



Utrecht University



Rethinking integration

ANALYSING SOCIAL AND SPATIAL DIFFERENTIATION IN THE
NETHERLANDS REGARDING SYRIAN NEWCOMERS' PERSPECTIVES ON (THE
ROLE OF WORK) FOR INTEGRATION



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Analysing social and spatial differentiation in the Netherlands regarding Syrian newcomers' perspectives on (the role of work) for integration

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Abstract

This research examines the perspectives on and experiences with integration, especially focusing on the role of paid work, by different groups of Syrian newcomers in diverse socio-spatial contexts in the Netherlands. Integration is a hotly debated concept but does not have one agreed upon definition. In discussions around this topic, the perspectives of newcomers are often overlooked while they are main actors in processes of integration. Highlighting their views and experiences, especially regarding the essential aspect of paid work, is therefore of great relevance. Hereby, this research analyses social and spatial differentiation concerning this topic. This because newcomers' experiences with their process of integration are embedded in structures of wider socio-spatial contexts and are influenced by their social attributes. The relevant social attributes looked at in this research are age, gender, ethnicity, level of education and type of residence. A qualitative view on the division between cities and villages allows for an analysis of different socio-spatial contexts. An intersectional approach has been used to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the interrelatedness between these aspects. Thereby, the conceptual framework of integration by Strang and Ager (2008) is used to put into perspective similar research findings on key aspects emerging from this research. The research methods used are the conduction of sixteen semi-structured interviews with Syrian newcomers together with three expert conversations. Regarding the findings, this research first of all identified six key aspects of integration being cultural knowledge, personal development, social network, connection with host society, safety and stability and work. Those findings align in large part with the key aspects of Strang and Ager's conceptual framework of integration from 2008. Regarding integration in general, younger and Kurdish newcomers tend to have the least difficulty with their process of integration, especially those who live without family and those who reside in cities. With regard to experiences with paid work for integration, those who are male, younger, lower educated, live in a city and own a permanent residence permit appear to be most likely to have positive experiences with the search for work and/or working in the Netherlands.

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List of abbreviations, definitions and Dutch translations

COA	Dutch for <i>Centraal Orgaan opvang Asielzoekers</i> , meaning Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers.
IND	Dutch for <i>Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst</i> , meaning Immigration and Naturalization Service.
DUO	Dutch for <i>Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs</i> , meaning Education Implementation Department.
CBR	Dutch for <i>Centraal Bureau Rijvaardigheidsbewijzen</i> , meaning Central Office of Driving Licences.
<i>Inburgering</i>	Civic integration
<i>Klantmanager</i>	A status holder's contact person from the municipality.
<i>Uitkering</i>	A form of social benefits for people without an income paid by government agencies.
Refugees	In the 1951 refugee convention, a refugee is defined as: "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion." (UNHCR)
Asylum seekers	An asylum seeker is someone who asks another country for protection by submitting a request for asylum. The country where asylum is sought then examines whether the asylum seeker is covered by the United Nations Refugee Convention and therefore needs protection (VluchtelingenWerk).
Statusholders	Asylum seekers become statusholders as soon as they are recognized as refugees and therefore receive a residence permit (UNHCR; Rijksoverheid).

1. Introduction

Being described as one of the largest and most complex crises globally, the civil war in Syria has gripped the country already since 2011 (OCHA). While the conflict started as a peaceful civilian uprising against the regime of Bashar al-Assad, nowadays it has caused around eleven million people to be in need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria and the registration of over five point six million individuals as Syrian refugees (VluchtelingenWerk Nederland; IOM 2019). Since 2011, more than a million Syrians have applied for asylum in Europe, with the amounts peaking in 2015 (VluchtelingenWerk Nederland). In 2015, eighteen point seven thousand Syrians applied for asylum in the Netherlands, accounting for forty-three percent of the asylum seekers in that year (CBS 2016).

When asylum seekers enter the Netherlands, they get dispersed across the asylum seekers' centres of the country. Often, the location of those centres is in the more rural areas where fewer facilities and opportunities such as demand for labor are present compared to larger cities (De Hoon 2017). If the IND (the Dutch Immigration and Naturalization Service) recognizes the asylum seeker as a refugee, this person is granted a temporary residence permit and is assigned a specific municipality in which the person receives an offer for social housing (Rijksoverheid; De Hoon 2017, 11).¹

As soon as you are granted a residence permit in the Netherlands, you must start your integration process (*inburgeren*). It used to be the case until the end of 2021 that you needed to pass the integration exam (*inburgeringsexamen*) within three years to officially integrate. This exam consists of seven parts including writing, reading, listening and speaking skills, knowledge of Dutch society and orientation of the Dutch labor market (VluchtelingenWerk Nederland). If someone fails to pass the exam within three years without a legitimate reason, this person receives a fine of at most 1250 euros and gets an additional two years to pass the exam (VluchtelingenWerk Nederland). When you pass the exam, you get officially integrated which gives you, among other rights, free access to the Dutch labor market. From January 2022, a new integration policy has been implemented.² This policy requires newcomers to learn the Dutch language at a higher level. Also, it requires newcomers to focus on integration on the job by meeting Dutch residents and gaining work experience through volunteer work or internships. Lastly, it increases responsibility for municipalities to take care of the integration process (VluchtelingenWerk Nederland). The system changed because the old system was criticized for being fraud-prone and was putting too much responsibility on the newcomers themselves (VluchtelingenWerk Nederland). Both policies however are highly focused on gaining successful integration outcomes; people knowing the Dutch language, having a job and actively participating in society. In general, both integration policies and the public discourse focus on outcomes (or failed outcomes) in their perception of integration (Craig 2015, 25). This fixation raises the question: is this really what integration is all about?

¹ The temporary residence permit is valid for five years. After five years, the IND investigates if the refugee is still in need of protection and if the person has passed the integration exam. If this is the case, the refugee receives a permanent residence permit (Rijksoverheid).

² The integration law was supposed to be implemented on July 1, 2021. Because of COVID-19, the introduction is postponed by six months (Rijksoverheid 2020).

1.1 Research problem and objective

In academic literature, the concept of integration is a hot topic for debate. Academics provide many perspectives and alternatives however so far, there is no consensus on how to define integration (Grzymala-Kazłowska and Phillimore 2018) and therefore the concept remains contested (Strang and Ager 2008). Moreover, research on the topic often is done through quantitative research or by scholars who theorize about integration from their scholarly perspective, building upon the work of others and ignoring the perspectives of newcomers. For a topic like integration, this appears to be problematic since there is a lack of acknowledgement of the importance of the views of the newcomers. Research on integration is a subjective matter. Its definition seems to differ depending on the actors you ask and the views they carry with them (Phillimore 2012). Therefore, newcomers need to be able to articulate their perspectives and experiences (Phillimore 2012).

In order to address the aforementioned issue, this research scrutinizes the concept of integration by exploring the perspectives of newcomers. This is done through qualitative research on the experiences of Syrian newcomers in the Netherlands. The examination of their experiences is carried out by focusing in particular on the aspect of work. Among scholars and policymakers concerned with integration processes this aspect of work is considered to be of great importance. Having a paid job provides newcomers with opportunities to gain economic independence, meet more people from the host society and improve their language skills (Cheung and Phillimore 2014, 521). Although a focus on paid work is highly evident in academic literature and policies aiming at successful refugee integration outcomes, there exists a migrant-refugee gap in the Dutch labor market. This means that labor market participation rates of refugees lag behind in comparison to other migrant groups (Razenberg, Kahmann and de Gruijter 2018; De Gruijter and Razenberg 2019). Moreover, there is also persistent gender inequality indicated among recently arrived migrants in the Netherlands (Ala-Mantila and Fleischmann 2018). For instance, among Syrian refugees that received a temporary residence permit between 2014 and 2016, fifteen percent of the men are employed compared to four percent of the women (De Gruijter and Razenberg 2019). While processes of integration and labor market participation are thus influenced by someone's gender, other aspects such as age and country of origin are also expected to be of importance (Bakker, Dagevos and Engbersen 2017). Unlike the high focus on gender, not very much is known about whether, which and how other social attributes shape experiences of newcomers and how they interrelate. Therefore, this research examines the perspectives and experiences of Syrian newcomers on integration, and in particular on the aspect of work, while accounting for possible differences between social groups.

Another aspect that strongly influences Syrian newcomers' experiences with integration and work is the socio-spatial context. Because of the Dutch dispersal policies, newcomers are placed across the country. This placement happens when the newcomers arrive and when they receive their residence permit. This place is likely where they will live for some time because they often lack resources to move (De Hoon 2017). So, while some newcomers start their integration process in villages in the more rural parts of the country, others live in urbanised cities. Since the experiences of newcomers' everyday lives are embedded in structures of wider

socio-spatial contexts, this research also compares the experiences of different groups of Syrian newcomers with the role of work for integration between those living in cities and villages.

1.2 Research questions and relevance

Following from the previous section, this research aims to examine the perspectives on and experiences with integration, with a focus on the role of work, by different groups of Syrian newcomers in diverse socio-spatial contexts in the Netherlands. This aim translates into the following question central to this research:

How do different groups of Syrian newcomers in different socio-spatial contexts in the Netherlands perceive and experience integration, particularly regarding the role of work?

This research question will be answered in the conclusion by means of the following sub-questions:

1. How do Syrian newcomers perceive and experience integration?
 - a. Are there differences between social groups? If so, what differences?
 - b. Are there differences between those living in cities and in villages in the Netherlands? If so, what differences?
2. How do Syrian newcomers perceive the particular role of paid work for integration?
 - a. Are there differences between social groups? If so, what differences?
 - b. Are there differences between those living in cities and in villages in the Netherlands? If so, what differences?
3. How do Syrian newcomers experience working in the Netherlands in relation to integration?
 - a. Are there differences between social groups? If so, what differences?
 - b. Are there differences between those living in cities and in villages in the Netherlands? If so, what differences?

Although the role of work for integration is a hotly debated topic, this research aims to enrich academic literature firstly by presenting a conceptualization of integration from the perspective of Syrian newcomers. Hereby, it addresses the importance to highlight this often overshadowed perspective and contributes to establishing more solid work hereon. Moreover, it lays the groundwork for understanding how participants view integration to interpret the experiences and views on the role of work for integration rightly during the rest of the research. The focus on work is relevant as it comes forward in literature as one of the most significant aspects. Moreover, this research shows that focusing on work reflects the views of Syrian newcomers as they attach high value to work in relation to other aspects as well. Thereby, during my thesis, I have been involved as an intern at NewBees, where I am currently employed. NewBees is a social organization committed to making the Netherlands more inclusive. Their core business

is matching newcomers to local entrepreneurs and organizations, organizing inclusive civic integration for municipalities and advising and guiding businesses on diversity and inclusion. My cooperation with NewBees contributed to the feasibility to do research on this topic. This research furthermore contributes to the abundant literature on the challenges newcomers face on the labor market as it offers a detailed picture of the experiences of Syrian newcomers with work in the Netherlands. The combination of focusing not only on relevant social attributes that influence experiences but also in combination with the influence of socio-spatial contexts offers a valuable addition. This is because first, the importance of different lived experiences between those living in cities and villages is clearly represented in literature but has not yet been brought into relation with differences between social groups. Secondly, literature on the influence of social attributes other than gender are scarce, while they do emerge as being of importance during this research. Lastly, now that a new integration policy was enforced since January 2022, gaining a deeper understanding on the experiences of newcomers with regard to the role of work for integration can be helpful to shape more valuable implementation of initiatives and policies that aim at enhancing the integration process, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive society. By addressing the role that newcomers play in social changes related to global migration, this research is of great interest to International Development Studies.

1.2 An overview of the chapters

Firstly, the next chapter provides a theoretical framework on the conceptualization of integration from an academic and migrant perspective with a focus on the domain of paid work. Subsequently, I discuss the challenges that refugees face in relation to the role of work for integration. Here, both the influence of relevant social attributes and differences between socio-spatial contexts are highlighted. After presenting the geographical contextual framework, the methodology of this research will be explained. This will be followed by two empirical chapters. The first empirical chapter discusses Syrian newcomers' perspectives on and experiences with integration. In the second empirical chapter, perceptions and experiences with the role of work for integration in the Netherlands are discussed. Both chapters highlight differences between social groups and socio-spatial contexts. Also in both chapters, the presentation of results are followed by a discussion in which the empirical data is linked with existing literature. Lastly, the conclusion provides answers on the research questions and offers some suggestions for further research.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Conceptualising integration: A historical overview

Integration is a chaotic concept; a word used by many but understood differently by most.
(Robinson 1998)

The term integration is a central concept in debates concerning the rights, settlement and adjustment of refugees or migrants in general (Strang and Ager 2010). It is a contested term that knows a variety of different meanings to different people. The EU defines integration as ‘a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents’ (EC 2004). Nevertheless, among academics there is no agreed single definition of the term (Grzymala-Kazłowska and Phillimore 2018). Cheung and Phillimore (2014) describe the conceptualization of the term integration over time. They show that scholars provided long debates on the topic, already starting in 1930. At the time, the Chicago School conceptualized integration as ‘a process through which migrants pass *en route* to assimilation’ (Cheung and Phillimore 2014). Sixty years later, in 1990, Hall argued that integration needed to be understood as an on-going negotiation between past and present and country of origin and country of refuge. Herein, identities are contested and shifting through social networks that are developed or maintained (Cheung and Phillimore 2014, 520). Cheung and Phillimore (2014) continue by saying that in the same line, building on the idea that integration is a process, Berry argued in 1997 that host societies and migrant groups change over time which leads to the emerging of new identities and values. He refers to integration as occurring when a person both maintains interest in their original culture and in taking part in daily interactions with other groups. In this conceptualization, the concept of social networks is a central aspect. He also differentiates between assimilation, which occurs when migrants do not maintain social networks with co-nationals, separation and marginalization.³ Approaching integration this way has gained support but has also been criticized for having an unidirectional and linear understanding. Over time, focus shifted towards a multi-dimensional understanding of integration, moving beyond the socio-cultural approach. A multi-dimensional approach highlights the interconnected role of different actors as well as the functional dimension of integration, such as education, the labor market, health and housing (Cheung and Phillimore 2014, 520).

When theorizing about integration, one of the main themes that have been identified concerns the development of social relations and different kinds of social networks (Phillimore 2012). Social networks refer to the contacts that are made with friends, relatives and organizations and play a crucial role in many conceptualizations of integration as they appear to provide access to functional resources (Cheung and Phillimore 2014). The resources that are obtained from social networks are referred to as social capital, a concept that was defined by

³ According to Berry, migrants become separated when they mix with the indigenous population and they become marginalized when they have no social networks and they become excluded (Cheung and Phillimore 2014, 519).

Bourdieu⁴, and theorised about by various others including Portes in 1998. As Palmgren (2017) concludes based on the ideas of the two aforementioned mentioned authors, the concept of social capital is fundamental to social network theories since the network is a result of individual and collective investments in social relationships that are able to yield resources (Palmgren 2017, 2248). Social networks that lead to increased social capital seem to have a positive impact on the integration of immigrants (Liltsi, Michailidis, Loizou and Chatzitheodoridis 2020). As Palmgren (2017) argues based on fieldwork experience in Los Angeles, securing and harnessing social relationships impact integration goals such as employment. This works two ways; while the absence of social networks limits greatly the access to work, being employed can facilitate access to new social networks (Cheung and Phillimore 2014). Much has been written about the relation between social networks, social capital and integration. In 2002, Putnam wrote an influential work on social capital which together with aforementioned work of Berry influenced also the ideas of Strang and Ager, to which will be turned to now (ibid.).

In 2008, Strang and Ager developed a framework in which key components are identified that are central to ‘successful’ integration (see Figure one). This framework is an exploration of creating an operational definition of the concept integration, thereby attempting to aid the assessment of the efficacy of integration initiatives by bringing together the functional and social aspects of integration (Grzymala-Kazłowska and Phillimore 2018, 188). In their framework, Strang and Ager (2008) differentiate between four core domains including ten indicators of integration. The first domain concerns markers and means with the corresponding indicators of employment, housing, education and health. Achievement regarding those four indicators are seen as markers of integration or means to support the achievement of integration. The second domain regards social connection, in which social bonds (connections that link members of a group, like family, co-ethnics or co-nationals), social bridges (connection between such groups or communities), and social links (connections between individuals and the structures of the state) are the indicators. Facilitators are the third domain and include aspects that ‘remove’ barriers to integration such as language and cultural knowledge and the themes of safety and stability. The last domain, foundation, refers to the importance of the concept of citizenship and rights. Although this conceptual framework aims to provide a base for a more effective debate, Strang and Ager (2008) acknowledge that the concept of integration is likely to remain contested. At the moment, it can be stated that they were right. In recent years, various scholars have dedicated their time to rethinking the concept of integration.

⁴ Bourdieu defined social capital as follows: ‘the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition or in other words, to membership of a group’ (Bourdieu 1986, 248).

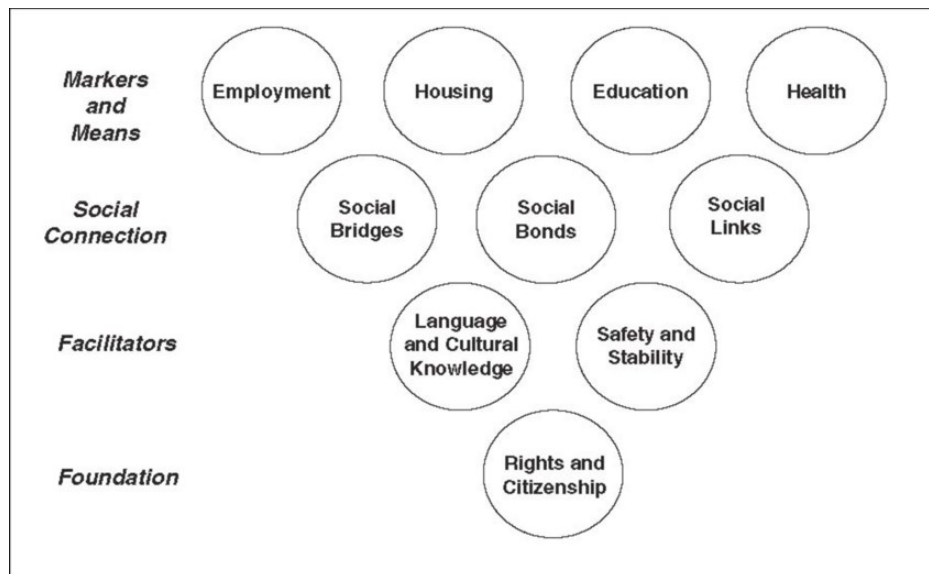


Figure one: A Conceptual Framework Defining Core Domains of Integration by Strang and Ager (2008)

2.2 Conceptualising integration: Recent attributes and alternatives

Over the years, there has been a shift from considering integration as a one-way process towards considering it as a two-way relational process (Strang and Ager 2010). Whereas integration used to be conceived as a process in which migrants are the ones that need to adapt, nowadays integration is seen as an adaptation process in which both migrants as well as the host society are involved (Gisselquist 2020; Grzymala-Kazłowska and Phillimore 2018). It is now a well-established thought that refugee-receiving countries influence refugee integration and according to Phillimore (2020), this happens through five sets of opportunity structures.⁵ Nevertheless, the acknowledgement of the dynamic and multi-dimensional characteristics of integration has not meant that the focus on policy and practice is not placed anymore upon migrants themselves (Phillimore 2020). Grzymala-Kazłowska and Phillimore (2018) also highlight the importance of the intersectionality of variables such as levels of education, language, gender, legal status and length of stay with regard to integration outcomes.

Rethinking integration is being done by various scholars in various ways of which Grzymala-Kazłowska and Phillimore (2018) have clearly outlined a couple. They argue that because we live in an era of superdiversity⁶, there is a need for a reconsideration of the concept. New insights are needed to capture the functioning of diversity, social changes and fluidity. So far, they argue, integration has been mostly understood as the permanent settlement of migrants in a country with a clear ‘dominant’ host population whereas nowadays, transnationalism and circular migration for example create situations that do not fit within that idea. Therefore, in their article they describe different ways of conceptualizing integration.⁷ One of the authors

⁵ This set of five opportunity structures include: locality, discourse, relations, structure and initiatives and support (Phillimore 2020).

⁶ Inspired by Vertovec who introduced the concept in 2007, super-diversity refers to ‘the growing complexity, acceleration of changes and increased interconnectedness across societies as well as a diversification of migrants’ (Grzymala-Kazłowska and Phillimore 2018, 179).

⁷ Some concepts that are proposed are holistic integration (by Strang, Baillor and Mignard 2017), reciprocal integration (Phillimore, Humpris and Khan 2017) and social anchoring (by Grzymala-Kazłowska 2017).

they mention is Ryan (2018), who proposes the concept of differentiated embedding. Hereby, he highlights the dynamic nature of the term instead of seeing it as a static, achieved state. He argues that this conceptualization may help to go beyond a simplistic, one-dimensional, ‘all or nothing’ view of migrant ‘integration’ (Ryan 2018, 238). With regard to the term, there are different dimensions that need to be considered. First, the relational dimension acknowledges the role of social networks. However, as Ryan argues, too much focus on social networks risks overlooking the wider structural context in which migrants live and work. Therefore, other key dimensions are the societal one; an actor’s belonging within wider socio-political structures and the territorial dimension; the ways in which an actor is located in particular places (Ryan 2018, 236). An important aspect of the term differentiated embedding is its attention for the varying extent to which particular people across different settings and in various geographical scales negotiated embeddedness, thereby also capturing multi-scalarity and multi-sectorality. When discussing studies that offer alternative ways of thinking around the topic of integration, also the study of Schiller and Caglar (2016) should be mentioned. With a multi-scalar analysis, they explain the emergence of domains of commonality within a disempowered city through their introduction of sociabilities of emplacement. With sociabilities of emplacement they refer to the bringing together of migrant newcomers and local people who together build aspects of their social belonging to the city. Herein, they emphasize that not only migrant newcomers, who experienced displacement as they have physically moved to another country, but also those considered as local people experience social dislocation and precarity in relation to the restructuring of their city. The concept of emplacement, defined as the social processes through which a dispossessed individual builds or rebuilds networks of connection within the constraints and opportunities of a specific city (Schiller and Caglar 2016, 21), hereby offers an interesting alternative.

While the aforementioned scholars are rethinking the concept of integration, King (2020) takes a step further in his criticism by arguing that the concept has hegemonic and neo-colonial implications. He then refers to Schinkel (2018; 2019) who elaborately discussed this and who argues that integration is ‘a neo-colonial exercise steering the political and socio-cultural hegemony of the nation-state and [...] to academics career building’ (King 2020, 8-9). In 2019, Schinkel goes even further by stating that the concept of immigrant integration should not be rethought, instead it should be recognized that any concern with integration is an imposition (Schinkel 2019). Another critique that is raised strikes at the implication of integration that migrants should aspire to the standards of the host population, although it remains unclear who this host population is (Saharso 2019). Although such criticism is of great importance when theorizing about integration, this research does use the term integration as it remains a very commonly used term which is also well-known among the research population.

2.3 Integration from the perspective of newcomers

In the process of conceptualizing integration, it does not happen often that researchers ask how newcomers themselves experience integration. Nevertheless, the importance to do so is expressed by multiple scholars like Phillimore (2012) who argues that it is very desirable to conduct research that enables refugees to express their experiences and views. As Phillimore (2012) argues, research on integration has a subjective nature since individuals make use of

their rights differently. ‘Having permission to work does not mean that a person will seek or secure work’ (Phillimore 2012, 527). Also The Refugee Academy (Ponzoni, Ghorashi and Badran 2020, 9) advocates for more attention for the perspective of refugees and wrote a report called ‘ Going towards a structural place for the perspective and vision of refugees in policy making’. They argue that refugees can identify blind spots and gaps in policies and that especially now with current integration challenges that the Netherlands and Europe are facing, the perspective of refugees is especially relevant and necessary. In the article of Strang and Ager (2008) called “Understanding Integration: A conceptual framework” they also include refugees’ experiences by conducting twenty-nine interviews with refugees. Huizinga and van Hoven (2018) conducted in-depth interviews with ten Syrian male refugees in the North of the Netherlands in order to gain an understanding about their sense of belonging in relation to space and place. Another example concerns McPherson (2010) who in her research contests the normalizing discourse of ‘integrationism’ through conversations with refugee women. She argues that refugees are often unfairly represented as problematic, deficient and in need of changing which makes an appeal for marginal choices necessary. Other scholars who do include the migrants’ perspective are Palmgren (2017), who draws his arguments on social networks and refugee management regimes from ethnographic fieldwork with Kachin refugees and van Liempt and Staring (2020), who conducted qualitative research among Syrian statusholders⁸ in the Netherlands in order to investigate how they shape their participation and what their experiences with the Dutch participation policies are.

2.4 The role of work for integration: Challenges for different groups of newcomers in different socio-spatial contexts

With regard to integration, perhaps the most researched area concerns work (Strang and Ager 2008, 170). Also newcomers themselves experience a great need to get a job soon after arriving in the Netherlands (van Liempt and Staring 2020, 72). They consider employment as a means to acquire relationships with host communities through gaining access to resources like information, knowledge and opportunities (Cheung and Phillimore 2014).

Although a focus on employment so far sounds very promising, migrants do report challenges when it comes down to their experiences with having or finding a job. Among different migrant groups, refugees in particular are struggling with the aspect of employment, hence the so-called refugee gap. Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2007) exemplify the refugee gap with their research. They interviewed three recently arrived refugee groups in Australia about their employment experiences and conclude that their employment outcomes are consistently worse than the ones of other migrants. At times, the refugees mentioned that they would take on any available job as a pragmatic decision from an economic perspective or from an acceptance of the structural disadvantage they face in seeking a job. Although refugees often have higher levels of education compared to other migrant groups, they face more difficulties with regard to securing employment. Many refugees are not able to provide proof of their previous qualifications and therefore it is a common experience for refugees to be under-

⁸ Statusholders are asylum seekers who are recognized as refugees and therefore receive a residence permit (UNHCR; Rijksoverheid).

employed, meaning that they have a job that does not match their skills (Ager and Strang 2008). Brell, Dustmann and Preston (2020) elaborate on the refugee gap by expressing how economic migrants for example, make a decision to move to another country based on relative opportunities abroad in comparison to those at home while the migration of refugees is often forced or unexpected. Refugees are therefore less able to choose a specific destination and have less locally applicable human capital. The result is that at arrival, refugees are likely to have lower employment rates and a lower wage. This position therefore also affects their ability to integrate in other domains. The article states that in the second decade after arrival, this gap between the position of refugees and that of other migrants comes close to disappearing, although this is more pronounced in employment rates than in wages. Migrants, and thus in particular refugees, may face various types of challenges. In Ireland for instance, it is observed that next to the fact that migrants and in particular mainly non-EU nationals tend to be overqualified while at the same they tend to be underemployed, they are facing a long and complex procedure for recognition of qualifications, they lack access to public sector jobs as well as targeted support for using and developing skills. Also, they struggle with language barriers, poor contacts and experiences with discrimination (Arnoldus et al 2019, 18-19). Those issues are not confined to Ireland, as shown for example by Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2007) who report that almost half of the interviewees experienced discrimination on the labor market.

Among refugees, women are especially vulnerable since they experience lower employment rates than men (Brell, Dustmann and Preston 2020). In general, it is known from the gender dimension of migration studies that women face more difficulties when integrating into the labor market at the place of arrival because women often have lower levels of education, fewer previous experience with the formal labor market than men and more childcare responsibilities (Hillmann and Koca 2021).

Next to gender, other social attributes may also be of influence on integration and labor market experiences. With regard to age, Bakker (2016, 59) reports that the refugees' chances to have a paid job reduces with a higher age at first residence status, meaning that those who arrive as adolescents have higher chances at work. They also report that singles are less likely to be employed than those being part of a couple just like having children reduces the likelihood of employment for women. In the report of Hillmann and Koca (2021), it is stated that the position of female refugees on the labor market is shaped by interrelated factors such as nationality, place of residence and age. Bakker, Dagevos and Engbersen (2014) relate experiences with the process of integration to the type of residence status granted as it may cause insecurity.

Concerning socio-spatial contexts, new immigrants appear to be attracted to large cities which can be explained by the contextual factors and the resources present such as the labor demand in a certain place, welfare provisions and access to public housing (De Hoon 2017). Nevertheless, asylum seekers are instead often placed in locations outside the immigrant-dense cities due to dispersal policies. Those places often have fewer facilities and job opportunities nearby. Based on an analysis of dispersal policy enactment across Europe, evidence shows that refugees exposed to dispersal policies have persistently worse labor market outcomes (Fasani, Frattini and Minale 2018). Damm and Rosholm (2010) thereby argue that transition rates into first jobs decrease with local population size, meaning that those rates would be higher in cities

than in villages. On the other hand, Bakker (2016, 59) concludes that the odds of having a paid job are smaller in highly dense areas.

2.5 The Dutch context for refugee settlement and integration

In 2020, 17.585 people applied for asylum in the Netherlands (CBS 2020) of which in December, thirty-six percent had the Syrian nationality. In that same month, sixty-two percent of the asylum seekers were men and ten point six percent were women. The remaining twenty-seven point two percent were children. This gender division is different among those who travel after their relatives, of whom thirteen point five percent were men, thirty-seven point eight percent were women and the remaining forty-eight point seven percent were children (CBS 2020). Because of the Dutch dispersal policies, refugees are accommodated scattered throughout the country. In spite that those policies are an effective tool regarding spatial distribution on the short term, on the long-term refugees tend to leave the rural areas and move to the cities because of its greater labor market opportunities (De Hoon 2017). Because the places that refugees are assigned to are often relatively far away from locations with high demand for labor, this poses a barrier for refugees that recently received their residence permit to find a job (SER 2016, 62-63). In relative terms, most Syrian refugees in the Netherlands live in smaller municipalities (van Liempt and Staring 2020) of which relatively a lot live in the municipality of Arnhem (CBS 2019).⁹ Nevertheless, in absolute terms most Syrian refugees live in the bigger cities such as Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague (CBS 2019).¹⁰ Because of these statistics in combination with the access to research participants gained from the network of my partner organization NewBees which has locations both in Amsterdam and Arnhem, this research focusses on the cities of Amsterdam and Arnhem and their surrounding villages.

With regard to access to the Dutch labor market, differences are assigned to different migrant groups. First, asylum seekers who are awaiting the outcome of their asylum application are allowed to work six months after the start of the asylum process but only for twenty-four weeks a year maximum (Rijksoverheid). Those who are recognized by the IND as refugees and therefore received a residence permit are allowed free access to the Dutch labor market. Other migrants who are allowed free labor market access are family members if their ‘sponsor’ has free access, migrants holding a permanent residence permit and long-term residents (de Lange, Oomes, Gons, and Spanikova 2019).

Unfortunately, those with free labor market access often do face barriers when it comes down to employment. Also in the Netherlands, a refugee gap exists as the labor market participation of refugees is considerably lower than that of labor or family migrants (Bakker, Dagevos and Engbersen 2017; Razenberg, Kahmann and de Gruijter 2018). According to SER (2019), *statushouders* experience difficulties regarding complicated regulations, limited financial incentives and administrative burdens. Based on a group conversation with ten, mainly Syrian, *statusholders*, SER (2019) also concludes that *statushouders* may lack social networks

⁹ The concentration-index of Arnhem counts 172, meaning that there are 1.72 as much Syrian refugees living in the municipality of Arnhem compared to the average of municipalities in the Netherlands (CBS 2019).

¹⁰ In 2019, three thousand first generation Syrian refugees lived in the municipality of Amsterdam (CBS 2019).

to get in touch with potential employers, have difficulties with applying for jobs and experience learning the Dutch language as a tough hurdle.

In relation to gender inequalities, a study based in Amsterdam shows that after three and a half years in the Netherlands, thirty-three percent of male refugees and fifteen percent of female refugees are employed. Regarding Syrian statushouders in specific, in 2019, eleven percent of women while forty-four percent of men had a paid job (Gruijter, Hermans 2019). Explanations for this gender gap can be found in both the personal background situation of refugee women as well as barriers arising from policies (Razenberg, Kahmann and de Gruijter 2018). SER (2019) thereby mentions that women are more vulnerable, especially those without an income or allowance. Because of the practical barriers refugees are facing, de Lange, Oomes, Gons, and Spanikova (2019) mention a call for a drastic improvement of the integration system in the Netherlands respecting labor market participation. It still remains to be seen if the new integration policy that is implemented since January 2022 will be a step in this direction.

3. Methodology

Following from the research objective and theoretical framework, this chapter first provides a presentation and operationalization of the key concepts this research works with. After, it presents a description of the research methods and participants and finally a reflection on my positionality as a researcher and research limitations.

3.1 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework as presented in Figure two reflects the connections between key concepts used in this research. Starting with the focus on integration, a bottom-up approach allows for a representation of the views of Syrian newcomers around this topic. Taking into account the multi-dimensionality of integration, this research presents key aspects of integration as put forward by participants while especially focusing on the functional dimension of employment. This dimension is introduced as one of the four core domains in the conceptual framework on integration of Strang and Ager (2008). Strang and Ager interviewed twenty-nine refugees for their research which makes their framework include the newcomers' perspective. As their framework therefore resonates well with the objective of this research, it is put into perspective with similar findings on key aspects emerging from this research. Attention is paid to the interrelatedness between those aspects. Subsequently, a focus on intersectionality is applied within and between relevant social attributes and socio-spatial contexts. The different social groups highlighted in this research are gender, age, ethnicity, level of education and type of residence. They came to the fore in literature (Bakker 2016, 59; Hillmann and Koca 2021) and in the empirical data. An intersectional lens offers a veritable discussion as people do not fall in only one category. A distinction is made between cities and villages for the spatial differentiation, representing two relevant and different socio-spatial contexts. Attention is paid to their characteristics in more detail in order to acknowledge the diversity between these two categorizations (see Table two on page twenty-three and twenty-four).

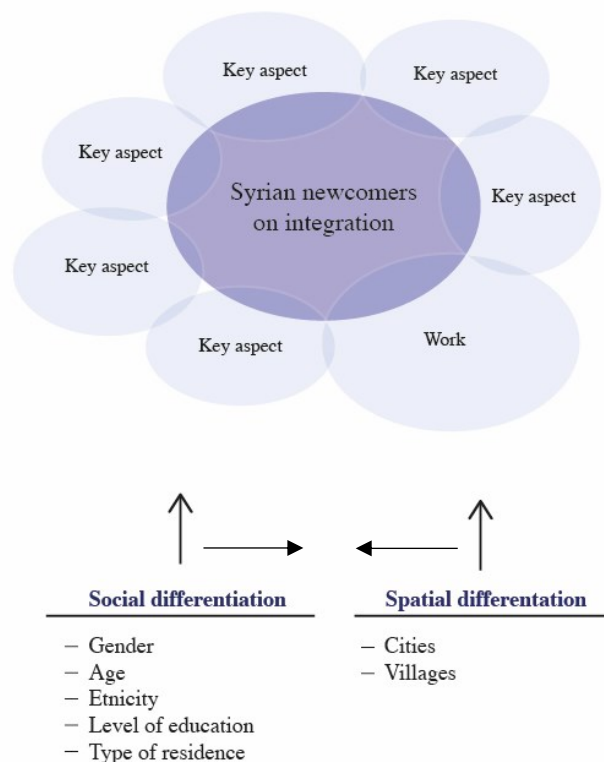


Figure two: Conceptual framework

3.2 Operationalisation of concepts

Here I define the key concepts I use for the analysis.

Work

With the concept of work, this research refers to paid work. Therefore it does not include social reproductive work¹¹ or other forms of unpaid labor. An exception concerns unpaid volunteer work, which is explicitly mentioned in the text when applicable.

Newcomer

I use this term to refer to migrants, which in the context of this research means mainly forced migrants. They may be asylum seekers, hold a status as refugees or have obtained nationality. I opt not to use the term statusholder as some might already have their Dutch nationality and therefore do not fall under the definition of statusholder. Also, I avoid the term refugee as much as possible as it may carry negative connotations which are not applicable. The term newcomer is considered a neutral term, often used among participants themselves as well as in civil society, thus therefore most suited.

¹¹ Meaning the set of tasks that together maintain and reproduce life.

Socio-spatial context

The analysis on the influence of socio-spatial context in this research refers to an analysis on the combination of what Ryan (2018) defines as both the societal and the territorial dimensions of embeddedness, including the wider socio-political structures of the specific place of an actor. I differentiate between the diverse socio-spatial contexts of cities and villages, as both literature and participants put forward the relevance of this divide. Next to looking at population size, the division between cities and villages is based on a qualitative categorization looking at urban/rural, vibrant/quiet and cultural heterogeneous/ homogeneous distinctions (See Table 2 on page twenty-three and twenty-four). Descriptions of the places of residence are primarily based on the descriptions given by participants and shape the aforementioned categories. Therefore, a village located in the Randstad¹², may be described as urban and cultural heterogeneous while the city of Arnhem is described as more rural and quiet.

Social groups

Social groups are defined as groups sharing a social attribute such as falling into the same age group or having the same ethnicity. In this research, the included social groups are based on the social attributes that appear relevant from the theoretical framework and from the empirical data.

The social attribute gender needs some extra clarification. In this research, gender is understood as a social construct and not limited to the binary distinction between men and women. This research however compares the experiences of men and women as participants have not identified themselves with other gender types. In academic literature and statistical sources, this binary does very much still exist which is why references in the theoretical section of this research are also mainly made to the male/female divide.

3.3 Research methods

The main research method of this research is semi-structured interviews. I conducted sixteen of them, allowing the participants to express their thoughts on topics that they find relevant while also covering a list of questions and prompts that were prepared beforehand. The initial plan to additionally conduct two focus groups turned out not to be feasible due to a lack of resources. Likewise, the initially planned policy review is not included in this final research since it was not applicable anymore after a change in the research question. The sixteen interviews were conducted through online video conferencing tools due to COVID-19 restrictions and lasted an hour on average. The shortest interview took forty-five minutes while the longest took ninety minutes. Five of the interviews were conducted in English and eleven in Dutch (See Table one). The lack of fluent Dutch language proficiency of most participants together with my lack of Arabic language skills may have caused misinterpretations of what the participants were trying to say, although I always asked for further clarification when stories were unclear at first. I translated quotes from interviews conducted in Dutch into English which inevitably may also have caused slight interpretation errors. All interviews were recorded with the permission of

¹² The Randstad is located in the West of the Netherlands and refers to the metropolitan area which is the political, administrative and (socio)cultural heart of the Netherlands. The Randstad can also be described as the engine of the Dutch economy.

the participants and have been transcribed and coded in NVivo afterwards (See Appendix A for the coding tree). Once the recordings were transcribed, they were deleted.

Some adaptations to the initial research plan were made when analysing the coded data. The focus within socio-spatial contexts laid first on the difference between urban areas (represented by Amsterdam and surroundings) and more rural areas (represented by Arnhem and surrounding municipalities), but this division did not match the experiences of participants. A division between cities and villages appeared to be more suitable as the experiences of those living in villages around Amsterdam and Arnhem and those living in the cities of Amsterdam, Utrecht and Arnhem had more in common. Because experiences did also differ between those living in more urban villages around Amsterdam compared to those living in more rural villages around Arnhem, I decided to include those differences by providing more detailed descriptions of the places of residence. To provide clarity, I will keep referring to cities and villages. Another adaptation concerns the change of the initial focus on gender only towards a focus on social groups more generally as the influence of gender did not come to the fore as much as expected while other social attributes were covered more than expected.

Next to the semi-structured interviews with Syrian newcomers, three expert conversations were held with Ilse van Liempt (Associate Professor in Urban Geography at Utrecht University), Jana Finke and Omotomilola Ikotun (two PhD researchers involved in the PhD School on Migration & Socioecological Development) in order to orient myself on the topic. Moreover, an online symposium and two webinars from Open Embassy were attended which further broadened my knowledge around this research' topic.¹³

3.4 Research population

The research population consists of sixteen Syrian newcomers living in the Netherlands. Among them, there are men and women of different ages, who live in cities as well as villages. Table one shows an overview of the participants, including information on their relevant social attributes being age, gender, level of Dutch language proficiency and their type of residence permit. Also the language in which the interview is held is included. From the sixteen participants, four are women and twelve are men. Five of the participants are Kurdish (indicated in grey). Three participants are aged below thirty, of which the youngest is twenty-two years old. Twelve participants are aged between thirty and forty years old and one participant is forty-three, thereby falling into the category of above forty. Participants own either a temporary or permanent residence permit or have the Dutch nationality and thereby everyone has free access to the Dutch labor market.¹⁴ With regard to their place of residence, an overview is presented in Table two including a description of the corresponding places. Eight participants live in cities of which five in different parts of Amsterdam, one in Utrecht and two in Arnhem. The other eight participants live in villages, of which most are located around the city of Arnhem and Amsterdam. Map one and map two show the distribution of participants in the Netherlands. Blue pins represent cities and red pins represent villages. In order to ensure the safety and

¹³ The symposium was called 'UU Open day international PhD School on Migration and Socioecological Change'. The two webinars from Open Embassy were called 'Focus op skills' and '*Symposium naar een data gestuurde, gelijkwaardige visie op integratie*'.

¹⁴ Except for Zahra and Ayman of whom the type of residence permit is unknown.

confidentiality of the participants, fictitious names are being used which are checked by an Arabic speaking colleague at NewBees to ensure that they are common Arabic and Kurdish names that fit the responding gender. Access to participants was achieved through various means. First, the social network of NewBees helped a great deal in finding participants mainly in and around Arnhem. Second was through an advertisement on the WelcomeApp¹⁵, that several newcomers mainly from in and around Amsterdam signed up to participate. Lastly, one participant was identified through the social network of another participant.

Table one: Research participants and their social attributes

Fictitious name	Age	Gender	Dutch language level	Type of residence permit	Language spoken during the interview
1. Mohamed	37	Male	B2	Permanent	Dutch
2. Amir	33	Male	A2	Permanent	English
3. Hamza	33	Male	A2	Unknown	English
4. Ahmed	37	Male	B2	Temporary	English
5. Ibrahim	37	Male	B1	Temporary	English
6. Yassin	30	Male	Unknown	Temporary	English
7. Zahra	22	Female	B1	Unknown	Dutch
8. Ayman	43	Male	B2	Unknown	Dutch
9. Yusuf	26	Male	C1	Permanent	Dutch
10. Izar	34	Female	B2	Unknown	Dutch
11. Zayd	34	Male	B2	Temporary	Dutch
12. Maher	33	Male	A2	Unknown	Dutch
13. Walid	30	Male	B1	Temporary	Dutch
14. Akram	35	Male	B2	Permanent	Dutch
15. Shaden	38	Female	B1	Permanent	Dutch
16. Saran	22	Female	C2	Dutch nationality	Dutch

Table two: Research participants and their place of residence

Fictitious name	Place of residence	Population size*	Qualitative description*
1. Mohamed	City	873.000	Urban, cultural heterogenous & vibrant
2. Amir	City	873.000	Urban, cultural heterogenous & vibrant
3. Hamza	City	360.000	Urban, cultural heterogenous & vibrant

¹⁵ The Welcome App is an online platform where organization, newcomers and locals are connected by providing local activities, information and opportunities for networking.

4.	Ahmed	City	873.000	Urban, cultural heterogenous & vibrant
5.	Ibrahim	City	873.000	Urban, cultural heterogenous & vibrant
6.	Yassin	City	873.000	Urban, cultural heterogenous & vibrant
7.	Zahra	City	162.000	Rural, cultural heterogenous & quiet
8.	Ayman	City	162.000	Rural, cultural heterogenous & quiet
9.	Yusuf	Village	27.000	Urban, cultural homogenous & quiet
10.	Izar	Village	75.000	Urban, cultural heterogenous & quiet
11.	Zayd	Village	6.000	Rural, cultural homogenous & quiet
12.	Maher	Village	23.000	Rural, cultural homogenous & quiet
13.	Walid	Village	40.000	Rural, cultural homogenous & quiet
14.	Akram	Village	100.000	Rural, cultural homogenous & quiet
15.	Shaden	Village	25.000	Rural, cultural homogenous & quiet
16.	Saran	Village	110.000	Urban, cultural heterogenous & quiet

* Of the municipality of the city or village. Source: CBS (2021). Source for population size of Zayd's village allecijfers.nl



Map one: Locations of participants' places of residence



Map two: Locations of participants' places of residence zoomed in

3.5 Reflection on positionality and research limitations

As a researcher, my personal context inevitable influences this research. I am a Dutch female of 22 years old, born and raised in the Netherlands. My own belief, which might be idealistic, is that newcomers in the Netherlands should have equal chances at employment to assure an inclusive society in which diversity is seen as an asset and not as a problem. Although I did my utmost best to assure the objectivity of this research, this cannot be a hundred percent guaranteed. An issue regarding my relationship with the participants may be that my personal characteristics (female, young, Dutch) have influenced the openness and trust of participants towards me. It is possible that participants adapted their stories on perceptions they had of me. Thereby, I always mentioned that I conducted research in cooperation with NewBees. Although I always explained that it is an independent organization, it might influenced their willingness to talk openly.

Also inevitable, some shortcomings can be identified that may have influenced the results that are relevant to reflect on. First, the research population consists of sixteen participants which is enough to provide interesting insights but could have been bigger in order to ensure a better representation of Syrian newcomers. Especially concerning the gender division, the little amount of women in this research may have influenced outcomes regarding the social attribute of gender. Thereby, it is noteworthy to mention that although this research is about different social groups of Syrian newcomers sharing similarities, much diversity exists within these groups. There does not exist such a thing as ‘the Syrian newcomer’ and it should be very clear that individuality matters and therefore customized work within policies is of great importance. Secondly, the current pandemic has affected research possibilities as due to safety

reasons, all interviews were conducted online. Although this might have the advantage that in some cases participants may feel more at ease as they are more in control over their own chosen environment, not meeting someone in person makes it more difficult to establish mutual rapport and trust. Moreover, in the past two years Covid-19 has largely influenced the lives of the participants and thus their experiences with integration. Some participants for example mentioned that due to Covid-19, it has been way harder to meet new people and to find a job.

Another shortcoming concerns the little variation of research methods used as method triangulation has the advantage of leading to a more objective research in which different perspectives are taken into account. Thereby, this research only focuses on the perspective of newcomers, which is considered a highly important perspective, but leaves out the perspectives of other actors such as employers, klanmanagers or social organizations. Finally, some social attributes have not been considered in this research due to a lack of data while they might have been of relevance, such as the amount of time being in the Netherlands and the amount of time spend in asylum seekers centres.

4. Syrian newcomers' perspectives on and experiences with integration

As stated by Robinson (1998), integration is a concept understood differently by most. In order to understand what integration means to the participants of this research, this chapter dissects their perspectives on and experiences with integration by means of six aspects the participants highlighted themselves. Differences between social groups and socio-spatial contexts are taken into account. Hereby, this chapter first serves the purpose of analysing and rethinking the concept of integration as it pays attention to the perspective of newcomers; a perspective that is often overlooked. During the interviews, it has been reaffirmed how important it is to engage this group into discussions around this topic. Participants were happy with the possibility to express their opinions or as Izar said: *'We [normally] are the listeners. {...} I think it is important to give us the opportunity to speak, to share our ideas with municipalities, ministers, employers, everybody.'* In order to achieve successful integration processes, the voices of the ones who are in the most difficult position need to be heard. Second, this chapter hereby lays the groundwork for the next chapter, in which the focus is narrowed down to the role of work for integration.

4.1 Key aspects

The insights from this chapter are gained by asking participants various questions about their perspective on integration such as: "How would you define integration?" "What is necessary for you to feel integrated in the Netherlands?" and "To what extent do you feel integrated and why?" The conversations that followed from these types of questions contained many topics that participants linked to integration. In this chapter, these topics are grouped into six key aspects. The importance of these six key aspects is expressed by all participants, regardless of their social attributes or their socio-spatial context as it appeared, for example, that participants of different ages and gender all talk about the importance of speaking the Dutch language. Nevertheless, the experiences with integration do differ somewhat between social groups and those living in different socio-spatial contexts which are therefore discussed in the following paragraphs. In the discussion section, the empirical data is linked to the theoretical framework.

4.1.1 Cultural knowledge

All participants mentioned that speaking the Dutch language is of major importance when talking about the concept of integration. Saran (female, aged twenty-two, fluent in Dutch) says: *'You arrive in a country where they speak a totally different language and if you want to integrate you will have to be able to speak this language. The first and most important step is to learn the language.'* For Saran, speaking fluently Dutch gives her a lot of opportunities. Moreover, Ahmed (male, aged thirty-seven, Dutch B2) for example explained: *'It gives you the ability to communicate with the original people here. This is important because if I want to live here, I should be able to understand everything.'* Although Ahmed speaks English as well and so he is able to communicate with many people in Amsterdam, his city of residence, without speaking Dutch, the importance of speaking the Dutch language to him lies in feeling like you

belong in the country. He explained: ‘*When I only use the English, I feel like I am only a tourist here. When you speak the same language in the country, you will see you belong more, you are attached more.*’ In addition to contributing to a feeling of belonging, the ability to communicate also has a domino effect of success in other fields of integration. As Saran mentioned, it facilitates the search for work. ‘*The language helped me find work and an internship.*’ Izar (female, aged thirty-four) adds to this: ‘*Speaking Dutch gives me confidence. When I am in a meeting at work or when I am writing a report, to me it is very important to be able to master the language and express myself without mistakes. This is really important to me, for my confidence and to communicate more easily with everyone.*’

When talking about the importance of speaking the Dutch language for integration, participants referred to different required levels of proficiency in the language. According to Zayd (male, aged thirty-four), his certificate in Dutch level B2 is enough to start in the Dutch society. Ahmed is at B2 level but he is currently studying C1. He finds that the required A2 level by the government is not enough to integrate. Shaden (female, aged thirty-eight, Dutch B1) raises the bar even higher and expressed a perspective more similar to Izar’s. She said: ‘*I am not able yet to use the Dutch language perfectly, I find that I have to be able to express myself perfectly.*’

Looking at how the topic of speaking the Dutch language is experienced by participants of different ages, it is notable that especially the three participants younger than thirty years put a lot of effort into learning the Dutch language and also experience less difficulty with the learning process. This can be seen, for example, in the levels of Dutch language proficiency of Yusuf (aged twenty-six, Dutch C1¹⁶), Saran (aged twenty-two, fluent in Dutch) and Zahra (aged twenty-two, Dutch B1¹⁷) which then expresses itself in the fact that all those three interviews were held in Dutch. Although multiple participants older than thirty years old are also highly focused on learning the Dutch language, it is noteworthy that the younger participants seem to have less difficulties learning the language and gain more benefits from speaking it well.

Regarding the experiences with learning the Dutch language in different socio-spatial contexts, some say it is easier to learn the Dutch language when living in a village as the population there tends to be less multicultural compared to cities and therefore you may less often have the option to escape to a familiar language such as Arabic or English. You are forced to speak Dutch in for example the supermarkets. The languages in which the interviews were held illustrate this point, as all interviews conducted with participants living in villages were held in Dutch while five out of the eight interviews conducted with participants living in cities were held in English.

Besides speaking the Dutch language, having knowledge of Dutch cultural practices is also perceived as a part of integration. Here, no differences are noted between the perspectives nor the experiences of different social groups or of those living in different socio-spatial contexts.

In the Netherlands, certain cultural practices are very different from the ones in Syria. When talking about those differences, Maher (male, aged thirty-three) refers to different cultural ‘systems’. He explained: ‘*The cultural systems of Syria and the Netherlands have*

¹⁶ Yusuf finished a Dutch language course at a University in Amsterdam and reached level C1.

¹⁷ Zahra is really focused on learning Dutch. She has a Dutch language coach and is seeking social contact with others to practice speaking Dutch.

differences. As a newcomer, you have to learn this cultural system of the Netherlands.” He gives an example: *“In our country [Syria], when a new person comes to live in the neighborhood, the neighbors invite the newcomer to their houses. Here in the Netherlands, this system is different. Here, when you move into a neighborhood, you have to talk to your neighbors, invite them to your house and say: ‘come have a coffee or a beer’ or invite them for a barbeque. When I came here, I did not know that this was the system.”* Learning the Dutch cultural ‘system’ can entail such practical issues like knowing and dealing with Dutch habits, according to Amir for example by congratulating the Dutch with their national holidays. Next to those practical issues, the Dutch cultural ‘system’ is also about different norms and values than the Syrian ‘system’. As Akram exemplified: *“Integration is about learning to have respect for the way the Dutch society thinks about many points like freedom for example. I cannot always do my own habits here.”* Just like those examples, various others were given by multiple participants, all exemplifying their effort in finding ways to deal with and adapt to Dutch cultural practices which can be very different from what they are used to. According to Zahra and Hamza, the best way of learning this is to walk outside and see how people are living. Hamza said: *“We don’t take it from school, you take it from straight, from friends, from communities, from people from work or from a supermarket.”*

An important note here is the question to what extent integration is about on the one hand Syrian newcomers having knowledge of Dutch cultural practices while on the other hand, maintaining their Syrian cultural practices. As Yassin expressed: *“I don’t feel that if you did the integration, you just came, you just change your identity. It’s like, you can still look at us, as a Syrian, or as the other person who came to this country, but in the same time at least you know, you know something about this country.”* In his view, integration thus is more about having knowledge about living in the Netherlands than it is about becoming ‘Dutch’. In this line, Yusuf mentioned that he adapts to the Dutch cultural practices he likes, as being on time at appointments while he holds on to aspects he likes from his Syrian background like being humble.

4.1.2 Personal development

The second aspect deals with the result that in various ways, participants regardless of their social attributes or socio-spatial contexts, link integration to achieving goals related to personal growth. Ahmed (male, aged thirty-seven), for example perceives every achievement as a step towards integration. To him, and also to Walid (male, aged thirty), integration is not easy as it is a long process that takes years. Therefore, getting a driver’s license (in the Netherlands) for example is also part of it. The desire to be able to develop yourself by learning new things, studying and working is shared by many. For Yusuf (male, aged twenty-six) for example, integration is about having the ability to reach your own potential. Also Zahra (female, aged twenty-two) says that one of the reasons she feels at home in the Netherlands is because of her ability to study and develop herself. The focus on developing yourself possibly derives from the situation newcomers find themselves in as they have to start all over and rebuild a new life in their new country. As Ahmed describes: *“When I came here, I was thirty-five and I achieved many things before but when I came here, I was like a new-born. I have to do everything again*

and again. {...} I have now to first know how to speak again and then okay how to study and how to work.’

Looking at the experiences regarding possibilities for personal development from a social-cultural lens, age appears to play a part as the focus on studying and developing yourself is especially present among the younger participants. All three participants under thirty years old are studying and preparing themselves for ‘a good future’, as Zahra (female, aged twenty-two) puts it. The main reason for this is the fact that when you are younger, it is easier to study for multiple reasons. The participants older than thirty are instead of studying, next to studying the Dutch language, more focused on work. As this may be a logical difference, it also has to do with the possibilities for financial support. When *statushouders* are above thirty years old, they are not able to receive an education funding.¹⁸ Walid (Male, aged thirty), is one of the participants facing the barrier of his age. He would like to study to be able to become a geography teacher in the Netherlands as he used to be before but faces the financial difficulty of his age. Next to having trouble receiving a fund he also needs to get the approval of the municipality because he is receiving an *uitkering*. Also according to Akram, studying while being above thirty years old is really hard.

From the socio-spatial context perspective, cities offer more possibilities for studying, as stated by Yusuf (living in an urban, cultural homogenous and quiet village), Zahra (living in a rural, cultural heterogeneous and quiet city) and Akram (living in a rural, cultural homogenous and quiet village). Educational institutions are often located in urban areas resulting in younger people being attracted to urban areas where they gain more possibilities for personal development, fostering their process of integration.

4.1.3 Social network

When Izar was asked what integration means to her, her response was the following: ‘*Having a social life. I think it’s even more important than work or education. Having a network, and with network I do not only mean colleagues but also friends, so everything.*’ Just as for Izar, having a social network is perceived as an important aspect of integration by participants from any social group or socio-spatial contexts. Having a social network can mean a lot for someone’s process of integration in the Netherlands. For example, it relates to the aspects of language in a way that having social contact with Dutch speaking people is a great way to practice the Dutch language. Zahra exemplified this by saying: ‘*I have a Dutch language buddy and I always say to her, you are not my language buddy, you are my friend. We do a lot of things together, she has the same age as I do and we are really happy.*’ According to Ahmed, having a Dutch friend is also a way to feel like you belong more to society. Nevertheless, a social network as a means for integration refers to having connections with not only Dutch people but people from all nationalities, according to Izar. To Zahra, also her own family with whom she lives forms an important social connection that gives her a feeling of home in the Netherlands.

¹⁸ Newcomers up to thirty years old can apply for educational funding if they want to follow a study at intermediate vocational education (mbo), higher vocational education (hbo) or university (wo). At the start of the funding they must be younger than thirty years old and after that they are entitled to study funding for a maximum of ten years (CPB/SCP 2020, 85).

Analysing the experiences with having a social network, it appears to be a central point of focus for Hamza (male, aged thirty-three, living in an urban and vibrant city), who has been actively seeking a social network around him since his first months in the Netherlands. Hamza describes himself as a very social person and as someone who feels very integrated in the Netherlands. He explains why: *‘Where I work when I am friends, when I am party with friends as well, and I made my Dutch friends, when we go camping is also like, you know, as when we study together, when I’m doing the CBR¹⁹ now, so I get a lot of nice advices of my Dutch friend about my driving lessons. I also have a friend of mine who studies for directors and theatre director. And you can’t imagine how much she’s really cute and nice and how much she’s want to help me more than how we wanted to help myself.’* Hamza has managed to build a large social network around himself, which is something very imported to him regarding integration. Also Saran has managed to gather many people around her, like her friends from work at the elderly care who form a team of young people from all different nationalities. To others, finding a social network is less easy. Yassin, for example, moved to an urban, cultural heterogenous and vibrant city during times of lockdown and during COVID-19 and really struggles to meet people: *‘I know very limited people. I have two friends here and some others from the language school but we do not meet that often. It is very hard to find a community; people who have like something in common. I don’t have that. Or to be able to meet people to go out or to get some, like exchange of experience. Thinking about like, any very stupid conversation haha.’* Also Akram has few social contacts, although he would really like to have more interactions with especially his neighbors in order to feel more integrated.

The ease with which a newcomer creates a social network may relate to someone’s personality as well as the social attribute of age. From this research, it appears that younger people often have less difficulty with meeting new people as they generally have naturally more opportunities to do so. Saran (female, aged twenty-two), for example, has met many people at work, at school and at her internship while participants above thirty years old mention to find it more difficult to find opportunities for meeting people. As Hamza explains, he says it would be easier when you are younger to build a network as you automatically meet people in school, through internships and social meetups that come from there. Now, he has to go out and create meeting moments of his own, which takes a lot more effort. According to Saran, age really matters as it affects the activities someone undertakes and the amount of contact someone has with the Dutch society. She explained: *‘When you go to school here you make young friends. You are in touch with them, learn from them and you grow older together. My mother, she went to a language school with only Syrian people and a Dutch teacher. Afterwards, she goes home again and that’s it. She does not go to work or outside or chilling with friends. She does not do those things so for her it is a bit harder.’* As younger people often have less difficulty with learning the language, Izar (female, aged thirty-four) explained that she also finds it easier than her mother to meet Dutch people as her mother does not speak Dutch well. Overall, Saran argued, it is easier to integrate when you are young than when you are older.

The ease with which someone creates a social network can also relate to someone’s socio-spatial context. Zayd (male, thirty-four) for example is living in a rural, cultural

¹⁹ CBR is the Dutch abbreviation for *Centraal Bureau Rijvaardigheidsbewijzen*, meaning Central Office of Driving Licences.

homogenous and quiet village and really struggles with his lack of social contacts. In his perspective, his socio-spatial context plays a major role herein as he finds that there is a big difference between the possibilities for building a social network between urban areas and rural areas. He says: *'Having social contact in the Netherlands is hard for me. Just having a conversation, having the chance to talk to people and having a conversation based on equality, I really miss that.'* In rural areas, the age of inhabitants is generally higher than in cities. In the village of Zayd, there are a lot of old and religious people with whom he find it hard to connect with and find common interests. Also he explained: *'When you do have contact with them, they try to have this contact because they pity you. It is not an equal relation.'* In his view, cities are places you have more opportunities to meet new people. This would in return also give him the chance to practice his Dutch more. Multiple participants share similar experiences, like Hamza (male, aged thirty-three) who lived in a village where according to him it was very hard to meet people and create a social network or Yusuf (male, aged twenty-six) who lives in an urban, cultural homogenous and quiet village with, "a lot of white, rich and older Dutch people". He would like to live in a city where more people of his age (students) are living and where the population is more diverse. Akram (living in a rural, cultural homogenous and quiet village) described how in villages like his are less social events where you can meet people whereas in Amsterdam for example, his friends have a social event almost every week. Although in villages it is harder to meet new people, participants also expressed that it is easier to meet Dutch people there than it is in cities. In villages, the population tends to be less multicultural which is why participants living in villages often have more chances to meet Dutch people. In cities, on the contrary, it is said to be easier to meet international people which according to Yusuf gives more opportunities for (international oriented) work as well.

4.1.4 Connection with host society

Moving on from having social networks, having a certain social relationship with the Dutch society more broadly is also considered an aspect of integration among participants of different social groups and socio-spatial contexts. Considering the experiences regarding this aspect, a small differences is noted between Kurdish and other participants.

First, let's dissect the perceived importance of having a connection with the Dutch society for integration. Many participants expressed a feeling of gratitude for the chances that the Netherlands has given them. In return, they would like to give something back to society. As Saran said: *'This country has given you a chance, you have to take it and you have to give back as well.'* Yusuf adds to this: *'I do a lot of volunteer work to meet people and to understand the culture better. Also I am a regular blood donor so those things to me are a sign of gratitude for the things that the Netherlands has done for me.'* Integration in this sense relates to the activities being undertaken by newcomers and the connections that are made through them. According to Walid and Yusuf, being active in society is therefore of great importance. To Yassin, integration is about getting involved in the community, about getting to know the people around you and finding some things you have in common that you can share and talk about. Hamza's perspective on integration adds to this. To him, integration is about feeling comfortable to share your life and emotions with people from the host community. Moreover, integration is, according to participants, foremost about having an equal relation

between newcomers and the people without a migration background. With an equal relation, Zayd for example means the following: *‘Integration is about equality, not having discrimination and being able to get chances. Equality as in feeling like you are someone who can do something in society, you have value, you can add something.’*

Even though an equal relationship is an important endeavour to achieve integration, participants do encounter difficulties. So, moving on to discussing the experiences with regard to this aspect, Akram, for example, expressed the fact that he is always extra careful with his words in order to prevent a situation in which he says something that makes other people dislike him. As he heard about islamophobia, he alters his behavior and humor for example in such a way trying to prove he is a good human being and thereby countering the existing stereotypes that foster islamophobia. As he explained, he comes from a collectivistic culture in which the opinions of others matter a lot. Therefore, it is important to him to prove wrong stories from the media in which people speak negatively about Muslims. Other participants also expressed difficulties in terms of dealing with stereotypes and ignorance about Syrians. Yusuf explained that he encounters a lot of misconceptions that people have about Syrians and Muslims that are contradictory to an equal relationship. According to Izar, the media plays a big role herein as people create prejudices based on what they hear in the media. She is dealing with people asking her how come that she speaks Dutch so well, if she is really a Muslim as she is not wearing a headscarf or even is she know what chocolate is. Those questions show that some people have no idea about where Syria is located or who the people are that live there. In Yusuf’s opinion, it would really help if people would be more culturally sensitive, would have more knowledge about other cultures and resulting from that, would be more tolerant. Barriers to an equal relationship are also being experienced by participants regarding their relationship with municipalities and *klantmanagers* as they often do not feel heard and or helped out. Also the Dutch bureaucracy can cause frustration among participants as there are many long waiting lists for everything, as expressed by Ayman.

Besides the more negative experiences described above, participants also find Dutch people nice and open to newcomers. Looking at this topic from the perspective of the Kurdish participants, it is remarkable that they express more often than participants from other ethnicities their happiness with the attitude of the Dutch society. Walid (Kurdish male) expressed the following: *‘Dutch people are so nice and have respect. The Netherlands treats foreigner way better than some other countries.’* Also Zahra and Maher (both Kurdish) explicitly pointed out their positive experiences with the Dutch society. They explained that in Syria, Kurdish people are an oppressed minority while in the Netherlands they are treated equally because their Kurdish ethnicity is of no importance.

In order to achieve successful integration, participants agree that equality and no discrimination go hand in hand with mutual acceptance and respect between newcomers and the people without a migration background. As Zahra put it: *‘Respecting each other’s cultures. When foreigners and Dutch people are happy together, all things will be fine.’* Mutual respects goes two ways, of which participants first express the need to have respect for the Dutch (their cultural practices, norms and values). Maher said about this: *‘Look, I don’t live in our own country [Syria], I need to have respect for the Netherlands and the people. I cannot come here and do my own system. I need to do the Dutch system. I live in the Netherlands, not in my own*

country.’’ Besides having respect for the Dutch, integration also requires the Dutch to have respect for the newcomers. As Yassin expressed: *‘‘You are just seeking for acceptance.’’* Zayd added to this by saying: *‘‘The Dutch society cannot change for newcomers. [...] But it can be open, respectful and tolerant.’’*

The need for mutual respect and acceptance shows that integration takes effort from two sides. Hamza explained: *‘‘Inburgeren, for me, we make it if we are able to have the ability to understand and accept each other’s whatever, is the background of it.’’* Hamza adds to this by saying that in order to gain mutual acceptance for each other’s behavior, communication with the people around you is important. *‘‘You learn from the people around you, how the people here behave.’’* Shaden adds to this: *‘‘According to me, it is not necessary to change my values and norms but it is important for me to get along well with the society. Respect, for another culture, other people, other everything. Respect that goes both ways.’’*

To some participants, the underlying importance of mutual acceptance and respect lies in the fact that it would result in being accepted by society for the person they are instead of being seen as a ‘refugee’. Integration to Izar and Yassin therefore relates to losing their refugee stamp in the eyes of others. In this light, Yassin explained what integration to him would mean as follows: *‘‘I think finding the right community to find people who accept you as you, not as only as a refugee or as only the person who came here just to do nothing, just to take money.’’* Although he does not really feel like people are looking at him that way, he described the feeling as follows: *‘‘It’s the feeling that you are not belonging or you’re just here for like, temporary time. It just gives you like, I’d say, just gave me like, a little push down.’’* Izar views the issue similarly: *‘‘I hope that in the future I can go out of this frame. That people will start looking at me as Izar, not as a newcomer or refugee you know? I can contribute a little bit more than being a woman or coming from Syria or being Muslim or a newcomer. No, I do have good qualities, good skills so hire me for that. Because sometimes I get opportunities that we are looking for someone with refugee background for this job. But I am not just a refugee, not just a newcomer or someone coming from Syria no I am Izar. So I hope that there will be people, employers, government or in general, looking at us in a different way.’’* Also Hamza shares this perspective and said: *‘‘The real inburgering to me, was to be me.’’* Yusuf shares this perspective but is at the same time sceptical. He explained: *‘‘Being a refugee is something chronic, you cannot hide it or ever let it go. At least, how people look at me I think’’*

From the empirical data I cannot draw clear conclusions about the possible differences in experiences of connection with the Dutch society among participants living in different socio-spatial contexts.

4.1.5 Safety & stability

All participants in this research have fled to the Netherlands because of the war in Syria. Because of the unsafe situation, they were no longer able to stay in their own country. Once in the Netherlands, they no longer have to worry about their safety. According to Izar, for many people this is the most important part concerning their residency in the Netherlands; being safe and being able to send their children to school under safe circumstances. Especially among Kurdish newcomers, their safety in the Netherlands is highly valued as they come from a situation in which they experienced oppression because of their ethnicity.

Next to safety, stability is an important aspect as well. Yassin described it as follows: *“I feel like I have more stability here. I know I’m not going to be kicked out anytime. So that’s the first feeling like I have since I don’t know, very long time. So it gave me the feeling of yea sort of home.”* Gaining this feeling of stability can be linked to having a permanent residence permit or even nationality. For Saran, the moment she received her Dutch nationality she felt like she really became a Dutch person. To Ahmed, a permanent residence permit means protection against the possibility of being sent back to Syria. Now, he is constantly afraid that his efforts to learn to language and finding a job are for nothing as he might be repatriated to Syria. With a permanent residence permit, he would have a long term perspective resulting in more motivation to invest in a future in the Netherlands.

Regarding the influence of diverse socio-spatial contexts, Shaden (a mother of two children) expresses her preference to live in a village because of the peace and safety she experiences there. As a mother of two, she values her life in her village where the inhabitants are less culturally diverse than in a city. Her reasons is that she would first like to raise her children with her own cultural habits before they get in touch with other norms and values from different cultures. In her village (rural, cultural homogenous and quiet), this is possible as there is no other influence than Dutch people around her children. Although she sometimes struggles to cope with the cultural differences in regard to the upbringing of her children, she prefers this over a more multicultural, and in her view less safe surrounding for her children like a city.

4.1.6 Work

The sixth and final key aspect that came up during the interviews about integration is the importance of work. As this research is in particular focused on the role of work for integration, the next chapter goes more in depth about this aspect in relation to the aspects mentioned in this chapter. Statements made in this chapter about integration therefore do not include the aspect of work.

4.2 Discussion

In this chapter, the concept of integration has been dissected using the perspective of Syrian newcomers, leading to a conceptualization of integration which will be analysed in the light of the theoretical framework below. Regarding the perspectives of Syrian newcomers on integration, no clear differences are found between different social groups or different socio-spatial contexts, as their perspectives on the concept appear to have more to do with their personal life and experiences. With respect to the participants’ experiences with integration, some differences are noted which will be interconnected and analysed in relation to the theoretical framework further on in this discussion section.

4.2.1 Conceptualising integration

Integration is a concept that touches upon many topics which in this chapter have been categorized into six aspects; cultural knowledge, personal development, social networks, connection with host society, safety and stability and work. Although these aspects have been considered separately in this chapter, they are highly interrelated as speaking the language for

example influences the ability to meet new people and possibilities for work. Together, these aspects form the conceptualization of integration from the eyes of the participants, in this research representing Syrian newcomers. Bridging to existing literature, the views coming up from this research have considerably overlapped with issues raised in previous research. Whereas the aspect of social networks for example appears to be of great importance to participants, it is also a much-discussed topic by a range of scholars like Putnam (2002), who again influenced the conceptual framework on integration developed later on by Strang and Ager (2008). In their framework, which is based among other methods on 29 interviews with refugees, they indicate ten key domains 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. Notable is that fact that almost every indicator, except for housing and health, have come up during the interviews of this research as well. Regarding housing, participants in this research have expressed concerns about the bad conditions of their assigned social house²⁰ and their lack of ability to decorate their homes with self-bought furniture which would foster a feeling of home²¹, but it did not come up as strongly related to their process of integration as described by Strang and Ager (2008). Moreover, the framework appoints education as a marker and means of integration, whereas in this research, education is considered a pillar for personal development. A common understanding herein is that education provides support for a future career and results in more active members of society (Strang and Ager 2008, 172).

With regard to the indicator of citizenship and rights, Strang and Ager (2008, 174) argue that notions of citizenship are widely differently understood but necessary to define, as it shapes the core understanding of rights accorded to and responsibilities expected from refugees. They argue that although these rights do not define integration, they underpin important assumptions about integration. Possible rights referred to are human dignity, equality, and justice. So, looking at the perspective of the participants, a much expressed topic has been the necessity of establishing equal relations between newcomers and the host society. Equality is thus seen an important pillar of integration, or in light of Strang and Ager's framework, it can thus be considered right underpinning citizenship. The responsibility attached to this, as expressed by my research participants, entails having mutual respect for and acceptance of each other's values and cultural practices. Integration is not considered as changing one's identity and becoming "stereotypically Dutch", as with assimilation. Rather, it goes hand in hand with maintaining one's Syrian identity. Although the balance in which this takes place may differ per person, the underlying necessity for integration to succeed in this sense is thus mutual respect for each other's cultural practices.²² Here, participants place the responsibility to secure the right of equality on both themselves and the society as a whole. In the article by Strang and

²⁰ Poor maintenance conditions of the assigned house are reported by Ibrahim (Male, aged thirty-seven, living in Amsterdam) and Ahmed (male, aged thirty-seven, living in Amsterdam)

²¹ Reported by Shaden (female, aged thirty-eight, living in a village)

²² Here, it touches the core of debates around integration as it can be questioned who is conforming to what? Who defines the cultural practices of the host society? Who is this host society? Thereby, cultural practices are dynamic and not static.

Ager (2008, 175-176), it appears that, as also from literature, the responsibility to assure rights is placed both on the states as well as on all sectors of society, including the refugees themselves. These aforementioned understandings of integration by both the participants and Strang and Ager (2008) point to viewing integration as a two-way process. This meaning that integration takes effort from both newcomers and the host society, as also articulated by many scholars as one of the main characteristics of a contemporary perspective on integration.²³

Moving on to the frameworks' domain of social connections which relates to the aspect of social networks, this is divided into three indicators including social bonds (to describe the connections that link members of a group), social bridges (to refer to the connections between different groups, like refugees and host communities), and social links (to address the connections between individuals and the structures of the state). Starting with social bonds, participants expressed their need to meet new people in order to have a feeling of integration, which can take various forms. The importance Zahra attaches to living with her family in order to feel at home in the Netherlands resonates with Strang and Ager's (2008, 178) argument regarding that the proximity to family, being a like-ethnic group, is often highly valued as it enables them to share cultural practices and maintain familiar patterns of relationships. Zahra, and her friendship with her language buddy, on the other hand, relate to what Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2016) explain as the construction of "sociabilities of emplacement" between a local and a migrant newcomer in an institutional setting. They found that newly arrived migrants generally depend on personal networks for support in their process of settling in their new city. The construction of sociabilities between migrant newcomers and locals expressing mutual respect take place in three different settings being proximal settings, like people crossing each other on the streets or neighbors, workplace settings in which sociabilities arise at work, and institutional settings, like at churches, school and social agencies. The importance Akram attaches to contact with his neighbors thus exemplifies his wish to construct a sociability in a proximal setting, while Saran befriending her colleagues is an example of sociabilities arising at a workplace. Social bridges relate to the aspect of connection with the host society. Both participants and Strang (2008, 180) report a positive influence of experiencing friendliness from people you encounter on a daily basis as well as the importance of participation in (all kinds of) activities. On the contrary, perceived unfriendliness, as also reported by participants in the form of islamophobia for example, undermines other successful aspects of integration according to Strang and Ager (2008, 180). This latter is also reflected by the perspectives of participants as some tell about negative encounters, often led by stereotypes, that hinders their feeling of belonging. Lastly, establishing social links are said to be a major task in supporting integration while there are generally many structural barriers to effective connection (Strang and Ager 2008, 181). Such barriers have also been expressed by participants who say to struggle with Dutch bureaucracy and having difficult relationships with their municipalities and or *klantmanagers*, just as van Liempt and Staring (2020) show that the bureaucratic landscape of the Netherlands is very fragmented and unclear for Syrian statusholders.

The final domain of the framework consists of facilitators, being language and cultural knowledge and safety and security. Considering the first, it relates a lot with the aspects of

²³ Among them are Gryzmala-Kazlowska and Phillimore (2018), who explain that integration is an adaptation process in which both migrants as well as the host society are involved.

Dutch 'culture' as this aspects entails both the topic of language and cultural knowledge. Speaking the language of the host society is considered a key aspect of integration by participants of this research as well as by Strang's framework and other scholars, impacting many other fields of integration. Secondly, the framework's emphasis on having a broader cultural knowledge, which refers to both refugees' knowledge of national and local procedures, customs and facilities as well as non-refugees' knowledge of the circumstances and cultures of refugees (Strang and Ager 2008, 182), again resonates with the perspectives of the Syrian participants who express the importance of having knowledge of Dutch cultural practices such as practical information around social rules or holidays. It has also been expressed that it would foster integration processes if the host society would know more about the Syrian culture and background. Moreover, this research confirms the importance of the frameworks' facilitator of safety and stability, be it in the Dutch contexts among Syrian newcomers. Being in a safe and stable situation helps participants in their integration process, just like Strang argues that a sense of safety is paramount for a feeling of integration.

In conclusion, the conceptualization of integration as put forward in this research based on the perspectives of newcomers, has some fair overlap concerning the key aspects of the conceptual framework on integration of Strang and Ager (2008) and other academic literature on the topic of integration. Thereby, it adds specifications of the contexts of Syrian newcomers in the Netherlands. It has become clear that integration is not easy for newcomers; it is a long term process that takes a lot of effort from all sides. Thereby, integration entails other people seeing you as the person you are instead of looking at you as a refugee. The question here is the extent to which this is possible as participants expressed that stereotypes and prejudices about Syrian refugees are very much alive in the media as well as in society. Therefore, some shared their doubts about how realistic it is to achieve integration as they say they would always be seen as a refugee or they will keep feeling as a guest in this country.²⁴ Another, final, remark on the conceptualization of integration is that there seems to be present an overarching sentiment related to integration. Many underlying goals for integration mentioned in relation to the aspects, such as being able to understand and communicate with the people around you, having friends, being able to develop yourself, feeling safe, confident, accepted and equal to others or more broadly speaking, having a feeling of belonging, relate to the ability to live a life similar to non-refugees and thus to a life like they had before they fled, except that it is now taking place in the Dutch context. Ultimately, integration for newcomers in a sense is about what van Liempt and Milliet (2020, 2386) describe as 'starting an 'ordinary life again' or about what Ahmed expresses as: '*going back to my normal life as how it was before.*' Although this research does not attempt to come up with a definition of integration, the perspectives of Syrian newcomers in the Netherlands do align with what Bakker (2016, 29) summarizes following a rich literature review, as the common view on integration, namely that "Integration is seen as a multidimensional two-way process that [...] requires from immigrants a willingness to adapt to the lifestyle of the host community and from the host country a willingness to facilitate integration (i.e. access to jobs and services) and an acceptance of the immigrants in social interaction."

²⁴ Amir said: "It is like to get respect for the mind here because in the end we are visitors, we are not like you know what I mean? We are guests in our new countries you know they just accept us." Izar said about this: "I still see myself as a guest in this country, yes."

4.2.2 Analysis of Syrian newcomers' experiences with integration concerning differences between social groups and socio-spatial contexts

Contrary to the perspectives on integration, data from this research does show a difference regarding the experiences with integration between different social groups, based on ethnicity and age, and different socio-spatial contexts. Here, the empirical data about all aspects is interlinked and compared to existing literature to provide a discussion, bearing in mind that opinions and experiences are determined in large part by people's personalities and personal circumstances.

First of all, this research shows that the social attribute of ethnicity may influence experiences of integration as it appears that Kurdish newcomers feel happy, safe and accepted in the Dutch society more easily compared to other, non-Kurdish, newcomers. Kurdish newcomers more often report their happiness about friendly interactions with the host community, hinting at the ability to establish successful social bridges more easily than others. This finding can be explained by Kurdish people being oppressed in Syria (van Liempt and Staring 2020, 24-25) leading to possible different standards regarding feeling safe and happy compared to others.

When analysing the experiences of different age groups considering all aspects together, it appears that younger people tend to have less difficulty with their process of integration. First of all, young Syrian newcomers (below thirty years old) appear to put relatively more effort in learning the Dutch language and have less difficulty with it. Also, while the focus on personal development is of importance to all ages, younger participants have less difficulty with educating themselves by following a study due to governmental policies about financial support, as also confirmed by van Liempt and Staring (2020, 12) who mention that those over thirty years old struggle with not being eligible for student loans. The European Migrant Advisory Board (2019, 18) adds to this by concluding, based on the results of focus groups in the Netherlands, that it is way easier for refugees between eighteen and twenty-seven years old to get access to services from municipalities than it is for those who are older than twenty-seven. Moreover, younger newcomers have more chance of building a social network as they generally undertake more activities like going to school and social events where they may meet new people. Between these 'advantages' for younger Syrian newcomers exists an interrelated relationship as for example studying gives opportunities to meet new people resulting in more opportunities to practice and improve the Dutch language which again makes it easier to connect with Dutch speaking people.

Although the three participants below thirty years old in this research are all living in villages, in the light of socio-spatial differences it can be argued that the previous statement about the relation between age and integration is especially true for those living in cities since participants mention that cities have relatively more educational facilities (fostering personal development), offer more possibilities for social events and generally host a more diverse, international, multicultural and young population (fostering social networks) in comparison to villages. This conclusion is in line with Liempt and Miellet (2021) who found that the environment of cities are easier for refugees to become used to as they are associated with greater opportunities to find work or complete education and due to the presence of co-ethnics, relatives and friends. It also resonates with the research from Regioplan (2019, 39-40) that explains how *statushouders* from Amsterdam appreciate both the greater ability to talk in their

mother language and the multicultural atmosphere leading them to feel less alienated. Nevertheless, the latter especially counts for those who are younger and single as it should be mentioned that Syrian newcomers with children or those living with their family generally prefer to live in a (rural, culturally homogenous and quiet) village because of the peace and safety, both confirmed by Shaden as well as by Regioplan (2019, 39). A similar statement is made by van Liempt and Staring (2020, 46) who mention that housing can be a very important part of integration as parents with children for example more easily ground in smaller municipalities like more quiet villages compared to young or single people who prefer living in bigger urban areas like cities.

In conclusion, this research shows that younger and Kurdish newcomers tend to have the least difficulty with the process of integration, especially those living without a family and those residing in cities. The other way around, it appears to be of importance to pay attention to Syrian newcomers of a more advanced age and those who are young and single living in villages as they are more likely to struggle with various aspects (being cultural knowledge, social networks, connection with host society and personal development) that are vital to integration according to the participants.

Now that integration is conceptualized from the perspective of the research participants and their experiences are discussed in light of social and spatial differentiation, the basis is laid for the following chapter in which the aspect of work is elaborated on.

5. The role of work for integration

In this chapter, first an overview of the perspectives of participants on the importance of work in relation with the other five aspects is presented. Herein, attention is paid to the differences between social groups with a special focus on the social attribute of gender. No points of attention are present regarding different perspectives on the role of work for integration between socio-spatial contexts. Afterwards, the second part of this chapter provides an in depth overview of the empirical data on experiences with work in the Netherlands in relation to integration. Here as well, analyses on possible differences between social groups and socio-spatial contexts are provided as differences are found between cities and villages as well as between social groups based on age, gender, level of education and type of residence permit. Both chapter sections are followed by a discussion in which the empirical data is connected to the existing literature.

5.1 Syrian newcomers' perspectives on the role of work for integration

From the empirical data, it quickly becomes clear that work is considered very important for integration for many reasons. The social attribute of gender in particular is of importance herein.

First of all, participants express that having a job makes you earn your own money which subsequently makes you financially independent. It enables you to no longer depend on social benefits and to make more money than the amount you received before. As Maher mentioned: *'I want to work because I don't like doing nothing and receiving social benefits. I want to buy a house, travel; everything. Social benefits is very little money for me. Maybe 300, 400 euros and then it is gone. If I work I receive more money than social benefits.'* Also Shaden wants to earn more money herself because she is taking care of her family and also wants to do a Dutch and an English language course which are both expensive.

Although earning money is of great importance for some, to others it is not such an issue. Ayman has been receiving social benefits for 5 years. He said: *'The money is little but it is okay for me. Yes, with work you will earn more, fine, but money is not always important.* For many participants, even more important than earning money is the fact that work enables them to be independent of others. Ahmed: *'It's not the purpose of integration is to work but I mean, to be able to earn the money by myself, not through the municipality or someone else. This means also that okay, now I, I am really integrated, and I can be independent.'* Zayd works at NewBees Arnhem as a matcher since one year and put it in words like this: *'I do not earn a lot of money, I earn the same as I did when receiving social benefits. But the feeling you have that you're not getting benefits, it's valuable, you're valuable. The way that I talk to my friends, to my colleagues, it's different actually. I feel equal now, I'm on the same level with people, I'm not less.'* Having a job and therefore being financially independent is for Zayd a way to regain his self-worth. As he said, he now feels equal to others which is something that emerged in the previous chapter as a core aspect for integration. Also for Izar, a job means dignity. She explained: *'I cannot just sit at home and ask for social benefits, I find that very difficult. I did receive social benefits in 2017 but to me it was a difficult time emotionally. I am an independent person so it was hard to ask the municipality for money while I did not work for this money.'* More than money, a job can therefore be of great importance to someone's mental well-being.

One of Maher's statements made this very clear: *'If I find a job, I will be very happy here in the Netherlands.'*

Also related to the improvement of mental well-being, having a job can give you a new purpose in life; something that makes you excited to move forward. Therewith, a job gives hope for the future as well. As Yassin mentioned: *'[the job] really gave me the feeling that I'm on the right path. So we just get to reach my goals. And it will stop the guilt feeling about doing nothing. Yeah, I think it's so important thing.'* Akram experiences the same: *'Work is important because it makes you enthusiastic to live, to move, to know that you have the possibilities to develop yourself. Some people, I saw, started working and after a few years they have an office, maybe a car, [...] that is good. It is better than not having work, or than working in a restaurant for money but not for enthusiasm like this other job.'* As Akram mentioned, it is important for this that a job matches your skills, allowing for self-development which is again one of the key aspects of integration. A job has to be able to offer you a feeling of productivity. Gaining a feeling of productivity and fulfilment is what to Ayman is the importance of having a job. He explained: *'Everyday, every evening, I can say to myself I did well. It does something with you mentally, if you do something good during the day, you can be at peace at night.'* The other way around, not having a job can be mentally very draining. Ayman has not find a job in three years which really made him lose his motivation. *'You don't feel like doing things anymore, really. When you have a job, it makes you do many things like doing your best to learn the language but when you don't, you don't feel like doing anything anymore.'*

Furthermore, a job can offer Syrian newcomers more social status and/or respect from the people around them. As Maher explained: *'Look, before, I was always bored at home. Now, if my neighbors ask me what I do and I can say I work at a company, that is good for me. I do not say I receive social benefits because he will ask why? You are young, you can do anything! He will look at me as a man doing nothing and receive money from social benefits. I do not want that, I want to work as well.'* By gaining respect from others, having a job contributes to the process of integration as learned in the previous chapter. The obtained respect not only comes from society but can also come from one's own relatives. To Ayman, this is important as he explained: *'For my children, I have to be a good example.'*

In this respect, differences between gender play a role as especially for men, having a job can be of great importance because of existing cultural gender norms among some Syrians about work. Ayman, who is struggling to find a job mentioned: *'Maybe the culture here in the Netherlands is a bit different. Men are able to sit at home while the woman is working but in my culture we do not accept this. Work is very important to me, I cannot sit at home.'* In Syria, it is more common than in the Netherlands for men to work in paid jobs outside the house and for women to take care of the household and the children. As Zahra said: *'In my family, the girls would not work [for a salary].'* Nevertheless, these gender norms are different for each individual and it does not mean women place less value on the role of work for integration. The female participants in this research are highly motivated to work and attach great importance to it.²⁶ One of them is Saran (female, aged twenty-two) who's family adheres these traditional gender norms. Saran herself is really opposed to this division of gender roles. She said: *'When*

²⁶ See Izar's quote on page forty-one

I look at my aunts and my mother I think what are you doing, just do something.[...] It is not like the man is better than the woman or vice versa, no, we are just the same.’

With regard to the aspect of social network, a job can provide the ability to meet new people. Zayd’s experiences are a good example hereof. *‘Through work, I got the chance this morning to meet with the municipality and now I am talking to you. Work and voluntary work really help me a lot with meeting people.’* Yusuf added to this by saying: *‘Work can help you to meet new people, colleagues, who might become friends, family, so I think having a job is a totally different experience than not having a job.’*

Meeting new, under which possibly Dutch, people also gives you an opportunity to gain Dutch cultural knowledge as well as to improve your skills in the Dutch language. Zayd mentioned: *‘Voluntary work helps me to practice my Dutch, not only the language but also the culture, the way people think, how things go in the Dutch society. Actually it helps me a lot with everything. Without work, I cannot develop myself.’* Since personal development is another important aspect of integration, having a job fosters integration by enabling people to learn about the Dutch language and culture as well as by putting in practice what they have learned in schools. Saran exemplified this by saying: *‘I started working in a restaurant and really, I did not even know what a plate and fork meant in Dutch. My boss just pointed out the objects and told me to grab a plate. Step by step I learned all this kind of things and mastered the language.’* Work thus enables to learn new words and practice them at the same time, which, according to Maher, is very important: *‘I think when you learn Dutch and go to work, you can learn faster. When you don’t work, after two months you forgot about the words you learned before.’*

Lastly, and related to the final aspect that came up in the previous chapter, having a job provides stability. Ayman told about it: *‘Look, we are not on a holiday here, we arrive here with a lot of problems and difficulties brought from Syria. It is not easy to do so, but I feel safe and calm here. The only problem is work. If I find a job, I really have no problems anymore and I will feel at home.’* Also to Maher, having a job is his key to stability: *‘If I find a good job, I will be able to do anything and I will be happy. If I don’t, there will always be stress and boredom, yes.’*

5.1.1 Discussion

From the empirical data, it turns out that the importance of work for integration is very versatile. This is not surprising as employment, according to Strang and Ager (2008, 170), has consistently been identified as a factor influencing many relevant issues. The aspect of work touches upon all other aspects mentioned in the first chapter, showing its highly interrelated connection and major importance for integration.

Moreover, as also often mentioned in literature (Strang and Ager 2008, 170; van Liempt and Staring 2020, 72) employment enables participants to earn money which results in economic independence and often more financial opportunities compared to receiving social benefits. According to a research among Syrian newcomers in the Netherlands by van Liempt and Staring (2020, 72) the importance of earning your own money to some also lies in having to pay off debts from resulting from their journey to Europe. As a consequence of earning their own money, people gain a feeling of independence and dignity. Therefore, a paid job can

improve someone's mental well-being as participants and literature express that it may foster self-confidence (Strang and Ager 2008) and a feeling of equality and stability. It may also boost (a feeling of) productivity or as articulated by Hannah Arendt in *Nederland Papierland* (van Liempt and Staring 2020, 12), the ability to serve again. Thereby, it gives fulfilment as well as hope for the future (Strang and Ager 2008) and respect from the surroundings. Furthermore, participants express that having a job gives people the opportunity to broaden someone's social network, practice the Dutch language and gain Dutch cultural knowledge, which is also stated by Strang and Ager (2008). Similar to this perspective, Cheung and Phillimore (2014) state that employment is considered as a means to acquire relationships with host communities through gaining access to resources like information, knowledge and opportunities.

All of the reasons as summarized above show that the perspective of the participants from this research align well with what is said in the literature about the importance of work for integration. Work is more than a just a job. Participants from this research attach a lot of value to being employed in their process of integration as to them this is for a large part about what van Liempt and Staring (2020, 12) describe as rediscovering your work identity which is an important part of the process of feeling at home and being able to give meaning to life.

Interestingly, whereas the social attribute of gender was absent in the previous chapter, it does come to the fore in the analysis on differences in perspectives between social groups on the importance of work for integration. Some participants assign cultural norms about gender roles as a reason that work is seen as more important by some for men than for women, which is something that has been discussed in literature as well. For example, the study of Razenberg, Kahmann and de Gruijter (2018) states that refugee women often come from countries where traditional gender roles, referring to role patterns in which it is not self-evident that the woman work and where women often have to take care of the children, are more dominant than in Dutch society. Men are then seen as the breadwinners, which makes paid work more important to them than to women. As the example of Saran exemplifies, this research also shows that there are exceptions in which female newcomers from traditional families do have paid jobs while the men may or may not stay at home, showing that also within families adhering traditional gender norms, women may attach as much importance to work than men. As Gruijter and Hermans (2019, 13) show with their research on female statusholders in the Netherlands, the main reason participants attach such importance to work is that it gives them something to do during the day and as well as a sense of appreciation. Although it does not come to the fore in this research, de Gruijter, Verloove and Sikkema (2021) however report from a survey amongst Syrian newcomers in the Netherlands that women are less likely than men to say they want to go for a paid job or to be looking for it. According to Gruijter and Hermans (2019) the main reason is their feeling of lacking Dutch language skills.

In conclusion, this research is in line with existing literature about the reasons as to why paid work is of great importance for integration. This chapter does however add a detailed picture on the perspective of newcomers in the Netherlands and highlights more than others the sense of dignity and improved mental wellbeing that work may bring. Considering differences between social groups, paid work can be seen as more important by men than by women due to traditional gender roles although this is not automatically the case and differs per person. No differences are found between socio-spatial contexts.

5.2 Syrian newcomers' experiences with working in the Netherlands

As we established that paid work is of major importance for integration, this section elaborates on the experiences participants have with first, their search for work and secondly, having a job in the Netherlands. Here again, attention is paid to differences between social groups (in particular age, gender, level of education and type of residence permit) and different socio-spatial contexts. During this chapter, different types of work come to the fore, being paid jobs, voluntary work and internships.

5.2.1 The search for work

Starting with the social attribute of age regarding participants' experiences with looking for a job, it seems to be easier for those who are younger compared to those who are older for various reasons. First, younger people tend to easily find their way on the internet when looking for job opportunities while the oldest participant, Ayman (aged forty-three) mentioned he finds it somewhat difficult to find suitable vacancies online. Second, when asking about the most common way for looking for a job, it was often mentioned that people make use of their social network. Creating a professional network tends to be easier for younger people as they have often naturally more opportunities to meet people through their studies and internships. For people who are not studying, like Hamza (aged thirty-three), it can be more difficult to get 'in' the professional network as you have to put more effort in meeting new people. He explained: *'I have found my way alone. When you are younger, you get more support from everywhere without planning for it. When you are studying, you meet people, you meet teachers, the teacher enter you for an internship, you get connections who will ask you for jobs. It will happen because you are already in that circle, ready to get that invite. I am out of that cycle, I am pushing myself to be in. This way, with my age it is more difficult.'* The importance of having a network in the search for work is undisputed, as according to Hamza just like in Syria: *'If you don't have network, you can't work, whatever your profession.'* Hamza started networking since he was awaiting his asylum procedure and since then he found various jobs because of this network. Not everyone is as successful in networking as Hamza, as Maher for example mentioned: *'Dutch people have a lot of connections. They come here and know all people. For me, I cannot. I only talk about work with the municipality and the municipality with me. I don't have a network.'* Izar shares this struggle as she feels like she has been rejected to many jobs partly because of the fact that she does not know anyone in the organizations. While for some it is easy to seek contact as they speak the Dutch language or are not afraid to reach out to people, for others networking can be very difficult. To Yassin, the fact that he lacks good Dutch language skills makes it hard to create a network as it complicates communicating with people you might be able to work with in the future. Thirdly, younger people have less difficulty finding a job compared to older people as, like mentioned in the first chapter, older people generally have more difficulty with learning the Dutch language. Izar exemplified this point by talking about her mother: *'My mother is 55 years old and she has not worked yet in the Netherlands, only voluntary work. It is hard for her to find a paid job. She has a lot of experience in Syria with accountancy, 29 years, but here in the Netherlands finding a job is harder for her because of her age and poor Dutch language skills.'* In general, all ages report that the Dutch language is one of the biggest hurdle in the search for a job. This already starts,

according to Mo, with vacancies that are written in Dutch. With his A2 level in Dutch, he often uses a translator to understand a vacancy. Moreover, to apply for a job, often you need to write a motivation letter. Shaden said about this: *“Because my language is not good enough, I find it hard to write a good motivation letter. When you send a good letter, you have better chances at the job. When you are not able to, even when you sometimes have a lot of experience, you have less chance to get the job.”* According to Ayman, his (lack of perfect) Dutch language skills is the reason employers mention when they reject him for a job. Even Yusuf, who has level C1 in Dutch, struggles to find an internship. He is studying psychology in English and so his Dutch professional vocabulary is not that good. Since it is important to communicate well as a psychologist, employers always ask for someone who can speak Dutch well. People who have Dutch as their mother language are therefore much faster hired than him. Also Zayd feels like employers are requiring someone to speak Dutch like a native speaker. Therefore, the Dutch language is a big obstacle to him in finding a job. Izar expressed her concerns around this topic: *“Some, for example, have worked in construction and here in the Netherlands there is a lot of demand for people in construction but even those people are not able to get a job because their Dutch is not good enough. But to be honest, what level of Dutch do you really need in construction? Those people have skills and are good at their job so I think it is a shame that they are still unemployed.”* According to Izar, you need good communication skills in order to convince the employer of your other, even practical skills. So, while having a job is of major importance to be able practice the Dutch language, Ayman explained that in order to find a job, you already have to be able to speak the Dutch language. For newcomers who are learning the Dutch language, this is clearly a very difficult situation.

The extent to which it is necessary to be able to speak Dutch well differs per sector. Mo, for example, who works as a photographer, mentioned that although employers prefer someone who is fluent in Dutch, it is not a requirement. Yassin, who is looking for a job as an architect, said that especially within the international environment in Amsterdam, offices hardly mention anything about the Dutch language in their vacancies. The same counts for the IT sector as Ahmed mentioned that a friend of his is working in IT without speaking any Dutch. Also Yusuf sees possibilities for jobs as a psychologist for expats or other internationals. So, although newcomers often struggle with the Dutch language, the fact that they often do speak other languages can be an advantage for them as Zayd exemplified: *“It can go both ways, okay my Dutch is not perfect but I do speak English, my mother language is Kurdish and I speak fluently Arabic and Turkish so I speak five languages. This helps me a lot at work. In the beginning, my English helped me a lot because I could communicate with the people here.”* Just like speaking the Dutch language is not a requirement in some sectors, it is not a requirement for some employers either. Hamza, who is working in the well-known Dutch media sector, has been told he is the first non-Dutch person who achieved such a position. He said: *“The media is really hard for anyone to get it but when I proved myself to be here, I got accepted. I did not fail and actually I was very welcome.”* Hamza’s example shows that there are employers who look beyond language skills and instead focus on the person and the quality of work someone delivers.

Although participants agree that it is easier to find a job when you are younger, being a bit older also has its advantages. Some participants mentioned they don’t think employers care so but about age as they do about work experience. Maher, for example, encounters this problem

during job applications as he graduated as soon as the war in Syria started and has not been able to gain work experience yet. Zayd, who does have previous work experience said: *“Younger is always better, as you can learn everything from scratch. However, if I would have been younger, I would lack the work experience I have now. It is thanks to my work experience that I can do what I am doing now.”* Amir adds to this by saying: *“I have more experience because I worked in Dubai for three years. Even my English is better and my mind is better, I deal with European more in Dubai so I know how the European think and how they work how they, you know, what the profession is so yes I get more experiences.”* Although people with a more advanced age may have more work experience, this experiences is not always applicable in the Dutch context. According to the participants, employers are often looking for someone who has previous work experience in the Netherlands, which is something many are lacking as they have not had the opportunities yet to gain it. According to Maher, there is no differences between the Netherlands and Syria as in both countries it is harder to find a job when you are older.

Moving onto the second social attribute regarding experiences with the search for work, it appears that Syrian newcomers with a higher level of education often struggle more to find a job than those with a lower education level. Paid jobs that require a lower level of education, as for example practical job in factories or restaurants, are said to be rather easy to find.²⁷ Higher educated people, on the other hand, experience difficulties especially concerning the recognition of their diplomas, which are often undervalued because of the difference between the education systems in the Netherlands and Syria. That is when newcomers even have their diploma with them, which is often not the case as they were not able to take it with them during the time they fled their country, like Saran who does not own a high school diploma as she said: *“When we fled I couldn't take the diploma with me. I had to go to school for papers, signed by the principal. That was so much hassle and it just wasn't possible.”* To Ayman, the rules around required certificates in the Netherlands are the biggest obstacle to find work. In Syria, he studied 8 years to obtain a bachelor and a master degree in veterinary medicine. Afterwards, he has worked as a veterinarian for thirteen years. However, his diplomas are not valued at the same level in the Netherlands which means that he would have to study another five years in order to be able to practice his profession here. He expressed his feeling: *“To me this is really annoying, it really made me depressed. But life has to go on.”* According to Ayman, ninety-five percent of the Syrian people he knows who are highly educated have not find a job yet. He find it a big problem that because of the many rules from the government around certificate requirements in the Netherlands, almost no one with a diploma finds a job that matches their skills without further education. As the people to whom this applies are often above thirty years old, it is hard to make this financially possible as they are not able to apply for an educational fund.²⁸ Also, as in the case of Ayman, it requires a lot of time that he does not want to invest as he has a family to take care for. His option to work as an assistant makes him feel undervalued which makes him rather work in logistics or another totally different work sector. Maher has a similar experience. In Syria, he graduated from university with a master study as agricultural engineer. In the Netherlands, his diploma is credited as an HBO bachelor. In order to get to the same level, he has to do another master as his knowledge of Syrian agriculture is not applicable in

²⁷ by Maher, Hamza, Zayd, Shaden and Ayman

²⁸ See explanation on page thirty

the Dutch context where the agriculture is dealing with other characteristics. Also Izar recognizes this issue and said: *'When I look around me, I see many Syrians who had very good jobs, who were entrepreneurs and who are now unemployed. It is very hard for them to find a job.'*

Like Ayman and the others, there are many, especially higher educated, newcomers with a lot of experience and skills that due to their position in the labor market, labor market conditions and government rules, are not able to practice their profession. As Akram explained: *'In the Netherlands, to be a lawyer, you have to study many years, speak the Dutch language on a high level and have a broad professional network. All three things are very difficult as a newcomer.'* As a result, many are either unemployed or settle for jobs that are below their capacity.

Not related to a specific social group, another issue mentioned during the search for work is the existing prejudices and ignorance among some employers towards refugees and Syrians. Saran explained that she experiences that employers reject or are either very hesitant towards job applicants with an Islamic surname. When Saran, who speaks fluently Dutch, calls the employers to ask about her application instead of only sending an email, she gets much more positive responses. One time, an employer who seemed a bit hesitant invited her to a job interview. She tells that the moment he realized that she spoke fluently Dutch, was still young and has a lot of motivation and thus contradicted the image he had of her, she was immediately hired. Although situations like this in which people have a certain image of the Syrian refugee that does not match with reality really annoys her, she also expressed understanding as she says that there are so many stereotypes, reinforced by the media, that are confirming a certain image. Izar expressed a similar view. According to her, she does not get invited to job interviews because employers are suspicious of her Syrian background. She explained that many people for example don't know what the education level in Syria is like. Many people have only heard about the Syrian refugees in the media but have no idea about what kind of persons they might be and what skills they might have. According to her, this unfamiliarity results in suspicion towards Syrians, which is why Syrians are less likely to get invited to job interviews. For this reason, Izar does not put her nationality on her CV. On the other hand, to some employers and for some jobs, having a non-Dutch nationality is considered an advantage. Izar, who works at the GGD, said that Dutch colleagues pass Arabic speaking clients to her as she is the only one who can communicate with them. Also, there are employers who do see potential in Syrian newcomers. Mo, for example, was hired for a job by someone who believed in his talent and therefore gave him a hand, as he formulates it, by giving him a contract. Hamza also has a positive note on this by saying that he believes that if you show that you are good at your work, you will be fine because employers will look at your professional characteristics instead of your personal characteristics including the fact that you might not speak Dutch perfectly. Also Saran said that by presenting yourself well and by showing your motivation and your hard work, employers will grant you the job.

The difficulties mentioned above show that, especially older and higher educated newcomers, experiences various barriers in their search for work. It can be very difficult to compete with other, Dutch candidates on the labor market as they lack the same level of Dutch language proficiency, professional network, and the right certificates. As stated by Zayd: *'Reaching equality in work is very difficult. When I compare myself with a colleague who is*

born in Arnhem, he knows more people, he studied in the Netherlands and he speaks the Dutch language. That's why, as a newcomer, you have to work twice as hard. It is very difficult for newcomers.'' As Amir described, employers are looking for candidates that are best for their companies and often, newcomers do not fit into their picture.

Some differences can be noted between different socio-spatial contexts. Although voluntary work can be found rather easily in both cities and villages, participants mentioned that when it comes down to possibilities for paid work, cities, and especially those in the Randstad, have a lot to offer. More than in villages, many companies can be found in cities. About his village (rural, cultural homogenous and quiet), Akram for example said that besides factory or restaurant work, not much job offers are available. Also Izar mentioned that she has not found suitable vacancies for herself yet in the surroundings of the urban, cultural heterogenous and quiet village she is living in. For newcomers, the international atmosphere of urban areas is also interesting as it offers more possibilities through international companies. Cities are therefore said to offer more possibilities for building a network, although this differs per sector. For the art sector, for example, this is especially true.³⁰ According to Amir, living in an urban, cultural heterogenous and vibrant city, there is a big difference in the ability to create a network for those living in cities, especially Amsterdam, and those living outside of the cities. He said: *''As a photographer I know like a lot of my friends, so my refugee friends they are also Syrian, they are also good photographers and are really I like their pictures but they are living in another cities and they cannot find a job like me.*'' While Amir explains that while it also really matters how good you are at your job, living in a city really has a positive influence on your ability to find a job. Moreover, for Zayd, living in rural, cultural homogenous and quiet village near Arnhem, the travel expenses would be one of the reasons he would rather want to live in the city of Arnhem, he says: *''Now I don't get travel reimbursement for money I spend on public transport from my house in [name of village] to my job in Arnhem. If I would live in Arnhem, I would not have to pay for it.*'' On the other hand, some participants like Amir argue that it is easier to find a job in a village, where there are a lot of factories you can work and earn easy money, than it is in cities where there would be too much competition on the labor market. In the end, participants are mostly flexible, they will accept a job that is good for them, even if they have to move. Maher for example, says: *''I do not have to find a job in [name of village], if I can find a job in Amsterdam, no problem I can switch houses and move to Amsterdam.*''

5.2.2 Working in the Netherlands

Despite the barriers newcomers face during their search for work, many participants do currently have a job in the Netherlands. This sub-section discusses the experiences in light of differences between genders and between those with and without a permanent residence permit, next to other difficulties and possibilities participants face.

Concerning gender, various participants reported noticing no differences in the way men and women experience working in the Netherlands. Instead of gender, it is said that it is experience that matters. Nevertheless, others note that gender actually can create different experiences. As discussed in the previous section, existing cultural gender norms in Syria result in some men focusing more on work than women, resulting in a lower labor market participation

³⁰ According to Hamza, Amir and Mohamed.

of women. This gender division may continue when they are in the Netherlands. As Saran said: *‘‘In Syria, the men used to do everything, so when they come here, they continue this way. The men will search for work and the women will look after the house and the children.’’* Also Zayd expressed that in his culture, the women have little chances to be independent. He explained that the men are raised with a better education, to be independent and often have had work experience in Syria before they came here. This makes that it is easier for men to work in the Netherlands than it is for the women who lack this background. Izar shares this view by saying that she noted that men find jobs faster than women. Her reasoning is that women might be married and busy with the children of still busy with a study or they might be housewives like they were in Syria. They were not used to work and so they have no work experience. This makes it harder for women to find a job. She said: *‘‘Imagine that a women of 50 years old with three children who has never worked [for a salary] in Syria will work for her first time here in the Netherlands, what will she do? It will be very hard.’’* Izar herself has no experiences with differences between genders when it comes to working in the Netherlands. As mentioned before, Saran is very against this way of thinking and tries to show her family that men and women are equal. *‘‘For my internship, I started at seven in the morning till five in the afternoon. Afterwards I went to my work from half past five till ten. To show that I am a women and I do way more than all the men in this family.’’* According to Zayd, when it comes to gender differences at work in the Netherlands, it depends on the sector as in the Netherlands there are certain sectors like social services in which ninety percent of the employees are women.

Next to gender, some participants mentioned that having a permanent residence permit makes a difference in their experience with work. Although Amir explains that since his first year, no one asked him what type of residence permit he has, mentally your type of residence permit can make a difference, according to Ahmed who has a temporary residence permit. He explained: *‘‘From one side, we have responsibility of the job. [...] But on the other side, also, they [refugees] have to live in fear that always they might be send back to Syria. So I found that it’s like, they cannot be productive and a hard worker and then at the same time, you have to be ready to leave the country. Because whatever I spent the effort here, it doesn’t matter. But I have to leave after one year or two years.’’* Also according to Amir, the moment you have a permanent residence permit, you start to focus more on a future in the Netherlands. Having a permanent residence permit gives him more confidence and motivation to learn the Dutch language better, which makes working in the Netherlands easier.

Considering general notes on experiences with work that are not specific to one social group, participants mentioned their struggle with the Dutch bureaucracy. For example, it frustrates Ayman that there are so many rules for everything and that you have to make an appointment for everything. Yassin adds to this by saying that everything therefore takes a lot of time as everything has a waiting period. Second, the Dutch language is again an issue as, according to Yusuf and also Izar, who are both young and both learned Dutch at a University, the Dutch language as they learned it at school does not represent the way people speak in reality. Izar explained: *‘‘When I am in the office talking to colleagues, they say to me that I speak too formal.’’* To Yasser, not speaking the language fluently is problematic as at work, she experienced a conflict between two colleagues. She felt like her colleague was not treating the other colleague well and she wanted to speak up to end the conflict. However, she did not feel confident enough to do so as she felt like she was lacking the ability to express herself in

the way she wanted to. For Shaden, not speaking the language perfectly is a barrier to standing up for yourself. To her, having a nice job where she feels comfortable while speaking the language fluently would make her feel better and more confident which is important in feeling at ease in the society. Moreover, it is mentioned by some participants that they at times struggle with the straightforwardness of colleagues. Shaden said: *“Dutch people are direct, more direct than I can understand. Sometimes, I find that a bit annoying. Maybe I'm not used to the atmosphere yet.”* The atmosphere on the work floor can be very different in the Netherlands compared to Eastern countries where participants have worked before. For example, Izar mentioned that in Syria, you need to work hard to become successful as the manager will see your hard work and give you a promotion. In the Netherlands, she experienced that employers say to their manager that they work hard, despite the manager already noticing it. *“You always need to say it out loud, I work hard, I did this and that. You need to ask for a promotion. You need to convince your manager.”* Yusuf adds to this by saying that he feels like Dutch people are more confident to express their needs, like negotiating their salary during a job interview. This is something he struggles with. In addition, Akram shared his difficulties with the cultural differences that also play out at work. For him, there are two times a year related to the Islamic religion that he would like to have some days off but when he has to work as his employer does not allow him to have these days off. He said: *“This is really annoying because you wait all year to get those two weeks of holiday and visit family and friends. It is really important.”* Also, Akram has experiences with employers who do not allow him to pray during work hours. He said: *“Muslims pray five times a day. One time a factory, they said I am sorry we understand you but you cannot pray here. If you would like to pray, then there is no chance for you to work here.”*

Concerning socio-spatial differences, no real findings can be presented on this topic.

5.2.3 Discussion

This empirical chapter shows that the social attributes influencing participants' experiences with (the search for) paid work in the Netherlands are age, level of education, type of residence permit and gender.

Starting with the latter, some participants reported noticing no differences in the way men and women experience working in the Netherlands while others say that cultural norms about gender divisions cause men to more often have a job than women and also have more ease with finding a job. This issue is discussed a lot in literature as researchers more and more focus on identifying reasons for the refugee (gender) gap on the labor market (like Razenberg, Kahmann and de Gruijter 2018; van Liempt and Staring 2020). Hillmann and Koca (2021, 2) for example elaborate on reasons that were also mentioned by participants by saying that in their country of origin, migrant women are often lower educated and are less likely to have previous experience with the formal labor market than men. Their lack of previous education and experience also makes them have a less concrete image of what their possibilities are in the Netherlands (de Gruijter, Verloove and Sikkema 2021; Razenberg, Kahmann and de Gruijter 2018). Thereby, access to employment for women is further complicated by childcare responsibilities (Hillmann and Koca 2021, 6) as women more often take main responsibility of family care (de Gruijter, Verloove and Sikkema 2021). Bakker, Dagevos and Engbersen (2017)

found that women with children have less chances at work than those with no kids. The impeding factors mentioned above relate to traditional gender divisions within families that according to Razenberg, Kahmann and de Gruijter (2018) form an overarching obstacle for women to work, especially for those with a lower level of education. Moreover, de Gruijter, Verloove and Sikkema (2021) conclude from their research among Syrian statusholders in the Netherlands that municipalities are more focused on men than on women, contributing to the lower labor market participation of female statusholders and that their higher risk on psychological and physical complaints from possible (sexual) abuse during the time they were fleeing their country may form another barrier to labor market participation. Regarding labor market discrimination, no differences between gender have been reported by participants however van Liempt and Staring (2020, 80) mention that female statusholders looking for work are at times confronted with discrimination based on religion as they are told that them wearing a head scarf negatively impacts their chances at work in the Netherlands. Although discrimination poses a problem to all newcomers, it can thus pose another barrier to work for female *statusholders* in particular (de Gruijter, Verloove and Sikkema 2021, 6). The same counts for lacking a social network, as for women there are a couple reasons why they may have a smaller social network (Razenberg, Kahmann and de Gruijter 2018).

The second social attribute at play concerns the level of education of newcomers. Participants mentioned that those with a higher level of education often struggle more to find a job than those with a lower education level especially because of the experienced difficulties with the recognition and requirements of certificates. This obstacle has also often been reported in literature as according to van Liempt and Staring (2020, 70) for example, skills, knowledge and competences obtained in countries of origin are often not recognized in the Netherlands. The certificates newcomers obtained in foreign countries just like the work experience they have gained is not considered equivalent to similar qualifications and experience gained in the Netherlands, as also reported by Strang and Ager (2008, 170). Thereby, newcomers often lost or left behind the documents they need for their qualifications to be recognized (Hillman and Koca 2021, 13), as the example of Saran shows as well. In order for higher educated newcomers to find a job that matches their skills, participants said that it is almost always necessary to follow further education in the Netherlands. Hillman and Koca (2021, 13) report a similar finding by stating that many of the highly qualified female refugees in Germany they researched had to complete additional and lengthy training in order to obtain certificates or work experience that was accepted. Especially for elder women this was a struggle. They add that many of them instead work in low-skilled jobs, showing what participants of this research mentioned as well that many highly educated newcomers work at jobs that are below their capacity. This finding is shared by Strang and Ager (2008, 170) who calls this phenomenon under-employment³¹ and by the European Migrant Advisory Board (2019, 19) who conducted focus groups among refugees in the Netherlands and report that the participants emphasize that their jobs do not correspond to their professional experience. Tomlinson and Egan (2002, 1026) confirm this in the contexts of the UK by stating that refugees who find work are often over-qualified for the jobs they are doing, or are working on a casual, insecure, or part-time basis.

³¹ Under-employed is defined as holding a job which does not require the level of skills or qualifications possessed by the jobholder (Strang and Ager 2008, 170).

The third social attribute that appears to be of influence on experiences with work is age. The data of this chapters shows that looking for a job is easier for newcomers who are younger compared to those who are older. This finding is in line with Bakker, Dagevos and Engbersen (2017, 71) who did a quantitative study on the developments in the labor market participation of migrants who settled in the Netherlands in the period 1995-1999, and found that the chance at finding work decreases with increasing age. This can be explained first by the finding that younger people tend to more easily find their way on the internet when looking for job opportunities as also stated by van Liempt and Staring (2020, 79) who found that the search for a job on the internet via online job agencies is a very common way, resulting in younger people having an advantages compared to older people. Secondly, creating a professional network tends to be easier for younger people as they often have naturally more opportunities to meet people through their studies and internships. Lastly, younger people also have less difficulty finding a job compared to older people as older people generally have more difficulty with learning the Dutch language and language is considered as one of the biggest hurdles. Literature adds that those who are younger struggle less with the obstacle of recognition of certificates as, according to Hillmand and Koca (2021, 13), they more easily opt to obtain a new degree in Germany while elder women struggle more to do so as it would require additional commitment and result in further delay. Although participants agreed that it is easier to find a job when you are younger, being a bit older also has its advantages as some participants mentioned they don't think employers care so but about age as they do about work experience. Lastly, Bakker, Dagevos and Engbersen (2017, 1788) add that next to the current age, the age of arrival is also crucial to employment opportunities as those who arrive as adolescents are more likely to be successful with learning the language and obtaining a qualification.

Fourth, the type of residence permit influences experiences with work in a way that having a permanent residence permit makes the mental difference of feeling more secure about their future in the Netherlands, making them more motivated to invest in it. Van Liempt and Staring (2020, 85) share a similar finding as they found that one of the main obstacles to find work are the worries newcomers have about their future in the Netherlands. Participants in their research expressed their fear of being send back to Syria which complicates their full participation in society.

Other difficulties faced by participants concern the Dutch language (also acknowledged by van Liempt and Staring 2020, 89), existing suspicion and ignorance towards Syrians or refugees among some employers, dealing with Dutch bureaucracy, having difficulty getting along with Dutch colleagues as they can be more straightforward and direct than participants are used to and cultural differences playing out at work.

Some experiences described above seem to differ between socio-spatial contexts as cities, except for factory work, offer more possibilities for paid work than villages. According to participants, cities host more companies, offer more opportunities for creating a professional network and have a more international labor market which is attractive for newcomers. Research shows that refugees are often drawn to urban locations due to the location of specific resources such as their employment and educational opportunities (De Hoon, Vink and Schmeets 2021, 3). On the other hand, the higher competition on the labor market in highly

urbanized environments reduces the chances at work as put forward by some participants and Baker and Dagevos (2017).

To conclude, the experiences as put forward by participants in this research do largely align with extensive existing literature on newcomers' barriers to work. Adding to the difficulties mentioned, participants of this research also highlighted some possibilities on the labor market they experience as newcomer, like speaking other languages than Dutch and English. Concerning differences between social groups and socio-spatial contexts, it can be stated, taking into account the nuances as described in this chapter, that younger, male, lower educated, Syrian newcomers who own a permanent residence permit and are living in cities are most likely to have more positive experiences with the search for work and/or working in the Netherlands. Lastly, even though many reasons are mentioned in the literature why women have more difficulty working in the Netherlands, from the empirical data of this research it appears that women, even if they come from a family that adheres to traditional gender norms, do not necessarily have more struggles with working in the Netherlands than men. It does come to the fore that this can be the case among other women who respect those norms and stay at home.

6. Conclusion

In this research, the perspectives on and experiences with integration of different social groups of Syrian newcomers living in different socio-spatial contexts in the Netherlands have been examined, with a special focus on the role of paid work.

Based on sixteen semi-structured interviews, this thesis research started by presenting the concept of integration from the perspective of the participants. Hereby, six interrelated aspects are identified, being cultural knowledge, personal development, social network, connection with host society, safety and stability and work. Regarding the importance participants attach to these aspects, no differences are noted between social groups or those living in cities or villages. However, a slight difference occurs when men due to cultural gender norms may attach more value to work than women.

The conceptualisation of integration appears to align in large part with the key aspects of Strang and Agers' conceptual framework of integration from 2008. The aspect of work is particularly considered important for a great number of reasons. These reasons include its highly interrelated connection with the other aspects, the opportunities it provides through being financially independent and the feeling of dignity and improved mental well-being that it may bring about. According to participants, integration in its broader sense is considered as a long-term process in which a balance needs to be found between maintaining their Syrian identity and adapting to the country of arrival's lifestyle. Although now taking place in the context of a new country, integration is ultimately about regaining your life as usual. Herein, the key to success is said to be mutual respect and acceptance and thus having an equal relation between newcomers and those already living in the host country. To some, it remains the question to what extent this is really possible.

The introduction of Syrian newcomers' conceptualisation of integration laid the groundwork for understanding their experiences with integration and in particular the role of work. Here, differences are found between first, different social groups based on age, gender, ethnicity, type of residence permit and level of education, and second, between those living in cities and in villages. Regarding integration in general, younger and Kurdish newcomers tend to have the least difficulty with their process of integration, especially those living without family and those residing in cities. Breaking it down, ethnicity may influence connection with host society and feelings of safety and stability as Kurdish participants report more positive experiences concerning those aspects. An explanation can be found in their relatively worse connection with society in their home country as Kurds are there treated as an oppressed minority (van Liempt and Staring 2022, 24-25). Regarding age, younger people tend to have less difficulty with their process of integration due to their relative ease with learning the Dutch language and greater opportunities for personal development and meeting new people. For those who are younger and single, living in a city may especially be beneficial due to the cities' educational facilities, the international, multicultural and young population and the greater possibilities to build a social network. Those who live with family on the other hand generally prefer living in a village.

With regard to experiences with work for integration, those who are male, younger, lower educated, live in a city and own a permanent residence permit, are most likely to have positive experiences with the search for work and/or working in the Netherlands. Starting with

the social attribute of gender, differences between men and women do not emerge as clearly as in existing literature. Whereas literature most often represents women as having a more vulnerable position on the labor market than men, all women in this research are either studying or working and experience the same amount of difficulties and possibilities as the men. Nevertheless, the existing gender gap is taken seriously as it is mentioned both by participants as well as in literature that traditional gender divisions within families can cause barriers to employment for female refugees. Hereby, this research does not disprove that women can have a more vulnerable position but does show the less often portrayed image that they can also have a strong labor market position, fostering their process of integration.

Furthermore, the social attribute of age again plays a role. Younger Syrian newcomers experience less difficulty looking for a job compared to those who are older. First of all, this research finds that younger newcomers more easily find vacancies online and have relatively more opportunities to create a professional network. Second, they have less difficulty with the Dutch language. Lastly, their flexibility with choosing or changing their career is helpful as problems with the recognition of requirements are avoided. On the other hand, older people often have more work experience which is a common requirement for employers.

Moving on, newcomers' level of education is of influence. Those who have a high level of education, and especially those who are older, often struggle to find a job. They experience difficulties with the recognition and requirements of certificates while jobs that require a lower level of education are rather easy to find. Under-employment and over-qualification therefore is a real issue. Regarding the type of residence, having a permanent residence permit provides a feeling of stability what motivates to invest in a career in the Netherlands. Finally, this research finds that especially urban, cultural heterogenous and vibrant cities, as expected from literature, provide a socio-spatial contexts in which processes of integration may be fostered. This especially counts for younger newcomers living without family. They value the attractive labor market, the presence of educational institutions and the international and multicultural atmosphere. On the other hand, villages do offer more opportunities for factory work and generally have less competition on the labor market. In general, newcomers who live with a family prefer the more rural and quiet villages.

Concerning suggestions for further research, it remains interesting to discuss the value of the concept of integration. In recent years, more and more research criticizes the term and offer alternatives. Especially among scholarly researchers, the trend is towards no longer using the term integration. As no such critique came to the fore in this research, it would be interesting to investigate in further detail the perspectives of newcomers on the criticism expressed in order to engage them into the discussion around this topic. Moreover, this research did not address the role of policy, employers and civil society organizations including *klantmanagers*, job hunters, and organizations like NewBees and language schools, respectively. However, participants expressed these were all relevant actors and institutional frameworks for their experiences with integration. Therefore, more research on the role of such actors as well as policies may be interesting for further research.

As migration and integration are topics that are of great relevance in today's world and will remain to be important in the foreseeable future, further research will definitely prove useful. For me personally, I will stay involved in activities around those topics as this research

has increased my interest, sparked my curiosity about the stories of newcomers and provided me hope for more efficient and successful integration processes in the future.

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Appendix

A. Coding tree

The transcripts of all interviews have been coded in NVivo. First, deductive nodes were created that derived from the topics of my interview guide and from the literature review. Secondly, the data has been coded according to two different stadia: open and axial (Boeije 2014). During the open coding phase, I went through all the data and coded all fragments that seemed of relevance for the research question. Afterwards, codes were organized into different categories during the axial coding stage. Below, the coding tree after the axial coding phase is presented.

Codes
<p>Arrival</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social housing allocation started networking Wasting time Waiting kills the motivation in you
<p>Integration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Age Being open to new things, new culture Perspectives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to communicate with the original people in the NL Ability to work and study Being able to reach your own potential Being active in your host community Being comfortable to share emotions and more Being "in" the culture Being independent (financially) Being of use for yourself as well as for your host community Being safe <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being seen and accepted as your own person, not as a refugee. Losing you refugee status Communicating, understanding, accepting and learning from each other Daily interactions being simple communication with people in the NL Doing Dutch habits Doing something voluntary for your community, vrijwilligerswerk Equality Feeling of stability. of sort of home Feeling strong and confident to be able to feel safe in society Getting involved into the community, having things in common and share Giving back to society, saying thank you Having (Dutch) friends and colleagues, a social network Having a drivers license Having chemistry between all people, sharing your life and experiences Having respect for each other Having respect for the Dutch people and their way of living I don't know actually It is not changing your identity Knowing the Dutch society Language, having A2 Dutch Long process, little steps are all part of integration like drivers license Mixing ways of thinking

More than inburgeringsexamens
 Passing the inburgering exam
 Respect the Western mind
 To go back no normal life
 To have a good work, be busy
 To have a permanent ID, having more security and safety
 We are just visitors, guests in our new countries
 Differences between NL and the east
 Arabics give more, feel more
 Combining identities
 beautiful mix
 Imbalance
 Migration is transformation
 Not always possible, some things are difficult
 Not belonging anywhere 100%
 Picking best of both
 respect for Dutch system, keep system that is no problem for the dutch
 Trying to balance cultural norms and values
 You are more used to your own group of people, easier communication
 You have no choice, you have to deal with it
 Contact with neighbours is different
 Different humor
 Dutch are more direct, Syrians more complicated relations
 Dutch are more tolerant f.e. for gay people
 Dutch are quiet, Arabics are more together and outside
 Family
 In Arabic countries, its easier for men to find a job
 Koerden less strict than others
 Kurdish people are discriminated by Arabs
 Less freedom in the east
 Loyalty, connections and collectivist society
 Religion
 Social rules
 Syrians care more about others opinions
 Work
 Work possibilities
 Difficulties
 Dealing with stereotypes and ignorance about Syrians
 Different social rules to learn
 Islamophobia
 Never able to loose refugee status
 Rejections give stress
 Stressful to start a new life in the NL
 You have to work hard for it
 Dutch people are nice and open
 Dutch system is good for foreigner
 Feeling at home because the people around you
 Give respect to the habits of NL
 Congratulate Dutch with their holidays
 Inburgeringscursus
 Better to start in AZC
 Does not help with integration
 A2 is not enough to get a job
 Language school is not the same as in reality
 Fraud

Helps understanding the NL (language, basic info)
More culture sensitivity needed, dealing better with different cultures
Need for social media program
Need for starting earlier with participating
Need for starting to learn the language in AZC
Needs to have a better structure
Quality differs per school
Integration takes effort from both sides
Learning the language
 Importance of learning Dutch
 Not having to translate in your mind
 Speaking Dutch gives confidence
Level of feeling integrated in the NL
New chance in the NL
Not feeling at home with Dutch people alone
Permanent residence permit strengthens connectedness
Permanent residence permit gives you more confidence, eye for the future
Struggling with having the status of refugee
We are listeners, give us the opportunity to speak
You get integrated by friends and community, people around you

Municipalities

differences between klantmanagers in approach
focus on getting out of the *uitkering*, they want you to do any type of work
Good relation with klantmanager
Klantmanagers think along with suitable job
Klantmanager does not give help when needed
Klantmanager does not inform well
Klantmanager has no interest in plans of statushouders, only getting out of the *uitkering* matters
Klantmanagers should have more interest in the life and wishes of statushouders
Municipality is too much focused on learning language, not dual traject
Need to give more structure
Not giving permission for traineeship
Systematic discouragement of klantmanagers

Personal information

age
Household
Job
Level of Dutch
Life in Syria
Residence
 Alphen is big enough to have the facilities of a city
 Arnhem
 Arnhem good for study and shopping
 Conservative people, little social contact possible
 Elst is tolerant
 Feels like my own city
 Little refugees in the neighbourhood
 More old people living in a village
 Multicultural neighbourhood
 Ongelijkwaardige relatie met dorpsgenoten
 Residents are happy with us as well
 Village is quiet and peaceful
 First town of residence became home town

Opinion on Amsterdam
Arabic neighbourhood
attractive because of (international) companies
Feels like my city
Good for presence of universities
International city
Lot of things to do
Possibilities for work and study
Possible to depend on English
Similar to Damascus
Soul in the city
Turkse buurt, moeilijke communicatie
Very nice city
Plans for moving, is difficult
Preferred place to live
Place with ability to learn and speak Dutch
travel expenses
Village (Deventer) is quiet
Residence permit
Plans for the future
Reasons to come to the NL

Social network

Arnhem
Family and neighbours
Family close by
Little social contact with neighbours
Taalcoach
Culture differences with Dutch friends
Easier to get along with Syrian people
Easy to make friends in Amsterdam because of English
Family around the world
friends and network in the cities
Friends close by
Friends or colleagues help with CV
Good for learning the language and creating a network
Hard to make contact, other social system in the NL
looking for non Syrian community
Making friends in different ways
Many Dutch friends
Not having a community
Not having many friends
Not much Dutch people

Social organizations

Finding it through network
Getting help with finding work
No help needed
Now more than few years ago
Taalcoach
There is a need for more structure from social organization like NewBees
Way of social contact

Study

Age

30 + learning is more difficult

30 + no financial support

Bakaloria

Difficulties

Dutch language

Finding motivation when level is too low

Needing approval of municipality

No proof of diploma because of war

Important for learning the Dutch life

Learning English

plans for studying

Struggles with internship

Study history

Village VS city

Cities are lively, soul in the street

Cities have more facilities (theatres, art, sports)

City has more art, therefore more work

City is more international and multicultural

expensive to live in Amsterdam

Language

Easier in a village to learn Dutch

Easy to switch to English in a city

in village no one speaks English

More chances in a city because of more social contacts

No difference between village and city

Less time to study in a city

Less travel expenses when living in a city

Little jobs in village

Meeting people

Cities have the ability to make friends more easily

Easy to meet people in Amsterdam

Ghost village

More chances for social contact in a city

More possibilities for new contacts in a city

More chances for work and study in a city

More chances for work in a city (Amsterdam)

More jobs in a village

More nature in villages

More social events in cities

More social organizations in cities

More young people in cities because of universities

Village better for families

Village better to bring up children in your own way

Village is lacking opportunities

Village with older, rich and white people

Village without diversification of people

Voluntary work is possible in Villages

Work

Age

30 + less support from social surroundings or networks

finding a job can be harder when you are older

no employer will look at your age

Older = more experiences = makes working here easier

Contact with colleagues
 Equal relationships
 Feeling different because of refugee background

Difficulties of working in NL
 Being able to start working takes a lot of time, long procedure
 Bureaucracy
 Different style of communication, more direct
 Dutch have more confidence, hard to discuss salary f.e.
 Dutch language
 Employers not always respect Islamic rules at work
 Having to deal with rules you dislike
 Living in fear of being send back
 Mismatch in job and experience
 Need to learn the language first
 Paying public transport
 Paying taxes and therefore earning as much as *uitkering*
 Rules
 Self marketing is required, not in Syria
 You need approval of municipality

Discrimination
 Not experiencing discrimination

Dream job

Feeling guilt because of lost years

Gender
 Cultural differences
 Differs per sector
 Girls would not work in Syria
 Man finds jobs faster than women
 No differences
 Syrian man have more experience and education than women, therefore easier to work

Importance of work
 A job means dignity
 Being able to move forward
 Being independent of others
 Cultural norm for men to work
 Earning more money than receiving from the *uitkering*
 Enables learning about the Dutch society, how people think
 Enables self development
 Feeling of productivity
 Financial independence
 Gaining experience
 Gives feeling of satisfaction
 Gives you confidence
 Gives you feeling of equality
 Learning the Dutch language at work
 Makes you enthusiastic
 Meeting new people
 Money is not very important even
 Practicing Dutch
 Solving many personal problems
 The reason why I came to Europe
 To eliminate a lot of stress
 To keep busy
 Way to reach my goals
 Work is the most important part of integration

Looking for a job

Bigger network, more work

Difficulties

Being dependent on the municipality

Conditions of employers

Corona

Costs time

Dutch language

Employer are ignorant and suspicious about Syrians

Syrians are known as refugees not for their knowledge

Employers don't want to hire refugees

Employers want more experience

Employers wanted the best candidate

Even case manager struggles

Finding paid work

Finding work that is not practical work

Finding work that matches your experiences and skills

Having a refugee status, feeling different

Having an international diploma

Having the wrong ID papers for a job

Many rules and lots of waiting

Many years of extra studying needed

Not getting invited to job interviews

Not having a network

Rules from municipalities

Syrians or foreign diplomas are not recognized

Taking the job you are able to get, even if its a mismatch

The application process

Finding the right vacancies

Too much competition on the labor market

Travel expenses

You cannot work without a diploma

Finding vacancies is no problem

Possibilities

Being flexible, starting with that what's possible

Hiring someone is about experience, not about background

In some jobs being a refugee is a plus

Jobs are not about career but about people and community

Many job in It available

No Dutch needed in some job sectors, English is good

No problem to move to another place for work

Permanent residence permit gives more focus on learning the language

Practical jobs like factory work

Someone who wants to help will hire you

Speaking English enables having contact from the start

Speaking multiple languages

When proving yourself, I got accepted

When you really want something, it will be easy

When you show good motivation someone can wish you well

When you speak Dutch well

Work of ourselves more

Type of residence permit does not matter

Ways to look for a job

Opinion on current job

Enjoy working

Not matches skills
Speaking English at work
voluntary work
Work experience
Has not worked in the NL
Worked for fun