2022) show that volunteering may contribute to improving one's self-conception, building social networks, and developing skills in addition to understanding volunteering as one way to contribute to and engage with society. They also point towards the general health-promoting effects of volunteering. Volunteering can furthermore be understood as a form of active citizenship (Ambrosini and Artero 2022). Special attention has been paid in some studies to the role of immigrant and religious organizations in integration including the contribution to strengthened religious and civic identity (Peucker 2018), and the positive relationship between US American democratic traditions and religious identity (Dana, Wilcox-Archuleta, and Barreto 2017). This approach stands in contrast to many of the policy documents' neglect of these types of organizations' (beneficial) role in integration.

Nevertheless, using the voluntary sector in integration as proposed in the policy documents may pose several challenges. Policies in general may reproduce inequality between "the" majority and "the" minority (Rytter 2018a). Within this context, voluntary activities may under certain circumstances contribute to minoritization, as has been shown for instance by Stein (2022), in addition to immigrants, and in particular refugees and asylum seekers, tending to be perceived as "users" and not "actors" (Ambrosini and Artero 2022). Another challenge is identified by Slootjes and Kampen (2017) who show that though volunteering contributes to becoming active citizens, volunteering is seldomly recognized as work experience, thus does not actively lead to paid employment.

Concluding remarks

The aim of this article was to show how integration has been problematized in Norwegian governmental documents between 1973 and 2021. Following a WPR inspired approach, we have shown that integration has largely been problematized as unemployment and its resulting threat to the welfare state. Suggested solutions to this "problem" have been more formal demands to the individual immigrant including the successful participation in the Introduction Programme and individual integration contracts between Introduction Programme participants and the respective municipalities. These measures target to a large degree refugees and asylum-seekers which contributes to a subjectification of refugees and asylum-seekers as "unemployed". In recent decades, we see that societal participation has come to the fore in political documents as part of the concept *everyday life integration*. Here, the voluntary sector is seen to play a crucial role as both an arena and actor contributing to integration. We suggest that this is a turn in the political

approach to integration pointing towards de-subjectifying immigrants as “unemployed”. Nevertheless, we also suggest that the voluntary sector is being put under increasing pressure to contribute to public tasks.

The developments described in this article need to be seen in the light of bigger changes, including an increasingly “civic” approach to integration especially in the Scandinavian countries, in that immigrants are to become “citizens” (e.g. Borevi, Jensen, and Mouritsen 2017). Moreover, recent developments in Norwegian integration policies should be seen in the light of what Vasta (2007) has called “moral panic”, and what Djuve (2011) described as the (changing) public debate around immigration and integration to which research has contributed and during which the governmental documents and acts were written.

Notes

1. Comprised of the Conservative Party (H), the Christian Democratic Party (KrF) and the Liberal Party (V).
2. Comprised of the Labor Party (Ap), the Center Party (Sp) and the Socialist Left Party (SV).
3. Of which 7.7 per cent comprise immigrants from EU countries, Great Britain, USA, Canada, Australia or New Zealand, while 11.2 percent are from the rest of the world SSB. (2021a). *Innvandrere og norskfødte med innvandrerforeldre*. <https://www.ssb.no/befolkning/innvandrer/statistikk/innvandrer-og-norskfodte-med-innvandrerforeldre>.
4. Target group for the programme are primarily newly arrived refugees with approved residence permit between 18 and 55 years old and their family members. Nordic citizens and citizens from an EEA country are not obliged to participate nor entitled to free tuition (cf. Norwegian Ministries 2022)
5. We are aware of the fact that the term “refugee crisis” is not a neutral term. Following Greussing and Boomgaarden (2017), we use the term to situate this study in the discourse evolving around the term in academia.

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