



# **The Experience of Socio-Economic Integration of Ethiopian and Eritrean Migrants in The Hague, the Netherlands**

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## List of Acronyms

BSc	Bachelor of Sciences
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
COA	(In Dutch - Centraal Orgaan Opvang Asielzoekers)- Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EU	European Union
GP	General Practitioner
ILO	International Labour Organization
IND	Immigration and Naturalisation Service (in The Netherlands)
ISS	International Institute of Social Studies
KMs	Kilometres
MBO	(In Dutch - middelbaar beroepsonderwijs) means Secondary Vocational Education
MSc	Master of Sciences
NGOs	Non Governmental Organizations
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UWV	(In Dutch - Uitvoeringsinstituut Werknemersverzekeringen) - Dutch Employee Insurance Agency
WWII	World War Two

## Abstract

This research focuses on the socio-economic integration of Ethiopian and Eritrean immigrants who have been living for 5-10 years in The Hague, the Netherlands after receiving the asylum residence permit. In the Netherlands, to determine their degree of integration, the government mainly utilizes the labour market position (statistics) of migrants. However, a comprehensive status of integration may not be discerned simply from analysing labour market statistics because it neglects migrants' actual perspectives and experiences. This research, based on interviews conducted with 16 immigrants, selected experts, and a review of earlier studies in the area, mainly explains the integration of the immigrants from their own perspective through the lens of the concept of social navigation and theory of human capital focusing on their experiences in the labour market, housing, social security, health, education, knowledge of the language and culture of the host society. The concepts of social navigation and human capital have been applied because for immigrants, settlement requires new navigation skills since they face an unfamiliar host environment and new settlement tasks such as a new working environment, new educational system, and so on. This in turn underlines the need for human capital which plays a crucial role in the process of immigrants' navigation of the new environment and their overall socio-economic integration. It is found that despite a very limited involvement of the participants in key professions that require qualifications such as architecture, law, and teaching, and their limited involvement in vocational and entrepreneurship trainings and education, the participants' socio-economic position shows their potential to navigate and integrate in the city although there are various challenges which are encountered in the process. In addition, effective integration requires the host country's commitment and genuine support that in turn needs to have a concrete data about the immigrants; their reasons for arrival, their background, and what they bring with them. However, it was not possible to find data, particularly from the municipality of The Hague where the officers contacted indicated that the municipality does not register immigrants by background. As a result, I strongly recommend that having a comprehensive data about the immigrants in the city helps the municipality to a great extent in terms of addressing issues related to those immigrants and speed up their integration process.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

Migration is one of the major themes in the field of development studies research and includes the role of migrants in the economy of both the sending and receiving countries. Migrants can boost capital accumulation for themselves and the native societies, and increase the employment-to-population ratio in host countries, which is particularly important for countries with aging populations. However, playing these roles requires successful integration of the immigrants in the host countries and societies. Studying the socio-economic integration of migrants from their own perspective remains important for at least two reasons. On one hand, the socio-economic dimension is the key dimension easing long-term integration of immigrants into society and their possible contribution to the host countries. On the other hand, studying this from the immigrants' own perspective becomes crucial because many of the previously produced reports mainly utilize the labour market position (statistics) of migrants to determine their degree of integration which may not show the comprehensive status of integration since it disregards migrants' actual perspectives and experiences. By empirically exploring the degree that immigrants navigate the complex system and expectations of self-reliance articulated in the integration policies, the research paper contributes to a better understanding of the prevailing lived experiences of integration of immigrants in The Hague, and makes some important policy recommendations.

## **Keywords**

Migration, Ethiopian migrants, Eritrean migrants, Integration, Labour market, Host country, Socio-economic situation, Health, Education, Housing, Human Capital, The Hague, The Netherlands



# Chapter 1 : General Introduction to the Study

## 1.1. Nature of the problem

My motivation to conduct a research on the ‘integration experience of migrants’ emanates from the lived experience of my close friend who graduated from the University of Wageningen of the Netherlands in the 2019/2020 academic year. After his graduation, as many people do, he applied for and was granted a work permit that enables him to search for jobs in the Netherlands. After securing the work permit, he applied for a job in a particular private company and was selected for the announced position. As a next step, the hiring organization called my friend to report and sign on the contract agreement to start the new job. On the day of appointment, he went to the organization and the CEO asked him if he speaks the Dutch language before signing the agreement. Unfortunately, my friend replied that he does not speak the language and the CEO told him that he cannot be hired unless he speaks the language since the job involves interaction with customers. This experience may have been encountered by many, and there are a number of similar cases with which migrants struggle in host countries to successfully engage and integrate in the legal, political and socio-economic dimensions.

Despite the existence of studies conducted in the field of migrants’ integration, the findings from an initial literature review indicate relatively contradicting results. On one hand, there are studies showing that migrants have enormous potential to integrate successfully, and many do during their journeys and while they are in the host countries (Pittaway, Muli and Shteir 1969; Danso 2002; Van Heelsun 2017). On the other hand, there are claims that migrants are failing to successfully integrate in the new environments (Munteanu 2015). For instance, according to the municipality of Amsterdam:

[...] most Eritreans in Amsterdam are poorly integrated and are far from Dutch society in terms of orientation, manners, values, language, participation and training. Many are unsure about finances and struggle with debt... (NL Times 2016).

Similarly, in 2018, the Netherlands Institute for Social Research reported that:

[...] Eritrean refugees are having a difficult time adapting to life in the Netherlands (DutchNews.nl. 2018).

In the Netherlands, the government utilizes the labour market position (statistics) of migrants to determine their degree of integration (Munteanu 2015:v). In fact, this helps to make comparisons of immigrants’ involvement based on gender, age and years of residence since arrival. However, a comprehensive status of integration may not be discerned simply from

analysing labour market statistics because a total reliance on statistics neglects migrants' actual perspectives and experiences of their own integration process. Therefore, there is a need to know about the socio-economic integration experiences from the perspectives of immigrants themselves, highlighting their agency in the process. This has also been proposed as an area for further study by several authors (including Tastsoglou and Preston 2005:52; Campbell and Afework 2015:117; De and Santos 2019:84; Derks and Sremac 2020; Bijl and Verweij 2012) since little is known about the experience of immigrants from their own perspective.

In addition, frequent changes in the migration and integration policy of the government created different approaches in understanding migrants' integration in this country. The more recent integration policy of the government underlines that migrants are to blame for their slow (or lack of) integration, and that efforts to advance the process should come from their side (Ho 2013:128). This implies that, according to Munteanu (2015:9), any poor migrants' socio-economic position is seen less as a consequence of structural constraints that the migrants might face, and more as a result of lack of effort of the migrants. This in turn led to a contradiction that migrants who had been supported to maintain their own identity during the era of multiculturalism were now criticized for insufficiently identifying with Dutch culture (Entzinger 2013:699). Such varying considerations in turn lead to disparity as the government views integration one way, while immigrants live it another way (Abbink 2011:369; Entzinger 2013:697).

According to Reitz (2002:1005), not only the characteristics of the immigrants shape their successful integration and their impact on the economy and on society, but also the basic features of the society that those immigrants have joined.

With regard to the reasons behind focusing on Ethiopian and Eritrean immigrants, various points can be raised. Firstly, the two countries are among the top ten African countries with a relatively large immigrant size in the Netherlands making it a preferred destination assuming 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> positions with a population of 25,642 and 20,978 respectively. Looking at the ranking of some African countries in terms of the size of their immigrant population in the Netherlands, we see that Morocco, Somalia, Egypt, South Africa, Ethiopia, Ghana, Cape Verde, Eritrea, Nigeria and Tunisia are the top ten countries based on 2020 data from Statistics Netherlands (Statistics Netherlands 2021). Except Morocco and Somalia that occupy the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> positions, the immigrant population size of the rest of the countries is not far away from one another. In addition, the years in which large number of immigrants arrived from the two countries were 2015 and 2016 with 3,311 Eritrean and 3,116 Ethiopian immigrants respectively (Statistics

Netherlands 2021). As an Ethiopian researcher, I wanted to study the experience of immigrants from the two countries with regard to their socio-economic integration in The Hague.

Secondly, the two countries have historically shared identities that make a combined study logical. According to Sarbo (2013:9), they belong to the same linguistic, cultural, and religious group and the same political formation until the Italians carved out the Eritrean colony in 1890.

Thirdly, migrants from these countries are forced to leave mainly because of conflicts, disasters and forced military services. In fact, the movement of people within and from the Horn of Africa because of conflicts and disasters is hardly a new phenomenon. As reported by Fransen and Kuschminder (2009:9), the political overthrow of the Ethiopian Imperial Government in 1974, the struggle for independence by Eritreans, and the 1977 and 1978 war between Ethiopia and Somalia have all aggravated the involuntary movements of people. During the last months of 2018, Ethiopia has registered 2.9 million new conflict-related and more than 290,000 new disaster-related displacements (Mcauliffe, Khadria and Bauloz 2019:61). Similarly, according to the Mixed Migration Centre (2017), since 2012, Eritrea was identified as one of the countries which is losing its citizens the fastest with about 4,000-5,000 Eritreans leaving the country every month. Military service (and the desire to avoid it) is the most frequently heard motive given by asylum status holders for fleeing Eritrea (Sterckx, Fessehazion, and Teklemariam 2018:5). According to the Human Rights Watch (2019), regardless of gender, military training and national service are compulsory for all Eritreans and it is often indefinite, despite provisions in Eritrean law limiting the national service to 18 months. According to the same source,

National service providers have no choice in their assignment, location of their deployment, and they are often forced to be in the government's service for years. If someone is sent with the national service to teach physics, he/she will be a physics teacher for life. Trying to leave the national service leads to reprisals, including cutting the already meagre wages and imprisonment (Human Rights Watch 2019).

It is almost impossible for young Eritreans, particularly boys and men, to avoid the compulsory state service, and this in turn results in feelings of hopelessness and the decision to leave the country.

As far as the choice of case study is concerned, the city of Hague is considered as a relevant city since it is home to a number of migrant populations. According to Hermesauto (2016), more than half of the residents of the city have a migration background. In 2020, 1290 Ethiopian and 935 Eritrean immigrants lived in the city as reported by the Municipality of The Hague (Statistics Netherlands 2021). From these, 915 Ethiopian and 791 Eritrean immigrants constitute the first

generation and the remaining 375 Ethiopian and 144 Eritrean immigrants belong to the second generation immigrants. In addition, the city has been recognized for its commitment to accommodate status holders as reported by the Global parliament of mayors.org (2016). Studying the experience of integration in this city enables us to see the practice and the way the city approaches immigrants. Moreover, locating the study in this city gives an advantage of proximity to the researcher that in turn facilitates the data collection process for the study, especially in times of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Finally, the target group of the study were the 1<sup>st</sup> generation male immigrants who already secured an asylum residence status and have been living for 5-10 years in The Hague. The assumption here is that more in-depth insights into integration experience can be obtained from those who have already stayed for a relatively longer period of time. The main reason for focusing on the 1<sup>st</sup> generation is that this generation is likely to put most of its effort into economic integration rather than the legal and political, and cultural dimensions as indicated by Vathi (2015:114) who studied Albanian migrants in Europe. The socio-economic dimension of integration is the main concern of the current study because as indicated by various scholars, it is the key dimension easing long-term integration of immigrants into society and their possible contribution to the host countries (Bijl and Verweij 2012:37; Nijhoff 2016:625).

## **1.2. Justification and relevance of this research**

This section briefly presents the review of related literature that brings out the knowledge gap thereby highlighting the relevance of the study. According to the Migration data portal (2011), integration touches on different policies and various aspects of migrants' lives and therefore data on migrant integration covers a wide range of information, including whether migrants are integrating into the economic, social, and political spheres of society, the discrimination they face, how policies affect migrants' inclusion, and how the public perceives migrants and immigration as a whole.

Several studies shedding light on the field of migrants' integration have been conducted by various scholars and institutions in different times; some indicating success stories of integration despite the challenges encountered in the process, others pointing out immigrants' failure to integrate with the corresponding reasons. One of the researches which has been cited by various studies as far as the former is concerned, is a study by Pittaway, Muli and Shteir (1969) on "I Have a Voice-Hear Me, Findings of an Australian Study Examining the Resettlement and Integration Experience of Refugees and Migrants from the Horn of Africa in Australia". This study revealed that while immigrants have enormous potential to integrate successfully, and

many do, there are obstacles which persist. The authors identified these as “trauma, separation of family members, lack of adequate on-arrival information and support, difficulties with language acquisition, lack of access to appropriate and affordable housing, lack of education support, discrimination in the work force, conflict within families, racism, and violence against women”.

Similarly, Van Heelsum (2017) investigated how immigrants arrived in the Netherlands from Syria and Eritrea in 2015–16 have managed the first year(s) of their life and discovered that knowledge of the local language, having a job and becoming part of a local community were essential issues with which the migrants struggle with. According to the author, structural factors in the asylum system, including the high number of deportations and slow start with language learning and work were frustrating for them. In addition, Danso (2002) studied the “initial settlement experiences of Ethiopian and Somali refugees in Toronto” and found that most of these migrants encounter social exclusion, high unemployment, and overcrowding, as well as frustrations and despair at the initial stages of their settlement. According to this study, host language incompetence, everyday racism, and inadequate information from government were among the challenges faced by the migrants. The focus of both Heelsum and Danso is on initial settlement experience of migrants in host countries, and they do not tell us much about the experience of socio-economic integration of the immigrants as they stay longer in the host countries.

On the other hand, by examining the “Experiences of Polish Greenhouse workers in the Netherlands with the intention of bringing immigrant voices into integration discourse”, Munteanu (2015) came up with findings which are relatively contradicting with those discussed in earlier paragraphs. Munteanu argues that the “neoliberal governance” of labour markets is the reason behind the precarious positions of migrant workers, which leads to their failure to integrate. The study claims that instead of understanding migrant labour positions in the broader context of neoliberalism, their precarious positions are used to fuel the legitimacy of the idea that migrants are not successfully integrating and that this is their own fault. By pointing out the structural constraints that migrants face in the labour market, the research problematizes the integration policy of the Netherlands for using mere labour market participation to measure immigrants’ integration.

A related study to Munteanu’s work is a contribution by Khalad (2016) who examined “Ambiguous positionalities of Bangladeshi migrant men in The Hague” to understand how they experience process of marginalization resulting from the post 9/11 perceptions. This author argues that the process of marginalization for this group is embedded in the intersection of gender, race, colour, class, religion and ethnicity. The study indicated that those intersections of

uneven, complex and dynamic power relations and identities that give them advantage in one context make them vulnerable in another. It is indicated that their darker skin colour and South Asian facial features, for example, save them from direct Islamophobia, and their low class position protects them from direct competition with white Dutch men. However, according to the study, once their religious affiliations are disclosed, they are shunned by Dutch neighbours, and their socio-economic position brings them in competition with other migrants.

A closely related work but with a particular focus on skilled immigrants is a study conducted by Obot (2018), who studied the “Highly Skilled Refugees and the Right to Decent Work in the Netherlands”, focusing on refugees from Syria, DRC, Pakistan and Georgia. This study found that even skilled migrants generally face difficulties to find a job that matches their background because of both structural and social discrimination and exclusion. According to the author, what is offered to these migrants is ‘volunteering’; but that this does not attract them, given their costs and family obligations.

Despite the status held by immigrants and the arguments for or against their potential to integrate, understanding and taking all the necessary steps to support them is required both by the host societies and immigrants themselves. This in turn, partly, requires having a clear picture of the practices of integration from the everyday lived experiences of the immigrants themselves. Qualitative research in general traditionally aims to reconstruct people’s everyday experience with the meanings attached to situations (Znaniecki 1934 cited in Zapata-Barrero and Yalaz 2018:114).

As indicated in the preceding paragraphs, various studies have been conducted in the field of migration and migrant integration, although with relatively varying findings; some showing immigrants’ potential to integrate successfully while others claiming immigrants’ failure to integrate because of their own fault. This contradiction requires further exploration and the current study, therefore, by adopting a qualitative approach and focusing on immigrants’ own perspective, helps to understand the experience of Ethiopian and Eritrean immigrants’ socio-economic integration in The Hague.

### **1.3. Background of the study**

Historically, the Netherlands has been a country of immigration for a long time until about the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (1550-1800). Since 1800 until the 1960s, the country developed into a country of emigration. After WWII, the country faced considerable levels of immigration of diverse origin: from its former colonies, labour migration and more recently asylum migration. Continuous net

migration figures made it factually once more a country of immigration since 1967 (Penninx, Garcés-Mascareñas and Scholten 2005:4)

Although the country has had a positive migration surplus since the early 1960s, the successive governments denied that it was a country of immigration (Rath 2009:674). In the 1950s, when the former colony of the Dutch East Indies became an independent state-Indonesia - a group of 'repatriates' arrived in the Netherlands (Bijl and Verweij 2012:239). According to the same source, this was followed in the 1960s by migrant labourers (guest workers) from the Mediterranean, from Italy, Greece, Spain and Portugal, later followed by more substantial contingents from Turkey and Morocco. This wave of guest workers was in turn followed by migrants who came for the purpose of family reunification, migrants from Surinam who came after the former colony's independence, asylum seekers in the 1990s, and, more recently, migrants from new European member states as well as highly skilled migrants (Bijl and Verweij 2012:239).

The increasing influx of migrants from different countries and regions resulted in the relatively high number of migrant population the country has today. According to the Statistics Netherlands, in 2020, about 24.2% of the Dutch population of 17.4 million had an immigrant background (Statistics Netherlands 2021). This means, almost one in four persons living in the Netherlands has an immigrant background. The increasing trend of immigration in turn opens up ways to classify immigrants by generation as first generation, second generation and natives, and give due attention to integration and drafting the corresponding policies for its governance in the country.

Looking at the classification of the immigrants by generation, in the Netherlands, the first-generation immigrants are defined as individuals living in the country who were born elsewhere whereas the second-generation constitutes individuals who were born in the country with at least one parent born elsewhere. Natives are people who are native to the Netherlands (Scholten et al. 2015:217; Jansen et al. 2003:9).

Integration is the new area of challenge that the migrants face once they leave their countries. Before delving in to the discussion of the various experiences of integration, it is worthwhile to understand the concept itself in the first place. Integration is the process by which migrants become accepted into society, both as individuals and as a group (Penninx 2004:141). It is a two-way process of adaptation by migrants and host societies (IOM 2011 cited in Migration data portal 2011). As briefly stated in the last part of section 1.1, integration has different dimensions, including legal and political, socio-economic and cultural dimensions. These dimensions can be measured with different indicators.

The legal and political integration can be expressed in terms of the number of migrants naturalised annually or who obtain a secure residence status, the number of migrants with dual citizenship, participation in politics including voting, and involvement in civil society organizations (Entzinger and Biezeveld 2003:35; Penninx 2019:6).

Similarly, socio-economic integration can be measured through employment, level of income, level of dependence on social security benefits, level of education, quality of housing, and the degree of spatial segregation of the immigrants (Entzinger and Biezeveld 2003:32). According to Bakker, Dagevos and Engbersen (2014:433), integration in this dimension is mainly determined by the immigrants' achievements in employment, education and housing.

Moreover, the extent to which immigrants are integrated culturally can be identified based on their attitude towards basic rules and norms of the host country, frequency of contacts with the host country and country of origin, choice of spouse, language skills, and levels of delinquency (Entzinger and Biezeveld 2003:33). The focus of this study is the socio-economic dimension because it is the key dimension easing long-term integration of immigrants into society and their possible contribution to the host countries (Bijl and Verweij 2012:37; Nijhoff 2016:625).

Finally, as it has been explained earlier, integration is a two-way process of adaptation by migrants and host societies that also involves various institutions in the process. Believing that it is worthwhile to shedding light on the various roles that the governmental and non-governmental institutions play with regard to the immigrants' socio-economic integration I have tried to contact organizations including the Dutch Employee Insurance Agency (UWV), Culture in Harmony (one of the migrant organizations), municipality of The Hague, and the Dutch Council for Refugees. To the extent that they participated in the research, the various roles played by these organizations in supporting the immigrants in the city have been incorporated in to the analysis.

## **1.4. Research Objective**

The objective of this research is to assess and explain the socio-economic integration experience of Ethiopian and Eritrean immigrants through the lens of the concept of social navigation and theory of human capital in The Hague as told by the immigrants themselves.



## **1.5. Research Questions**

### **1.5.1. Main Research Question**

What does the lived experience of the Ethiopian and Eritrean immigrants tell us about their socio-economic integration in The Hague?

### **1.5.2. Sub-Questions**

1. What are the Dutch government's policy grounds and main discourses with regard to immigrants' integration?
2. What is the integration experience of immigrants from the two countries in terms of their labour market participation?
3. How do the immigrants from the two countries describe their experiences of housing, social security, health, and education in the city and what is the contribution of selected governmental and non-governmental organizations engaged in facilitating immigrants' integration in the city?

## **1.6. Outline of the research**

The paper is divided into five chapters including this introductory chapter, i.e. chapter one. The second chapter deals with the theoretical underpinnings and the analytical framework of the study. By critically exploring an overarching framework to better understand the wider context of immigrants' socio-economic integration practices, this chapter serves as the foundation for the analysis of the data results in chapter four. The methodological aspect of the study is briefly presented in the third chapter. The fourth chapter addresses the research questions by engaging with the narratives of immigrant respondents, experts and data from secondary sources. Finally, chapter five presents the conclusion of the findings and corresponding policy recommendations.

## **Chapter 2 : Theoretical Underpinnings and the Analytical Framework**

### **2.1. Introduction**

Migration is as old as the history of humanity (Hughes et al. 2019:1). Today all over the world many people make one of the most challenging decisions in their lives: to leave their homes and townships in search of a safer or better life. Acquiring the imagined safer or better life requires integration of the immigrants in the new environment. However, integration itself is not a straightforward concept (Shapiro and Jørgensen 2021:173). It is an essentially contested concept, with policymakers adopting a new frame of integration almost once every decade or so (Scholten 2011:277). As a result, there is a need for frameworks to understand the experiences of immigrants' integration in a new environment and context.

The concept of social navigation and theory of human capital have been used to explain the socio-economic integration of immigrants and to understand the existing knowledge and inform the findings later in the thesis.

### **2.2. The Concept of Social Navigation and Theory of Human Capital**

'Navigation' literally means 'to sail'. The term is etymologically related to the Latin *navigare*, meaning 'to sail', and thus defines a special form of movement: that is, the way we move in a moving environment (Vigh 2009:420).

Social navigation explains the idea of 'motion within motion', focusing on how people are making sense, predicting and managing situations of flux; it is the act of moving in an environment that is wavering and unsettled, and when used to illuminate social life it directs our attention to the fact that we move in social environments of actors and actants, individuals and institutions, that engage and move us as we move along (Vigh 2009:420; Shapiro and Jørgensen 2021:176).

With the analytical focus on constant adjustment to changing conditions directed towards a desired future, social navigation is defined as movement through the socially 'immediate' as well as the socially 'imagined', in which the temporal and aspirational aspects of human action are addressed (Vigh 2009:425). This understanding of social navigation provides an analytical lens

into how immigrants are moved by and continually moving in relation to managing their affairs particularly with regard to their socio-economic integration in this study.

The participants of this study had different positions before their departure, i.e., some were students, and others were employees in government and private companies. They also had various reasons for fleeing their respective countries; some fled because of political crisis, an endless (forced) military service and lack of human rights protection, whereas others moved in search of better opportunities abroad, education, family reunion, and visiting purposes. The majority of the participants also moved with limited information about the city (country) in general and the labour market in particular, which means, they had to face a new environment with limited information. That is why, for these immigrants, settlement requires new navigation skills as it has been indicated by Nunn et al. (2017:49). According to Nunn and his colleagues, the immigrants' settlement requires new skills not only because the host environment is unfamiliar and often unstable, but also because the specific settlement tasks are new such as a new working environment, new educational system, and so on. For instance, the school environment frequently differs from that in previous countries of residence and can present particular challenges for those who have a limited previous schooling (Nunn et al. 2017:49). This in turn calls for the concept of human capital which plays a tremendous role in the process of immigrants' navigation of the host country system and their overall socio-economic integration.

In addition to what the immigrants bring along with them, it is suggested that host country-specific human capital has a major impact on labour force status (Friedberg 2000 cited in Lancee 2012:72). Tan (2014:412) has defined human capital as "productive wealth embodied in labour, skills and knowledge". Education, in this approach, is placed at the center and considered as the source of economic development (Tan 2014:411). The customary advice embodying the essence of human capital theory, offered daily to school children, adolescents, displaced homemakers, and unemployed workers by parents, teachers, members of the clergy, outplacement counsellors, and seekers of public office in this regard is "if you want a good job, get a good education" (Strober 1990:214).

The human capital theory argues that human capital factors including individual characteristics such as language, education, professional working skills, and knowledge about the receiving country are central for immigrants' economic integration (Russ 2014:114; Selvi and Bevelander n.d.). The theory is borne out by the findings of this study, as will be discussed in more detail in chapter four. The majority of participants did not receive any formal education in The Hague beyond the Dutch language and civic integration courses. The effect of such low level of education is also reflected in the type of jobs that the participants are engaged in. In this

regard, a very limited number of participants are currently working based on their academic background and qualification.

Overall, the study builds on the interplay of individual human capital and the degree to which the immigrants navigate the labour market, housing, social security rights, health and education sub-systems which are crucial for their socio-economic integration facilitated by the knowledge of language and culture of the host country as it is explained in detail in the analytical framework in the next section.

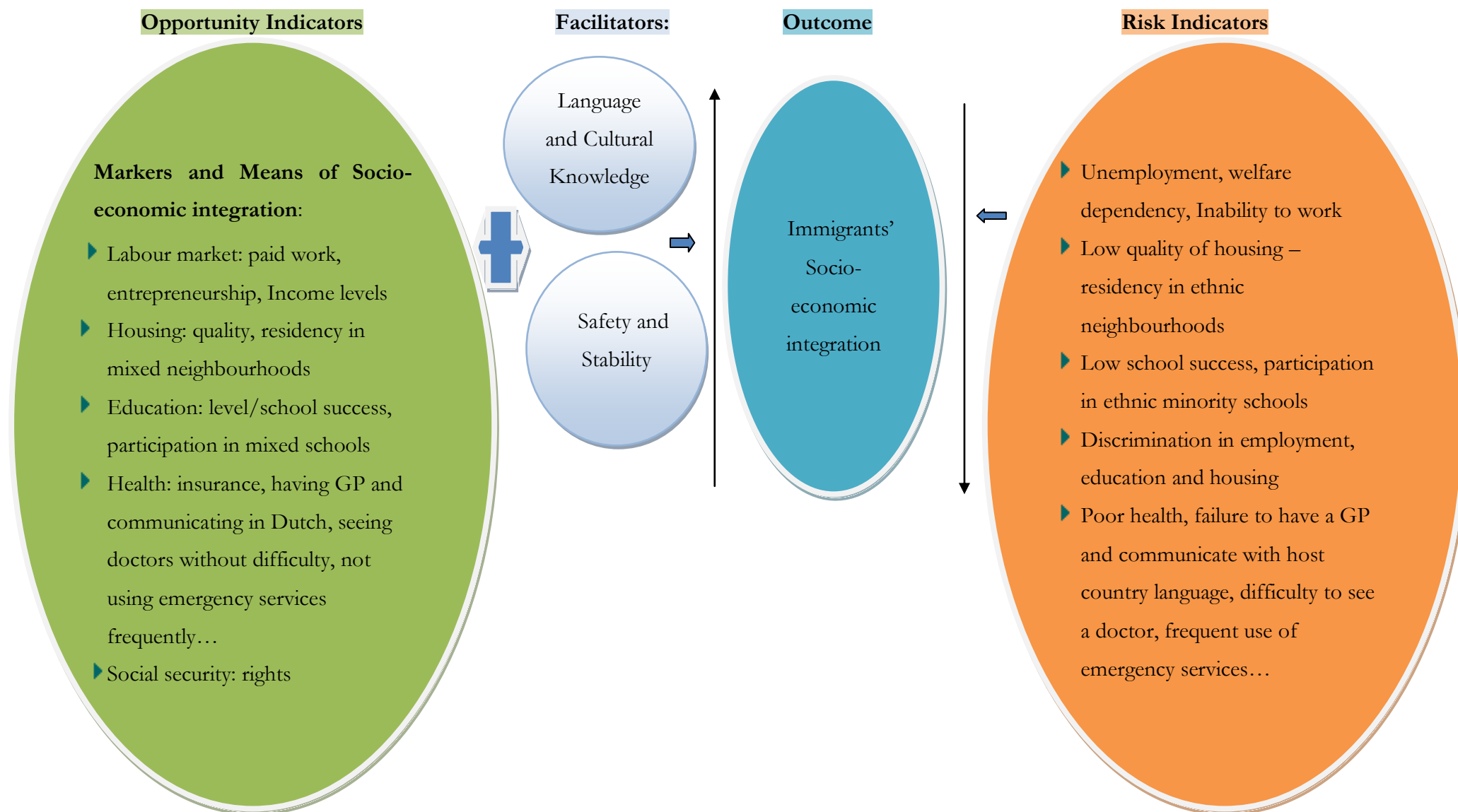
## **2.3. The Analytical Framework**

In addition to the concepts and theory discussed above, the analytical framework of the study is adopted from two prominent frameworks in the field of integration studies. The first one is the work of Ager and Strang (2008): “Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework”. These authors identified possible indicators highlighting a number of key areas of activity which indicate a successful integration and generated four key domains or elements that are essential to any integration phase namely; employment, housing, education and health. They call these as “Markers and Means of integration” (Ager and Strang 2008:170). For these authors, the integration process could be facilitated or constrained by the “knowledge of language and culture” of the host society, and “Safety and Stability” in the host city/country.

The second one is Entzinger’s and Biezeveld’s (2003) “Benchmarking in Immigrant Integration”. These authors too listed out indicators of socio-economic integration as employment, income level, social security, level of education, and housing and segregation (Entzinger and Biezeveld 2003:32). High scores on these indicators represent opportunities, and low scores represent risks. As stated above, for this particular study, the analytical framework has been developed by borrowing components from the integration domains of the framework of Ager and Strang and combining them with the integration indicators identified by Entzinger and Biezeveld as depicted in figure 1 below.

The brief explanation of the analytical framework is that if the immigrants, based on the indicators, perform well in the labour market, housing, education, health and social security accompanied with the knowledge of Dutch language and culture, and live in safe and stable environment, they are socio-economically well integrated in the city.

Figure 1: Analytical Framework



## **Chapter 3 : Methodology**

### **3.1. Research Approach and strategy**

To answer the research questions, the study adopted a qualitative approach under the framework of interpretive research philosophy since the study looks at reality or truth as a social formation (Aliyu et al. 2014:84) and it is geared towards understanding migrants' integration experiences (Yang and Miller 2008:146). Qualitative methodology was deemed suitable for this study because as indicated by Yang and Miller (2008:147), this approach builds on "multiple realities subjectively derived from the participants' local, everyday, emergent experiences (its ontological dimension) and the researcher interacted with participants or the immigrants studied (its epistemological dimension)".

The study combined descriptive and explanatory research strategies since it explains the experience of immigrants' integration as told by the immigrants themselves and it documents the practices, attitudes, and processes (Yang and Miller 2008:152) in relation to their socio-economic integration in the Hague.

### **3.2. Type of Data, Method of Collection and Sampling strategy**

The research employed both primary and secondary data. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 immigrants from the two countries that have been living in the city for 5-10 years after receiving asylum residence permit. Once the immigrants receive asylum residence permit, they must register with the municipality and they have the right to take out health insurance, work, and travel abroad. The interviews were conducted between July and August 2021, both by phone and in-person, and lasted from 30 to 75 minutes. I decided to stop interviewing after the 16 interviews because of repetitions in responses that indicated a possible saturation. This method was preferred over other methods like survey since, according to Mack et al. (2005:29), it enables to elicit a vivid picture of the participants' perspective on the research topic. The interviews were designed in a way that explores the beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, and opinions that might not be exposed by using other techniques. According to Habecker (2012:1203), this method enables to obtain thickness of data within the context of well-established relationships (rather than statistically significant data within a representative sample).

The selection of the respondents was based on recommendation of earlier respondents using snowball sampling technique. The sampling technique is chosen based on the nature of the problem and the characteristics of the population. This technique, according to Mack et al.

(2005:7), is applicable in cases where there are no details about the list of target population which makes it hard to directly contact all potential participants.

A personal relationship had been established with the first two contacts who work in men's beauty salon and own a super market where I usually go to get my hair cut and buy some local food items respectively for about a year that in turn created a level of trust where they felt safe to refer to their friends as participants in the study. The interviews were held in Amharic<sup>2</sup>, and Tigrinya<sup>3</sup> (with translation) and in English, or in a combination of these languages. Amharic has been used mostly for participants with the Ethiopian background who better communicate with this language than in English. Similarly, Tigrinya has been used for participants with Eritrean background since many of them do not speak Amharic and English very well. Here, one of my close friends who earned his MA degree from the University of Groningen of the Netherlands in the 2019/2020 academic year and currently working in The Hague helped me with the translation since he speaks the three languages fluently. The interviews were structured in such a way that the views and experiences of the participants' socio-economic integration could be expressed.

The immigrants were asked to share their practices of settlement in The Hague, regarding their employment, education, health, social security, knowledge of Dutch language and culture guided by the concept of social navigation and theory of human capital<sup>4</sup>.

Moreover, representatives from selected institutions have been approached and asked to explain their roles in the immigrants' integration process in the city. The first one of these organizations is a particular migrant organization called 'Culture in Harmony' that is engaged in supporting and guiding immigrants from different corners of the world including those from Ethiopia and Eritrea. Before establishing Culture in Harmony, members of this organization used to work in the Dutch Migrants Integration Team (DMIT). The DMIT is a young ambitious organization that is engaged in ensuring that migrants can integrate better and more independently in the Netherlands inspired by an expert team. The DMIT started in 2017 with the support of the province of Overijssel. For Culture in Harmony, it is only about two years since it started supporting immigrants as an independent entity and it works with immigrants all over the country although it has its office in Zeewolde, the Netherlands<sup>5</sup>. The other organization with core responsibilities of helping people in unemployment situations and associated coping

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<sup>2</sup> Amharic is the official language of Ethiopia

<sup>3</sup> Tigrinya is a widely spoken language in Eritrea and in the northern part of Ethiopia

<sup>4</sup> The interview guide used for the immigrant participants is attached in appendix 1

<sup>5</sup> The interview guide used for the migrant organization is attached in appendix 2

mechanisms that has been contacted by the researcher was the Dutch Employee Insurance Agency (UWV)<sup>6</sup>.

In addition to the immigrant participants and selected organizations, efforts have also been made to contact various experts with immense knowledge in the area including the co-authors of a well known report, “Eritrean asylum status holders in the Netherlands” which has been published by The Netherlands Institute for Social Research in 2018. I have managed to interview one of the co-authors and incorporated his insights in the analysis<sup>7</sup>. With regard to the secondary data, a range of literature and policy documents have been consulted.

### **3.3. Participants’ Demographic Information**

As depicted in table 1 below, from the total immigrants involved in the interview, nine of them have Eritrean background whereas the remaining seven are from Ethiopia. That is, there is no big difference in the number of participants from the two countries and this in turn helped to see the experience of the immigrants from the two countries more or less proportionally.

The table also shows that people with different age levels have been involved in the study, the minimum and the maximum ages constituting 27 and 58 respectively, giving an opportunity to analyze the integration experience of people at different age levels. In addition, eight of the participants are married and they have children, whereas five of them are single and the remaining three participants are separated from their wives.

Looking at the educational background, only six of the participants have college level education. The rest of the participants have an educational background falling between grades 6 to 12 indicating that about two-third of the participants do not have educational achievement beyond grade 12 which in turn can have an implication for the type of work at which the participants can be engaged as it is discussed in detail in section 4.3.1.

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<sup>6</sup> The interview guide used for the UWV is attached in appendix 3

<sup>7</sup> The interview guide used for the experts is attached in appendix 4.



**Table 1: Description of the Research Participants**

Respondent No.	Country of Origin	Age	Marital Status	Education	Current Employment	Position before departure	Years in the Hague
1	Eritrea	42	Divorced	10	Self-Employment	Military	7
2	Eritrea	30	Single	12	Works in private Company	Student	7
3	Eritrea	48	Married	BSc	Self-Employment	Contractor	10
4	Eritrea	58	Married	6	Works in private Company	Carpenter	8
5	Ethiopia	47	Married	10	Works in private Company	Barber	6
6	Eritrea	27	Single	11	Works in private Company	Furniture worker	7
7	Eritrea	58	Divorced	BA	Currently unemployed	Tailor	10
8	Ethiopia	36	Married	12	Self-Employment	Student	10
9	Ethiopia	46	Married	12	Self-Employment	Footballer	10
10	Eritrea	30	Single	9	Works in private Company	Mechanic	6
11	Ethiopia	52	Married	12	Currently Unemployed	Technique expert	10
12	Ethiopia	35	Married	MA	Works in NGO	Lecturer	10
13	Ethiopia	37	Single	MBO	Self-employment	Student	8
14	Ethiopia	35	single	MA	Works corporation	Project supervisor	7
15	Eritrea	33	Married	9	Works in private Company	Farmer	8
16	Eritrea	28	Divorced	MBO	Works in private Company	Student	7

*(Source: Author's construction based on interviews, 2021)*

### 3.4. Method of Data Analysis

Although the interview guide was prepared in English, the interviews were held in Amharic, Tigrinya and English itself, but transcriptions were written in English for efficiency. In fact, the arrangement of the interview questions in themes and performing the transcription and categorization of the data accordingly provided some sort of structure/guidance. Deductive manual coding was used to make sense of the interview notes and then, after arranging and compiling the data in one document, thematic analysis and interpretations have been performed

accompanied with careful incorporation of data gathered from secondary sources to establish connections between findings.

### **3.5. Ethical Considerations**

Before the start of each interview, the aim and objective of the study were briefly explained and respondents were assured of their rights to withdraw at any point during the interview if they felt uncomfortable. Respondents were also asked for consent (orally before starting each interview) to record the interview and were ensured of their anonymity when citing them in this paper. In line with this, informants were assured that all information will be kept confidential. As promised, the data gathered was used only for the sake of this study. That is, due attention was given for transparency and confidentiality with regard to the privacy and protection of the research participants. To ensure anonymity, numbers have been allocated to the interviewees instead of their names when referring to them in this paper.

With regard to my position, on one hand, being an Ethiopian that understands the local context, background, and language gave me the advantage of building initial rapport and communicating easily with the participants with the Ethiopian background using the local language. I was also able to relate to some of the responses provided by participants, which helped the interviews to flow like a conversation. On the other hand, before starting each interview, the aim of the study was clearly explained to the participants and they were requested to provide their actual experiences in the areas. This in turn helped to manage the possible bias that might have occurred otherwise. In addition, despite my inability to speak Tigrinya and the historic relationship between Ethiopia and Eritrea, I also did not see any difference among the participants from the two countries in terms of their cooperation to help me with my study by answering my questions.

### **3.6. Limitations**

Like any other research process, this study had its own limitations. In general, the limitations are twofold; one is related to the research's qualitative approach itself, and the other has to do with obtaining data from organizations.

With regard to the research's qualitative approach, by nature, its findings cannot be generalized to a larger population outside of the study group (O'Leary 2017:66). However, this type of research allows delving deeper into many of the issues related to the immigrants' socio-

economic integration experiences and can be used as a starting point to understand the experiences from their own perspective in general.

On the other hand, the efforts made to get information from the municipality of The Hague to incorporate with the immigrants' interview results were not successful because of various reasons. Of the four contacts I approached from the municipality, two of them could not help mentioning that the municipality does not register immigrants by origin and referring issues related to "integration" to the IND respectively. The remaining two contacts replied to me that it is not their area of expertise and they do not have specific information about the Ethiopian and Eritrean immigrants in this city.

Furthermore, I planned to approach the Dutch Council for Refugees to incorporate the roles it plays with regard to immigrants' integration in the study; unfortunately, this also could not be achieved since according to the email response I received from the team leader of refugee work of the Southwest Netherlands, the Council supports the immigrants only in their first year of arrival, which is not in the scope of this study.

However, I took these challenges as a learning process and proceeded with the good amount of data obtained from the immigrants, experts, the UWV and 'Culture in Harmony' to produce this research paper.

# **Chapter 4 : Ethiopian and Eritrean Migrants' Lived Experiences of the Socio-Economic Integration in The Hague**

## **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter addresses the lived experiences of the socio-economic integration of Ethiopian and Eritrean immigrants by analyzing the narratives of respondents, and data from the secondary sources. Within the socio-economic dimension of integration, the position of immigrants can be analysed by looking at their access to and participation in domains that are crucial for any resident (Penninx 2019:6), as it has also been indicated in section 2.3 above.

The data gathered from various sources have been analyzed and presented based on the framework developed for this purpose. As it has been discussed in chapter two, the framework includes two major areas; (a) Markers and Means of Socio-economic integration, and (b) Facilitators of integration. The first major area encompasses the immigrants' (i) labour market participation (ii) circumstances of housing (iii) involvement in education and training (iv) access to health facilities, and (v) immigrants' use of Social Security rights. The second major area contains the immigrants' (i) knowledge of Dutch language and culture, and (ii) physical safety and stability in their current neighbourhood. The lived experiences of the immigrants in those areas have been analyzed vis-à-vis the policy directions and indicators of socio-economic integration.

Broadly speaking, integration can be understood as the performance of immigrants on a given indicator in two ways (Lancee 2012:57). On one hand, it can be compared with the performance of the native population on the same indicator, which is not the focus of this study. Although without any doubt, comparing the immigrants to the native population is of high importance, a drawback here is that one cannot take into account migrant-specific information. On the other hand, the position of immigrants in the host society can be explained through their performance along certain indicators. That is, one is in the first place concerned with explaining the performance of immigrants, not so much with how immigrants do as compared to the native population. The second approach is the one chosen for this study. The advantage here is that it allows inclusion of migrant-specific information in the analysis.

## 4.2. Overview of Migrant Integration policies in the Netherlands

This section is intended partly to answer the first research question about the existing Dutch government migrant integration policy grounds and main discourses in general terms<sup>9</sup>.

According to Bendick, Egan and Lofhjelm (1998), immigration policy defines who is allowed to be present in a country, for what purpose and under which conditions, whereas integration policies are those that ensure the participation of those who are allowed to settle in all or particular fields of society. The integration of immigrants and their children is vital for social cohesion and inclusive growth and for the opportunity for migrants to become self-reliant, productive citizens (OECD 2018:17).

In the Netherlands, integration policy has always been formulated and coordinated primarily from the national level although a new integration system shifting the integration regulation from national to municipal level is about to be implemented by 2022 (it was scheduled to enter into force on 1<sup>st</sup> of July, 2021). According to the Netherlands News Live (2021), the delay was due to the claim by institutions, such as the IND and COA that have indicated they are not yet ready partly due to the Covid-19 crisis. The new system allows status holders to follow an integration plan which can be better tailored to their individual situations (Rijksoverheid 2019 cited in Heerkens 2020:36).

Although immigration in this country has a long history, integration policy is only 40 years old. Those 40 years have featured four major integration-related policy periods (Poppelaars and Scholten 2008:344).

According to Rath (2001 cited in Duyvendak and Scholten 2010:338), the first Dutch policy on migrant integration was initiated in the early 1980s. During this time, an “Ethnic Minorities Policy” was developed that was targeted at specific cultural or ethnic minorities in Dutch society, such as the foreign workers from Turkey and Morocco, the Surinamese, the Moluccans, and the Antilleans. Migrants were framed as “minorities” in Dutch society instead of temporary guests, and government decided to focus on those minorities whose position was characterized by an accumulation of cultural and socio-economic difficulties.

Secondly, a more socio-economic and individualist “Integration Policy” was adopted after the abandonment of the Ethnic Minorities Policy in the early 1990s emphasizing citizenship as a core part of a welfare-state approach to integration. During this period, the group focus was replaced by a more individualistic orientation, defining individual immigrants as “citizens” of

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<sup>9</sup> In areas where it was not easy to access the policies of the Dutch government, the researcher referred to the policies of the EU and OECD and other research works produced by scholars in the discipline.

Dutch society. This policy entailed an intensification of general socio-economic policy, such as labour, education, and housing, for immigrants as new citizens rather than a group-oriented policy for specific ethnic minorities (Poppelaars and Scholten 2008:340).

Thirdly, the Netherlands experienced an assimilationist turn (Joppke and Morawska 2003) after 2001/2002, which was codified in an “Integration Policy New Style”. This connected integration to broader concerns about migration (such as by imposing compulsory civic integration tests in the country of origin as well as after arrival in the Netherlands) and about the re-imagining of national identity and social cohesion in Dutch society.

Finally, since about 2007/2008<sup>11</sup>, the Netherlands is going through a fourth policy phase. There are clear indications that central government is retrenching from the domain of migrant integration, while putting more focus on limiting immigration. This retrenchment reflects that integration is increasingly individualized by attributing responsibility for integration to migrants themselves (Duszczuk, Pachocka and Pszczółkowska 2020:92).

According to an expert from Enver, which is a not for profit organization engaged in offering youth and parenting assistance for immigrants in the regions of Rotterdam-Rijnmond, South and Central Holland:

Successful integration requires understanding who is in front of us, as immigrants have different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. The current Dutch government policy approach is a more general, neo-liberal approach that makes all immigrants responsible for their own integration thereby disregarding the differences among the immigrants that may make the integration process quite slow/difficult (Interview with Coordinator and Youth Care Worker at Enver).

For this expert, the more generalized approach needs to be revisited and the adoption of a tailored approach would help to speed up the process of integration and social cohesion of the immigrants.

Overall, looking at the trend, it is possible to understand that the more recent policies make the immigrants responsible for their own integration in general although they have different backgrounds. That is, any poor migrants’ socio-economic position is seen less as a consequence of structural constraints that the migrants might face, and more as a result of lack of effort of the migrants.

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<sup>11</sup> Revisions have been taking place since 2013, like requiring migrants to cover the costs of their own courses and examinations, inclusion of ‘participation contract’ and so on.

### 4.3. Markers and Means of Socio-Economic Integration

#### 4.3.1. Expectation of and Participation in the Labour Market

This section answers the second research question, ‘integration experience of the immigrants in terms of their labour market participation’. Before delving in to the detailed discussion of their labour market involvement in the city, participants were asked about their reasons for fleeing their country of origin, and about their expectations of the city and the labour market in the Netherlands. As far as the former is concerned, political crisis, an endless (forced) military service and lack of human rights protection were the dominant reasons identified. In addition, a search for better opportunities abroad, education, family reunion and visiting were among the reasons stated by some of the participants. According to one Eritrean respondent:

I moved to the Netherlands because I needed better opportunities. Currently, I am doing my own business; I have my own men’s beauty salon. I work for about 30 hours per week. I also engage in janitorial work in a hotel in my free time (Respondent 1).

With regard to their expectation, 13 of them indicated that they did not have any information about the city in general and the labour market in particular before their arrival. That is, they had to face a new environment with limited information.

Regardless of having various reasons for their departure, the participants had different positions before leaving their respective countries. Except four participants who were students, the rest were engaged in various jobs/positions as stipulated in table 1. This means that employment, income and related matters were not new to them.

The labour market integration of immigrants and their children has long been a topical issue in the Netherlands (OECD 2008:189). According to Newman et al. (2018:1), finding employment and navigating the employment relationships are crucial for successful integration into mainstream society. A vital element in the integration policy advocated by the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy consists of immigrant minorities’ participation in formal employment (Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy 1990:71). Similarly, according to Lancee (2012:58), perhaps the most important difference in the labour market participation is between having employment of some kind and having no employment whatsoever. The meaning of employment used in this study is the one provided by the International Labour Organization (ILO):

[...] an employed person is one who, in the course of the reference week, worked at least one hour or who had a job but was absent from work (OECD 2018:72).

Despite the differences in the nature of employment, except two of the participants who are currently unemployed, the rest are engaged in various jobs. Getting many of the participants engaged in jobs in the city is a good sign showing a progress in the integration process of the immigrants.

Table 1 also shows that except for 1 participant working at the energy department of Shell which is a public limited company, the rest of the currently employed immigrants are working either in their own business or employed in other private companies and NGOs. In fact, the two currently unemployed participants indicated that they used to work at the municipality of The Hague and Ethiopian Embassy in the Netherlands located in The Hague. This represents a limited recruitment of the participants in public sector and the corresponding scarce integration since according to the OECD and EU (2015:120), recruitment of immigrants in the public sector is firm evidence of the host country's commitment to integration. The limited engagement of the participants in public sector is also partly attributed to their low level of educational achievement as the education achieved in the host country has a major impact on labour force status increasing the chance of participation in the labour market (Friedberg 2000 cited in Lancee 2012:72).

In addition, six of the participants preferred to be self-employed than working for someone else and an increasing level of self-employment among immigrants signals their better position, since usually to set a business requires an effective navigation skills and deep knowledge of the host country norms and regulations as it has also been indicated by Zincone, Caponio and Carastro (n.d:22) in their project report on "Promoting Equality in Diversity: Integration in Europe". According to one participant who is self-employed and running a restaurant:

I started this job because running my own business was always in my mind. I launched it immediately after securing the asylum residence permit and I have been running it for about 5 years by now (Respondent 8).

Similarly, a participant engaged in the transportation industry (Taxi driving) explains his employment experience as:

Primarily, I was interested in working as an electrician, then I found setting up own business a better option. In fact, before starting this job, I worked for someone for a year in a similar position. I started the process for this job immediately after securing the asylum residence permit. Doing this job, I financially support seven people in my family here in the Netherlands and back home (Respondent 9).



Although having employment of some kind is one of the indicators of immigrants' integration by itself as explained earlier, their involvement in key professions where qualifications are necessary such as architecture, law, teaching, engineering, health, accountancy, and managerial and governmental posts is a step forward which signals levels of social mobility in the migrant population according to Zincone, Caponio and Carastro (n.d:21). When viewed from this perspective, from the total number of immigrants involved in the study, only two of them with master's degree are currently working based on their academic background and qualification, and involved in key professions as a water and sanitation advisor in an NGO and an expert in energy department of Shell Corporation respectively. The rest of the participants do not have the necessary educational qualifications to engage in such key professions that in turn shows a significant gap among the participants. The background of the participants may also have contributed to such low level of education and poor participation in key professions as it has also been indicated by an expert from Enver:

Many of the Eritrean immigrants come from areas where there are limited opportunities for education and learning, and that is why we need a tailor made approach to support them in their integration process (Interview with Coordinator and Youth Care Worker at Enver).

Perhaps an equally critical indicator as having employment of some sort and the extent of immigrants' engagement in key professions is their capacity to use all the alternative ways to acquire jobs in the host city. According to the interview, the participants accessed their current jobs through municipality referral, job fair, and internet search as indicated by six, two and one participant respectively. The rest are self-employed. This indicates an increasing level of adaptation of the immigrants to the labour market as the utilization of the alternative possibilities of acquiring jobs manifests their understanding of the system and how it works.

Looking at the amount of hours that the currently employed participants spend on work per week, except one participant who works for less than 30 hours on a part-time basis (OECD 2018:162) because of his student status, the participants are engaged in full-time jobs and they work between 36 to 60 hours which indicates the potential of the participants to find themselves as a full time worker and adjust to the labour market.

One may also go through the amount of time the immigrants stayed to start working in the new city or country to analyze how long it takes for them to get in to the job market. When asked in this regard, half of the participants indicated that they started working even before securing asylum resident permit since asylum seekers are allowed to work when they have been in the Netherlands for more than six months (under specific conditions) according to the Dutch

government integration policy (Het and Al 2001:79). This has also been indicated as important by Engbersen et al. (2015:40) in their policy brief:

[...] another way of sustaining the pace of the integration process is to formulate approaches in which learning the language, receiving schooling and searching for work occur simultaneously rather than after each other.

For these authors, a parallel approach is clearly preferable to a sequential one. Additionally, five participants have started working after receiving the asylum resident permit and the remaining three of them stayed for 2 to 3 years to start working after receiving the status because of their own decision to fully focus on the language and civic integration course. Here, it is possible to see that it did not take long for many of the participants to get in to the labour market in the city.

The adoption of a parallel approach also enables immigrants to generate additional income from the very beginning to meet essential needs as decent housing and healthcare which are crucial if the immigrants are to take their place in the host society, as it has also been pointed out by the OECD (2018:25). According to the IND (n.d), one needs an average monthly income of ≈€1500 to get a permanent resident permit (to live) in the Netherlands. On top of this, looking at the monthly income of the currently employed participants, except three of them who earn €1000 and lower, the rest earn €1600 and more per month as shown in the table 2 below.

**Table 2: Average monthly income of the Research Participants**

Average monthly income in Euros	Number of participants earning the income level
800 and less	1
800 to 1,000	2
1,000 to 1,600	0
More than 1,600	11
Currently unemployed	2
Total	16

*(Source: Author's construction based on interviews, 2021)*

The data shows that a good number of the participants work and earn income required to make a living in this city that in turn indicates the participants' progressive move in navigating the labour market.

As the employment of immigrants in the new city is an indicator of their integration as it has been discussed earlier, the opposite is also true (Bijl and Verweij 2012:249). When asked if there are instances where the participants became unemployed since they started working, only four participants indicated that there are times at which they lost their jobs. As a follow up, those who experienced unemployment in this city were asked to explain the reasons why they had (are

having) such instances, Covid-19, other health related issues and closure of an office where they used to work were the main reasons explained by the participants. According to one participant who is engaged in school transportation services:

[...] I couldn't work for about one and half a year due to the outbreak of Covid-19. I am engaged in providing school transport services to students and unfortunately, education became all online putting my job in danger for more than a year (Respondent 9).

Similarly, a participant who works in a restaurant describes his unemployment experience as:

[...] due to the sudden outbreak of the pandemic and changes in the subsequent government policy, the restaurant where I used to work has been closed, which forced me to stay at home for about one and half a year (Respondent 10).

This information shows that except for those who lost their jobs because of unforeseen circumstances like the pandemic and health issues, many of them have managed to maintain their employment positions and that in turn indicates their relative settlement in the jobs they are engaged in.

Difficult times that workers pass through in the labor market like those stated above make the roles of organizations engaged in supporting workers even more critical as the participants' navigation skill may not be adequate by itself. One of such organizations helping people in unemployment situations and associated coping mechanisms in the Netherlands in general and The Hague in particular is the UWV (Employee Insurance Agency in the Netherlands). I had an opportunity to interview the consultant and advisor of employee benefits in The Hague office and when asked about the ways through which the UWV helps the immigrants with their unemployment, the expert explained that:

[...] we advise the unemployed people to register with the UWV as a job seeker and help them search for a job in Dutch or international companies via our '*werk.nl*' website. In addition, we advise them on the procedures they should follow whenever they lose their jobs. We also keep track of their progress through employer service points and the data management system even after they got employed (Interview with consultant and advisor of employee benefits, UWV).

According to this expert, the UWV also checks if seekers of the help have adequate information about working in the city and if not, it provides information related to the employment laws, rules and regulations in the form of brochures and manuals to them. However, the researcher could not access statistical data of beneficiaries by country of origin from the office although the UWV is entrusted to keep track of all employed people in the city.

One can also think about proactive ways and programs to help immigrants navigate and proceed in the labor market (Het and Al 2001:79). Provision of various trainings and encouraging entrepreneurship are among these programs according to the OECD (2018:90). When asked in this regard, except four participants who indicated that they attended vocational and entrepreneurship training, the rest of them pointed out that they did not come across any of those trainings in this city indicating a possible gap<sup>13</sup> in this area. As acknowledged by one of the participants working in an international wholesaler of bicycle accessories, trainings play a key role in improving competition in the labor market:

I attended trainings about maintenance of different machines for two months and entrepreneurship training for three months which were organized by the municipality and IOM. These trainings helped me a lot on the job that I am currently working in (Respondent 4).

Regardless of its high place on the public agenda and in the news, the process of integration has not been without challenges. Participants of this study had various experiences in this regard; lack of fluency in Dutch language was the dominant challenge followed by finding a house for rent to set up a business and getting a driving licence. In addition, lack of familiarity with the job application system through online platforms is another area which was raised as a challenge by one of the participants:

[...] While applying for a rider position at Uber Eats, my application documents by an online system were rejected so many times and it was quite disappointing for me as a foreigner during the time (Respondent 2).

Only two participants pointed out that their readiness to engage in jobs regardless of the nature and type of job they encounter and their English language capacity helped them not to face many challenges. According to one of these participants:

In fact, I did not face many challenges with regard to finding a job except the challenge posed by Covid-19 pandemic while I was working. This is because from the very beginning, I have convinced myself that I would do whatever job I come across (Respondent 10).

Moreover, those participants who are currently employed were asked to rate their level of satisfaction on a scale of one to five; one being very dissatisfied and five being very satisfied. Six of them indicated that they are very satisfied in their current employment conditions. These participants in turn were requested to justify their responses. The main reasons were the generation of income, doing jobs based on qualification, doing a job related to previous work

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<sup>13</sup> It could have been better if this has been triangulated with views of the municipality.

from back home and leading a stable life and educating their children without any major challenge. One participant who is engaged in transport services justifies his satisfaction as:

The flexibility of my job enables me have adequate time with my family, it is also a job to support people because it deals with interaction with different people every time, as a result, I am happy doing it (Respondent 9).

On the other hand, seven participants pointed out that they are somewhat satisfied<sup>14</sup> with their current employment because they want to do more to change their life and support their family beyond the level they do now. Only one participant rated his satisfaction on his current employment status as ‘average (neutral)’<sup>15</sup>. Interestingly, none of the participants rated their satisfaction below average level. Overall, majority of the participants rated their satisfaction with the jobs they are doing above average, which is a good sign in their integration process.

Finally, an immigrant organization called ‘Culture in Harmony’, which is engaged in supporting immigrants navigate the host society and system plays a role in helping the immigrants in their labour market participation. After explaining the purpose of the organization, the co-founder indicated that ‘Culture in Harmony’ supports the immigrants in various areas:

[...] the initial purpose of the establishment of our organization was to help the newcomers, but now its scope is widening and we work with status-holders as well. Our aim is mainly about smoothing the process of integration for the immigrants, dealing with their traumatic situations, and giving them various trainings about the language training process, employment, financial management, and one-to-one support for elders. In addition, we provide trainings to the professionals from the municipality and other organizations working with the immigrants about their background so that these organizations can better understand and support them. We help the immigrants in enrolling their children at day care as well as other schools. Moreover, our organization supports the immigrants in CV preparation in order to help them find decent jobs as quickly as possible (Interview with co-founder of Culture in Harmony).

This particular organization is working closely with the status holders and relevant government bodies in the city, and supports the immigrants since their initial periods to helping them find a job, and work with others in the city. Organizations like the Culture in Harmony play an important role in bridging the differences between background of the immigrants and the host society which has also been acknowledged by experts in the area:

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<sup>14</sup> These are participants who rated their satisfaction 4 on the scale of 1 to 5.

<sup>15</sup> This is a participant who rated his satisfaction 3 on the scale of 1 to 5.

[...] one of the main areas in which the immigrants face a massive challenge in the host country is encountering a relatively different (new) cultural environment which may not be compatible with their own culture and may require a long time to adapt. However, there are various organizations engaged in helping the immigrants in such areas and working with those organizations helps in smoothing the integration process (Interview with an expert from Enver).

This in turn helps to bridge the gaps and differences resulting from the cultural background of the participants which is one of the important areas that requires much effort to speed up the integration process and that is why the government should use the various migrant organizations working in the area.

### **4.3.2. Experience in Housing, Social security, Health, and Education**

Explaining the experience of the immigrant participants in housing, social security, health and education as well as the role of selected governmental and non-governmental organizations in the city is the main concern of the third research question although the discussion of the latter ones has already started in the preceding sections. To make it easily understandable, the findings of these areas have been discussed in separate sub-sections as indicated below.

#### **A. Housing**

Quality of housing and residential segregation is one of the relevant indicators in dealing with socio-economic integration of asylum residence status holders. According to Engbersen et al. (2015:40), integration begins with housing. If migrants systematically live in poorer housing conditions than the rest of the population, this is clearly a sign of exclusion (Zincone, Caponio and Carastro n.d.:23). Finding suitable housing therefore, is critical to successful integration of immigrants (OECD 2018:53).

According to the Dutch government's policies of integration, after admission, immigrants are offered an apartment, but they are free to settle wherever they wish (Het and Al 2001:91).

The integration of immigrants proceeds more smoothly if they are sufficiently dispersed across different neighbourhoods (no concentration) and there is a 'smart' mix of permit holders and other groups of residents (no separate facilities) (Engbersen et al. 2015:30).

In the interviews, the status holders were asked about the number of years that they have been living in their current houses. I found that they have been in these houses for periods ranging from nine months to ten years. About two-third of the participants have been living in their current house for more than six years, which indicates that a good number of the participants have settled in the neighbourhood in which they live. On the other hand, all of the

participants used to live in social housing and the majority still live in such housing. According to the interview, many of the participants still live in the houses provided by the government and the number of participants who managed to find houses on their own is very limited. In addition, except one participant who managed to own a house, the others still live in rented houses and this in turn shows that the participants are yet to afford decent houses by themselves based on their choices in the city.

When asked about the size of the houses, half of the status holders involved in the study explained that they live in houses with one-bed room. However, they did not indicate that they face a major challenge in terms of size of the houses. On the other hand, close to the remaining half of the participants live in relatively bigger houses with two, three and four bed-rooms. Perhaps a special case in this regard is that one participant lives where he works in a relatively narrow, single room. This participant explains his housing experience as:

[...] I used to live with my brother, however, at some point; disagreement occurred among us to the level that we cannot live together anymore. Understanding the situation, I decided to leave and the company where I work offered me a place where I am residing currently (Respondent 6).

Looking at the rent, depending on the location and the relative sizes of the houses, the monthly payment varies from house to house. The minimum amount in this regard is €180 per month (reported by a participant who lives at his work place) whereas the maximum is €1180. The other participants pay a monthly rent between €400 and €1000. A participant living in his own house pays €1180 per month to the bank as mortgage. The aim here is not to compare the level of rent among the participants, rather, it is possible to see that the status holders have managed to work, earn and pay the rent expected from them, which in turn shows a progress in their integration process.

Regarding the distance between their homes and work places, unless for those for whom the distance between their houses and workplace cannot be determined because of the mobile nature of their jobs, the participants live within and less than 10kms from their work place which is much lower than the average of 22.6kms in 2015 in the country according to Wedia (n.d.). That is, the participants reside not too far from where they work and none of them have a complaint in accessing service centres like supermarkets, health centres, and schools in close proximity. Using the expression of one respondent, which has also been repeated by many of the participants:

I can access supermarkets, health centre, and school in close proximity; I did not face any difficulty in this neighbourhood so far in this regard (Respondent 7).

When it comes to housing segregation, the Dutch government has policies in place to address it, for example, investments in disadvantaged areas and ‘diverse building’, i.e., mixing of cheap and expensive houses in one neighbourhood. According to Zincone, Caponio and Carastro (n.d.:23), housing segregation either at a district, neighbourhood or city level, is often regarded as an indicator of exclusion and social distress. When asked about their view on this, except two of the participants, they indicated that the neighbourhood in which they live is made up of people with various backgrounds including the native Dutch people. According to these participants, it is a mixed neighbourhood.

However, for one participant, about 90 percent of the residents in his neighbourhood are immigrants. Similarly, according to one other participant, in the neighbourhood in which he lives, in the past, people with various backgrounds including the Dutch people used to live, but since recently, the natives leave for unknown reasons. This participant’s observation is supported by a study conducted by Léontine, Dagevos and Ross (2010:24), which claims that “many prefer to live in mixed neighbourhoods, but find that many indigenous Dutch residents move out of these neighbourhoods”. If this trend continues, it may make the environment relatively segregated although the participants currently live in a mixed neighbourhood.

Finally, when asked about its contribution with respect to housing of the immigrants, the co-founder of ‘Culture in Harmony’ indicated that their role is mainly related to training the immigrants on life style, use of facilities such as power, internet, laundries, and etc and helping them to adapt to the people and neighbourhood in which they live. This information from the co-founder shows that the role of Culture in Harmony is not limited to supporting the immigrants in their labour market conditions; it also plays an important role in helping them socialize in the neighbourhood and use facilities properly.

## **B. Social security**

The second focus area of the third research question is the experience of the participants with the social security programs. The access of immigrants to social welfare programs and the degree to which they benefit from these programs is an important area which has major implications for their integration. In general, immigrants with permanent residence status have access to social security benefits on the same basis as nationals in all EU member States (Fermin and Kjellstrand 2005:25). According to Entzinger and Biezeveld (2003:32), the use of, for example, child benefits or pension schemes, is a sign that migrants are well integrated and able to find their way in the host society. This is also a sign that immigrants are conscious of their rights and are able to take advantage of them (Zincone, Caponio and Carastro n.d.:22). On the other hand, a relatively high



use of social welfare programs and heavy dependence on them is often considered to be a sign of poor integration in society (Het and Al 2001:81; Zincone, Caponio and Carastro n.d.:22).

When asked about their position in this regard, except one currently unemployed participant who is totally dependent on the benefit from the government, the rest lead their lives by engaging in different jobs as presented in the preceding paragraphs, except for the participant who just lost his job because of the closure of the office where he used to work<sup>16</sup>. Similarly, a significant number of participants receive children's benefits for their children who are less than 18 years of age because parents are entitled to do so to help them with the cost of caring for a child (Shewbridge et al. 2010:29). This seems to represent a promising position of the participants in the city as far as their involvement in the social security benefits is concerned.

### **C. Health**

This sub-section briefly answers the third area of the third research question, which has to do with the experience of the immigrants as far as health is concerned. Once the immigrants are granted asylum residence permit, they can subscribe to basic health insurance (OECD 2018:77). According to the interviews, all the participants involved in this study have either their own GP. Except two of the participants who communicate in English, the rest of them use the Dutch language whenever they interact with the health professionals. When asked about the difficulty of seeing a doctor in this city, all the participants pointed out that although it is on appointment, it is not so difficult to see a doctor when needed.

On the other hand, higher rates of use of emergency services by the immigrants is usually assumed to be an indicator of difficulties in getting access to mainstream healthcare according to Zincone, Caponio and Carastro (n.d:22). As indicated above, participants of this study use the health system based on appointment, there is no tendency of using emergency services frequently.

In addition, except two participants who see a doctor every three months and every year respectively, many of the participants do not make check-ups of their health status regularly, according to the interview responses. As stated by one participant:

[...] in fact, I do not regularly make check-up of my health status, except for my eyes for which I sometimes go to see a doctor. I also do not have any instance at which lack of information regarding the health system prevented me from taking up the health services (Respondent 1).

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<sup>16</sup> The interview with this person was conducted after the closure of the Ethiopian Embassy in The Hague where he used to work. During the time, the staff of the embassy were asked to report to the government back home, but he told me that since he is a permanent resident in The Hague and has a family here, he does not want to leave. The researcher has no updated information about this participant at the time this paper was submitted.

Agreeing with the above respondent and appreciating the health system of the city in particular and the country in general, one participant highlighted that:

Although I am not regularly doing medical check-up, I am a witness that this country has a developed health system. You can definitely reach your doctor in the place and time of your appointment (Respondent 9).

When asked if there are instances at which lack of information about the health system in this city/country prevented them from taking up the services, none of the participants had come across such instances.

Overall, having their own doctor with whom the participants make a follow-up of their health status, use of the host country's language to communicate with the health professionals, and not using emergency services frequently shows the potential of the participants to utilize the health system of the city.

Finally, looking at the role of 'Culture in Harmony' in health related matters of the participants, according to the co-founder; it serves as a bridge between the immigrants and the health professionals especially during the early times of arrival since it is during these times that the immigrants face many challenges. In fact, migrant organizations in general function as a bridge between different communities in cities (Poppelaars and Scholten 2008:16). According to the co-founder:

[...] our role involves explaining the health system to the immigrants and the ways through which they can access it. Oftentimes, we receive complaints from both health professionals and the immigrants. The immigrants complain that they are not properly treated by the health professionals whereas the health professionals argue that the immigrants have a massive information gap in using the health system. For instance, according to the health professionals, the immigrants try to have more than one case in one appointment, which is not possible. In addition, they do not come on time on the day of their appointment and when the health professionals tell them that they do not work outside of the appointment date and time, the immigrants take it personal and feel as if they are treated differently. In all these, our organization works intensively with both sides, explaining the background of the immigrants to the health professionals and the ways through which the health system functions to the immigrants for better understanding (Interview with co-founder of Culture in Harmony).

Some of this information from the co-founder seems somehow contradicting with the one which has been explained by the status holders earlier. However, as indicated by the co-founder, the complaints stated are made by immigrants as newcomers during their early periods of

settlement and the immigrants approached by the researcher are those who have been living in the city for 5-10 years after securing an immigrant status, as a result, they may have a relatively better information to use the health system than the new comers.

For further support of the immigrants, according to the co-founder, the organization has a mechanism of follow-up, sometimes quarterly, bi-annually or yearly depending on the cases of individual immigrants. The organization carries this out in cooperation with the relevant offices, i.e. with the municipality, schools, health centres, and etc. However, she acknowledged that her organization is yet to support the immigrants and concerned offices at the level expected.

#### **D. Education and Training**

Apart from labour market participation, housing, social security and health, one of the main focal points of integration is education. Several studies have shown that a Dutch diploma greatly contributes to the successful integration into the Dutch labour market (Klaver 2016:18). As it has also been stated earlier, education achieved in the host country has a major impact on labour force status (Friedberg 2000 cited in Lancee 2012:72).

Immigrants who want to study in the Netherlands have to meet entry requirements, e.g. proof of prior education and sufficient command of the Dutch (or sometimes English) language. According to Het and Al (2001:71), in the Netherlands, school attendance is compulsory for all residents including legal immigrants. The school age for full-time attendance is from 5-16. From age 16-17, part-time school attendance is compulsory. It is noted that even children (<18 years old) of irregular immigrants have a right to education.

Looking at the educational attainment of the participants involved in this study, they have a low educational achievement in this city in general. According to the interview responses, except five participants who are involved in MBO, BSC and MSC degrees, the remaining participants did not have any formal education beyond the Dutch language and civic integration courses.

Perhaps as equally important indicator as parents' involvement in education is the position of their children in education in this city. As described in the table 3 below, ten of the participants have children ranging from 1 to 5 and 22 of the total 24 children are at school.

**Table 3: Participants who have children and their Involvement in Education**

Respondent	No. of children	Level of education at which they are enrolled		
		Pre-school	Elementary	Higher education
1.	-			
2.	-			
3.	1	(1)		
4.	2	(2)		
5.	3		(3)	
6.	-			
7.	3			(3)
8.	2		(1)	
9.	5	(2)	(1)	(2)
10.	-			
11.	3	(1)		(2)
12.	2	(1)		
13.	-			
14.	-			
15.	1	(1)		
16.	2	(2)		
Total	24	10	5	7

*(Source: Author's construction based on interviews, 2021)*

As we can see, close to half of the participants indicated that they have children attending pre-school. However, for these participants, it is too early to speak about the way their children are treated and interact as they are at lower ages to understand such issues. In addition, there are participants whose children are studying at elementary and higher education. These participants too indicated that they haven't had any complaint from their children for any biased treatment. That is, despite the limited participation of the immigrant parents in education in this city, one can see a better involvement of their children at different levels and there are no reported cases of dropout and low performance as well. The participants did not also come across incidences in which their children are treated differently at least for those who are at the elementary and higher education level.

When asked about the nature of schools at which their children study, all parents who participated in the study indicated that children of any parentage can attend those schools, implying the mixed nature of the schools. Since 2006, school boards, municipalities and childcare providers are legally required to consult each other in order to achieve a "more balanced distribution of students across schools" in the Netherlands (Shewbridge et al. 2010:36).

According to the same source, the national government as well as local authorities have taken steps to realise more mixed primary schools, while preserving choice and autonomy. Moreover, the participants also highlighted that they participate in parents' days and the parent-teacher meetings regularly organized by the schools to discuss matters related to their children's education which signals their involvement in decision making of their children's' education.

To ensure that people are 'guided' through the education system, several organizations work together (Het and Al 2001:72). 'Culture in Harmony' is one of these organizations, and as it has been indicated by the co-founder, this organization mainly works with elementary schools in various areas to support both the learners and the schools:

[...] we work with the elementary schools; they have complaints in relation to parents' involvement, children's nutrition, dropping the children outside of the compounds of the schools that may have a consequence on the safety of the children and so on. My organization gives orientation to the parents with regard to the issues raised at different times and we also help the schools understand the background of the immigrants and their children effectively (Interview with co-founder of Culture in Harmony).

This data shows that although not so much negative has been said by the parents about their relationship with the schools, there are areas that require attention in terms of parents' responsibility with regard to their children at the elementary schools. The data also indicates the Culture in Harmony has been playing important role to foster integration as it has helped in the early stage.

## **4.4. Facilitators of Integration**

### **4.4.1. Knowledge of Dutch Language and Culture**

Mastering the host-country's language is the most important skill immigrants need if they are to find their place in the labour market and society at large (OECD 2018:68). As it has also been argued by the human capital theory, levels of knowledge of the host country language can be regarded as relevant indicators of economic integration, since speaking different languages fluently is likely to open up access to better job opportunities (Zincone, Caponio and Carastro n.d:22). According to the immigrant integration policy of the Dutch government, attending a Dutch language and the civic integration course is mandatory for immigrants outside of the EEA:

The Netherlands, where a full-fledged civic integration abroad program was developed and rolled out from 2006, is the precursor of civic integration policies. Those policies take place both in the

Netherlands and abroad. Policies taking place in the Netherlands consist of language courses and courses on knowledge of the Dutch society, as well as specific courses on issues such as child upbringing, working in the Netherlands, entrepreneurship or social participation. The target group includes both newcomers and “old comers” (Garibay and Cuyper 2013:35).

These immigrants have the obligation to follow Dutch language courses and courses about Dutch society (Het and Al 2001:71). This is because according to Engbersen et al. (2015:31), permit holders are often considered difficult to employ because they are not proficient in Dutch. The participants were asked about their involvement in the Dutch language and civic integration courses; all of them indicated that they have followed the course. These participants further pointed out that the course helped them to learn the language, pass the civic integration exam and communicate with others at the work place.

When asked to rate their level of proficiency in Dutch, except three participants who feel that they are beginners, the rest of them believe that they have an intermediate level of proficiency. As explained by many of them, they are good at listening the language, they can read and speak the language reasonably well, but what is relatively difficult for them is writing.

According to Garibay and Cuyper (2013:35), the obligations of the participants with regard to civic integration are set out by means of contracts, and integration requirements are only fulfilled after newcomers pass a language examination for (at least) level A2 and an exam on civic integration. Passing the exam is obligatory for those immigrants from outside the EEA applying for permanent residence and for the Dutch nationality (Odé 2008:19). The participants of this study indicated that they have taken the exam at different times depending up on their speed of learning.

When asked if they use professional interpreters, about two-third of the participants indicated that they have never used an interpreter in this city, the rest of them pointed out that they sometimes use(d) an interpreter, especially during the early periods and for matters related to legal issues.

Following the host country media by the immigrants is another indicator of immigrants' integration in those countries (Wachter and Fleischmann 2018:156). The participants were asked if they follow the Dutch media and understand what is being reported by those media. In this case, all of the participants indicated that they do follow the media although with varying degrees and they understand what is being broadcast, showing their relatively good position in this regard.

Moreover, according to Wachter and Fleischmann (2018:156), contact between natives and immigrants can facilitate economic integration through providing access to the social capital of natives. That is, the extent to which the immigrants know about and interact with their neighbours and vice-versa remains another important issue as far as the socio-economic integration of immigrants is concerned. In this regard the participants have varying experiences; about half of them indicated that they have a good interaction with the people around them. Some of these participants pointed out that there are times at which they have a get together specially during Eritrean holidays. One participant described his interaction with the people around him:

My family sometimes arrange a get together with the neighbours and have a coffee together, especially during summer seasons; my wife likes such social life more than I do. This gives us an opportunity to know each other further and strengthen our future relationships (Respondent 9).

A quite different response in this regard was given by one participant who stated that he does not have much time to spend with the neighbours as he spends most of his time at his work place. Similarly, a few participants indicated that they do not have such a meaningful interaction beyond just exchanging “greetings” whenever they meet. Over all, having many participants who were involved in the language training, took the civic integration exam, follow the media, and having a good contact with the people around them indicates the immigrants’ positive experience in Dutch language and culture which in turn plays a key role in speeding up the integration process.

#### **4.4.2. Safety and stability**

The final aspect which indicates the experience of immigrants’ integration in the socio-economic dimension in the host society is the feeling that the immigrants develop and the associated every day practice in terms of their physical safety and stability in the neighbourhood they live. Safety and stability also serve as facilitators of integration as indicated by Ager and Strang (2008:170). Immigrants often indicate that if they do not feel physically safe in the neighbourhood they live, they could not feel integrated (Ager and Strang 2008:183). According to these authors, immigrants feel at more “at home” in their localities if they saw them as “peaceful”, while non-immigrants are often concerned that new arrivals could not cause unrest in their community.

Very often, an incidence of violence or feeling of being threatened determines the overall perceptions of the immigrants (Ager and Strang 2008:184). When asked to express their views in this regard, from the total immigrant participants involved in the study, fifteen of them indicated

that they feel safe in the neighbourhood they live. To mention the view of one of the participants that has also been shared by many of the participants;

[...] living for about 6 years in this neighbourhood, I did not come across issues threatening my physical safety or the safety of my family (Respondent 5).

That is, a sense of personal safety is paramount for the immigrants which in turn plays an important role in their integration process thereby contributing to the immigrants' improved participation in the labour market, education, and other areas that speed up their socio-economic integration.



## Chapter 5 : Conclusions

This chapter highlights the key conclusions drawn based on the research questions formulated, the data analyzed and presented in the preceding chapters. The major conclusions have been organized according to the thematic arrangements and the research questions of the study, and presented in the subsequent paragraphs.

The concepts of social navigation and human capital applied in the study greatly helped to understand that settlement of the immigrants in the new environment requires new navigation skills as they face a new environment and new settlement tasks that in turn require human capital if the immigrants are to find their places in the labour market, housing, social welfare, health, education and other areas determining their overall socio-economic integration. The analytical framework used has also helped me to present the findings in a more structured manner.

The first area of analysis that received my attention was the Dutch government's policy grounds and main discourses with regard to immigrants' integration. I found that frequent changes have been taking place in migrants' integration policies in the Netherlands. The trend shows that the more recent policies make the immigrants responsible for their own integration in general although they have different backgrounds. That is, any poor migrants' socio-economic position is seen less as a consequence of structural constraints that the migrants might face, and more as a result of lack of effort of the migrants.

Looking at the labour market experience, despite the arguments directed by previous studies and reports including the NL Times about immigrants' integration versus lack of it, based on the lived experience of the participants in the labour market involvement, this study found that the participants have a potential to navigate the labour market as many of them are in full-time, paid work, and earning the necessary income to make a living in the city. It also did not take long for many of the participants to acquire jobs and a good number of them are in self-employment. However, their involvement in key professions, and vocational and entrepreneurship trainings is very limited.

Concerning the performance of the participants in housing, only one participant managed to own a house although the majority of them live in mixed neighbourhoods. There is no participant sharing a room. Many of them still live in the social housing provided by the government, paying a rent. Unless for the participants for whom the distance between their houses and workplace cannot be determined because of the mobile nature of their jobs, the status holders live within and less than 10kms from their work place and there is no reported

complaint in accessing service centres like supermarket, health centres, and schools in close proximity.

With regard to the experience of the immigrants with social security, a good position of the participants have been identified as all participants having children below 18 years of age receive children's benefits and they do not depend on or make a high use of social welfare programs, except one participant whose source of income is welfare benefit.

When it comes to the experience of the immigrants in health, the participants have an encouraging position as all of them have someone from the profession to deal with their health related issues and they can access doctors without difficulties on appointment. The study also found that there is no practice of frequent use of emergency services by the participants in this city and the capacity of the majority to communicate in Dutch with the health professionals helped them to a great extent.

Looking at the integration experience of the immigrants in education, majority of the participants have poor achievement in this regard. However, their children are in good position attending the various levels of education in mixed schools, without reported cases of dropout and low performance and biased treatment.

Furthermore, the knowledge of Dutch language and culture which has been achieved by following the language and civic integration courses and passing the exam helped them to have an intermediate level of the language that in turn plays an important role for better integration of the immigrants in this city. In addition, the knowledge of the language and culture helped many of the participants to follow the Dutch media and to have good contact with their neighbours. Similarly, a sense of feeling personally safety in the neighbourhood they live is found paramount for them which in turn plays an important role thereby contributing to the immigrants' improved participation in the labour market, education, and other areas that speed up their socio-economic integration.

The study also revealed that governmental and non-governmental organizations like the UWV and the Culture in Harmony respectively are playing an important role in diverse areas to foster the immigrants' integration from the early stages of their settlement to helping them improve their positions in the labour market, housing, education, health, and etc.

In general, despite the debates in the literature and previous studies about immigrants' successful socio-economic integration versus their failure to integrate, by looking at the lived experience of the participants in The Hague based on the basic indicators, this study concludes that the socio-economic position of the participants shows that they have the potential to

navigate and integrate in the city although there are various challenges which are encountered in the process.

However, the poor educational achievement of majority of the participants and their limited involvement in the vocational and entrepreneurship trainings require attention to improve their educational achievement and involving them in vocational and entrepreneurship trainings in the city as it greatly contributes to the immigrants' successful integration into the Dutch labour market in particular and their overall socio-economic integration in general.

Effective integration also requires the host country's commitment and genuine support that in turn needs to have a concrete data about the immigrants; their background, and what they brought with them. However, during the study, it was not possible to find data, particularly from the municipality of The Hague where the officers contacted indicated that the municipality does not register immigrants by background. As a result, I strongly recommend that having a comprehensive data about the immigrants that arrive in the city helps the municipality to a great extent in terms of addressing issues related to those immigrants and speed up their integration process.

Finally, as this study is confined to assessing the experience of integration of only male status holders in the city, future researches considering the experiences of both male and female participants would help in shedding light from a relatively wider perspective.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Interview Guide (for Ethiopian and Eritrean immigrant respondents)

### Introduction

First of all, I would like to thank you in advance for participating in this research project. My name is Misgana Massebo and this interview is designed to gather data for my research paper which I am conducting on “the Experience of Socio-economic integration of Ethiopian and Eritrean immigrants in the Hague” in partial fulfilment of the requirements for MA in Governance and Development Policy program at the International Institute of Social Studies. Integration is the process by which immigrants become accepted into society, both as individuals and as a group. Your genuine contribution determines the success of the study and therefore, it is highly appreciated. The interview takes less than one hour of your time. If it’s okay with you, I will be recording the session so that I can get all the details but at the same time to be able to have a smooth conversation with you. The information you provide and your comments will remain confidential and all responses will be kept anonymous. I also assure you that any information included in the report will not identify you as a respondent.

If you have any question about what I have just explained, please don’t hesitate to ask.

### Demographics:

1. Could you tell me about yourself and your background?

1.1. Name\_\_\_\_\_

1.4. Nationality\_\_\_\_\_

1.2. Age\_\_\_\_\_

1.5. level of education\_\_\_\_\_

1.3. Marital status\_\_\_\_\_

### Markers and Means of Socio-economic integration

#### A. Labour Market Participation:

1. How long have you been in The Hague? Could you tell me your expectation about job opportunities in this city before your arrival?
2. What have you been doing before coming to the Hague/Netherlands, what is/are the reason(s) behind your movement to this city/country?

3. Are you currently employed? What is the status of your job: [Permanent/temporary/full-time/part-time/self-employment], how many hours do you work per week?
4. What is the title of your job? In what field/sector do you work? Is your job part of professions such as architecture, law, teaching, engineering, health related profession, and managerial post? Is this job commensurate to the level of skills or qualifications you possess?
5. Could you explain to me the way through which you secured this job; was it through friends, family, agency, directly contacting organizations, (social) media, others...? How long did it take to find a job after securing a refugee status?
6. How long have you been in your current position? What is your average monthly income? ☐ Under 800 euro ☐ 800 to 1,000 euro ☐ 1,000 to 1,600 euro ☐ More than 1,600 euro
7. Do you have any other family members (parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, their children) in The Hague or elsewhere who are dependent on you for financial support? How many dependents do you have?
8. Could you explain to me if you have ever experienced periods of unemployment in this city/staying out of paid employment? If so, why do you think you were unemployed? How easy/difficult was it for you to get employment/re-employment?
9. Have you had the chance to enrol and complete vocational qualification in this city? Did you receive any entrepreneurship training in this city?
10. What challenges did you face while looking for a job in this city? Please elaborate.
11. Could you rate your satisfaction with your current employment situation on the scale of 1 to 5, (5-Very satisfied, 4-Somewhat satisfied, 3-Neutral, 2-Somewhat dissatisfied, 1-Very dissatisfied)? Please explain your rating.
12. Do you receive any social security benefits in this city? What type of benefits are these; child benefits/state pension?
13. In your opinion, what do you think that the government could do to improve immigrants' employment conditions in the city?

**B. Housing:**

1. Could you please tell me for how long (approximately) you have been living in this place (your house)? Was it your choice to move to this house? Is it a social, rented or self-owned housing?
2. How do you explain the size, facilities in the house (having own kitchen, own toilet, heater, etc?).

3. How much do you spend on housing per month? How many persons live in your house?  
How far is your home from your work place?
4. How do you rate this neighbourhood on the scale of 1 to 5, in terms of:
  - 4.1. Safety (5-Very safe, 4-safe, 3-neutral, 2-unsafe, 1-very unsafe). Please explain your rating.
  - 4.2. Satisfaction in the availability of facilities like supermarkets, schools, restaurants, health centres, etc? (5-Very satisfied, 4-Somewhat satisfied, 3-Neutral, 2-Somewhat dissatisfied, 1-Very dissatisfied). Please explain your rating.
5. Do you feel at home in this neighbourhood? Please elaborate.
6. Do you consider 'your' neighbourhood as a segregated one rather than mixed neighbourhood? If so, could you tell me if you encounter any 'problem' living in segregated neighbourhoods?
7. Could you rate your satisfaction with your current housing conditions on the scale of 1 to 5, (5-Very satisfied, 4-Somewhat satisfied, 3-Neutral, 2-Somewhat dissatisfied, 1-Very dissatisfied)? Please explain your rating.

### **C. Education and Training:**

1. What educational level did you attend/attending in this city/country? Did you get your education from your country of origin valued in The Hague? Could you explain the contribution/difference made by the new education/skills attained in the Hague/Netherlands?
2. Do your children participate in pre-school/elementary/higher education? Is this an ethnic minority school? What does their results look like? Was there any instance of school drop-out? Do they participate in lunch time and 'after school' clubs like football?
3. Are there instances at which your children experienced insufficient support to learn the Dutch language, isolation and exclusion (bullying, racism, difficulties in making friends)?
4. As a parent, have you had an opportunity to engage in making decisions on your children's education in partnership with the municipality? If yes, in what way?
5. What challenges did you/your family face with regard to education and training in this city?

### **D. Health**

1. Do you have a GP (General Practitioner) in the city? How often do you communicate with health care professionals by using Dutch language?
2. In this city, how difficult or easy would it be for you to see a doctor?
3. Do you do medical check-ups in this city? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, how often?

☐every month ☐every three months ☐every six months ☐once in a year

4. Could you explain any instance at which lack of information about services available prevented you from taking up the services (or lead to inappropriate use of services, e.g. accident and emergency facilities for routine health problems)?

### **Facilitators of integration**

#### **A) Knowledge of Dutch Language and culture**

1. How do you rate your Dutch language capacity in speaking, reading, listening and writing (Beginner, Intermediate, Proficient, Fluent, and Native)?
  - 1.1. Did you attend Dutch language training and civic integration courses, and if so, for how long?
  - 1.2. To what extent do you think it helped you learn the language?
  - 1.3. Did you sit for the integration exam?
2. Do you use a professional interpreter whenever you need services from public-sector/other offices?
3. Do you watch/read/listen to Dutch media (television, newspapers and/or radio)? Do you understand what is being reported in those media?
4. To what extent the Dutch native community in your neighbourhood know about you (customs, religion, culture and history) and could you give me some examples?

#### **B) Safety and Stability**

1. Do you feel physically safe, living in a peaceful and violence free neighbourhood? Please elaborate.

### **Closing**

Thank you very much for participating in this interview. If you would like to add more information, please feel free to do so.

## **Appendix 2: Interview Guide (for Organizations working on Immigrants)**

Name of the Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of the Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Could you briefly explain to me about the main services that your organization provides?
2. How do you contact the immigrants/the immigrants reach your organization?
3. What do your organization does in helping the status holders to find a job and overcome challenges they face while working? How many people did the organization has supported in the last five years? How do you explain the readiness of the status holders to involve in the labour market as fastly as possible?
4. What do your organization does in helping the status holders with regard to housing? How many people did the organization has supported in the last five years in this regard?
5. What do your organization does in helping the status holders with regard to their participation in education, language training, etc? How many people did the organization has supported in the last five years in this regard?
6. What do your organization does in helping the status holders with regard to health related facilities? How many people did the organization has supported in the last five years in this regard?
7. What are some of the most difficult moments you have experienced in supporting Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants with respect to issues stated above? How did you solve/attempted to solve them? Please explain the story in detail.
8. Have you/your organization noticed any specific issues peculiar for Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants?
9. Do you have a mechanism to follow-up the migrants you supported? Please, explain.
10. In your opinion, how would you rate/perceive the support your organization provides to migrants so far on the scale of 1 to 5 (1=very poor, 2=poor, 3=average, 4=good, 5=very good)

### **Closing**

Thank you very much for participating in this interview. If you would like to add more information, please feel free to do so.

### **Appendix 3: Interview Guide (for the Dutch Employee Insurance Agency)**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ position \_\_\_\_\_

1. Could you briefly explain to me about the activities of the Dutch Employee Insurance Agency with regard to immigrants' socio-economic integration in The Hague?
2. How many employed immigrants from Ethiopia and Eritrea live in The Hague as the UWV keeps track of all employed people?
3. Could you tell me the ways through which the UWV helps the immigrants find jobs in the city? Is there a way through which it ensures whether those immigrants succeed with their jobs?
4. For how many immigrants (and in what way) does the UWV provide employment-law information and advisory services?
5. Could you explain to me about the number of unemployment, disability and sickness benefits application that UWV received in the last five years and the number of immigrants who received the benefits accordingly?

#### **Closing**

Thank you very much for participating in this interview. If you would like to add more information, please feel free to do so.

#### **Appendix 4: Interview Guide (for Experts)**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ position \_\_\_\_\_

1. Could you please describe your current job, tasks and responsibilities within your organisation?
2. How is The Hague different from others regarding migrant integration (in terms of needs and actions taken)? Do you perceive other cities as more or less advanced in this regard?
3. Do you think that there are practices that other cities and regions could learn from integration experiences in The Hague or the vice-versa?
4. Have you noticed any specific issues peculiar to Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants in terms of their integration experience?
5. From your experience and your opinion, what are the priority areas in which governments should invest regarding the integration of migrants in the near future? Do you see steps taken in that direction? Are there issues being ignored?
6. What can you say about the efficacy of the Dutch Integration Policy in relation to immigrants' integration in general?
7. The study applies the concept of social navigation and the theory of human capital to explain the socio-economic integration of immigrants in the city; do you think that they fit to the study?
8. Could you brief me about the roles of the Dutch Council for Refugees with regard to immigrants' integration?

#### **Closing**

Thank you very much for participating in this interview. If you would like to add more information, please feel free to do so.