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From imagination to reality

An anthropological study of the Norwegian Bio-politics of
Integration

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Summary

This thesis builds on six months of multi-site fieldwork conducted in a division of the Norwegian Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi), the *integration* office and adult education centre of a small municipality, a text analysis of *integration* policy documents, and interviews of policy makers. Utilising Bourdieu's "bureaucratic field" and Foucault's reflections on neoliberalism, governmentality, and bio-politics as theoretic lens, the thesis examines the social imaginaries and bio-political goals which informed the creation of Norwegian *integration* policies and the ways in which street-level bureaucrats implement these policies in day-to-day practices on the ground. The analysis illustrates how governmental policies conceptualise *integration* as business model and commodify refugees into trading objects which generate income for municipalities and to fill the gaps in Norway's vocational labour market. The thesis argues that *integration* policies in Norway are a neoliberal project designed to maintain the welfare for the majority population of Norwegian citizens at the expense of those who are subjected to the *integration* regime. Norwegian policymakers utilise the notion of *integration* to legitimise anatomo-political technologies of discipline and control which aim to shape refugees into "ideal citizen workers". The technologies create an elaborate bio-political apparatus in form of the introduction program, which transforms refugees into partial citizens that have adapted Norwegian values, norms, and ways of (work) life and maintain the Norwegian welfare state by working in specific sectors of the labour market. The thesis explores how street-level bureaucrats implement these bio-policies based on their discretion, their role understandings as enforcers of state bio-policies, and their social imaginaries on *integration*. Rooted in empirical data from a small municipality, the thesis presents the fictitious city of Låsen as case study to illustrate how the daily *integration* practice of street-level bureaucrats is shaped by local power struggles and neoliberal reforms, bringing the local *integration* infrastructure to the verge of collapse.

Keywords: Biopolitics, anatomo-politics, governmentality, neoliberalism, refugees, integration, policy, Norway, Scandinavia, street-level bureaucracy, bureaucratic field, social imaginaries, immigration, introduction program, Institutional Ethnography

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List of Abbreviations

IE	Institutional Ethnography
IMDi	Integrerings- og Mangfoldsdirektoratet (the Norwegian Directorate of Integration and Diversity)
KD	Kunnskapsdepartementet (the Ministry of Education and Research)
LIO	Låsen Integreringstjenester (Låsen Integration Office)
NAV	Ny Arbeids- og Velferdsforvaltning (the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration)
NIR	National Introduction Register
NOK	Norwegian Kroners
NPM	New Public Management
PP	Fremskrittspartiet (Progress Party)
UDI	Utlendingsdirektoratet (the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration)

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Introduction

«For what exactly does the little word "integration" mean? [...] I termed the term as a large black box, where the majority society can place everything that it considers problematic, where the only common multiple is that the problems involve people in Norway who have non-Western origins. [...] When many voices have different formations about what integration really entails, it results in them simply talking past each other. People talk on different terms. In such a setting, it is easy for people with hidden intentions to pursue their own agenda.»

Athar Akram (2002), then leader of Norway's Muslim Youth

What does *integration*¹ mean? The question posed by Akram has been at the centre of political and public debates in Norway for the past four decades, in line with many other states across the globe. Norwegian discourses on *integration* are inextricably tied to the debate of issues of immigration, national identity, belonging, and multiculturalism (Eriksen, 2013). Hagelund (2002) conceptualises *integration* as a nodal point, whose meaning is relational and shifting depending on the points which are addressed in a specific discourse, stitching together ideas, problems, concerns, agendas, policies, and measures into a "structured network of meaning in which the games and struggles of integration politics take place." (p.403). She postulates that *integration* has played a crucial role in constructing a new identity of Norway as a multicultural and diverse society which re-articulates cultural differences as a double-edged sword. While "cultural diversity" is celebrated and appreciated in mainstream political discourse, certain cultural differences are problematised by painting cultural practices of Muslim immigrant minorities as threatening to what is regarded as fundamental values in Norwegian society, especially gender equality.

Integration as social imaginary

The Danish anthropologist Rytter (2019) points out that *integration* is a concept that is "exceptionally unclear", and that academic literature has placed too little attention to the differentiation between emic categories of *integration*² used in popular discourse and etic concepts applied in social theory. Rather than thinking of *integration* as an innocent category of analysis,

¹ Inspired by Rytter (2019), I use the italic font to *integration* to emphasise that my work discusses the Norwegian emic concept of *integration*.

² Rytter draws on the anthropological distinction between descriptions formulated by people themselves (the emic) and definitions drafted by scientists and researchers (the etic; Headland, Pike, & Harris 1990).

integration in political and public discourse should be conceptualised as an emic concept which is embedded in and (re)produces fundamental, promoting specific perspectives on “the self”, “the society”, “the nation”, “belonging”, and majority-minority relationships, so-called “social imaginaries”. Social imaginaries refer to moral conceptions of an ideal society which combine moral structure (*what is right*) with moral agency (*what is worth striving for*). These discourses legitimise social and political practices which are socially accepted as “meaningful” and “right” (O’Neill, 2016). Ritter (2019) argues that Danish social imaginaries on *integration* problematise and exclude Muslim immigrants from these imaginaries and reinforce the power asymmetry between the ethnic majority and immigrant minorities by stamping “non-Western” migrants as problematic in specific ways, usually tied to norms, values and practices of everyday life. Several scholars have argued that *integration* systems in Norway, Denmark, and Sweden attempt to turn refugees and immigrants into “good citizens” according to Scandinavian norms and values (Larsen, 2011; Olwig, 2011). In the Nordics, *integration* has thus become “a powerful notion, designating who belongs - and by implication who does not belong - in society”, synonymous to “the ability to conform to social norms and cultural values defined in dominant discourse as basic to proper citizenship” (Olwig 2011, S. 180).

Towards an Anthropology of the Norwegian Welfare State

The study of politics has a long tradition in anthropology, see Krohn-Hansen (2015) for an overview over its history and Vincent (2005) for a selection of key readings. In the past decades, anthropological research on the state has moved away from a narrow focus on “politics” to examining the modern state as the product of broad and shifting fields of power relations, day-to-day practices, and constructions of cultural meaning which are shaped in everyday encounters between street-level bureaucrats and individuals (Krohn-Hansen, 2015; Sharma & Gupta, 2006a). The term “street-level bureaucrats” refers to state representatives at the lowest levels of government, who implement public policies in daily interactions with clients, patients, or users, such as teachers, nurses, and social workers (Camillo, 2017; Lipsky, 1980; Rugkåsa, 2012a). Their daily practice is an exercise in state-making as it shapes peoples’ social imaginaries on *integration* and reinforces the legitimate violence of the state over its citizens (Gupta, 1995; Weber, 1946). The encounters with street-level bureaucrats play a crucial role in producing social hierarchies and shape peoples’ ideas of and relationship to “the state”, embedded in and shaped by trans-local discourses in public media, the news, and policy documents (Gupta, 1995; Sharma & Gupta, 2006a).

To study the intersecting and conflicting power structures which shape local settings and are intertwined with the trans-local processes that characterise our globalised world, political anthropologists began to draw on theories from political philosophy and political science (Sharma and Gupta 2006a, see Krohn-Hansen and Nustad 2005; Sharma and Gupta 2006b for a selection of

readings). Especially Foucault's reflections on power and meaning, governmentality, and biopolitics (Foucault, 1978, 1980, 2008, 2009) have informed the work of anthropologists on questions of modernity (Inda 2008) and policies (Fassin, 2011; Shore & Wright, 2003; Walters, 2015). Their work gave rise to the domain of the anthropology of policy, which view policies as "assemblages" that have agency and develop as they enter in relations with different actors and institutions and are implemented in everyday practice (Shore & Wright, 2011).

There is a robust body of anthropological literature which examines the ways in which policies are used as instruments of power to shape individuals and explores neoliberal shifts of government policy in welfare states across the world (Shore & Wright, 2003; Shore, Wright, & Però, 2011). However, few anthropological studies build on ethnographic fieldwork from the Nordic states to examine how social politics are realised in local contexts and what consequences they entail for the citizens (**Rugkåsa 2012, p. 16**). Notable exceptions from Norway are Bendixsen's research on the control of irregular migration through welfare rights (2018), as well as the works of Halvard Vike and Marianne Rugkåsa. Vike is a leading figure in the anthropological study of the Norwegian welfare bureaucracy and its policies and has conducted over three decades of ethnographic fieldwork among local politicians, administrative municipal leaders, and street-level bureaucrats in the social service and health sector (Vike, 2004, 2013, 2015, 2018). Marianne Rugkåsa focuses on *integration* and child protection policies, informed by the disciplines of anthropology and critical social work (Rugkåsa, 2012a, 2016; Ylvisaker & Rugkåsa, 2022). In her book "*The dilemma of sameness*" (2012b), Rugkåsa discusses consequences of Norwegian *integration* policies on people's everyday lives and sheds light on the dilemmas that Norwegian street-level bureaucrats face in implementing an *integration* measure that targets "low-skilled" immigrant women. According to Rugkåsa, Norwegian *integration* policies subject immigrants to extensive processes of normalisation to transform them in line with cultural models of gender equality, economic independence, and "sameness" (Gullestad, 2004). She postulates that the street-level bureaucrats have a mandate as "civilising agents" and that *integration* in Norway is "*a homogenising and normalising process where individuals who fall outside of what is defined as being normal are transformed to an ideal, and this ideal is the image that the majority population has of itself*" (Rugkåsa, 2010).

An anthropological study of the Norwegian *integration* regime

Examining the creation and implementation of policy measures across the different bureaucratic levels of the Norwegian *integration* regime provides an excellent opportunity to explore the social imaginaries which informed these *integration* policies and situate the day-to-day practices of their implementation in the wider context of neoliberalist shifts in the modern welfare state. I draw on multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork (Marcus, 1995) to uncover the links and frictions

between macro- and micro-level processes of Norwegian *integration* policies and examine the political goals which informed the creation of *integration* policies. My field sites encompassed the digital realms of home-office in a division of the Norwegian Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi) in Oslo, as well as the *integration* office and adult education centre of a small municipality. I also interviewed policymakers to gain insights into the policy creation process of the 2021 Integration Act. My ethnographic fieldwork combined participant observation, qualitative interviews, and a text analysis of policy documents which shaped the legal regulations of Norwegian *integration* policies. In my analysis, I will draw on Bourdieu's work on the "bureaucratic field" (1994), and Foucault's reflections on neoliberalism, governmentality, and bio-politics (Foucault, 2008, 2009).

I argue that Norwegian policymakers utilised the notion of *integration* to legitimise bio-political practices of discipline and control of the refugee population, which are enacted through day-to-day practices in local *integration* measures, specifically, the so-called "introduction program" for refugees. Informed by neoliberalist ideology, the legal framework of Norwegian *integration* policies conceptualises *integration* as a business model and utilises the introduction program as bio-political technology of discipline and control to shape refugees into "ideal citizen workers" which are channelled into specific sectors of the Norwegian labour market. The commodification of *integration* work clashes with the social imaginaries of the street-level bureaucrats, whose work is shaped by local power struggles and neoliberal reforms and who struggle to implement the measures of the *integration* bio-policies.

I utilise the term "refugee" to refer to people that were granted protection in Norway and are therefore subjected the regulations of the Norwegian *integration* regime. According to international law, the term "refugee" refers to any person that was forced to leave their country of origin due to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, and membership of a particular social or political group, and is unable or unwilling to return out of such fear (UNHCR, 2010). In Norway, the legal term "refugee" refers to people that were granted protection based on one or more of the abovementioned grounds and is used interchangeably with "newly arrived immigrants" in policy papers (Norges Stortinget, 2003). The target population of Norwegian *integration* policies consists of the following groups: (1) refugees granted political asylum, (2) persons granted residence on humanitarian grounds, (3) refugees with collective residence permits, (4) quota refugees and (5) those granted family reunification to people falling under the previous four categories (Norges Stortinget, 2003). Academic and general discourse tend to construct the term as a social category and turn it an essential part of one's identity by constructing a typical "refugee experience", which downplays diverse experiences of displacement and the heterogeneity of the group that the term "refugee" refers to (Malkki 1995, p. 510). I utilise

the term “refugees” in line with its legal definition and do not try to imply that the people that are encompassed by this label share the same characteristics or background.

Thesis structure

In **chapter one**, I introduce the theoretical work of Foucault on governmentality, biopolitics, Bourdieu’s theory of the “biographic field”; and academic work on neoliberalism which informed my analysis. **Chapter two** introduces my field sites and discusses the methodological approach that informed my fieldwork, as well as reflections on my positionality and ethical challenges tied to my research. In **chapter three**, I provide a concise overview of Norway’s immigration history and its corresponding policy responses to situate Norwegian *integration* policies in their historical context. I move on to discuss the social imaginaries of *integration* and the neoliberal ideologies that informed the creation process of the two laws that underpin Norwegian *integration* policies. **Chapter four** draws on Foucault to discuss the bio-political goals and technologies that underpin the measures and regulations tied to the so-called introduction program, which forms the pillar of the Norwegian *integration* regime. In **chapter five**, I explore how bureaucrats working in IMDi navigate their daily work as facilitators of state *integration* policies, informed by their role understanding as state servants, national neoliberal reforms, and their imaginations on the work reality of street-level bureaucrats. **Chapter six** draws on my empirical fieldwork in a small municipality to describe the implementation of Norwegian *integration* policies, and their effects on the enactors and targets of the policies, in the fictitious municipality of Låsen. The chapter examines how conflicting social imaginaries on *integration*, local power struggles, and the neoliberalisation of care services shape the daily work practices of the street-level bureaucrats that implement the introduction program. **Chapter 7** provides a summarising discussion of the main points of the previous chapters and concludes with a final reflection on policy changes as response to refugee movements triggered through the Russo-Ukrainian war.

Chapter 1: Theoretical framework

As my work examines state-level policies and day-to-day practices of state bureaucrats, it is crucial to conceptualise “the state” as empirical object of research. My theoretical understanding builds on work of Abrams (1988), who rejects the note of “the state” as a distant, coordinated and fixed entity. Abrams distinguishes between the state-idea as an ideological power and the “state-system”, which he describes as a web of processes, political practices, and institutional structures such as immigration departments, prisons, and social policies. He argues that “the state” comes into being as an ideological project through ideas of the state that are produced under specific historical and social conditions (Abrams, 1988). The function of the state-idea is to legitimise measures of social domination and moral regulation in form of political processes and public practices, presenting them as legitimate and morally right (Abrams 1988, p.76).

The bureaucratic field of the state

Like Abrams, the French sociologist Bourdieu opposes the notion of the state as abstract entity. Bourdieu (1994) conceptualises the state as a “bureaucratic field” constructed by entities which are situated in different positions of power and have specific interests and values. This field is characterised by struggles between different agents, who have access to different forms of capital and aim to realise their – often conflicting – agenda and vision of the state. These struggles take place within and across other fields in different cultural or economic spheres, which are reflections of power relations among other institutions or entities. Bourdieu distinguishes between the protective and supportive “left hand” of social welfare policies and the state’s strict, penalising “right hand” which aims to regulate behaviour through penal practices and economic sanctions such as budget cuts, financial incentives, and economic deregulation (Derby, 2010).

Governmentality and bio-power

The concept of “governmentality” was coined by Foucault in his 1977-1978 lecture series “*Security, Territory, Population*”, where he analysed the emergence of modern government and its new technologies of power throughout the history of Western nation states (see Inda (2008) for an excellent discussion). Foucault argues that “the art of government” emerged after the collapse of the feudal system in Europe’s sixteenth century and marked a profound shift in thinking about the exercise of political power (Foucault, 2009). Issues of sovereignty and the force of law, which built on physical punishment and death penalty to ensure people’s obedience, lost its importance. Economy was introduced as a crucial form of power as it enabled to exercise “*towards its inhabitants, and the wealth and behaviour of each and all, a form of surveillance and control as attentive as that of the head of a family over his household and his goods.*” (Foucault 1991, p. 92)

Foucault highlights that population is both the *target* and the *instrument* of the art of government, resulting in a new set of techniques and tactics which are rooted in bureaucracy. Foucault argues that the purpose of modern government is to increase the wealth, welfare, and health of the population by improving its conditions through direct and indirect techniques which the people are not always aware of. Foucault distinguishes between two types of technologies: technologies of power and domination, which regulate and control the behaviour of individuals, and technologies of the self, which individuals expose themselves to either on their own or with the help of others. While technologies of power and domination objectify individuals by subjecting them to specific goals and different forms of domination, technologies of the self are techniques that individuals employ on their own bodies, minds, and behaviour, allowing themselves to be controlled and transformed towards a specific end (Foucault, 1988). Both technologies use statistics to gather knowledge about the population and effectively manage the disciplining of individuals. Since the two types of technologies intersect to shape the conduct of individuals on different levels, there is always a relationship between political governance and the governance of the self (Gordon, 1991). Government becomes “*the conduct of conduct*” (Gordon 1991, p. 48) – calculated activities and ways of thinking that aim to influence and regulate the behaviour of individuals or groups towards peculiar ends through acting on their hopes, desires, or surroundings. Foucault refers to the interaction of these technologies as “governmentality” and describes it as:

“The ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security.” (Foucault 1991, p.102).

It is in this context that a new technology of power emerges, which aims to manage the biological processes of populations – in other words, the lives of the people that form the population (Foucault, 2013a). Foucault labels this new technology “bio-power” and distinguishes between two technologies of power that carefully administrate and subjugate life in general, regulating both the individual body and the general population (Foucault, 2008). One form of biopower, which Foucault calls *anatomo-politics* or *discipline of the human body*, is directly enacted on the human body and increases control through disciplinary techniques of surveillance, training, punishment, and people’s spatial distribution. This “individualising” form of power aims to increase the productive force and utility of bodies and is embedded in institutions such as schools, the army, and psychiatric institutions. The goal is to produce human beings which are productive and obedient, and to integrate them into systems of economic control where their labour force can be extracted (Foucault, 2013b).

The second form of biopower, called *biopolitics*, targets the collective body of the population and aims to regulate the biological phenomena that characterise living human beings: health and illness, reproduction, sexuality, living and working conditions. The goal of this “massifying” type of power is managing the life of the whole population through interventions and regulatory controls. Statistical assessments play a crucial role in biopolitics, paving the way for exhaustive measures and interventions which target the entire social body such as compulsory vaccines or birth control. Foucault argues that bio-power played a decisive role in ensuring the supply of labour forces to the “machinery of production” and in sustaining production relations, utilising institutions such as administrative bodies and school (Foucault, 2008).

The neoliberal art of government

Foucault argues that contrary to classical liberalism, which builds on minimal state regulations and free market economy, neoliberalism promotes state policies and interventions on the technical, juridical, demographic, and social level, arguably to protect the “fragile formal structure” of free market competition (Cotoi, 2015). The aim of the neoliberalist art of government is to exercise political power based on the principles of a market economy, which requires continuous state vigilance and activity (Peters, 2007). According to Foucault, it is through the regulations of economy that government can exert power over the individual. Foucault argues that neoliberalism constructs economic subjects as “abilities-machines which will produce income”, whose human capital can be enhanced through processes such as education and parenting. Thus, neoliberal policies of growth focus not only on material investment of physical capital, but also on the investment in human capital through social, cultural, and educational policies (Foucault, 2008).

In the years following Foucault’s lecture series on governmentality and biopolitics, neoliberalism became one of the most influential political movements worldwide. Building on the work of Foucault of neoliberalism as governmentality, Larner (2000) and Viens (2019) argue that neoliberal strategies of rule are a complex form of political and economic governance which promote a conceptualisation of people as “individualized and active subjects” who must continuously “work on themselves” to enhance their well-being. These are reflected in social policy reforms in the context of education, work, health, and welfare, which shift the responsibility for social problems such as poverty or unemployment over to individuals. Viens (2019) highlights in her work on health policies that neoliberalist concepts of *individual responsibility* and *commodification* shape the ways in which neoliberalist states operate through social policies. As economic growth forms one of the main pillars of neoliberal economic policy, governments often promote austerity measures which target health policies and other social policies as a natural and effective solution to improve the

economy, despite research demonstrating that austerity politics are a large-scale failure (Schui, 2014).

While anthropological research on the neoliberal reforms of social policies in the Nordic welfare system is limited, researchers from other academic disciplines such as migration studies and social work have studied the implementation of these policies from different theoretical perspectives. There is a growing body of literature from sociology and social work research with a special interest in how neoliberalist policies affect the organisation and implementation of social policies of the Nordic welfare state system “on the ground” (Hammer, 2021; Kamali & Jönsson, 2018b). There is a growing body of research literature which applies a Foucauldian framework in their analysis of Nordic *integration* policies, and several scholars have analysed the challenges that street-level bureaucrats face when implementing *integration* measures (see Guilherme Fernandes 2021 for a detailed overview). In the context of Norway. Guilherme Fernandes is one of few scholars who studies the ideologies, justifications, and goals of Norwegian *integration* policies (Fernandes, 2013, 2015; Gubrium & Fernandes, 2014). Her doctoral thesis draws on Foucauldian concepts of governmentality, discipline, and control to examine how the introduction program in Norway can be understood in relation to Foucault’s idea of governmentality (Guilherme Fernandes, 2021). She argues that the introduction program is a governmental technology of power which disciplines and shapes refugees and their family members into “ideal citizens” who are employed, economically independent, and culturally assimilated.

Chapter 2: An Institutional Ethnography of Norwegian *integration* policies

I use Institutional Ethnography (IE) as my methodological framework, as it is a form of ethnography which examines linkages between local experiences and trans-local processes of administration and governance (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011). This critical mode of inquiry was introduced by the sociologist Dorothy J. Smith (2005) and focuses on the ways in which day-to-day experiences of work³ is experienced, talked about, and made sense of by people in local settings (Tummons, 2017). The approach draws on feminist thinking which postulates that people's experiences and perspectives are always informed from their standpoint within a socio-political structure and that knowledge about a society must always come from a subject position "within" (DeVault & Gross, 2012). Thus, the goal of IE is to take peoples' "embodied knowledge" as a starting point to uncover how their everyday experiences and activities are shaped by and interwoven with the institutional relations that are being researched (LaFrance, 2019).

IE builds on a social constructivist epistemology, which views peoples' activities as organised through "the social" and recognises that the ways in which individuals understand the social world and construct knowledge are informed through their specific historical, social, and cultural contexts (Lombardo & Kantola, 2021; Tummons, 2017). Its ontology is informed by Marx' materialist method, which proposes that society is "an interrelated whole" based on an economic structure of production forces that forces people to engage in social relationships to produce the material requirements of their lives. Smith refers to these forces as trans-local "ruling relations" which connect people across time and space and organise their everyday activities and ideals of (work) practice. The ruling relations are "*the forms in which power is generated and held in contemporary societies*" (Smith 2006, p. 79) and manifest in bureaucracy, administration, management, professional organization, and cultural as well as institutional discourses. IE conceptualises institutions as dynamic fields of intersecting work processes, which take place at multiple sites and are organised around specific ruling functions, such as education. In this context, institutional texts form a powerful technology of establishing ruling relations as they shape peoples' workplace and coordinate their activities across time and space (Smith, 2006). To get an understanding of how work is coordinated across time and space and how individuals co-create the dynamics which characterise their local site, IE researchers combine text analysis, interviews, and observation to examine how individuals negotiate social, professional, and institutional systems in their day-to-day work practices and decisions (Smith, 2005).

³ Smith defines "work" as coordinated practices which a person routinely puts time, effort, and energy into in form of paid labour or "invisible work" such as child rearing (Smith, 2006)

Mapping out my field sites

An IE project always begins with a problematic experience by people in their work context, which suggests a direction for an investigation. These “uneasy moments” allow researchers to examine how individuals experience and negotiate the influence of institutional discourse, conflicting policies, professional expertise, and other factors in their daily work (LaFrance, 2019). Holstein and Gubrium (2011) describe IE as driven by the aim to uncover “how things happen” and compare it to grabbing a ball of a string, finding a string, and pulling it to find and describe social processes that shape people’s experiences. The lived experience of street-level bureaucrats who work with the introduction program for refugees serve as a starting point of my investigation. The 2021 Integration Act introduced a series of changes targeting the content and structure of the introduction program, arguably to improve refugees’ *integration* in the work sector (IMDi.no, 2020). But what about the front-line workers that play a crucial role in the practical implementation of these policies? What challenges do they experience in their day-to day work with refugees, and how does the new law impact their work? What support do they get from the institutions that are embedded in the Norwegian *integration* regime and to what extent do the imaginaries that inform these policies match their reality “on the ground”?

These problematics formed the “strings” I used to trace the ruling relations which coordinate how street-level bureaucrats carry out and negotiate their everyday *integration* work. For a full understanding of the institutional processes which shape the experience of these frontline workers, I followed the “chain of action” around the 2021 Integration Law from the policy-making process to its execution in classrooms and municipal *integration* offices. I build on ethnographic field work conducted at three different field sites: a department of IMDi, the governmental body which is responsible for administrating and implementing Norwegian *integration* policies, and the *integration* office and adult education centre of a small municipality. To establish rapport with my informants and for my presence to be naturalised, I accessed my field sites through unpaid internships at IMDi and the *integration* office. The internships allowed me to look “behind the scenes” and emerge myself into the daily work of the employees working in the respective institutions by joining them in their activities and through interviews. Additionally, I conducted interviews with state bureaucrats that were part of the project team which created the 2021 Integration Act. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I had to conduct my ethnographic fieldwork at IMDi in the digital realms of home office and through online interviews, which came with its own challenges. For clarity purposes, I will provide a short description of the respective field site and empirical data which informed my analysis at the beginning of each following chapter. All quotes from policy documents and interview statements are translations which I conducted from Norwegian to English and representative of

responses shared during interviews and informal conversations with 31 informants conducted during my fieldwork.

Positionality

Since qualitative research is informed by the researchers' identity and reflections throughout the different steps of the project, (Bourke, 2014) it is important to reflect on my positionality. My professional background, informed by my education, my student activism, and my work as advisor at an organisation which supports refugees and migrants, have informed my engagement with and commitment towards the study of *integration* policies in Norway. Together with my background as migrant, they have shaped how I developed the research project and analysis of the thesis at hand.

I became interested in Norwegian asylum and *integration* policies after I had moved to Norway in 2019. As I was involved with anti-racism student activism at that time, I moved in ethnically diverse social circles together with people whose parents had come to Norway as refugees, or who came as refugees themselves. As an ethnic German student, my experience of migrating to Norway was informed by the privileges that holding an EU-passport and being part of the Norwegian university system entails: visa-free entry and stay in the country, being able to decide between different student housing facilities, high-quality language classes, and a selection of courses I could choose from in line with my interests. These experiences stood in sharp contrast to the experiences of the people that came to Norway as refugees and motivated me to "dig deeper".

I was interested in examining how the policies that had shaped the lives of the people I encountered had been created, how they were implemented, and so on. In 2022, while I was writing the present thesis, I began to work in an organisation specialised in supporting refugees and migrants in their interactions with Norwegian municipal and state authorities. Through my encounters with people that the Norwegian state classifies as "refugees and their families", I have witnessed the long-term effects of Norwegian *integration* policies on refugees' private and work lives. As such, my academic interest and engagement with people that are subjected to the Norwegian *integration* regime have shaped how I have framed the research questions that informed my analysis of the empirical data. While it can be argued that my interests, my activist background, and my work experience have led me to approach my fieldwork with pre-informed assumptions and apprehensions, the social constructivist epistemological stance which informed my method of data collection rejects the idea of "objective and neutral" research (Lombardo & Kantola, 2021). I recognise that empirical data is constructed collaboratively by the researcher and the informant and that my experiences may have informed the critical stance of my data analysis. However, I perceive my experience as a strength as it was informed by the embodied experiences of the population that is targeted by the examined policies. This led me to ask relevant questions and challenge the "Nordic

exceptionalism” which leads Norwegians to downplay the experiences of racialised others and deny the existence of racism and other systems of structural discrimination and subordination (Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2016). By being transparent on my research positioning and the whole process of my research, I enable the reader to critically examine the empirical foundations and analytical conclusions which informed this thesis.

Since I conducted fieldwork at different sites in Norway, the present thesis is as much an anthropology “at home” as it is not (Madden, 2010). My social and work life is embedded in Norwegian social and economic structures, and I have adapted the Norwegian language and was shaped by some of its cultural norms. I have come to regard Norway as my new “home”, as the country has been the centre of my life for the past couple of years, and I have no plans of leaving the country. However, as I grew up outside of Norway, my concept of *home* is multi-relational, referring to the surroundings I was born into in Germany as well as the place I chose to relocate to. During my fieldwork, I shifted between “insider” and “outsider” position depending on the social and spatial context which I found myself embedded in. The hybridity of insider/outsider position was informed by the different ways in which my identity markers were perceived by my informants in relation to particular social contexts (Carling, Erdal, & Ezzati, 2014). As my work and social life are embedded in Norwegian circles and I speak the language fluently, I am considered as “successfully *integrated*” immigrant according to the public and political discourse. My background as ethnic and White German aligns with the Norwegian ideal of “imagined sameness” (Gullestad, 2006) and is usually perceived as “unthreatening” and “similar” enough by ethnic Norwegians to feel comfortable around me. This makes it easier for me to move over the “invisible fences” which ethnic Norwegians tend to construct towards other ethnic groups (Gullestad, 2002a) and allocates me an “insider” position in the presence of racialised immigrants and refugees. At the same time, my upbringing outside of Norway and resulting characteristics such as an accent and certain ways of conduct mark my position as “outsider”, which enabled me to take a more distant perspective and informed how I developed the research topic and analytic angles of the project from a critical point of view.

Ethical considerations

*“How can we not feel anxious about making **private** words **public**, revealing confidential statements made in the context of a relationship based on trust that can only be established between two individuals?”* (Bourdieu, 1999)

The words of Bourdieu echo a concern which has profoundly shaped the ways in which I present the results of my analysis. How could I ensure that I did not break the relationships of trust that I established with my informants during my fieldwork and that my discussion did not result in any negative repercussions for them? And how could I ensure that their statements and actions were

not misunderstood? As first step, I submitted an outline of my research project to the Norwegian Centre for Research Data, which approved my preliminary research questions, my fieldwork approach, and my methodology as ethical. I also obtained permission by the leadership of the IMDi division, the *integration* office, and the adult education centre to conduct fieldwork as part of my internship. To prevent any negative consequences for my informants, I anonymised their names and background information. Most importantly, my analysis presents the “*detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships*” (Denzin 1989, p. 83) of the lived experience of my informants and situates my observations in the wider historical and socio-political context of Norwegian *integration* policies to avoid the singling out of individuals.

A crucial part of conducting ethical ethnographic fieldwork is that informants are aware of the questions that inform a research project, what data will be collected, and how the data will be used in the subsequent analysis. I introduced my research project at the beginning of each internship and was transparent about my double role as intern and researcher, which I re-iterated prior to each conducted interview through an informed consent form with detailed information about my project. However, some of my informants may not have always been aware of the implications of my double role, such as that I would include observations of their behaviour in their everyday work into my analysis. In the *integration* office of the small municipality where I conducted parts of my fieldwork, my informants openly shared their feelings, worries, and confidential information with me, and I repeatedly observed them in vulnerable situations due to the dilemmas they faced in their work. I had to present the results of my analysis without violating my duty of silence or exposing my informants to potential repercussions. To solve this dilemma, I built on my empirical data to provide a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of *integration* work in the fictitious city of Låsen. The anonymisation does not influence the results of my analysis and all events and interactions which I refer to took place. I also sent a draft of my analysis to two of my informants prior to finalising the thesis to ensure that the situations and statements described in the thesis have no negative consequences for interpersonal relationships between the office staff or to other municipal actors.

Chapter 3: Historical and political context

Policy papers are significant “cultural texts” which shed lights on the ways in which policy problems are constructed and how political interests and ideological views become naturalised as policy narratives (Shore and Wright 2011, p.13). As material embodiments of state-ideas, policy documents serve to legitimise the “insupportable” by presenting the political and public practices of the state-system as legitimate and morally right (Abrams, 1988). A critical analysis of these texts in relation to their historical context is therefore crucial to shed light on the social imaginaries and political interests that informed the creation of Norwegian *integration* measures. In the present chapter, present a concise overview of Norway’s immigration history and its corresponding policy responses to situate the policies which I discuss in the thesis in their historical context. I then move on to explore the following questions: what social imaginaries of *integration* informed the creation process of Norwegian *integration* policies, and what role did neoliberal ideology play in the process? What social problems does the ideological project of *integration* construct, what solutions does it legitimise, and what technologies of power does the Norwegian *integration* regime build on to manage the conduct of the refugee population? What role do Norwegian *integration* policies assign to refugees and their families in the wider scheme of the Norwegian population? In my analysis, I draw on a selection of policy papers that informed the policy creation process of the 2003 Introduction Act and the 2021 Integration Act, which form the legal framework of the Norwegian *integration* apparatus. A description and overview over the empirical material which creates the basis for my analysis is listed in Appendix A.

A short introduction to Norway’s immigration history

Norway is an ethnically diverse country: in 2022, immigrants and their children made up around 15% of Norwegian society (Statistisk sentralbyrå, 2022a). Immigration to Norway is not a new phenomenon - workers from neighbouring countries such as Sweden have been migrating to Norway since the end of the 19th century, and the country has been resettling refugees in collaboration with UNHCR for more than 70 years (Gursli-Berg & Myhre, 2018; Statistisk sentralbyrå, 2020b). From the 1960s onwards, non-European migrants from countries such as Pakistan, Turkey, and Morocco began to arrive as guest workers and political exiles (Gursli-Berg & Myhre, 2018; Hagelund, 2002). Like other European countries, Norway did not have any *integration* policies prior to the 1970s. In the eyes of the Norwegian government, immigrants alone were responsible for “*integrating*” themselves into the Norwegian society by adapting to Norwegian values and customs – an expectation which often entailed processes of strict assimilation (Alseth, 2018). Many of the migrant workers lived in poor housing facilities and were subjected to exploitative and harsh working conditions. Concerns over the emergence of an ethnically based underclass as a result of the social problems that these

workers faced and the possible negative effect of cheap labour presence on Norwegian work conditions led to an immigration stop in 1975 (Hagelund, 2002).

Since the only possible way to enter Norway was as specialists or refugees and through family reunification, immigration continued mainly from countries in Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, as well as South and Latin America, classified as “non-Western” in Norwegian discourse. Due to the immigration stop, the proportions of “non-Westerners” and asylum seekers in the overall immigrant population grew rapidly from the end of the 1980s onwards. Although non-Western immigrants had similar education levels compared to the Norwegian population, they struggled to get access into the Norwegian job-market and many ended up working in un- or semi-skilled jobs in the service sector which they were overqualified for (Gullestad, 2002a). Among the immigrant population, refugees were the group with the highest unemployment rates and the poorest living conditions. For most of them social benefits were the most important source of income, especially in the first years after their arrival in Norway.

In the general discourse, refugees’ unemployment rates and long-term dependence on social welfare had been explained in neoliberalist terms through lack of speaking Norwegian, lack of qualification, and lack of motivation to *integrate*, neglecting other explanation factor such as ethnic discrimination in the labour market (Alseth, 2018). The numbers of refugees and asylum seekers, as well as their need for welfare benefits and their high unemployment rate, was utilised by the right-wing Progress Party (PP) to gain electoral support (Brochmann & Hagelund, 2011). The PP had been building on anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim propaganda to gain voter support and entered the Norwegian government through a minority coalition with the Conservative Party in 2013. The PP promotes an assimilationist policy which demands immigrants to fully conform to Norwegian values and ways of life and played a key role in introducing restrictive and neoliberal reforms to *integration* policies (Alseth, 2018). Their anti-refugee and anti-Muslim discourse in public and political debates influenced other political parties, who tailored their programs towards stricter immigration and *integration* policies to challenge the PP’s electoral success (Simonnes, 2013).

Norway’s partial citizens

With around 244 000 people with a refugee background registered in 2021, refugees make up one third of the immigrant population in Norway (Statistisk sentralbyrå, 2022b). While most refugees come as asylum seekers or through family reunification, one out of five came to Norway as so-called quota refugees which are registered at UNHCR (Statistisk sentralbyrå, 2012, 2022b). Each year, the Norwegian Parliament defines the size of the quota and decides which groups should be prioritised. While the countries of origin change from year to year, the government has a clear policy of favouring women, families with minors, and refugees who they regard as having an “*integration*

potential” through an educational or work background that is relevant for the Norwegian job market (Henriksen, 2012; Utne & Strøm, 2019). Most resettlement refugees are 30 years or younger and come as families with minors (Statistisk sentralbyrå, 2020b). Once the applicants are granted a permit, the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) and IMDI jointly organise their settlement in a municipality (Utne & Strøm, 2019). Contrary to quota refugees, asylum seekers must be in Norway or on the Norwegian border to be able to apply for protection and are subjected to a heavily regulated asylum policy (Nedrebø, 2010; Solberg, 2017).

Once their application is approved, quota refugees and asylum seekers receive a temporary residence permit which is valid for five years. Refugees can lose their residency permit under specific conditions such as breaking the law or providing incorrect information during the asylum application (UDI, 2022b). After five years, refugees can apply for a permanent residency permit, provided they can prove twelve months of regular income of around 280.000 Norwegian kroners, a minimum of A2 Norwegian language skills, and passing of a test about Norwegian society. Refugees with a permanent residency permit have unlimited right to live and work in Norway, however they can still lose their right to residence under certain conditions (UDI, 2022a). Their political and civic participation remains restricted as the right to participate in parliamentary elections and access to certain positions in the public sector are reserved for Norwegian citizens (Statistisk sentralbyrå, 2019).

Norwegian policies on residency and citizenship keep refugees in a vulnerable and impermanent state as “partial citizens” (Parr, 2015). The concept of partial citizenship was coined by Professor Parreñas (2001) in the context of her research on migrant Filipina domestic workers across the globe. Parreñas argues that low-skilled migrant workers have limited access to rights and services and are restricted in their personal freedom as they are denied full citizenship, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation in the countries that they are employed in. Bauböck (2011) expands the concept to asylum seekers and refugees. He argues that although people with a refugee status are granted the right to stay in a country, they remain vulnerable as they can lose their residency permit under certain conditions. The resulting hierarchies of belonging rank refugees and asylum seekers as partial citizens according to their legal status and restrict their social, political, and civic participation (Back, Sinha, & Bryan, 2012; Oliver, 2020).

To obtain citizenship, refugees must have lived in Norway for at least seven years, have a minimum level of Norwegian oral speech of B1, passed a so-called “citizen test” in Norwegian, and fulfil the requirements for a permanent residency permit (UDI, 2020). Access to citizenship is thus constructed as a commodity which refugees and other immigrants need to “earn” through investing financial and temporal resources into language and social studies classes, reaching a certain level of

language skills, and having a certain income which qualifies them for the application. Various practitioners and language experts have criticised the language requirement as unrealistic, denying refugees that have little or no school background the chance to obtain citizenship (Dalen, 2019). As refugees are overrepresented in low-income groups, many refugees struggle for years to fulfil the strict economic requirements for permanent residency and family reunification, which were introduced by the government in reaction to the so-called “refugee crisis” in 2015.

The government had justified the financial requirements as a “*necessary requirement for a fast and successful integration*” (Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet, 2015). Eggebø and Staver (2021) argue that these regulations use money as a tool of control, mirroring a broader trend in European immigration policies where income requirements function as crucial tool to regulate immigration. Various organisations such as Amnesty and UNHCR criticised Norwegian immigration policies for breaking human rights conventions and deliberately keeping refugees separate from their families through “insurmountable” legal obstacles (Amundsen, Johnsen, & Skarvøy, 2016; Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet, 2017b, 2017a; NOAS, 2021; Østby, 2016; UDI, n.d.-a, n.d.-b; Wienskol, 2016). Only 46% of refugees are employed after five years of stay in Norway, one out of two refugees earns less than the required minimum income to be able to apply for family reunification for up to ten years after their arrival in Norway, and many are dependent on social benefits as an additional source of income (Statistisk sentralbyrå, 2018, 2020a, 2021).

Neoliberalising *integration* – the 2003 Introduction Act

The rising numbers of refugees, the changing ethnic make-up of the immigrant population, and the dependence of the welfare system on high labour participation led the Norwegian government to establish a coherent *integration* policy in form of the 2003 Introduction Act (*introduksjonsloven*). The Act introduced three major reforms in form of a nation-wide introduction program: the intensity and extent of existing qualification measures for refugees was increased, participation was made mandatory for all newly arrived refugees, and all municipalities were required to offer a full-time program (Djuve, 2011). Access to social welfare benefits was replaced by an activation policy⁴ in form of a monthly “introduction allowance” that was tied to participation in the introduction program (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2003).

⁴ The activation policy mirrors a general trend in Norway and other Western countries to replace “welfare” with restrictive “workfare” policies to increase work activity among larger population. Starting in the 1990s, social policies were reformed into incentive schemes where recipients of welfare benefits had to accept public-service jobs or participate in job training programs and were sanctioned if they did not comply (Sahl, 2003).

The policy papers that underpin the Integration Act made refugees responsible for their unemployment and their “passivity” as recipients of social welfare (Guilherme Fernandes, 2021). Refugees’ unemployment rates and dependence on social welfare were explained through lack of speaking Norwegian, lack of skills, and lack of motivation to *integrate* (Alseth, 2018). The policy texts also indicated that refugees were lacking an understanding and endorsement of fundamental “Norwegian values” such as gender equality. The papers constructed an image of refugees as “unmotivated” and “too lazy” to work (Guilherme Fernandes, 2021) and emphasised the different cultural background and fast growth of the refugee population to re-incinerate the need for a nation-wide policy reform (**Anon 2003, p. 25**). The neoliberal rhetoric of the policy papers was used to justify the implementation of a nation-wide technique of government in form of a qualification program which should create “responsibilised citizen-subjects” (Ferguson, 2010) by transforming refugees into “better versions” of themselves. The main argument was that refugees and their family members need to be “taught” how to productively function in a Norwegian work setting:

“Social assistance as the main source of income for newly arrived immigrants has proven to be an unfortunate arrangement over time, as the immigrant can easily get used to a need-based support system and the role of a passive recipient. It is one of the purposes of the law that the program participant actively provides something, first and foremost for the benefit of oneself, but also for society, to make himself entitled to the financial benefit.” (Norges Stortinget 2005, p. 16).

The rhetoric of the policy papers underpinning 2003 Introduction Act must be seen in the wider context of neoliberal reforms which the Norwegian government had been implementing in the public and private sector since the end of the 1980s. The reforms re-organised the social welfare state and included New Public Management (NPM) strategies such as economic incentives and cost-efficiency measures, cuts to public spending, and introducing privatisation in the public sector (Alseth, 2018). NPM strategies build heavily on the responsibility and pro-activity of individuals and are applied by business enterprises to boost work performance. According to Shore and Wright (2011), NPM is a form of governance which combines techniques of surveillance and discipline and deflects attention away from the system of state power which designed these political technologies to transform people into productive, self-managed, and docile workers.

Building heavily on neoliberal goals of profit maximization, efficiency, and individual responsibility, the Act introduced incentivisation policy as cornerstones of municipal *integration* work. Refugees were constructed as potential sources of labour, whose human capital could be enhanced through an elaborate course and work practice system which taught the target group fundamental Norwegian values and Norwegian ways of (work) life (Kommunal- og Regionaldepartement, 2003). To “activate” the refugee population in working age between 18 and

55, they should attend full-time, full-year courses to acquire “*basic proficiency in Norwegian*”, “*basic insights into Norwegian societal life*”, and enough work practice to “*function*” on the job market as fast as possible. The program “*intensified and streamlined*” existing training courses in Norwegian and social studies which should be adapted to an individual’s personal background and goals to increase the “*efficiency*” of existing qualification measures (Kommunal- og Regionaldepartementet, 2005). Access to social welfare was no longer conceptualised as a fundamental right accessible to all inhabitants of Norway, but an incentive that refugees and their families had to earn every month by participating in the introduction program.

Integration as business model

Although the program was introduced as “*the biggest measure in integration policies that Norway has ever had*”, the law bill did not offer any definition of the term *integration*. In the Introduction Act itself, *integration* is not referred to at all (Kommunal- og Regionaldepartementet, 2005; Norges Stortinget, 2003). The round letter from 2003, which provides municipalities with specific recommendations on how to implement the Introduction Act, promotes an understanding of *integration* = getting a job as fast as possible:

“Working life is the most important arena for newly arrived immigrants to become part of the community. In addition to income and financial independence, work has value in the form of social affiliation and having work provides the opportunity to realize one’s own abilities and opportunities.”
(Anon 2003, p. 8)

The underlying message is clear: without employment, refugees are not regarded as valuable members of Norwegian society. Peoples’ legal “refugee” status and their educational background become the defining elements of their identity. Rather than a social service, *integration* is constructed as a commodity whose accessibility is conditional upon refugee’s ability to participate in the Norwegian labour force. The purpose of the introduction program is to transform refugees into economic neoliberal subjects who can contribute to the Norwegian “machinery of production” through taxes and physical labour (Foucault 2008, lecture 9). This neoliberal approach to *integration* as economic transaction reduces refugees to human capital and ranks their worth based on the applicability of their education and work experience in the Norwegian job market.

At the same time, the *integration* model commodifies refugees as tokens which the Norwegian government trades with municipalities and whose market value is enhanced through the mandatory introduction program. As the settlement of refugees is voluntary for municipalities, the Integration Act builds on an incentive system in form of “*integration grants*” to make *integration* work more attractive for municipalities, presenting it as a subsidy to the municipal “investment” into

future labour force. As the grants are not earmarked and stretch over a five-years period, municipal profit depends on the number of refugees that are settled and the amount of money that is spent on the administration and implementation of the introduction program (Brochmann & Hagelund, 2011). The faster municipalities manage to get refugees into some form of employment, the more profit they can make from the *integration* grants and tax revenues paid by refugees (Brochmann & Hagelund, 2011). Importantly, the law and corresponding policy papers stay silent on the settlement phase of refugees and their families prior to the program start, apart from briefly mentioning that this “phase of establishment” could be included into the introduction program (p. 58 law bill). *Integration* is thus constructed as business model which follows the principles of market economy and is restricted to the spheres of classrooms and the working hours of local businesses.

For each refugee, municipalities receive around 1,02 million NOK over a period of five years – municipalities can earn millions of NOK by settling refugees and operating asylum centres (Hanstad, 2016). Some municipalities have maximised their profit by assigning employees to administer different grant schemes – in 2019, Kristiansand received over 315 million NOK through one full-time employee who had specialised on grant applications (IMDi.no, 2019b, 2022b). In 2021, the government paid out a total of eight billion Norwegian Kroners (NOK) in grants to municipalities (IMDi.no, 2022b). The decision not to earmark the *integration* grants forms a political-horse trade which hazards the consequence that some municipal leaders use considerable sums of the money for other municipal expenses such as operating costs (Borkamo & Høyem, 2009). This “*laissez-faire*” approach was only marginally affected by recently introduced changes in form of the 2021 Integration Act, which I will elaborate in detail below.

The welfare state in crisis

Despite framing the Introduction Act as an important reform which would facilitate municipal *integration* work and improve refugees’ chances on the Norwegian job market, the economic success of the introduction program was limited. The negative employment gap between refugees and ethnic Norwegians remained, and many refugees ended up with temporary employment contracts in low-skilled job and continued to be dependent on social benefits (Bratsberg, Raaum, & Røed, 2016; Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019).

After the 2017 governmental elections, where the PP secured its standing as third-strongest political party, the new government published a political platform which identified *integration* and safeguarding existing social welfare schemes as two of Norway’s biggest social challenges (Bergh & Karlsen, 2017; Statsministerens kontor, 2018). The platform described immigration as a two-sided sword which contributes to economic growth and a diversification of human capital, while at the same time threatening the sustainability of the welfare state through low-skilled immigrants that are

dependent on social welfare. If possible, this threat should be controlled as much as possible through a “*restrictive, legal and responsive immigration policy*” which focuses on keeping refugees outside of Norway through providing humanitarian efforts in “*surrounding areas*” and prioritising quota refugees with the “*highest chance for successful integration*” (Statsministerens kontor 2018, p. 20). The platform announced a holistic reform of the whole *integration* field which should solve these social challenges and improve the overall living conditions for both the refugee and the majority population.

As part of the *integration* reform, the Norwegian government initiated a re-making of the legal landscape in form of the 2021 Integration Act. The reform was justified through an evaluation study from the FAFO Institute for Labour and Social Research, which had revealed major shortcomings in the implementation and results introduction program (Djuve, Kavli, Sterri, & Bråten, 2017). On average, only four out of ten course participants passed the A 2 level language test, a considerable part of participants was dependent on social benefits after program completion, and only 40% of male and around 20% of female course participants were permanently employed several years after completing the program.

The study also showed strong differences regarding the organisation, content, and structure of introduction programs across municipalities. In addition to the FAFO study, the planned policy changes were justified through the “Brochmann II report” from 2017, which mapped out long-term consequences of migration on Norwegian society and economy, including the effects of high immigration on trust and unity. The report warned that existing *integration* policies had to be improved to avoid that refugees’ “cultural differences” and precarious economic situation would “weaken the foundation of unity and trust” of Norway’s society. According to the authors, expectations that immigrants had to support foundational values of democracy, gender equality, childrens’ rights, and equal participation in work life needed to be communicated more clearly through the introduction program (Ministry of Education and Research Norway, 2017).

The reform should succeed in what the Introduction Act had failed to achieve: transforming the “problem population” of refugees into good “citizen workers” which could take the jobs which Norwegians “no longer want” (Gullestad, 2002a). Work was presented as a crucial *integration* tool deeply intertwined with the wider Norwegian societal life whose benefits went beyond financial independence, giving “community, freedom, and independence” and contributing to the creation of societal values. The then integration minister Jan Tore Sanner conceptualised *integration* as a simple socio-economic equation: every Norwegian kroner invested in improving the introduction program would equate to four Norwegian kroner sur-plus in form of tax income (Sanner, 2018). By providing refugees with the competencies that are sought-after in the vocational sector of the Norwegian

labour market, they would play an important role in fulfilling the demand for around 70.000 workers in specific skilled jobs (*yrkesfag*) within the next 10 years and therefore “*contribute to solving important social tasks*” (Kunnskapsdepartementet 2019, p.8). Refugees had become the solution for Norway’s societal challenge to feed the engine of the social welfare state with the required “fuel” of skilled workers. The planned policy changes put an even stronger emphasis on neoliberalist tools of effectivization, work orientation, individual responsibility, and incentivisation measures. The paper shifted the responsibility of the policy failure to the street-level bureaucrats which were implementing the program, arguing that they made too little use of the “flexibility” of existing regulations and therefore failed to enhance refugees’ human capital in line with the needs of the Norwegian job market.

Same, same but different? The 2021 Integration Act

In 2018, the Norwegian parliament commissioned the “integration section” of the Ministry of Education and Research (KD), the main administrative body for institutions, policies, and research in the educational sector, to write a law bill for the so-called “Integration Act”, which would replace the 2003 Introduction Act. At that time, the section was a key player in the Norwegian *integration* regime and responsible for developing and coordinating a wide range of policies, measures, grant schemes and research activities which address issues of citizenship, refugee settlement, qualification programs such as the introduction program, and societal issues such as negative social control⁵ (Regjeringen, 2022).

Among other changes, the law introduced a differentiated program length for refugees depending on their educational background, mandatory courses in parenting and “life coping skills”, and the counties as “new actor” in the *integration* regime (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2020b). I will dedicate this chapter to discuss how the process of writing the new law was a tug of war between neoliberal, bio-political agendas and voices from practitioners and academics about “what is right”. To do so, I will draw on three in-depth digital interviews of bureaucrats, as well as the law bill that informed the 2021 Integration Act. The three interlocuters Marcus, Andrea, and Guro, were part of a project group which had been tasked to go through the 2003 Introduction Act and set up a new law which translated the measures that the government had introduced in the political platform.

⁵ Negative social control is defined as “*pressure, supervision, threats or coercion that systematically restricts someone in their life and repeatedly prevents them from making independent choices about their life and future. For example, this applies to the individual’s self-determination over their identity, body, sexuality, freedom to choose friends, leisure activities, religion, dress, education, job, boyfriend/girlfriend and spouse, and to ask for health care*” (translation retrieved from IMDi.no, 2022c; Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet, 2017c)

The tug of war between politics and practice

The project leader Marcus was an “old hand” who had been working with the legislations of the Norwegian *integration* regime and the implementation of the introduction program since the beginning of 2000. For Marcus, working on the law bill had been a balancing act between political guidelines, recommendations from the 2017 FAFO study and the Brochmann II report, and strict budget restrictions.

“We work against the political leadership in order to get the best possible result, at the same time we have to follow the political guidelines”,

Marcus explained to me. Based on the political goals that the new government had announced in the platform, the project team identified three main mandates: a focus on formal competency to attune refugees’ qualification to local labour market needs, more differentiation in the overall program length to get municipalities to use the “flexibility” of the law, and improved Norwegian and social studies training to enhance refugees’ human capital. The project team had been instructed to stay within the existing state budget for municipal *integration* work and was told not to add regulations or measures which would cause additional costs. Moreover, the government had given specific notifications which the project team had to follow although they were not backed by empirical evidence or professional recommendation, such as introducing an *integration* contract. Most municipalities and organisations had criticised the *integration* contract as unnecessary paperwork which would create confusion among refugees and additional work for employees – a symbolic political gesture which emphasises the increased focus on the duties that both municipalities and refugees have in “doing the work” of *integration* and emphasise that “*the participant has to commit to participate in different measures to assure a successful integration*” (p. 29). By shifting the concept of *integration* from a social contract to a work contract, the contract re-incinerates the *integration* business model as it presents *integration* as a business transaction limited to the facilities of classrooms and local businesses.

Marcus was not the only interlocuter who experienced the work on the new *Integration* Act as a turmoil between political agendas and the interests of other actors. Andrea, one of the lawyers in the project team who had been working in the governmental integration sector for about a year, saw her work as a balancing act between the feedback that they had received in the hearings and “translating” the demands of the political platform into the new law on *integration* and corresponding regulations:

“If the politicians say that something has to stand in the law, it has to enter into the law.”

The pawn sacrifice of higher education

Within the strict framework which the political guidelines imposed on the project team, its members ended up in a “tug of war” between political agendas of control and profit maximisation and municipal interests backed up by empirical research. As the formal education system in Norway is regulated by the so-called “Training Law” (*Opplæringsloven*), the team had to balance two legal frameworks within a legal landscape that fluctuates in conjunction with the political agendas of the respective politicians in power. According to Andrea, the result was a pragmatic bricolage which weaved new guidelines announced by the political platform into existing structures within the program and re-shaped pieces of the program to match the strict budget restrictions:

“One has to see the new law in its whole – in the end we managed to find a balance.”

As example, Andrea named the differentiated program length which had been sharply criticised in many hearing replies. The project group had set up program times of different lengths to increase the chances for refugees with little or no school background to complete a formal education - one of the main goals that had been addressed in the political platform. The team had to shorten the program length for refugees with higher education to compensate for the additional costs resulting from the longer program length for refugees with little or no school background. For Andrea and the rest of the project team, the decision was a moral dilemma:

“One looks at the numbers one has based on competency, how much time one can take to have a certain room to manoeuvre. One has to differentiate the program time in a way that is possible to practise, and one has to differentiate between individual considerations – what is best for the individual person – and what is best for everyone. One has to choose between individual consideration, and structures which make it easy enough to divide people in several paths.”

The main goal of the introduction program was to help people getting **a job** as fast as possible – whether that job matched refugees’ actual competencies or their dreams, was of secondary importance in that context. In the end, the needs of the many and the neoliberal quest for “efficiency” outweighed the dreams and aspirations of the few that had a background in secondary education – according to Andrea, a pawn sacrifice to align political agenda and municipal interests:

“We have felt that we had some limitations we had to implement. For example, those with a minimum of secondary education, which have a different length in the training than others. The thought here was – we want to have more completing former secondary education. So those which will have this training full-time must get more time in the introduction program. But then those who already have secondary education must get a bit less, because we think that they will manage better when they come out. And that have been very challenging trade-offs to make.”

Guro saw the final law bill formed a patchwork of compromises which prioritised the feedback of governmental institutions over voices from the field. According to her, the team had struggled to align the political demands that been voiced in the political platform and the objections from practitioners and researchers:

“You cannot satisfy everyone’s wishes and needs. It is clear that the political platform was one thing, and the guidelines it provided. And another limitation was clearly the budget, which we had talked about earlier. But otherwise, professional considerations of arguments for and against have been very important. The feedback from the directorates IMDI and Kompetanse Norge has been central because when you sit in the Department, you are unfortunately a bit removed from what happens in the municipalities.”

Carrots for municipalities, sticks for refugees

Guro’s main task was to create the legal framework for what she considered the main goal of the law: allowing more refugees to combine their language training with formal education such as elementary or secondary school. She disclosed that the project group was hesitant to impose law regulations which would enhance the program quality but challenging for municipalities to implement:

“Of course, it is a big plus if a teacher also has a different competence. But when it comes to legalising it, as said, that is a very strong tool and would be a bit... it would be a bit unrealistic to demand that everyone should also have multi-cultural communication, even though that would be good.”

This quote reveals an interesting paradox, which I would also repeatedly encounter during my fieldwork at IMDi: on the one hand, the bureaucrats seemed to have no problems to apply the “*very strong tool*” of law regulations on the refugee population and to demand formal competencies based on premises which practitioners and researchers deemed unrealistic and unethical. On the other hand, the interviews revealed a strong hesitance towards subjecting the municipalities and their employees to the same kind of control. By building the *integration* model on market rules of minimal regulation and linking it to per capita payments, the policy makers created the problem of the varying quality of the introduction program. The new law formed an attempt to correct the “*problem*”, however the policy makers were inhibited by the minimal regulations which lay at the core of the incentive-oriented *integration* business model. This put the project team in a difficult situation as it was confronted with the crossroad between keeping the municipal scope of action as wide as possible – which was highly important to municipalities – and the necessity to intensify control measures to get municipalities to improve the quality of their introduction programs.

The solution of the project team was to present new requirements such as mandatory courses on “life mastering” and “parenting counselling”, which had been dictated by the political leadership, as changes which would make it easier for municipalities to tailor the introduction program to the individual participants. According to Guro, the team members had specific expectations with regards to how municipalities should improve their existing program – none of them legalised in the final law:

“To achieve what is stated in the new law, the municipalities cannot continue to work in the way that they have always done. They have to change; they have to think in new ways. We want the changes that will now come into force to contribute to innovation in training methods, a greater degree of cooperation with other municipalities, a greater degree of flexibility, the use of online digital training. But it is clear that... if the municipalities continue the same way they have been doing, then one will not be able to successfully implement the new law.”

Rather than directly subjecting municipalities to the force of the law, the project team assumed that the new regulations would indirectly force them to “be creative” and use the range of possibilities that the law provided. Often, the project team would introduce new guidelines in form of minimum requirements which created a “middle ground”, as they left the concrete implementation of these requirements up to the municipalities. In the eyes of the project group, the demands were a starting point which should motivate the municipalities and front-line workers to be “innovative” and “do more”. On a grander scheme, the new law can be compared to a poker game whose success depended heavily on municipal good-will and the willingness of employees to invest time and energy into changing the program. Mechanisms of control and discipline, which would ensure that municipalities would follow up on the regulations, were still lacking, and most of the “heavy lifting” of the *integration* work stayed placed on refugees’ shoulders. Both Marcus and Guro emphasised that the new law should improve refugees’ employment rates through strategic changes in the introduction program which adapted the existing bureaucratic system through the new standardised elements and the differentiated program time – without being sure whether these changes would have the desired effect. According to Marcus, the team was aware of the shortcomings of the new law, whose success still depended on whether municipalities were willing to follow the regulations. Marcus told me that it was still possible to change elements and regulations of the new introduction law if they should prove to fail their purpose. His words illustrate what Wacquant describes as “post hoc functionality”: a mix of policy intent, sequential bureaucratic adjustment and political trial and error applied at the intersection of public measures concerning the low-skill employment market and public aid. Guro stated that the project team regarded the new law as an experiment with uncertain outcome:

“I have to be honest, I am very, very curious to see the impact. This has to be after several years. But it is clear that, currently, only very few refugees are coming. So, the participant groups in the municipalities can be quite small. This makes it difficult to split them in different groups, maybe. But as I said, one can think flexible training, use different tools, does one manage to think inter-municipal collaboration. But it is clear that time will show whether we can achieve the intention behind.”

Chapter 4: The bio-politics of the Norwegian *integration* regime

The Norwegian *integration* regime weaves surveillance, school, and financial sanctions into an elaborate apparatus to shape refugees' human capital and conduct according to the needs of the Norwegian labour market and policy makers' ideals of *integration*. By integrating activation and education policy, the Norwegian *integration* apparatus constructs a Foucauldian "disciplinary society" which instructs refugees on how to be a good "citizen-worker", attempting to shape how they think and act according to Norwegian (work) norms (Gubrium & Fernandes, 2014). Labour is an important bio-political technology to regulate populations, providing the techniques to rationalise and economize on (wo)manpower as cost-effective as possible (Foucault, 2013b). According to Guilherme Fernandes (2021), the introduction program serves as a technique of power which governs, disciplines, and shapes refugees' behaviour according to what government officials imagine as "successful *integration*". The aim is to turn refugees into "ideal citizens" which are self-sufficient through employment and have adapted Norwegian values, norms, and ways of (work) life. Through program participation, refugees' human capital is optimised according to the needs of the Norwegian labour market. Provided that the qualification offered through the introduction program is effective, job placements of refugees can fill gaps in the local job market and thereby contribute to municipal tax income.

The law bill of the 2003 Introduction Act argued that the introduction program would improve refugees' quality of life by getting them into employment (p. 19) and have several benefits for the Norwegian welfare system, which depends on high labour market participation (Kommunal- og Regionaldepartement, 2003). The overall unemployment rate would be reduced, more refugees would become financially independent from social benefits, which are financed through Norwegian tax money, and the overall production and tax income would increase. Drawing on statistics such as low employment rates among "Non-Western" refugees in the first years after their settlement, the law bill argued that the introduction program would improve refugees' chances to get a job and therefore improve their quality of life (p. 19). Norwegian government authorities had specific ideas about the kind of jobs that the program participants should be introduced to, filling the gaps in low-skilled labour and vocational job sectors which are unpopular among ethnic Norwegians:

"In many municipalities, the personnel office can provide an overview of small jobs, engagements, seasonal work and more permanent positions within several occupational areas. They can also profile the workforce potential of the participants in the introductory program vis-à-vis the other agencies and have an ongoing overview of relevant participants for placement. Municipal business owners or executive leaders within, for example, kindergartens, schools, after-school programs, technical support, operation and maintenance, caretaker services, nursing, and care, etc.

can also be useful contacts to identify potential workplaces.” (Kommunal- og Regionaldepartementet 2005, p.36).

The introduction program combines the supportive “left hand” of social and educational welfare with the penalising “right hand” of restrictive workfare policies and relies heavily on the anatomo-political tools of discipline and control to channel refugees into the lower segments of the Norwegian labour society. This also becomes apparent in the photographs used throughout the White paper which lay the foundation for the 2021 Integration Act and are displayed in illustration 1.



Illustration 1: *Photographic illustrations from the White paper “Integration through knowledge. The Government’s integration strategy 2019-2022” (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019). The photographs show people with an ethnic minority background in various work settings indicating vocations such as nursing, hair stylist, mechanic, and unskilled jobs such as shop assistant and logistics worker.*

The introduction program as anatomo-political tool of control

The policies of the Introduction Act embed the individual bodies of refugees and their families into an economic-educational system of control which dictates where people live and how they spend most of their day. To be able to participate in the introduction program, refugees and their families must settle a specific municipality which is chosen by state authorities. Only refugees that are settled after agreement between municipalities, IMDi, and UDI have the right to attend the introduction program, and people lose their access to social welfare if they decide to move to a different city or drop out of the program (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2003). These restrictions guarantee a systematic spatial distribution of refugees and their family members in the whole country, limit their agglomeration in urban areas and fixate them in a specific place for a minimum of two years. A part-time participation in the program is explicitly ruled out, even if participants have health issues or are incapacitated to work. The structure and length of the introduction program is based on an individual action plan which is set up by a program counsellor in collaboration with the participant and re-evaluated on a regular basis. Program counsellors play a crucial role in safeguarding the surveillance and control of refugees and their family members:

“Close individual follow-up is of great importance for the implementation of the program. (...) Central tasks in the follow-up will be to map the individual background and competence, and to provide guidance to the program participant and the various bodies involved in the work of creating an individual qualification plan. The program advisor must also maintain regular contact with the participant throughout the program and provide support as needed.” (Regionaldepartement 2003, p. 57).

Following a carrot and stick approach, the monthly introduction allowance is utilised as a disciplinary technique which functions as economic incentive as it is higher than unemployment benefits. According to Guilherme Fernandes (2021), the comparatively high level of the allowance serves as a powerful gratification tool to participants which conform to the regulations, norms, and expected behaviour of the program. At the same time, the allowance is instrumentalised as punishment tool through financial cuts in case of “illegitimate absence” from the program. Municipalities can also decide to exclude participants from the program in case of repeated or long periods of absence, who thereby lose the right to social benefits. Fernandes argues that the introduction allowance is “the epitome of a disciplinary power technique” which micromanages the behaviour of the participants through observation, monitoring, rewarding, and sanctioning if participants fail to live up to the rules defined by the law and program regulations.

As part of the surveillance apparatus, a National Introduction Register (NIR) stores personal information about each participant, including their address and for asylum, and information about

their participation in the introduction and language classes, including absence, passed exams, time of program start, and overall number of participated hours. The index is accessible for municipalities, UDI, IMDi, and the Police, and forms the base for the payment of *integration* grants to the municipalities, as well as for the administration of people's applications for permanent residency or citizenship (Kommunal- og Regionaldepartementet 2005, p.102).

Between 2003 and 2017, several amendments were introduced which imposed further measures of behavioural control on refugees and their families (Djuve & Kavli, 2019). In 2005, Norwegian government authorities introduced a policy which required refugees to document a minimum of 300 hours of classes to obtain permanent residency. The amount was raised up to 600 in 2011. In 2015, PP member and Minister of Immigration and Integration Sylvie Listhaug suggested a range of restrictive *integration* policies which marked a historic change in Norwegian immigration history, using the so-called "refugee crisis" which had been triggered by the Syrian civil war as a justification. The changes in Norwegian Foreigner Law included stricter entry policies, new financial requirements, and tighter restrictions for family reunification, and were supported by a majority in Parliament. The new regulations also introduced a longer time of stay, language requirements and the passing of a social studies test in Norwegian for obtaining citizenship, intensifying the bio-political attempt to turn refugees into "good" Norwegian citizens. While the government justified the tightening of the requirements as a "*necessary requirement for a fast and successful integration*", various organisations such as Amnesty and UNHCR criticised the law changes for breaking human rights and refugee conventions (Amundsen et al., 2016; Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet, 2017a; Østby, 2015; Wienskol, 2016). In 2021, it became mandatory to pass B1 level in Norwegian oral language skills for obtaining permanent residency. According to Djuve & Kavli (2019), the main policy changes resulted in an "increasingly controlling activation regime" over the refugee population.

Disciplining refugees into "good citizens"

The purpose of the introduction program stretches beyond neoliberal goals of "activation" – the language and social study course elements are supposed to ensure refugees' "*conformity towards the role as employee and wage earner*" (Kommunal- og Regionaldepartement 2003, p. 36) and teach them how to become "good" citizens who adhered to Norwegian value and culture. Within the limited time frame of its courses, the introduction program takes up a wide range of complex topics which aim to prepare its participants for everyday social and working life. The pedagogical value was emphasised repeatedly throughout the 2003 law bill: through the content and the structure of the introduction program, refugees and their families were supposed to learn values which the law regards as crucial, namely gender equality, economic independence, and individual responsibility. By making the program "*as similar as possible to the conditions that apply in working*

life” (Kommunal- og Regionaldepartementet 2005, p. 70) through a full-time set-up of 37.5 weekly hours, four weeks' vacation time, and the taxation of their monthly allowance, refugees should “get used to” the conditions of Norwegian work life.

As Foucault had highlighted, educational institutions are crucial in the bio-political production of a docile and productive refugee population which can easily be incorporated into existing economic structures. The school system of the introduction program imposes the “legitimate national culture” through the teachings about the Norwegian language, history, local customs, laws, and values. According to Fernandes, the program serves as a government technique of discipline which seeks to produce the “good and employed citizen” by ensuring that refugees modify their behaviour to eventually live up to “the normative expectation of full employment” (Gubrium & Fernandes, 2014). Bourdieu (1994) highlights that education systems play a crucial role in inscribing social divisions and hierarchies into people’s mental structures to create a shared consensus and submission to the existing social order. Building on Bourdieu (1994), I argue that the courses serve as a tool to shape refugees’ mental structures and impose a specific understanding of labour as a core element of Norwegian national identity. The full-time courses introduce refugees to the unified linguistic and behavioural codes which enable them to function in the Norwegian “cultural market” and are a deliberate attempt to change refugees’ attitudes and behaviour.

The course elements are motivated by the bio-political goal to shape participants’ lives according to Norwegian views on the “right” values and way of life, intensified through the new mandatory courses “parental guiding” and “life coping skills” introduced through the 2021 Integration Act. While the obligatory parenting course is supposed to “*create safe parents which can give children a good upbringing, and thereby support integration in Norway*” (IMDi.no, 2021), the course on “life coping skills” aims to “*strengthen participants’ motivation and mastering in encountering new expectations and a new society*” (IMDi.no, 2022c). The life coping skills course comprises of a minimum of 25 hours and is divided into the two theme blocks “migration, health and diversity” and “career competency”, which are supposed to help refugees to “*identify and use their own competency and resources*” (IMDi.no, 2022c). According to Guilherme Fernandes (2021), the two courses are disciplinary techniques operating through the technology of power and domination, as the courses and their curriculum are mandatory, and the technology of the self, inflicted through the course content. She argues that the courses are informed by underlying imaginaries of the course participants as “unmotivated”, “lacking coping skills”, and “unsafe parents” who do not know how to raise their children and need to be transformed through the program to live up to Norwegian standards of “good parenting” and the ideal neoliberal “citizen worker”. Both elements include teaching about negative social control, forms of violence in close relations, forced marriage, and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) – topics which are also incorporated into the curriculum for social

studies and language courses. Since the 1980s, the topics have made a frequent appearance in Norwegian media and politics and are utilised to problematise Muslim immigrants as threatening fundamental values in Norwegian society (Hagelund, 2002). To sum it up, the introduction program provides a powerful bio-political tool which combines technologies of domination and power with technologies of the self to turn refugees and their family members into “good partial citizens” which abide to Norwegian norms and values of the private and work life (Olwig, 2011).

Chapter 5: IMDi or The facilitator of the *integration* regime

To explore how the social imaginaries and bio-political goals underlying the Norwegian *integration* regime are translated into local practices, it is crucial to have a closer look at the Directorate for Integration and Diversity (IMDi). The history of IMDi dates to the beginnings of the 2000s, when the 2003 Introduction Act marked a profound shift in political thinking towards the bio-political management of the refugee population. The Directorate was established in response to the new focus on *integration* politics to form a bridge between the Norwegian governmental apparatus and street-level bureaucrats in the municipalities. For a deeper understanding of the procedural practices and social imaginaries which govern the day-to-day work of IMDi bureaucrats, I conducted six weeks of fieldwork in form of an internship in one of IMDi's departments, combined with 17 semi-structured interviews of IMDi bureaucrats I met through my fieldwork. The specific section, job positions, and personal information of my informants are not disclosed to ensure their anonymity. The field work at IMDi was challenging as the Covid-19 pandemic limited my field work to digital meetings and online interviews. Since the interaction with my colleagues was restricted to e-mails and the chat and video function of Microsoft Team, I struggled with the two-dimensionality of my field on the computer screen.

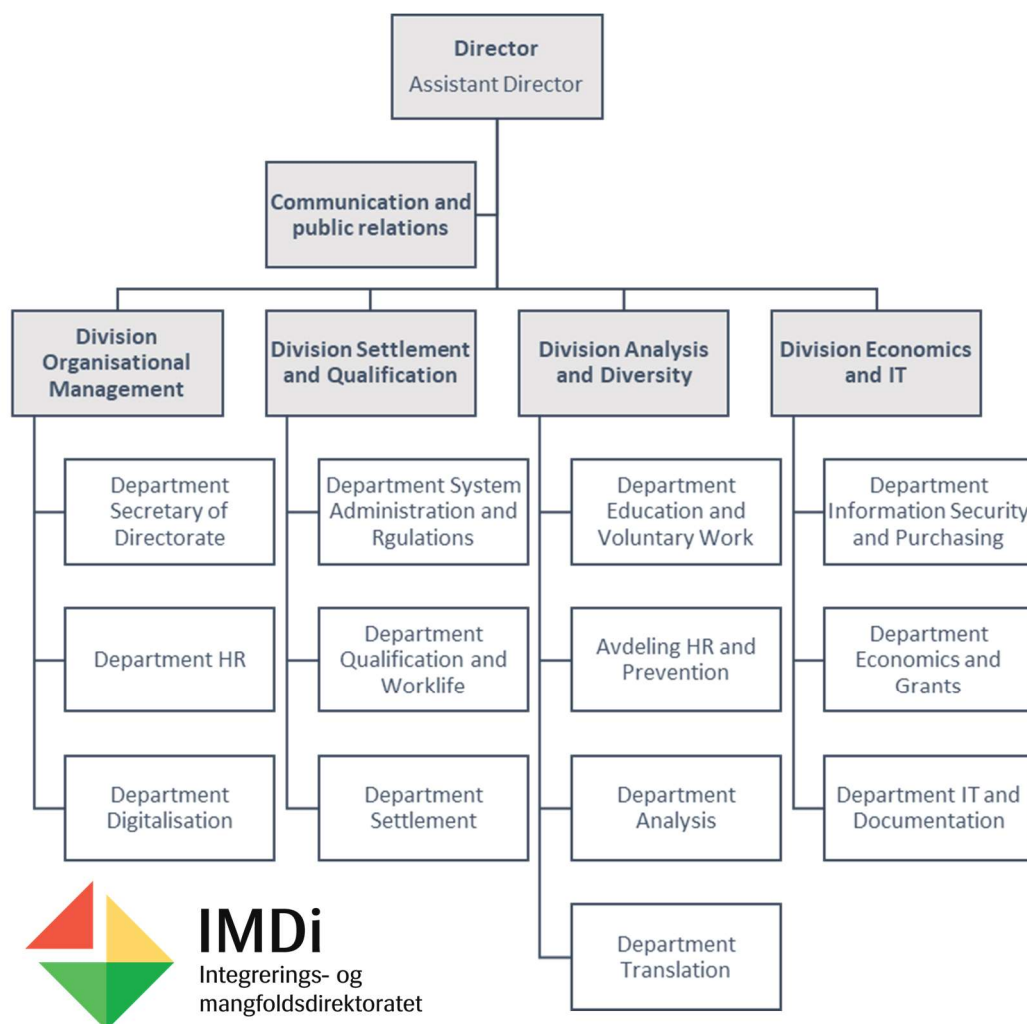
As my colleagues were involved in several projects with tight deadlines, there was little room for breaks and personal conversations. During my participation in the team meetings and the interviews I conducted with employees that were linked to the department, I hardly managed to get past the "mask" of the loyal bureaucrat that my interlocutors were displaying towards me. The setting resembled Berreman's experience in "Behind Many Masks" (2007), where he describes the back-and-forth dance between the interlocuter-as-performer who attempts to keep the ethnographer-as-audience out of the range of the "back region" by controlling their performance, preferably unrealised by the ethnographer. Like Berreman's interlocutors, most bureaucrats at IMDi were protective of the "secrets" of their work and colleagues and only allowed me to see the image of what they regarded as acceptable. While most employees of the section where I interned enthusiastically welcomed me at the beginning, invited me to join their meetings and positively responded to my interview invitations, more and more of my e-mails were not responded. In the last two weeks of my field work, I was hardly invited to any meetings. As we were approaching summer holidays and most of my informants had to meet deadlines, peoples' general enthusiasm about being monitored in their work and answering questions of a curious anthropology student had vanished. Often, I felt like I was unable to cope with the vast amount of textual information in form of reports and other government documents which were circulating in our day-to-day work. However, retrospectively, I recognise the feelings of urgency and pressure to produce and inadequacy of

tackling the workload as symptomatic for the neoliberal orientation of governmental institutions in Norway.

A short introduction to IMDi

As specialist directorate, administrative body and the national competence centre for integration, IMDi's mandate is to implement the Government's *integration* policy, with an operating budget of 302,5 million NOK in 2022. This includes coordinating measures against negative social control, forced marriage, and FGM. A central part of IMDi's work is to administrate the five-years *integration* grants alongside an elaborate system of grant schemes which municipal actors and voluntary organisations can apply for (Arbeids- og Inkluderingsdepartementet, 2022). As administrative organ and knowledge centre, IMDi is tasked to produce and disseminate statistics about the refugee population and tasked to provide professional recommendations for the development of further *integration* policies. IMDi is also tasked to administrate pilot projects testing out new *integration* measures, and to administer digital resources such as online newsletters and a digital "resource platform" to provide municipal actors in the *integration* regime with state-of-the-art knowledge (IMDi.no, 2019a).

The Directorate has around 250 employees which are situated in IMDi's headquarters in Oslo and a smaller office in Northern Norway which works with the administration of grant schemes. All my informants had a university degree in the field of social sciences, with previous work experience as employees in NAV (the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration) or municipal administration, and most of them had been working for IMDi for over ten years. The institutional organisation of IMDi reflects the Weberian model of bureaucracy, with strict specialisation and division of labour, formalised routines, a hierarchical structure with clear leadership and regular supervisions, specialised employees, and standardisation of procedures which followed established rules (Weber, 2006). To follow up on its jurisdictional areas, IMDi is divided into four divisions with several sub-sections that are responsible for a specific work area (see graph 1).



Graph 1: Organisational card of IMDi with an overview of all divisions and departments.
Retrieved and translated into English from IMDi.no (2022c).

Productivity as end goal

The day-to-day work culture at IMDi debunked all stereotypes of the lazy and inefficient bureaucrat (Willems, 2020). Being “productive” was the main principle that ruled daily work, keeping everyone in a hamster wheel of never-ending projects tasks that had to be finished, reports that had to be written, and meetings that had to be organised and attended. Each of my informants was balancing several projects at the same time, and our calendar was packed with meetings and deadlines. Every workday was filled with project group or department meetings, presentations of research reports and surveys, and workshops. I recognised a constant experience of stress and time pressure which was also voiced by Ida, who had a leading position in the department where I interned:

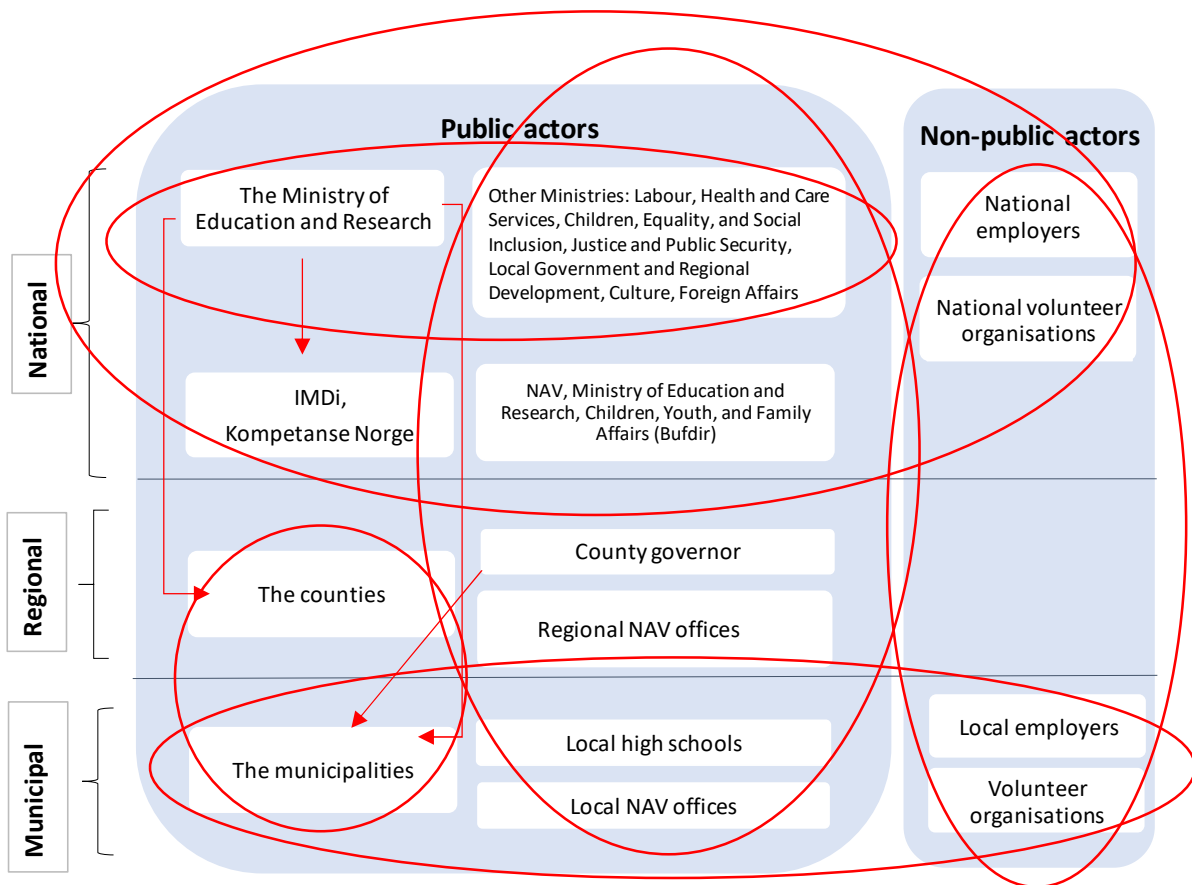
“We are always in a situation where one experiences that one is lacking resources. That is just how it is. You saw the structure: we get assignments in the Assignment letters, and then we get additional assignments, and we have ongoing assignments. We get a lot of great help to prioritise up, and too little help to prioritise down. And there is always the big challenge: when we get more to do – what is it we do less?”

As project work in IMDi heavily draws on information from research reports and governmental papers, my colleagues and me kept receiving documents which we should read to stay updated. Reading all the material was impossible – my informants had to prioritise which documents to read and were skimming through information rather than engaging with it in-depth. The verb “to produce” made a frequent appearance in the statements of my informants and mirrors the neoliberalist foundations of the *integration* regime. There was no time to take a step back and reflect on whether the products of our work were tackling the complex issues in the *integration* regime. When my colleagues or me raised one of these issues in informal conversations during brainstorming sessions or in more formal contexts such as section meetings, we would usually be reminded that we had to stick to the meeting agenda. Sindre emphasised the treadmill of production which governs IMDi’s day-to-day work in one of our interviews:

“It is about bureaucracy. You produce and produce and produce and produce and produce. You have assumptions and try to answer assumptions. Sometimes it fits, sometimes it doesn’t. I think that parts of these measures and guide manuals and recommendations try to answer some of the challenges in the field. “

The fluctuating field of the *integration* regime

IMDi is enmeshed in a web of relations with other state actors, organisations, businesses, and front-line bureaucrats in municipal offices to administer the (working) life conditions of the refugee population in the most effective manner (see graph 2).



Graph 2: *The bureaucratic field of the Norwegian integration regime, adapted with permission from Vilde Hernes' presentation at IMDi's digital seminar series "fagverksted" on June 10, 2021. The red arrows illustrate the relations between different actors of the integration regime.*

My informants understood their work sector as a politicised and constantly changing field, in which politicians use IMDi as tool to realise their respective agenda by introducing new regulations and *integration* measures - the 2003 Introduction Act had been changed more than 15 times (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2003). Anton, who had previously worked as municipal employee in an integration office, had to adapt his work to shifting political currents:

"The integration field very politicised and has lately been getting a lot of attention. And once you become Minister (Anm: of Integration) since I started working with refugees, I have worked under at least five different Ministers. It started with Anders Andersen, and then Sylvie Listhaug came, then Tine Skeiv Grande. And when a new Minister takes over a field which is politicised from the beginning, then a Minister maybe has to show that he follows this field, and that means more inquiries to the executive organs, and that may also mean new measures or tools."

A common theme among my informants were the conflicting interests between the political agenda of the respective government in power and the interests of municipalities. Municipalities are

powerful stakeholders in the bureaucratic field and place strong emphasis on their right to self-governance. This clashes with governmental attempts to increase control over municipal *integration* work and realising their bio-political agenda through new regulations. As IMDi receives pressure from both sides, a crucial aspect of its day-to-day work is to balance the opposing interests of political leadership and other actors from the practical field. This role is complicated through the 2021 Integration Act, which transferred major parts of IMDi's responsibilities towards the counties, who are a relatively "new player" in the *integration* game. Since IMDi does not have any juridical power over the municipalities, it is dependent on the municipal collaboration to settle refugees and implement policy recommendations. Anton explained to me that IMDi's limited political power places its employees in a predicament it leaves the success of their work up to the goodwill of the municipalities:

"We have a relationship of dependence, people like to think of the way that the public sector in Norway is organised as the state lying on top, and municipalities lying under the state, but it this is not hierarchical, it is actually organisational. We are equally dependent on them."

IMDi bureaucrats must be careful in navigating the bureaucratic "battlefield" with conflicting interests through the minimal regulations of the *integration* business model and the state's desire for control. During every meeting, my project colleagues emphasised that it was crucial that municipalities did not misunderstand the recommendations we were gathering for a planned guide manual as "telling them what to do." The struggle between the two agents is exacerbated by neoliberal currents in the Norwegian economic sector, which force municipalities to engage in austerity measures such as prioritising specific social services and re-arranging their budget allocations as the government is unwilling to invest additional funds into the implementation of the new law. Both IMDi and street-level bureaucrats who aim to implement sustainable social welfare policies struggle against the neoliberal market-oriented reforms initiated by the Norwegian government. Beate, who had been involved in a project to create a guide for implementing new content of the introduction program, pointed how austerity politics sabotage the proclaimed goal of the Integration Act to improve the quality of existing *integration* measures:

"Of course, many municipalities downscale, and at the same time we have to do all this (note: implement the new law). And the municipalities do not get extra funds to get started with these elements, while the number of participants goes down, so the municipal budget does not get better. That makes it difficult to think quality."

The accounts of my informants mirror Bourdieu's description of the state as a bureaucratic field with actors occupying different positions of power and access to capital, who engage in the struggle of promoting their conflicting interests (1993). As the *integration* sector is affected by

changes in overlapping areas such as the educational system, employees at IMDi are required to closely monitor developments in their area and the surrounding fields. Anton had witnessed the profound consequences of these inherent fluctuations on the work of IMDi's bureaucrats, which sabotage attempts to create a sustainable *integration* infrastructure and long-term relations with other actors in the field:

"I have been through several re-organisations. When you start working, you live in the illusion that you organise something and it stays that way. I believe that, especially in a politicised field, both us and municipalities have a need for continuity and are maybe concerned with continuity, building long-term relations, building something that has in any case some predictability. And it is difficult to reach predictability when re-organisation and movement are the rule, not the exception. So, I see that many resources go to re-arranging, that has costs, that generates disturbance, and the same goes for people in the municipalities."

The loyal servant of the state

The co-dependent relationship between IMDi and the municipalities leaves pedagogical and financial tools in form of recommendations and grant schemes as the only form of disciplinary tools that IMDi can use to influence municipal decisions. By pre-determining the target group and focus area of specific grant schemes, IMDi attempts to govern the conduct of both municipal leaders and the refugees who undergo the program. IMDi also functions as "watchdog" who monitors municipalities the National Introduction Register, in which municipal employers register information about refugees' participation in the introduction program, commissioned research projects, and the grant application system. IMDi's grant section is one of the few administrative bodies in Norway which have the mandate to follow up municipalities, and its case workers report from "the field" by following up on projects through extensive reports and coordinating network meetings with project municipalities. An important part of IMDi's work is to translate governmental documents such as action plans, and annual "Assignment letters" into concrete policy recommendations and resources which street-level bureaucrats can utilise in their *integration* practice. As "voice of reason", IMDi tries to identify measures which bridge the gap between politics and practice, give insights into municipal *integration* work, and provide the government with evidence-based policy recommendations. While IMDi has the mandate is to provide professional advice and warn of potentially negative consequences, it lacks the political power to influence the government. Sindre highlighted that as relatively young directorate, IMDi does not dare to challenge the superior Ministry or the government and enforce their recommendations:

"You have to work... that is just how it is. You can be against it, but you have to do your job. Bureaucrats are supposed to be loyal. You learn to deal with that. But especially when there is

political turmoil – if IMDI had been a stronger directorate, IMDI could have argued against on a professional basis. But IMDi does not do that; IMDi is very loyal towards the government. And those who work as employees have to do their job. You can be against it personally, but you do not have the possibility to say no.”

Sindre was one of several informants who emphasised the importance of understanding IMDi’s role as loyal servant to the state in the bigger scheme of the *integration* regime. This loyalty had a strong impact on my informant’s role understanding as bureaucrats and served as guiding principle in their work. They blurred the line between person and institution by constantly switching between “me”; “we”, and “IMDi” when talking about their work and IMDi. In interaction with other actors, their incarnation with the department became all-encompassing as their individual characteristics disappeared: their screen backgrounds, which usually provided glimpses into people’s personal living space, were hidden behind a wallpaper covered in IMDi logos, informal chit-chats about personal life were limited to the sphere of project meetings, and official emails were formulated using “IMDi” in third person. While my informants agreed on the importance of understanding one’s role in the administrative apparatus of the *integration* regime, they had different understandings of who that loyalty should count for. According to Anton, there are different types of bureaucrats working at IMDi:

“Anette is a very formal person, a proto-bureaucrat. She has worked in several state departments, one of them UDI, which had a different area of responsibility that was much more about making resolutions, with the right to appeal, where the state really exerts power over people that are in Norway and want to come to Norway. And I would say that people who have worked in UDI have a clear role understanding about this. And I came from a municipal office, and wanted the kind, helpful state. (...) And so I was much more concerned with doing good for municipalities, while Anette had a good role understanding for what it means to work in the state, and that one should treat all municipalities the same.”

These different conceptualisations of loyalty mirror Bourdieu’s restrictive “right hand” and supportive “left hand” (Derby, 2010) and influence the ways in which IMDi bureaucrats carry out political decisions in their day-to-day work. Since the governmental documents which these bureaucrats draw on in their daily work reflect current politics, the content of specific assignments in these letters leaves room for interpretation. IMD bureaucrats can prioritise specific formulations and thereby mould the product of their work in line with specific interests. Anton, for example, used strategic interpretations as strategy to match the needs of the municipalities he regularly is in touch with, without going against the law:

“If you decide to over-interpret the paragraph about the overarching goal in an Assignment Letter, I believe you have a good backing for most things. And I think you can do the same with different parts of the letter. You will always find a support in such an extensive letter for what you do, it is about how you chose to prioritise.”

IMDi employees like Anton break free from the traditional role understanding of bureaucrats as loyal servants of the state and bend the strict framework imposed by governmental papers according to their understandings of loyalty. While some bureaucrats generally focus on implementing the wishes and demands of those situated “above” in the power hierarchy, others feel a stronger obligation to safeguard the interests of those “below”. However, Sindre highlighted that IMDi’s leadership was careful in formulating open critique of the government since it does not want to be disloyal towards the government and their superior Ministry:

“I have never seen that IMDi has gone against the Ministry. Never. IMDi comes with its arguments – but not so clearly.”

The regional reform as game-changer

My informants emphasised the importance of keeping a close dialogue with the municipalities for their everyday work, which had previously been ensured through six regional offices which were spread across the country and kept close contact with municipalities. The offices had served as “gate keepers” who were intimately familiar with the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges of the integration work in the surrounding municipalities and could support them through advice, competency training programs and the administration of grants for new projects. However, this well-functioning, decentralised communication structure got destroyed through the 2020 regional reform, which merged several counties and municipalities and forced IMDi to re-invent itself. To legitimise the reform, the government had re-allocated tasks to the new counties, including several *integration* tasks which IMDi and the municipalities had previously administrated. The regional reform shook IMDi to its core, as it was forced to shut down its regional offices and transfer several of core IMDi’s responsibilities to the new counties. These changes shifted IMDi’s role in the *integration* field from a specialised municipal “guide” to a more generalist and passive “competency centre”. IMDi no longer had the temporal and human resources to engage with municipalities on an individual basis and introduced a centralised platform to handle the communication and high workload. Direct interaction with municipalities was replaced through a digital “support centre” which is only accessible through e-mail, and digital resources such as a digital “knowledge bank” with guide manuals and articles, webinars, and an e-mail newsletter have replaced the regular contact between front-line and IMDi bureaucrats. The internal chaos created through the regional reform was exacerbated through the Covid-19 pandemic, which reached Norway in March 2020 and forced

the whole country to switch to digital schooling and home office. As IMDi was re-calibrating its new role in the field, its bureaucrats did not have the capacity to prepare for the implementation of the 2021 Integration Act. Carmen, who had worked with grant administration in a regional office prior to the reform, pointed out how the changes alienated IMDi from its most important source of information:

“We now have to collaborate in a different way. In the old days, we had the regional offices – they had the advantage that we were much closer to the municipalities, and often had meetings with municipalities on different levels. (...). If they encountered a problem, we could help. We were familiar with the challenges they faced, and often met NAV and the adult education centres. But now – that contact is gone. We don’t know what challenges municipalities face, what they struggle with, what they stand in. Therefore, we cannot give them the good assistance they need.”

Techniques of resistance

As IMDi is situated in the heart of the *integration* regime, its bureaucrats stand in a field of tension created through conflicting interests between their obligations towards political leadership and the interests of municipalities. While they are to some extent aware of the complex issues that street-level bureaucrats and municipal leaders face, their loyalty to the state binds them to the limited scope of action that IMDi has in speaking “truth to power”. IMDi bureaucrats must balance these diverging interests and create a middle ground without violating the ruling principle of state loyalty within their narrow scope of action. Since IMDi is embedded in a hierarchical structure, its employees must choose their battles and decide which causes are worth challenging the internal and external power structures – as in the case of Anton, who chose to “fight” for the interests of the municipalities he previously worked with. For Anette and other informants, the battle is rooted in a moral obligation of accounting for the needs of municipalities and refugees without violating their loyalty towards the state. Their goal is focused on improving the lives of refugees, whereas the policymakers work to safeguard the interests of the neoliberal welfare state.

“Of course, you can disagree politically, but that is secondary. That is secondary. You have to find out whether this lies within that you can stand for, or whether it goes beyond what you are comfortable as bureaucrat and social being.” Anette told me. *“And what if it goes beyond?”* I asked her. *“You find yourself a new job. But then you should have tried to present practical experiences. (...) The strongest tool we have as bureaucrats are experiences and consequences of politics. And then we can say that this can turn out this way or another way, but we do not always have proof for that. Then we commission researchers.”* My interest was sparked, so I dug deeper: *“So, research is your weapon, in a way?”* A bright smile spread over Anette’s face, as she looked back at me: *“Yes. Of*

course, some of the results preach to the choir. The knowledge that is delivered – we knew what the researchers would find. But that gives us more weight, from a professional perspective.”

The “weapon” which Anette refers to is part of a set of strategies which builds on IMDi’s mandate as “voice of reason”. By carefully defining the research questions, IMDi employees can facilitate the production of results which they can use to their advantage when trying to persuade policy makers to re-consider or change political decisions. They can also build on the empirical results of research projects to suggest future grant schemes or projects tied to specific areas of interest (*satsingsområder*) through which IMDi can shape the municipal implementation of *integration* policies. Evidence-based policy recommendations are another tool which IMDi bureaucrats can utilise to advocate for the interests of municipalities and refugees. IMDi bureaucrats utilise this strategy when “speaking truth to power” in form of written hearing feedbacks to law propositions, suggestions for new grant schemes, or in meetings with the government or KD. To give their input more political weight, its employees build their recommendations on the input of strategically selected researchers and practitioners. Their expert voices have the potential to direct the governmental attention towards the points which the bureaucrats regard as important and can be used to challenge controversial governmental decisions. As a major part of IMDi’s work consists of producing online material and manuals, project groups use the input of experts to justify pushbacks against populist or neoliberal agendas by leaving out specific topics or adapting specific content. Rooted in a moral obligation to do “what is right”, some IMDi bureaucrats such as Ida use different strategies to modify their material, fine-tuning the content and introducing nuances in line with their professional convictions:

“There is a loyalty – you can participate in discussions, but when a decision was taken, we have to execute it. But there is something about how we chose to solve an assignment and how we reason. So, we get an assignment, and you execute it in the way you think – maybe you think that this does not quite correspond what we are convinced of, based on our expertise, you think that THIS is more expedient, so you take this (choice) and examine it properly and justify why it should rather be this way – which is not quite what you (note: the Ministry) asked for, but it got taken in anyway.”

IMDi’s work on a guide manual for a new course element called “life coping in a new country” is a prime example. The course combines a range of topics about “career competency”, mental and physical health, negative social control, and daily life in Norway. It is one of the biopolitical technologies which the Integration Act introduced to teach refugees the specific values and customs which they are supposed to follow to have a “good” life in Norway (IMDi.no, 2022c). Throughout the project work, my colleagues used different tactics to infuse the material they produced with pedagogical value and additional content based on their moral and professional

opinions. The project team had organised several workshops with a group of experts which they had carefully selected based on their work with trauma-sensitive teaching, negative social control, and mental health - topics which they considered crucial for the course. The members of my project team believed that courses such as “life coping strategies” and social sciences placed too little value to refugees’ lived experience and should stretch well beyond the minimum hours defined by the 2021 Integration Act. Beate pointed out that the team hoped that the guide manual would influence municipalities to go beyond the required minimum, as they disagreed with the governmental focus on speed and cutting expenses by shortening the course program:

“We have to stick to the regulations. But the challenge was ... everyone can see that there is something which does not add up. Because the minimum is supposed to be 10 hours, plus a very ambitious learning outcome. That does not work. But at the same time, we are required to follow this, we have to be loyal. But we can also say something about that even there is a minimum number for those with a short program time, we have to set up a suggestion for that, we can at the same time point to that municipalities can offer more.”

Imagining *integration*

Governmental social imaginaries promote a neoliberal view of refugees as cost/profit factor to the local economy and conceptualise *integration* as a utilitarian business transaction where refugees have to “do the work” of *integration* (Mill, 1871). IMDi’s measures focus therefore on refugees as potential workforce and promote the understanding of *integration* as a one-sided process in which refugees must make “strong efforts” – only one section focuses its measures on private and public enterprises. For the state, the term *integration* has an instrumental function, whose official definition shifts to legitimise measures of discipline and control as “*integration* measures”. Jeanette, who has been working in the governmental *integration* apparatus for over 30 years, referred to the discrepancy between *integration* as defined concept and enacted practice in Norway when I asked her what *integration* meant for her:

“Since I started (working) with the integration question – it has been re-defined many times. (..) I think that integration is both a process and a goal. When I started in the system, researchers talked about integration as a mutual process between majority and minority, a mutual adaptation. But now they talk more about that it is the refugees that must integrate into the Norwegian society, while researchers still say that it is a mutual process.”

However, the understanding of *integration-as-work* was not shared by my several of informants, including Sindre, who had a holistic understanding of integration as a complex process which involves different areas such as social network, “well-being” and (mental) health:

“Work or education are important, that is one of the supporting structures. If integration is a house, then education is supposed to give the foundation. But integration is about many things: that you are social, the school and teaching environment, feelings of belonging. There are many conditions that need to be in place.”

Most of my informants understood *integration* as a two-way process which takes time as people need to re-configure their original identity in line with their new cultural and physical environment. For Beate and the other project team members, the limited temporality⁶ which the law allocated to the process of *integration* was one of the main factors in which their social imaginary on *integration* diverged. In line with the official *integration* strategy, they regarded the Norwegian language and having a job as key factors to *integration* but rejected the short time frame that the legal framework allocated to refugees’ learning process. Beate, who had worked with language training for refugees for over 15 years, pointed out how the term *integration* was used by Norwegian politicians to legitimise policies of assimilation:

“It gets often conceptualised as assimilation, but that is not what integration is. It is being a part of the whole (note: society), and something which should go both ways. One is not supposed to give up one’s original identity. One is supposed to rest in a way – to rest one’s identity is a good definition. One is not supposed to throw everything away. But as time goes, one sees that one adapts in some ways. That makes sense with some things.”

The imagined reality of bureaucrats versus day-to-day reality in the field

Although IMDi bureaucrats try to keep an overview through commissioned research reports and formal communication with the municipalities, they must rely on static images which are inadequate to capture the complex dynamics of day-to-day *integration* work. The disconnect was exacerbated through the regional reform, as IMDi only communicates with municipalities by following up on grant-financed projects. As the contact to municipalities is now restricted to the ones who successfully applied for grants, IMDi no longer is in dialogue with smaller municipalities who struggle to maintain their *integration* infrastructure. Since grant-financed municipalities tend to be financially well-off and have a well-established and professionalised *integration* infrastructure, IMDi’ constructed reality of “the field” is skewed. My informants often referred to their bureaucratic work and the day-to-day reality of street-level bureaucrats as two different worlds. Sindre, who had

⁶ The concept of dual temporality repeatedly came up during the conversations with my informants, who described having to balance an intense feeling of temporal finitude and focus on the presence with a strong orientation on futurity. The duality is rooted in the work on projects that emphasise speed and “efficiency” through tight schedules and the demand for quick results. At the same time, my informants had to prepare proposals for future governmental budget plans and are involved in large-scale projects which go over several years. A detailed elaboration of this phenomenon is beyond the scope of the present thesis.

left IMDi for three years to work in a municipal *integration* office, had observed these differences during his time “in the field”:

“The practical world changes dynamically. (...) Those are two different worlds. In the practical field, your daily routine is concerned with facilitating for individual humans. That can be rent, career counselling, school counselling, help to find work. But then you come to IMDi, where you do not have the daily contact with the refugees. There, you sit with the feeling that you try to guide the municipalities how they are supposed to guide refugees. Sometimes you succeed, sometimes you don’t. Not everything we have produced has been used in the practical field.”

As IMDi bureaucrats are not in direct interaction with refugees in their day-to-day work, their imagined reality of the field differs - sometimes drastically - from the day-to-day reality of front-line workers, as I will illustrate in the next chapter. IMDi bureaucrats lack the experience of street-level bureaucrats which is crucial to generate an understanding of the complex dynamics and conditions which shape the practical field. Although they try to compensate this lack through expert focus groups, this has implications for the material they produce, as IMDi operates from a trans-local perspective which is not able to correspond to practitioners’ need for context-adapted solutions.

The guide manual for the “Life coping course” created by my project team provides an excellent example, where my colleagues had phrased the course content and teaching recommendations which they considered crucial for a successful course as tips for an extended course offer. Instead of acknowledging the struggles of lack of manpower, cooperation, and access to financial resources which many street-level bureaucrats experience in their daily work (Lipsky, 1980), Beate and the others built their work on imaginaries of a well-developed system:

“Some municipalities have had refugee for many years. Now municipalities which take in (note: refugees) and can demonstrate good results are requested to take in more. That is also part of the new regime – those who are most successful with integration, maybe also with employment. One has to hope that there is a collaboration with health services. Many collaborate with and have resources allocated to the health services. (..) We should not think that everything is new (note: to the municipalities) but have trust in that there is a collaboration, I think they have that in many places. If you have to build everything from scratch, it is way more difficult. I just have to hope that there is already something to build on. I hope so.”

The hope of my colleagues that municipalities would “*go the extra mile*” and utilise the recommendations that the team had set up clashes with the reality that especially smaller municipalities are forced to prioritise where to invest their human and financial resources. Due to the regional form, IMDi bureaucrats must rely on their own previous work experiences and expert

groups which they select according to the points which the team is trying to bring across in their work. This produces an image which risks being outdated, since the practical field is in constant flux. As the legal framework and IMDi's online resource are almost exclusively focused on work and education-oriented measures, they disregard the social work and settlement tasks which municipal employees in integration offices conduct daily. Although these tasks occupy a considerable part of their daily work, often well beyond the first year of refugees' settlement, this additional workload is not addressed in the legal framework and not considered part of IMDi's mandate to facilitate the qualification of refugees. As I will illustrate in the next chapter, this settlement work reflects the structural shortcomings of the Norwegian neoliberal welfare system and the commodification of *integration*.

The illusion of change

My colleagues spoke enthusiastically about the final guide manual they created, as they believed that their work could make a difference in the practical field. However, the political force of IMDi's techniques of resistance is limited as the government and municipalities are free to reject IMDi's suggestions. Moreover, the well-meant advice often clashes with the strict financial and temporal limits that municipalities are subjected to when implementing *integration* policies that attempt to get refugees into work "as fast as possible". Although the recommendations are performative rather than drivers for improving the challenging conditions practitioners experience in the field, they are a common strategy which IMDi bureaucrats utilise. A possible explanation may be that bureaucrats' daily work is governed by strict deadlines, limited resources, and high work pressure, which force them to prioritise material which is easier to produce within a short time frame.

In the case of "Life coping skills", my colleagues were bound by the law, their budget, and their role as loyal servant and chose a solution in form of a digital manual which aligns with IMDi's mandate to "produce". IMDi's inability to meet the needs of practitioners through the material it produces is rooted in its nature as bureaucratic institution, in which work processes are cumbersome and interlinked. To bring about structural change which improves the situation for the practical field, IMDi bureaucrats must bring municipal and state interests into alignment and overcome the inertia of the administrative apparatus. Caught in the web of legal obligations and slow working of bureaucratic processes, changes initiated by IMDi bureaucrats take long periods of time and are often unable to keep up with the fluctuating needs of the practical field which demand immediate attention.

Integration as a business model

“The municipality has to understand that having refugees means creating jobs. People work there, that in itself is employment. In small municipalities, already one or two employees count. That is big business, not only for refugees. Think about it. In our department, almost two sections work with this field. They get paid. IMDi with a huge number of employees, almost 200 – we get paid. The same with UDI, the police.... Think about how the municipalities, how many offices work with that. It is big business, employment deluxe. We all pay taxes.”

Sindre was not the only one who understood *integration* as “big business” - the neoliberally informed approach to *integration* was a consistent theme in the conversations with my informants. They frequently used market-oriented terms such as “products” to describe *integration* measures, and “unit price” or “financing model” to refer to the grant municipalities received for each settled refugee. In the wider scheme of the *integration* business model, IMDi functions as sales manager who utilises a combination of financial tools, digital tools, and conferences to facilitate the transformation of refugees into productive labour force. The job of IMDi is to “sell” the commodified refugee to potential employers and thereby advertise the business model of *integration* to municipalities. Kirsti, who had been working for IMDi for over 10 years, told me that an important part of her job is to convince municipalities that refugees are not an expense to the municipal economy:

“To be completely honest, a lot is tied on the economy. Why municipalities are sceptical to settle refugees. Why they only see problems. Because they see them as a cost factor. Having refugees in municipalities can be an expense for municipalities: low employment rates, unemployment, it creates costs for NAV to provide them with measures and pay out social support. Our task is to turn this around. You go in and show that immigrants do not necessarily have to be an expense if you work properly with qualification. You can change that, they can become resources. They are supposed to strengthen the municipal economy.”

According to Tobias, who was working on a project that promotes economic advantages of an ethnically diverse workforce, IMDi’s tasks are to focus on the “supply” of suitable labour force by administrating qualification measures for refugees and to stimulate the “demand” of Norwegian employers that are supposed to “buy in” labour force. To make the employment of refugees attractive for potential buyers, IMDi relies on economic arguments which aim to present diversity as competitive advantage. In the recent years, IMDi has intensified marketing efforts through measures such as an annual “Diversity Price” allocated to businesses with a high percentage of employees with

an immigrant background⁷, and an online campaign promoting “diversity” as economic asset among employees⁸. The online campaign targeted businesses working in the construction, gastronomy & catering, and health industries, which are in dire need of skilled workers. Such projects illustrate how IMDi serves to legitimise the neoliberal policies of the government which aim to channel refugees into vocational jobs. To identify measures which safeguard an efficient implementation of the governmental *integration* policies, IMDi sponsors projects which test out new *integration* measures in different municipalities, often over several years. The Introduction Act treats allows municipalities to restrict refugees’ rights and intensify disciplinary measures to test out new *integration* measures (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2020a). According to Sindre, refugees are utilised experimental subjects which are subjected to different economic, pedagogic, or administrative measures:

“The projects that we have are a sort of laboratory where municipalities test new methods within the area. We consistently have to try to find good measures and methods which we can trust. And we rely on that the municipalities test them out.”

Several of my informants, who had worked with developing language training courses, criticised the “efficient” program structure as brutal, and following a one-size-fits-all approach which makes it extremely difficult – and in some cases impossible – for refugees to reach a high Norwegian proficiency. Especially colleague Beate, who had previously worked as teacher in an adult education centre, was critical of the language courses:

“There is no quick fix. It is about recognising how much work it is to learn a new language as an adult. And if it is different from your own language or other languages you know –it is incredibly hard. Even those with higher education have huge problems. And if you are supposed to write on B2-level and get into the work life – I think that often there is a lack of understanding of what it takes to learn a language. That is a completely different way to think, and that takes time.”

For people that did not complete elementary school prior to coming to Norway, this can have detrimental consequences, as the Integration Act introduced sharpened language requirements to be eligible for Norwegian citizenship. In Linda’s eyes, who had worked with language training for immigrants for over 30 years, the new law regulations deliberately keep refugees in a subordinate and disempowered position:

“You must consider that a refugee who comes here and has never learned to read or write may not be able to get the citizenship because the language level has become so high. There are some rights you do not get because you have a refugee status.”

⁷ <https://www.mangfoldsprisen.no/>

⁸ <https://anbefalmangfold.no/>

The program length demands high performance and fast progression from day one and disregards impediments resulting from trauma, the process of migration, and personal life circumstances which may affect refugees' performance. Its participants are reduced to the potentiality of their human capital. This is especially the case for refugees with a background in higher education, as the new Integration Act shortened their program time to an extent that makes it extremely challenging to achieve a high language proficiency. According to Linda, who had previously worked with developing teaching guidelines and course content for the integration program, the new law sabotaged previous efforts to create a more humane teaching environment:

"We used to collaborate with municipalities, working specifically towards traumatised (note: participants). It was a lot about creating a safe framework, predictability, voice training, many different things. (...). But the way it is now – I can't say anything about that, because in the new integration law, the program time has been cut down. And that has consequences for how one sets up the training."

The bio-politics of producing the "good citizen"

During my fieldwork at the IMDi division, I noticed that negative social control was deeply entrenched in most areas of IMDi's work. In 2017, the government had introduced an extensive action plan to *"liberate more children and young people in Norway"* by eradicating negative social control, forced marriage and female genital mutilation and get refugees to internalise "Norwegian" norms of freedom of choice and gender equality. The plan argued that immigrants had imported *"different religious and cultural customs from those we have been accustomed to"* and named the increased number of refugees due to the so-called 2015 "refugee crisis" as trigger to increase political focus on FGM and forced marriage (Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet 2017c, p.6). One of the priority areas named in the document was to change attitudes and practices in migrant communities through long-term education measures which specifically targeted refugees, such as mandatory courses in "domestic violence" for asylum seekers and the inclusion of specific topics in the introduction program:

"It is important that immigrants receive information on norms and rules in Norwegian society at different stages of their integration process. Such information should be given to new arrivals as early as possible, and it should be repeated and elaborated as immigrants gain a better understanding of Norwegian society." (p.33)

The action plan allocated IMDi a major role in administrating preventive measures, such as a network of skilled practitioners placed at schools across the country and an expert team which offers competency training for practitioners. The political focus on negative social control is reflected in the

grants that IMDi administrates; over 11 million NOK were specially earmarked for funding *“attitude-fostering and preventive work against negative social control and forced marriage”*⁹. When I asked Anette why negative social control kept coming up as a topic, she answered:

“Because it is supposed to cut through the whole integration field. And you can say the same about interactions with the civil society. That ripples through all grant schemes. That is something one is supposed to be aware of: that negative social control is supposed to be addressed in different context, starting from that this is something you are supposed to talk about with quota refugees abroad, to that this is supposed to be an area of focus in many other contexts.”

Alongside the “action plan against negative social control”, the government had implemented a 50-hours compulsory course titled “Norwegian culture and values” for asylum seekers living in asylum centres, which was still ongoing in 2021. The course had been initiated by right-wing Integration Minister Sylvie Listhaug in light of the so-called “refugee crisis” and as response to an incident in Cologne, Germany, where asylum seekers were accused of mass sexual assault. In an interview, Listhaug stated (NTB, 2016):

“They (note: The sexual assaults) express that you come from a completely different culture and have a completely different view of women than we have in Norway and other Western countries. Therefore, it is incredibly important that those who come to Norway adapt to the Norwegian way of life, and Norwegian values. But then they must be trained, and that is our responsibility.”

The course content was supposed to foster a better understanding of the cultural codes and ways of being in Norwegian society through a wide range of topics such as *“day-to-day life and social interaction”*, including Christian celebrations and holidays, *“health with a focus on sexual health and drug and alcohol abuse”*, including penalties for using and selling drugs, *“violence in close relationships”* including forced marriage and FGM, a whole session on *“sexual harassment and assault”*, *“Equality”*, *“abuse of trust”*, *“radicalisation”* and *“terrorism as a threat to democracy”* (Kompetanse Norge, 2017; UDI, 2022c). While some content had overlaps with the social studies element of the introduction program, other topic mirrored populist stereotypes of male asylum seekers as sexual predators and Muslim immigrants as threatening fundamental values of equality and freedom (Hagelund, 2002; Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet, 2017c). Linda had been part of the project team that had set up the course content based on a detailed list of the topics that the government wanted included – topics she perceived *“difficult and sensitive”*. She

⁹ <https://test.imdi.no/om-integrering-i-norge/kunnskapsoversikt/negativ-sosial-kontroll-og-tvangsekteskap/>

illustrated to me how her team carefully crafted the demanded topics by adjusting its volume, integrating additional information, and changing the name of specific content elements. These small acts of resistance pushed against the populist agenda as they introduce more nuanced perspectives and modified the overall message of the course:

“Violence in close relationships, including forced marriage and FGM, those topics you are probably well familiar with, since you are in IMDi. Those we addressed in a superficial way, together with the other topics. Our justification was that violence in close relationships was also a topic in UDI’s program in reception centres, and in the 50 hours social studies course, and also a topic in language classes. (...) Our approach was to stick more to rules and regulations, how to get help. (...) And we tried to present the content from a dialogue perspective. The goal was to get a deeper understanding of how things work here, without taking the moral high ground, that was a difficult balance (...) And we chose to change the name from Radicalisation to Threats against Democracy. So, we took some actions within the topic.”

The extensive focus on negative social control, violence in close relationships, and forced marriage in IMDi’s work demonstrates how the introduction program and other educational programs for refugees are utilised as a bio-political tool to shape the refugee population in line with “Norwegian values”. While most of my informants were in general supportive of the bio-political goal to combat negative social control and thereby improve people’s lives, others such as Sindre were critical towards the underlying political motivations and questioned the effect of the tasks which dominate an increasing part of IMDi’s work:

“In 2008, they started with focusing on negative social control, and that part has become bigger and bigger and included more assignments, also with regards to forced marriage. That is politically decided. (...) I think that it is some populism (note: involved), this is a very politicised topic. And if you look at the resources the state has used, and you look at the results – I don’t know to what extent one has succeeded in changing behaviour and viewpoints, or ways of thinking of those that exert it. To change behaviour, that is (note: rooted in) culture or religion – that is difficult to tackle. (...) Changes happen through different processes, not within a course.”

Chapter 6: The case of Låsen

The following chapter explores ethnographically what is going on at the frontline in Norwegian municipalities, where street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980) are tasked with enforcing the *integration* policies and recommendations that were created by policy makers and IMDi bureaucrats. The chapter examines how the commodification of *integration* and neoliberalisation of care shape daily practices of transforming refugees into the “ideal citizen worker” through the following questions: How do frontline workers enact biopolitics in practice, and to what extent do their social imaginaries and lived realities of *integration* align with the imagined reality of higher-level bureaucrats? How do local power struggles and the neoliberalisation of care in Norway shape the implementation of the biopolitical “*integration*” agenda on the ground? And what effects does the practical implementation of Norwegian *integration* policy have on the enactors and subjects of the Norwegian integration regime?

To answer these questions, I conducted four months of ethnographic fieldwork in the *integration* office and adult education centre of a small Norwegian municipality in 2021, spending one day per week “hanging out” in a language course for refugees with little school background and the rest of the time in the *integration* office or accompanying staff in their daily activities. As representatives of the state, street-level bureaucrats in *integration* offices realise the biopolitical goal of transforming refugees into ideal citizen worker and are made responsible for the success (or failure) of Norwegian *integration* politics. As with other welfare policies, street-level bureaucrats must meet the individual needs of their clients through organisational structures while doing work that benefits society at large (Rugkåsa 2012, p. 15). This ambivalence confronts frontline workers of *integration* offices with dilemmas - they are supposed to handle social problems while at the same time representing the very societal order which generates these issues (Dubois, 2016). Since the local *integration* field is intertwined with other local and national bureaucratic fields, street-level bureaucrats must “play the game” with different actors involved with the welfare functions of the state and the “state nobility” of municipal leadership and higher-level government officials which focus on economic matters (Bourdieu et al., 1993; Loyal, 2016).

Contrary to the reservedness which I had encountered at IMDi, the office staff took me in as “one of their own” and openly shared their thoughts and feelings. My desk was in the heart of the open office landscape, placing me in the centre of “what was happening” and providing the scene for “office table conversation” around the office desks of the staff members (Gullestad, 2002b), where we would chat about their daily work, their views and feelings on *integration* and the changes introduced through the 2021 Integration Act, and the work situation of the office. As full-time office intern, I joined my colleagues in their daily work activities inside and outside the office, meetings

with other municipal actors such as the health station, and informal activities such as lunch. I also participated in the preparations and follow-up tied to the settlement of fifteen newly arrived quota refugees and conducted in-depth interviews with frontline workers and higher management figures of the office.

The biopolitical enforcer: Låsen Integration Office (LIO)

Låsen is a small town situated in the heart of Norway, which builds heavily on the tourism and service industry to ensure employment for its several thousand residents. The town and its surrounding areas are inhabited by four communities that barely interact with each other: the local community, an expat community that moved to Låsen to practice outdoor lifestyle and sports throughout the year, seasonal workers from European countries, and the refugee community, which Låsen started settling during the 1990s. At the time of my fieldwork, the Låsen Integration Office (LIO) comprised of eight employees. While some of them were educated in areas of health and migration studies, others had a background in economics or other fields and had gained experience through years of practical work in the local *integration* apparatus. Some had recently joined the staff, while others had been working for the integration office for over twenty years.

The office structure followed the Weberian concept of bureaucratic management (Serpa & Ferreira, 2019; Weber, 1946) with a strict hierarchical organisation comprising of a staff body, supervised by Katja, the professional leader (*faglig leder*), and Anton, the administrative leader. While Katja was responsible for training interns and providing guidance for staff, Anton was responsible for the office budget, personnel decisions, and communication with Paul, the municipal Head of Education. The administrative leader served as a system of control over the LIO staff and had to approve each resolution that LIO staff took with regards to housing, stipend payments, as well as set-up of the introduction program for each participant. Due to an internal re-organisation of the municipal education sector, which I will return to, Anton occupied a double function as leader who was superior to the leaders of two other actors involved in the *integration* apparatus, the adult education centre, and the office for unaccompanied minors. Only Anton had the mandate to report directly to the Head of Education. This granted him a key position of power as he controlled the flow of information between the horizontal and vertical levels of local bureaucracy involved in *integration* work, as well as LIO's official communication channel, the e-mail account.

Opposing social imaginaries on *integration*

As demonstrated in chapter five and six, Norwegian *integration* policy promotes an understanding of *integration-as-labour* and *integration* work as anatomo-political tool of control and discipline, with the bio-political aim to teach refugees how to become "good" partial citizens who

adhere to Norwegian values and (work) culture. In the eyes of Norwegian policy makers, refugees are *integrated* once they have some form of employment and speak sufficient Norwegian to navigate basic encounters with the rest of Norwegian society. Their social imaginary constructs *integration* as a one-way road which leads directly to vocational jobs in refugees' surrounding areas and built predominantly on refugees' individual responsibility and duty to make "great efforts". This understanding is diametrically opposed to the social imaginary of *integration* as a complex two-way process, which guided the day-to-day work practices and thinking of the team of the *integration* office in Låsen. Moreover, the exclusive focus on school and labour performance in the legal framework of the *integration* regime did not mirror the reality that LIO employees faced. Often, LIO staff would sit in meetings scheduled to talk about further program measures or process at school, and the refugees (called "participants" by the team) would be more concerned about other issues such as family members that were in zones of war, health problems, or challenges with the digital banking system. While my informants took their role as state representative seriously, they were torn between their loyalty to the state and their moral obligations to safeguard refugees' rights and interests, which they did not see reflected in the *integration* policy framework. In their experience, the policies that dictate street-level bureaucrats' daily work failed to accommodate the background and contextual factors which shaped refugees' responsiveness to the disciplinary tools of the introduction program.

In the years prior and during the so-called "refugee crisis" in 2015/2016, Låsen had mainly settled asylum seekers that had lived in reception centres where they had access to language classes and become accustomed to their new surroundings. Most of the asylum seekers had a certain educational background, little critical health conditions, and were used to Norwegian housing facilities, which allowed the LIO staff to follow up larger numbers of people at the same time. However, the restrictive asylum politics and the restriction measures of the Covid-19 pandemic, which made it difficult for asylum seekers to reach Norway on their own, resulted in a sharp increase in the percentage of quota refugees that LIO was asked to settle per year. For Brigitte, one of the program advisors, the changing demographics of the refugees that LIO worked with had considerable implications for her daily work:

"We quickly began to see that the picture of those who came changed. And for some time, we settled only families where one or more had major health issues, mental health, physical health, children with disabilities. When it became a growing group, it became very demanding. And that was the group that we had struggled to figure out how to get them into a program where they could not visualize themselves in a work-oriented future in Norway and had no background to build on from their home country. Resourceful people, certainly, but not in that way. And there were no signals that

we could see coming from the authorities and the authorities took a position on it (...) And we realised that our service was not designed for the number of challenging cases we received.”

Since the UN selects quota refugees based on their vulnerability and the Norwegian government does not channel them through reception centres prior to their settlement, quota refugees require extensive resources and follow-up. UNHCR prioritises people with mental and physical conditions which require medical support, survivors of violence and torture, elderly people, women at risks, and families in their selection process of quota refugees¹⁰ – in other words, groups whose characteristics are diametrically opposed to the demands and performance pressure of the Norwegian labour market. However, the 2021 Integration Act did not respond to the changing work conditions for street-level bureaucrats as consequence of to the higher settlement rates of quota refugees.

The LIO staff regarded *integration* as a service which every refugee was entitled to irrespective of their ability to work. To them, *integration* was a complex process which entailed refugees being able to navigate the local society and spheres of bureaucracy, knowing their rights, thriving in their mental and physical well-being, and finding employment which corresponded to their abilities and wishes. This understanding informed how the street-level bureaucrats of LIO utilised the legal framework of the *integration* regime. For the LIO staff, a holistic approach to *integration* work that combined preventive social work and extensive follow-up beyond the introduction program was crucial to fulfil their governmental mandate of *integrating* refugees. For Brigitte, who had been working as program advisor for several years, *integration* was a conglomerate of factors:

“Integration is to find well-being where they are. Enjoying the place where you live. Meeting people if you want to meet people. Understanding the environment around you. Participating in things you want to be a part of. Being invited into things if you want to be invited into things. And getting to the point where you can invite others yourself. And not necessarily being segregated into a language group or a background, flowing beyond that. Job and education - that's great, it's a motivation for most people anyway. But if they do not feel well-being where they are, then they are not integrated.”

In the eyes of LIO staff, refugees needed time to “land” in their new societal and spatial surroundings to be able to deliver what the Norwegian government expected from them. Street-level bureaucrats have the power to shape the practical implementation of state policies based on what they consider “best” for the subjects of these policies (Lipsky 1980; Rugkåsa 2012), and the LIO staff

¹⁰ <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/resettlement/558c015e9/resettlement-criteria.html>

was adamant about finding solutions which gave refugees access to as much education and financial support as possible. This entailed being lenient on the extension of classes and permission of leave, organising internships and English language classes for refugees aiming towards vocational training or higher education, and helping their clients in issues pertaining family situations such as filing for divorce. However, this approach clashed with the neoliberal emphasis on speed and labour and understanding of *integration* work as commodified service whose availability is limited to the funding period provided by the government.

To manage the “spilling over” of refugees’ private lives and struggles with Norwegian bureaucracy into the daily routine of the introduction program, the staff allocated considerable resources tasks to social work which went beyond their official mandate – the “blind spot” of *integration* work. The different understanding of *integration* and what the job of “facilitating *integration*” entailed had the consequence that LIO staff experienced constantly having to work “against” the system, as indicated by Katja, the professional leader of the office:

“The system is not made to integrate people, but to get them into work fast. Integration does not mean that refugees get work, they are not robots which only exist to work.”

Biopolitics in practice

While the biopower of the state dictates the framework of the *integration* apparatus on a macro- level, it operates as a distant force with little control over the practical enforcement of *integration* policies on the local level. Street-level bureaucrats have huge influence over refugees’ private and work lives (Guilherme Fernandes, 2021; Ylvisaker & Rugkåsa, 2022). Any mistakes committed during their daily tasks, such as forgetting the payment of an allowance or transferring wrong information into the National Introduction Register, can result in severe repercussions for refugees’ private lives and work future. As implementors of biopolitical policies, the work of street-level bureaucrats and their interactions with clients are determined by political guidelines and bureaucratic routines. However, the degree of discretion which street-level bureaucrats can apply in their daily work enables them to be liberal in deciding how to utilise the legal framework in line with their understanding of the “ideological project” of *integration* (Hagelund, 2002; Rytter, 2019). Rugkåsa (2012, p. 81) argues that the daily work of street-level bureaucrats transforms the identities of their clients from “unqualified” outsiders to “qualified” workers and participants of society, a controlled change which serves to establish social order by enforcing governmental imaginations of *integration*. In line with Rugkåsa, one of my informants compared their work to the seeding of plants, receiving refugees at their most vulnerable state and preparing them for life in society. To accommodate refugees’ need for follow-up, LIO had a team of program advisors responsible for administrating educational and financial matters tied to the introduction program, and a team of

social workers responsible for everything outside of the introduction program. The social workers of Låsen played a crucial role in transforming refugees into “ideal citizen workers” as they shaped refugees’ living conditions and explained refugees how to display behaviour that corresponds to the Norwegian “way of life” through home visits and so-called “housing courses”. At the same time, the program advisors of Låsen disciplined refugees into conforming to the customs and (un)written rules of Norwegian work life through the financial and educational tools tied to the introduction program.

The embodiment of discipline and power

As official enforcers of the biopolitical *integration* framework, the program advisors of LIO were responsible for administrating the introduction program. Expectations towards program advisors are demanding. They are supposed to set up an individualised course plan based on competency assessments, administer the monthly introduction allowance, follow up each course participant by controlling their attendance, and coordinate internships. To maximise the extraction of labour force from the refugee population, program advisors are expected to be intimately familiar with the local and regional work life and collaborate with potential employers from the private and public sector. Most of the daily work of the LIO staff was dedicated to setting up resolutions (*vedtak*), which informed refugees about decisions that the office had taken with regards to participation in program measures, the monthly stipend, and the allocation of other stipends for clothes, furniture, and the cover of medical expenses. Written in bureaucratic language and carrying the municipal emblem, these resolutions are the material embodiment of the state’s totalising power over refugees’ lives and demonstrate the control that the state and its representatives have over refugees. The documents keep track of the tools of discipline, reward, and punishment that refugees are subjected to through the introduction program measures as well as the monthly allowance and remind them of their obligations to the state.

The decisions that street-level bureaucrats take when planning the introduction program and administrating the allowance have far-reaching implications which grant them extensive power over refugees’ present and future lives. As “face of the law”, the LIO program advisors were caught in a tension between the punitive approach of the state, municipal austerity politics which constrained LIO’s budget, and their own role understanding as allies helping refugees to safeguard their rights. Program advisors can bend the law in favour of the refugees or maximise its restrictive and punitive potential when making decisions in their daily work, which places refugees in a vulnerable position (Eriksson & Johansson, 2021). Attempting to make decisions based on what they considered “best” for refugees, LIO program advisors capitalised on the vague legal framework and their power of discretion to allocate the maximum amount of program time and rarely used grant reductions as a punitive measure (Lipsky, 1980).

The cultural guide and discipliner

Several scholars have argued that social work plays a crucial role in the anatomo-political goals of discipline and control that characterises welfare policies and construct social workers as the “judges of normality” of the modern welfare state (Arp Fallow & Turner, 2013; Foucault, 1994). In the *integration* regime of Låsen, the social workers of LIO embodied the surveillance and disciplining tool who shaped refugees’ transformation into the ideal citizen worker outside of the context of introduction program (Guilherme Fernandes, 2021).

Quota refugees are placed an environment which is controlled by street-level bureaucrats up to the extent which cups people are drinking from, what mobile phone contract they have, and which medical services they access. For quota refugees, social workers serve as entry gate into Norwegian society: they are the first people refugees meet when arriving in their settlement municipality, they coordinate interactions with other municipal entities, and they demonstrate how to use the housing facilities and electric items such as a washing machine. The social work team of LIO was responsible for organising the housing facilities prior to refugees’ settlement, coordinating dialogue with other social services such as the children service, arranging appointments with health personnel, setting up digital services such as online banking, making house visits and holding so-called “housing courses”. By arranging the mandatory health screenings and police registration, social workers ensured that refugees were registered in the Norwegian surveillance apparatus. They also organised regular appointments with the local dentist and health station, where refugees’ medical condition was accessed, monitored, and treated to maintain their physical health and ability to perform in the introduction program. At the same time, the employees of other municipal employees relied on LIO’s social workers when interacting with refugees, utilising them as cultural translators which formed a bridge between the alien “other” and the local society.

In Låsen, the social work team chose the basic furnishing of the municipal housing facilities that refugees would get inhabit, shaping the living conditions according to Norwegian ways of live. As the money which the social workers spent on the furniture was deducted from a fix housing stipend which refugees in Låsen were entitled to, the team only bought the absolute necessary things prior to refugees’ arrival. This also included a cheese slicer (*ostehøvel*) – a typical Norwegian knife which is considered a strong symbol of Norwegian values of frugality (Eriksen, 1998; Helene & Skjelbred, 2002). This anecdote is an example of how social workers function as “cultural guides and discipliners” which introduce refugees to Norwegian customs and ways of life, teaching them how to navigate the spatiality of their new homes, the digitalised spheres of Norwegian bureaucracy, and access to medical and home maintenance services. Oda, who had been working as social worker for several years, told me:

“For those who come from a relocation camp, it takes a long time for them to manage their bank account, pay their own bills, understand how the system works. It takes a long time and requires a long follow-up. There is a lot they have to learn in the first months. In those months, they are very vulnerable due to the fact that they are confused, everything is new, there is a lot of information they have to absorb. You may think that they have learned, but it turns out that they need repetition again and again to be able to understand things.”

Oda’s words demonstrate how the social workers of LIO held extensive control over refugees’ private lives and interactions with their physical and social environment. Especially in the first period of settlement, the social workers interacted with refugees on a frequent basis and became intimately familiar with refugees’ private lives and concerns, establishing a personal bond with them. While the legal framework of the *integration* regime describes municipal responsibilities tied to the implementation of the introduction program, Norwegian and social studies classes, it stays silent on the settlement and social work which formed a considerable part of LIO’s daily work. As the tasks of the social workers in LIO were not formalised, they were moving in an unregulated legal space which allowed them to operate freely, but also fixated them at the bottom of the bureaucratic hierarchy when interacting with other municipal entities. The lack of legal tools created an interesting contrast to the powerful position they occupied in refugees’ daily lives, which put social workers like Ole in a difficult position:

“I am not aware of any opportunity to refer to a law to show that refugees don't get access to something unless it is Norwegian classes and the introduction program. I often find myself in a submissive position. Because I don't have any legislation I can refer to and put my foot down, right? It is getting worse in some offices. You see that people say: "But that what is foreign is unsafe." So, people who have no experience with refugees may refuse.”

Producing the ideal citizen worker

A crucial part of the state’s *integration* biopolitics is enacted in the classrooms of adult education centres, where refugees are taught the linguistic codes, behavioural norms, and fundamental values that policy makers regard as necessary to navigate the Norwegian (working) life. Since the Norwegian language is considered crucial for refugees’ ability to perform on the job market, a large portion of their program is dedicated to language classes. The language books utilise stories in which participants were supposed to “recognise themselves”; following the love story of an Eritrean and an Iraqi refugee, as well as other “typical” immigrant figures such as a Syrian refugee, a Polish migrant worker, and a Thai female that is married to an ethnic Norwegian. Ethnic Norwegians only appear as side figures, such as an elderly woman which the Eritrean character met in the asylum reception and who becomes his friend. The characters and vocabulary in the books focus on

vocational training and jobs such as mechanic, temporary substitute in kindergarten without formal training, care work, painter, cleaner, electrician, butcher, fisherman, warehouse, and factory worker. A different path, such as pursuing university, is not listed as possible option for the characters that were born outside of Norway - only the character of the Iranian girl, which has lived in Norway all her life, is studying. As the language classes are supposed to give the course participants a level of Norwegian skills which gives “*access to formal training and a long-term link to the work life*” (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2020b), the book content is illustrative of the roles which refugees are expected to take in the wider scheme of Norwegian society. The content reinforces the biopolitical goal to channel program participants into vocational jobs which ethnic Norwegians are unwilling to take on due to comparatively little pay, heavy physical labour, associated health risks, and unregular working hours (*Helseproblemer og ulykker i bygg og anlegg – Rapport 2018*, 2018; Mortensen, 2017).

According to Rugkåsa (2012b, p. 161), the asymmetric power dynamics which inform the interactions between street-level bureaucrats and refugees bear resemblance to adult-children-relationships in which the refugee has not yet become “*norwegianised*” and therefore not reached full adulthood. The “*infantilisation*” (Manchanda, 2004) of refugees with little school background became apparent in the language course I participated in once per week, where the decoration of the classroom reminded of an elementary school classroom with posters that showed playful images to teach vocabulary. Line, the language course teacher, utilised methods such as playing “*post-it games*” and writing letters to the rector to ask for permission to take half a day off and prepare a cooking recipe in Norwegian with the class participants. The contrast to the exercises and form of teaching which I had experienced in my own Norwegian language classes at a Norwegian university was striking. At the time of my fieldwork, the teacher had been teaching the class for three years and was working towards A2-level of Norwegian with the course participants. This level allows them to understand simple everyday language and hold simple conversations on subjects related to their own person, family, close surroundings, and work, but is insufficient for most jobs in the labour market. In the eyes of Line, the *integration* regime was missing a “*middle link*” which helps refugees with their transition from the introduction program into further education, which is crucial for their future employment options.

Line was worried about the language progress of her students, as most of them were approaching the end of their program time and did not have the necessary language skills to get into an adult elementary school. The legal maximum of three years program time did not accommodate the immense labour that learning Norwegian entailed for Line’s students, as many of them were not being able to read and write in their mother tongue. Most of them would be transferred to NAV to receive social benefits and continue their language classes, without access to courses teaching

English, natural science, mathematics, and social sciences. The limited language skills of the course participants and unwillingness of the leadership level to hire a mother tongue assistant forced the teacher to adapt a style of speaking which was slow and built on a limited vocabulary, re-iterating a construction of refugees as the “children” of the Norwegian welfare state that need to live up to the demands and expectations of their parental figures.

The dark side of integration biopolitics

Contrary to the participants of the introduction program, whose conduct is constantly monitored, the municipalities are not subjected to control mechanisms in their daily work. The vague legal framework leaves it up to the municipalities to organise local *integration* infrastructures and set up internal routines which hold the municipal leadership and the employees of *integration* offices accountable. This “*laissez-faire*” approach (Skogstad, Einarsen, Torsheim, Aasland, & Hetland, 2007) makes the local *integration* system vulnerable to mismanagement of funds and human error, which can have profound repercussions for refugees’ live quality, health conditions, and work future. The ambitions which underpin Norwegian welfare policies clash with the resources that policymakers allocate to municipalities, confronting municipal leaders and the street-level bureaucrats that are tasked with implementing the policies state with unsolvable dilemmas (Bakken, Brinchmann, Haukelien, Kroken, & Vike, 2002). The strained resources, restrictive organisational frames and strong emphasis on “speed” and “efficiency” which characterise implementation of social policy create strong pressure for street-level bureaucrats. This traps them in a “cycle of mediocrity”, as the lack of resources is usually not resolvable and street level-bureaucrats' moral obligations call for a higher quality of service than they are able to provide for individuals. Since street-level bureaucrats have extensive discretion in their work, they develop strategies which neglect the individual needs of their clients or prioritise some clients at the expense of others, such as transferring responsibility, simplifying routines, or prioritising “easier” cases (Camillo, 2017; Lipsky, 1980).

In their mandate as enforcers of *integration* biopolitics, street-level bureaucrats in integration offices can approve or reject treatment suggestions by dentists or other medical practitioners. Rejecting long-term dental treatment or delaying medical appointments can keep refugees in a prolonged state of pain, and I witnessed repeated instances where refugees did not get help from the medical emergency system as they were unable to communicate in Norwegian. In line with Foucault’s understanding of biopolitics as the power “to make live and let die” (2008), this gives street-level bureaucrats the power “to give healing or degenerate health”, as refugees are dependent on LIO staff to get access to physical and mental health services.

There was one incident where the child of one of the families that recently been settled in Låsen had an accident on a playground which resulted in a gaping wound on the forehead. Attempts

of the parents to organise help failed as the social worker had not used a translator to communicate with her. The social worker dismissed the worries of the parents and was not willing to organise medical care for the wound at first - a colleague had to insist on the worker driving the child to the emergency room to get the wound stitched up. Another newly settled refugee suffered from severe stomach pain and tried to organise help through the emergency hotline, which did not react despite him communicating in English. As the incident happened during the weekend and LIO could not be reached outside of regular working hours, he had to wait for the following day to get hold of a staff member that could help him to access medical support. The incidents remind of Herzfeld's (1992) work on the socially produced "indifference" which many clients experience in their encounters with state bureaucrats. Solutions such as an "emergency phone", which would have safeguarded availability in times of emergency, had been rejected by the municipal leadership as "too expensive" as it would entail paying night premiums. The neoliberalist mindset that frontline workers and refugees somehow "have to manage" disregards the practical consequences and repercussions that this decision has for refugees' health and safety.

The struggles of the local integration field

Since neither the 2003 Integration nor the 2021 Introduction Act specify the responsibility of specific municipal actors in *integration* work, the LIO staff was dependent on the goodwill of employees in other municipal entities to collaborate. This made the local *integration* regime vulnerable to human error and impeded attempts to create sustainable routines which safeguarded the interests of their clients. Låsen's *integration* regime was in constant fluctuation as the respective municipal leaders in power repeatedly re-organised its structures in line with their political agenda and economic interests.

Several years ago, the municipal leadership of Låsen had introduced an additional level of management into the education sector to reduce the workload on the Head of Education and strengthen the focus on *integration* work. Around the same time, the LIO staff was moved from their original office in the city centre to a new office in the outskirts of the town to accommodate their rising number of staff. Anton was promoted into the middle management level and moved his office to the courthouse, Låsen's centre of political power, alongside the other leaders of the middle management level. The moving isolated the street-level bureaucrats of LIO, who no longer were invited into meetings with the higher leaders and could only communicate with Anton during his weekly visits at LIO. Paul, the municipal Head of Education in Låsen, relied heavily on Anton to coordinate and shape the local *integration* infrastructure:

"I don't have any professional competency about integration through my education or experience background. So, I am very much leaning on Anton as the competent one, who has to

ensure professional development inside the integration office, but also ensure that there is good communication between the different institutions in Education and towards other municipal departments. I have to say that integration is the field I have least knowledge of. And I have been open about that since I started, that I need Anton as my right hand to be able to say something about the field and to know how we will work with the field."

In the local field of the *integration* regime, the LIO staff occupied a position as the "lone ranger" who was the only entity willing to safeguard refugees' interests and fight battles against the bureaucratic system. Often, the staff "hit dead ends" in their interactions with other municipal actors and the national bureaucratic apparatus of the *integration* regime. While LIO staff managed to maintain good relations to individual employees within other social services, their relationship to other entities such as the adult education centre was more complicated. Fuelled by the incentivisation model which underpins municipal *integration* work, some actors prioritised their economic interests over the negative effects that their decisions had on refugees' private lives and participation in the program measures. In some instances, the opponents got carried away by animosities and refugees ended up as "collateral damage" in the struggle over resources and responsibilities.

The "iPad incident" provides an excellent example of how power struggles between different actors sometimes are carried out on refugees' backs and sabotage the implementation of *integration* policies. As part of the general digitalisation trend in Norway, refugees are expected to use iPads as main teaching tool both during classes and when completing their homework. Refugees' dependence on the iPad became even more pronounced during the first two years of the Covid-19 pandemic, when most education facilities in Norway were forced to switch to digital home schooling. David, a staff member of LIO, had set up a loan system for iPads for the adult education centre, which borrowed the digital tools to refugees for a fixed monthly sum that was covered by NAV. This business model generated a regular flow of income and was supposed to be handed over to the IT-section of the adult education centre. However, David ended up administrating the loan system over a period of four years, which saved the adult education centre personnel costs. Eventually, a conflict that had been simmering over a longer period between the rector and David led him to abruptly terminating his work without an adequate hand-over of the tasks to the IT-team of the centre. As the rector was not willing to initiate a meeting where David could inform the IT team about the routines he had set up and David was not willing to send the necessary information without an explicit request, the program participants were left without adequate IT-support. This created huge problems for participants with little digital literacy, who struggled to complete their homework or utilise their iPad in class and were therefore impeded in their learning process. Although David and

the rector were aware of this issue, none of the parties was willing to make concession and the issue was still unresolved when I left the field site.

As major components of local public spending, street-level bureaucrats quickly become targets of austerity politics, and the frontline workers of LIO were no exception. The re-organisation of Låsen's *integration* regime coincided with a new municipal leadership that introduced strict austerity measures to improve Låsen's economic situation. The changes were part of a general neoliberalisation trend in Norway which introduced NPM strategies into the social service sector (Alseth, 2018). The austerity measures intensified in the aftermath of the regional reform, which merged Låsen with a neighbouring municipality and put additional constraints on Låsen's budget. The decreased settlement rates of quota refugees in 2019 and 2020 were used to justify austerity measures such as drastic cuts in the budget for LIO's personnel. The street-level bureaucrats were treated as expendable resource, whose fate was inextricably intertwined with the refugees that came. Two positions of staff that had left the office were not replaced and ongoing projects which were not mandatory by law were terminated, irrespective of the value that these projects had added to refugees' well-being. The austerity measures increased the workload for LIO staff, as they were forced to split the scarce resources between the program advisors and social workers to maintain the follow-up work which they considered crucial for refugees' *integration* process.

Contrary to other municipalities, who allocated the full sum of the *integration* grants to their respective *integration* offices, Låsen's municipal leadership fed the grants into the "big pot" of the municipal budget. This made it possible to channel parts of the *integration* grants into other expense posts, while LIO received a fixed budget which was negotiated by Anton and the municipal Heads of Economics and Education. Anton had to carefully navigate the complex bureaucratic field of tension to balance the interests of his staff and municipal leadership. He was open about the dilemma he experienced in navigating the conflicting interests of Låsen's grassroots level and the pressure of his direct superiors to cut down expenses:

"It is difficult. Because I know the workload, and I know what they face on a daily basis. And it is also quite new for us that Låsen was reorganized, at the same time as the other municipalities. In that process, we got a completely new municipal management. So, we have gone from a municipal management which is familiar with this field of work to a municipal management which is structured differently, and which has a very strong focus on finance. So, there is a constant conflict between savings and what the finance department thinks we must do, and what we stand for. And it is quite difficult. And it is my responsibility to stand in that tension. And it can be very uncomfortable at times. Among other things, because we are met with expectations for the economy that do not match the everyday life of those who work in our services."

As administrative leader, Anton was operating within the slow machinery of bureaucratic administration and dependent on maintaining good work relations with the different municipal actors involved in Låsen's *integration* regime. Anton had been absent from work for a year without replacement due to cases of illness prior to my fieldwork and was on partial sick leave for most of the four months I spent in LIO. Since the bureaucratic organisation reserved it to the administrative leadership to "speak" and decide on behalf of the office, the staff was dependent on Anton to make their voices heard beyond the physical spheres of the office. Daniel compared the structure to a pyramid to illustrate the powerless position of the LIO staff:

"This is our organization. It is built that way. We are a pyramid scheme. I cannot skip the first to fourth steps. I have to go step by step. The same way you go up ladders or stairs. You have to go one by one to reach the top with the leader. You can't skip all of them."

Anton's prolonged sick leave and irregular presence at the office had considerable consequences for the daily work of LIO's street-level bureaucrats, as all resolutions with regards to housing, financial matters, and the program content required Anton's consent. His absence also impeded the communication and collaboration with other municipal actors. Violating the internal hierarchy by directly reaching out to the municipal leadership in disregard of the "communication structure" (*tjenesteveien*) had previously been sanctioned: several employees in other offices had faced repercussions from their superiors. The hierarchical system fixated the street-level bureaucrats in a helpless position, as they could no longer execute their work tasks and were unable to communicate the precarious work conditions they faced. Since Anton formed the only link between the street-level bureaucrats and the municipal leadership, he controlled what information did – and did not – get forwarded to the Head of Education and thereby shaped the leader's impressions of daily work in LIO. Paul, the Head of Education, perceived the staff of LIO as a "*well-functioning service*":

"Of course, sick leave – when key persons are gone, this does not mean that one should lean back in the chair, that becomes a bit harmful. But you get a bit less information, and you take no news for good news and think that it's probably going quite well. And I find that the Integration Service, despite the leader being on sick leave, manage to a large extent to keep things going."

The disconnected worlds of policy and practice

Despite the crucial role which social workers played in facilitating the *integration* regime in Låsen, they did not see their work being valued by the municipal leadership. The invisibilised nature of their work forced the social work team to be humble and subservient in their interactions with

other municipal actors. Ole voiced his frustration as reaction to a recent statement of the municipal leadership that LIO should focus more on preventive work with families:

“I feel that the management does not understand social work. (..). When you are so hungry for feedback on the work you do, you are provoked by such things as you are almost told:” It is actually important that children are well so that the elderly will be well.” Oh, yes? I’ve been saying that for five and a half years. How important it is to consider the whole picture. And therefore, when I was working in the social work team, I saw the whole picture. But you have not been recognized for it, and no resources have been set aside for it either.”

Since the 2003 Introduction Act did not specify the content of so-called “work-or education-related measures”, the program advisors of LIO could plan courses and other activities at their discretion. The team would take refugees on visits to the local institutions such as the fire brigade and hold courses on topics they regarded relevant or that refugees had asked for, such ongoing elections or Wiking history. The ongoing course activities were an important part of LIO’s *integration* work, as they provided refugees with relevant information adapted to Låsen’s local context. However, the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic forced the office to put all courses temporarily on hold. Attempts to restart the coursing activities failed, as the LIO staff ended up prioritising other work tasks such as dealing with emergency cases.

Moreover, the course “life coping skills”, which the 2021 Integration Act had introduced as disciplinary techniques to facilitate refugees’ transformation process, created additional obstacles for the daily work of program advisors. The assumptions upon which the project team of IMDi had created the material juxtaposed the reality of the LIO team. There was no health personnel that had the capacity to teach the course and the program advisors were unable to prepare and hold the course due to the precarious work situation of their office. The course had been designed as technology dealing with unmotivated participants who must work on themselves to remedy what they lack (Guilherme Fernandes, 2021). The LIO staff, however, understood its coursing activities as a technology which should prepare for navigating everyday life in a new societal, spatial, and digital environment. In their understanding, “life coping skills courses” should focus on practical issues such as increasing digital literacy, the use of unfamiliar electric items, and a basic introduction into personal economy – social work-related content which is not recognised by the legal framework of the *integration* regime. Brigitte, one of the program advisors, highlighted the discrepancy between the needs which the LIO staff saw in their daily work with refugees and the legal requirements of the newly introduced mandatory courses:

“We have always run courses. But we have had situational courses. We have held some social information courses, health courses, mental health courses, but then we have also set up lots of

courses depending on who the group is. What do they need now? It's not that it can't be done to a certain extent within the life coping skills courses, but we often find that we carry out things that we don't think are necessarily in the participant's best interests. As they (note: the participants) may say that they need us for other things. They need to hear about other things. (..) We made courses we were happy with, received good feedback from participants, but it was of course a two-way communication with the participant. Again - there are many examples of the fact that there is no such two-way communication (note: with IMDi)."

The clash between the biopolitical motive underpinning the "life coping skills" course and the needs identified by the street-level bureaucrats is illustrative of the disconnect between policy and practice which characterise policies in general (Hudson, Hunter, & Peckham, 2019). Frontline workers are obliged to execute policy directives which they experience as unrealistic to achieve and must follow pre-defined tasks which do not adequately match the needs of their clients (Lipsky, 1980). Although IMDi's mandate is to serve as facilitator and "knowledge centre" who supports frontline workers in their daily work with the introduction program, its bureaucrats are tied through the slow machinery of bureaucracy and their loyalty to the state. For the employees of Låsen, the published material of IMDi did not respond to the needs of their day-to-day life. They experienced the material as unrelated to their day-to-day challenges on the ground. Several of my informants felt abandoned by IMDi, as they had lost their communication line with the Directorate through the regional reform and were insecure about how to implement the 2021 Integration Act with the strained resources. Brigitte told me:

"We no longer have a two-way dialogue with IMDi. We do not experience that they map out how things are with us, nor how the law affects us. There are some questionnaires that occasionally expire. I do not recognize myself in the answers that came. So, when you are presented with the results, these, I think: is it our municipality with our services, or is there something that is not right for me? Which again then confirms that: should there be such a big difference for our refugees who have just as much right to be looked after as refugees in another municipality?"

As it usually takes IMDi several months to conclude and publish the material, which has the requirement to be nationally applicable, the information does not match the need of street-level bureaucrats for fast information which is adapted to the local and specific issues. The regional reform, which shut down IMDi's regional offices, had demolished the bridge between policy and practice which is crucial for a successful implementation of bio-policies. LIO could no longer rely on a direct contact who was available for questions and the staff experienced on a regular basis that attempts to contact IMDi through the new support centre were not answered. The one-way communication with IMDi in form of newsletters and website posts was unable to address the

“messy” reality of budget cuts, high workload, lack of leadership support, and unwillingness of other municipal actors to cooperate which the LIO staff encountered in their daily work. When I asked Ole, who was working as program advisor, how much guidance and help the LIO staff gets from IMDi or other entities, he told me:

“I start to cry when you ask questions like that. We get nothing. But we are supposed to guide others, right? In the field of integration. I often feel that demands are made on us. And I think it's nice to be able to contribute, if I have knowledge that can help the refugees. Then I stretch myself this far. But getting guidance the other way, that's equivalent to zero.”

The LIO staff did not recognise themselves in the material and statistics that IMDi published on its website, such as the results of an annual study which examined how municipalities experienced IMDi as collaboration partners and which Brigitte discussed with me one day when we were sitting in the office. She started laughing when she read out aloud:

“Most respondents evaluate the use of IMDi’s services as good. The municipalities evaluate especially the use of advice and guidance about grants, information about qualification and qualification paths for newly arrived refugees and immigrants, as well as support in the settlement of refugees as quite good or good”¹¹.

These evaluations stood in sharp contrast to LIO’s struggles in establishing communication and retrieving relevant information from IMDi’s website and bureaucrats, as well as frustrations about the details that IMDi provided about quota refugees prior to settlement in so-called “CVs”. The CVs contained generic statements about language skills (i.e., “English – neither good nor bad”, school-related skills (“can do basic calculations for groceries”), digital skills (“can send an e-mail”) and previous living conditions (i.e., “lived in a house without electricity”). As there was little or no information about refugees’ physical and mental health, the LIO staff repeatedly found out during the settlement that the local health facilities were inadequate to meet the needs of these people, requiring them to organise regular appointments in the next bigger city which entailed hours of commuting. The experience of no longer being able to permeate the institutional wall of bureaucracy and losing access to a crucial source of support triggered feelings of abandonment, isolation, and frustration among the staff.

Structural challenges

The street-level bureaucrats unisono agreed on that the Norwegian *integration* system was “wrong” as it disregarded the complexity of refugees’ human experience and did not specify

¹¹ <https://www.imdi.no/om-imdi/rapporter/2021/imdis-kommuneundersokelse-2020/>

collaboration agreements with other municipal entities as prerequisite for municipal *integration* work. To safeguard refugees' access to adequate support, LIO staff ended up doing overtime work and taking on tasks such as organising women's circles. Since Låsen could no longer rely on IMDi's regional offices for guidance and the municipalities did not receive additional funding to implement the 2021 Integration Act, LIO was struggling to follow up on the new law. According to Anton, the interplay of the regional reform, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the new law had contributed to the challenging situation that Låsen and other municipalities found themselves in:

“At the same time as the new law came, there was a process in IMDI that caused the well-functioning regional office, which we could call and discuss problems with, to disappear. And then there was a kind of vacuum. Because no one really took responsibility for the new law and for the municipality. There was very little information work. And then there's Corona in addition, right? So, the introduction of the new law came at the worst possible time, really. I know that many municipalities that have not been able to work with the new law as they wished they could. So, it has been a very difficult situation for governing authorities and municipalities with regards to integration work. And it happens at the same time as the reduction in settlements is quite large.”

In their daily work, the street-level bureaucrats of LIO were faced with multiple structural issues which the 2021 Integration Act failed to address despite their profound implications for the local *integration* regime. For the frontline workers of LIO, the policy changes intensified the precarious situation as they could not rely on other municipal actors to share the additional workload. Local business owners and frontline workers from other social services were reluctant to engage with refugees in their daily work, perceiving them as “too different” and their cases as “too challenging” to take on. This behaviour is characteristic for the egalitarian value of “imagined sameness” that characterises Norwegian society and implies that others who are perceived as “too different” are a problem and must be avoided (Gullestad 2002a). Out of fear for the “unknown other”, other frontline workers shifted tasks that entailed direct interactions with refugees to the street-level bureaucrats of LIO. Brigitte felt pressured to add these tasks onto her other work to ensure that refugees' needs would be met:

“The need for support grew and it became difficult for the clients and staff to keep the focus on the introduction program. And you went around and felt in time that the rest of the municipality did not understand the problem. It was very easy for them to say: “Here”, just pushing a case back. “If it is a refugee, the integration office takes it.” It was much more difficult for us to pass a case on to other services that were supposed to follow up on an area that belongs to their services. But it didn't seem very difficult for them to push a service our way if it was a refugee. Which, quite often, ended up with people being treated wrongly.”

As the responsibility of other social services in municipal *integration* work is not specified, the vague formulations in the law allowed other municipal actors in Låsen to shift tasks that entailed interacting with refugees to LIO. This placed the “heavy lifting” of *integration* work on the shoulders of LIO staff and contributed to the precarious work situation in the office. At the same time, the shortage of personnel in other social services such as mental health care made it difficult for LIO workers to create sustainable support structures for their clients. Although the Norwegian welfare system includes the offer of mental health treatment services and municipalities are required to employ psychologists in their health and social care services, many citizens struggle to access these services (Lunde & Ramm, 2021). Moreover, refugees and immigrants often experience not being taken seriously in their interactions with health personnel or get access to professional mental health support years after they developed serious mental health disorders (Prøitz, 2020; Varvin & Lien, 2019). Since refugees have a higher likelihood of developing mental health struggles as a consequence of trauma and the stress of settling in a new environment, the LIO staff witnessed on a regular basis that refugees they settled developed chronic mental health issues.

The reluctance of other social actors in Låsen to work with refugees intersected with the governmental ambition to digitalise the Norwegian public sector for “*a more efficient public sector, more value creation in the business sector and, not least, a simpler everyday life for **most** people*” (Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation 2019, p.3, emphasis added). While most inhabitants of Norway adapted to the digital transformation, vulnerable groups such as elderly people and refugees fall through the cracks of the system as they do not possess the tools or digital literacy to navigate these digitalised spheres. Thus, a considerable part of social work in Låsen involved helping refugees to use digitalised services such as banking or residency renewals and helping them out of precarious situations such as debt collection as a consequence of unpaid digital invoices. For Oda and the other social workers, following up these tasks was a constant struggle:

“We face resistance at the bank when they want to get a bank card. Because that has been a problem. We have to have a fight on every single thing, right? When they want to have a mobile phone, they have to go somewhere and have a social security number and address. And an email. (...) It causes a lot of problems when we then have to go in and help them. It takes an incredible amount of time and effort to solve such things.”

The neoliberalisation of *integration* work

LIO was the only municipal service that lay at the outskirts of the small city, tucked in the back of a slightly run-down building with crude corners and a maze of doors which led to other offices. The staff occupied a worn-out open office landscape with bright LED lamps, functional and furniture and outmoded computers, a tiny bathroom, functional blue linoleum floors and white walls

where someone had hung up printed out caricatures to brighten up the atmosphere, next to old posters advertising outdated free-time activities. The contrast to the aesthetically pleasing facilities office of the municipal administration, located in the heart of the city and equipped with up-to-date technological devices, was striking. The peripheral location and cheap office interior are illustrative of LIO's precarious economic situation. For Tore, one of the social workers, and some of the other staff members, the austerity measures initiated by the municipal leadership triggered fear of losing the job due to the ongoing threat of budget cuts among the LIO staff:

"I have been here for almost six years. From day one, the boss came and said: "We have bad budgeting, we have to cut our services." He said that almost every month. That only creates stress, right? It creates insecurity. What is going to happen? What am I going to do? Should I continue to work here or stop? That creates a lot of pressure."

Many refugees struggled with issues such as debt collection, wrongly registered information through UDI, and technical problems that required street-level bureaucrats to take immediate action, or "putting out fires" (*brannsløkking*) as they called it. This constant state of emergency made it impossible for the frontline workers of LIO to invest in strategical work on establishing alliances or internal structures which would have enabled them to get out of their precarious situation. Paul, the municipal Head of Education, was aware of the tense financial situation of LIO. However, he explained to me that he did not see any reason to increase the office budget, as the dynamic nature of the *integration* business model clashed with the budgeting of the other educational facilities. Less settled refugees equated to less cash flow into the municipal "budget pot" and Paul expressed that the municipal leadership was not willing to prioritise LIO at the expense of other social services:

*"When we see that there are fewer refugees coming, or that there is a great deal of uncertainty about how many we will get, then we have to reduce expenses in that field. I've talked about that with Katja (note: professional leader) as well: where do we draw the line on what is justifiable? How little can a service be for us to still call it a service? And I perceive that we are at the very limit in terms of how far down we can go. But the expectation from the Municipal Executive and Head of Economics is that we tighten our belts and provide a service that we think is good enough based on the revenues we have."*¹²

¹² In our conversation, Paul also made references to a dual temporality which was similar to the accounts I encountered in my interviews with IMDi bureaucrats that I describe in Chapter 3. Paul described "different realities" of the economic section which focused on "snapshots of the here and now" and highlighted that LIO followed a more long-term perspective. His account indicates a neoliberal temporality of the "here and now", which clashes with the future-oriented and sustainable approach of street-level bureaucrats.

Integration work(ers) as collateral damage

The strained work conditions of LIO were exacerbated through the Covid-19 pandemic, which forced the staff to minimise physical interactions with refugees through meetings and group activities and put all social activities for refugees on hold. However, it was the coming into force of the 2021 Integration Act in addition to their regular workload, which brought LIO to the verge of collapse. Attempting to implement their shared imaginary of *integration* work, the street-level bureaucrats became the “fuel” that maintained the local *integration* regime by pushing themselves to the verge of mental and physical burn-out. Several failed attempts to communicate their precarious situation to the municipal leadership triggered strong feelings of frustration among the staff, who did not feel taken seriously by Anton and the municipal leader. The experience of not being “seen” was a recurring theme in my conversations with the street-level bureaucrats of LIO, who suffered the loss of communication with IMDi, and the disregard of their work beyond the introduction program. Not being able to implement their imaginaries of *integration* work and to fulfil their legal duties due to lack of resources and staff, coupled with the high workload, took an emotional and mental toll on the LIO staff. Some of the staff members developed medical conditions and went on sick leave, while others, such as Brigitte, felt obliged to continue working because knew that refugees would suffer grave negative consequences if the whole office shut down:

“I tried to stay at home for a bit and see that it helped, and as soon as I felt a little better, I came back and noticed that coming back to work doesn't help with stress. Lack of sleep escalates again, dreams about work, thoughts about work, waking up in the middle of the night and lying in bed thinking about work. It is harder to filter out issues that really need me more urgently than others, because you just feel like you're behind on everything. You do not know whether you will come to work next week, and a new colleague will be on sick leave. What additional stress this will cause. You are afraid that we will all be calling in sick. What will happen then? And that very unfortunate things will happen to the refugees which could have been avoided, but we just didn't have time to see the signs.”

The frequency and extent of sick leaves climbed sharply, towards the end of my fieldwork there were days where I would be the only one in the office, with periodic visits from a social worker that came back from fieldwork. As consequence of Anton's prolonged absence, the constant state of emergency, and the municipal austerity measures, the street-level bureaucrats could no longer maintain previously well-functioning work routines and LIO retrograded into a state of dysfunctionality. When I interviewed Anton, he acknowledged the critical state of the office:

“We are really in crisis in every way. This is unusual for us, because we are used to being a service that works very well. And what we stand for now is very backwards. Firstly, there is currently

some staff on sick leave here in the service. Secondly, I have been on sick leave for a long time and have been at work less than I should have been, and thus we are in it is a very difficult situation that we find ourselves in. And this means that the employees are terribly tired and do not feel that they are getting the job done that they are used to do in a great way."

The commodified refugee as "courtball in the system"

The Norwegian classes of Låsen's adult education centre encompassed people with a span of abilities, since the centre did not have the "capacity" to offer more course groups and to invest into a language assistance who could have facilitated the teaching for participants with little education background. The teacher tried to accommodate the different progress of the participants but could not prevent that some participants were hindered in their fast progression through the weaker students, while others were unable to keep up with the teaching pace of their class. The rector of the adult education centre had outsourced the social studies to the education centre of a bigger city. This forced the program participants to commute to the social studies course during their holiday, which entailed transport costs and several hours of transportation per day. Some of the participants had children in need of intensive care and were therefore unable to join the courses, while others experienced the commuting as highly stressful. Attempts of LIO counsellors to convince the rector to organise the social studies courses in Låsen were turned down by the rector. This illustrates how some municipal actors prioritise their economic interests over possible consequences for refugees' well-being, thereby sabotaging refugees' responsiveness to the disciplinary measures of the introduction program.

The neoliberalised *integration* regime in Låsen is exemplary for how municipalities can utilise the *integration* business model to their economic advantage and take in refugees irrespective of whether they are able to provide refugees with adequate follow-up. As the settlement of quota refugees who have physical or mental health issues, disabilities, or are unable to read and write demands extensive temporal and financial resources, there is little incentive for municipalities to take in these vulnerable groups. The practice of "refugee shopping" by rejecting refugees from specific groups which are known for a slow qualification progression was a known phenomenon which had been commonly practiced by municipalities across Norway several years ago. Many municipalities reject refugees with disabilities due to the financial implications beyond the state-financed five years period, prioritising municipal economic interests over social responsibility. Other municipalities like Låsen, which apply a moral policy of accepting every refugee and receive a large percentage of these vulnerable groups, must "pay the bill" of refugees' long-term need of health and social services. Contrary to some municipalities, which would mainly take in refugees with a higher

education because they were “easier to handle”, LIO followed a policy of agreeing to every refugee that IMDi asked them to settle.

As *integration* grants are not earmarked, there is no accountability mechanism in place which safeguards that the *integration* grants are exclusively used on refugees, aside from a clause that IMDi or the Office of the Auditor General can control whether the funds were used in line with the legal framework (IMDi.no, 2022a). This has consequences for the implementation of the introduction program, as the municipal leader and other leadership figures enjoy huge discretion in the allocation of the funds. In Låsen, Anton decided to shift parts of the *integration* grants that were tied to the settlement of adult refugees into the centre for unaccompanied refugee minors, which the municipality had threatened to shut down. Anton’s attempt to maintain the service for unaccompanied minors prioritised the needs of refugee youth over adult refugees, as the LIO staff was no longer to manage the high workload with the resources that Anton had negotiated for them. Without the means to closely follow up all refugees, the street-level bureaucrats of LIO had to prioritise the refugees which needed extensive support over others who were more independent. Brigitte, one of the program advisors, highlighted how it was common for refugees to end up as long-term “cases” for social services such as NAV and Child Protection Services as the LIO staff was not able to provide sufficient preventive work:

“It affects the service when you feel that you deliver worse and worse and struggle to meet deadlines and you really are not sure that people are aware of the kind of work we do and how sensitive the work actually is, and how much it affects them (note: the refugees). And if we are understaffed to do our tasks, how much that case can grow and become less fortunate and become ugly and end up in a much more extensive and time-consuming case later. And we’ve seen a lot of that.”

In the larger picture of power struggles between different municipal actors attempting to safeguard their economic interests and positions of power, refugees are reduced to commodities that are not considered worthy of the financial investment into measures that would have facilitated their *integration* into the local society and labour market. By commodifying refugees as “trading objects” rather than potential labour forces that require financial investment of the whole sum of governmental funding in the local *integration* structure, some municipalities sabotage the biopolitical agenda of producing the ideal citizen worker.

Resisting the integration business model

“Where there is power, there is resistance” - in his work on the history of sexuality, Foucault (1978, p.95) highlights that the people subjected to governmental techniques of discipline and

control do not simply accept their fate but find creative ways of resistance. This applies to the subjects as well as the enforcers of bio-policies. Bureaucrats can be critical of the work practices that are imposed on them through policy documents and follow their orders in a manner that breaks with the underlying policy objectives (Sharma & Gupta, 2006a). As demonstrated by Ferguson's work on a development project in Lesotho (1994), street-level bureaucrats can realise their mandate in ways which clash with the intentions and goals of higher-level bureaucrats, thereby interfering with the smooth functioning of the state apparatus. In the case of LIO, the street-level bureaucrats found creative ways to challenge the neoliberalist orientation of the *integration* regime, such as consciously exceeding the allocated budget for interpretation services.

A recurring theme among my informants was the shorter program time for refugees with higher education, which they perceived as denying program participants the chance to acquire the language skills necessary to secure a job that matched their competencies. The program advisors found solutions to navigate around the restrictions such as allowing refugees to "observe" language classes and allocating the maximum program length. They also tried to form alliances with other social services, but their efforts were hindered through the Covid-19 pandemic and the long sick-leave of their leader. Some of the social workers worked regular overtime to answer calls from refugees and help them with practical issues, such as doing groceries for a newly arrived family during the weekend and helping two newly arrived refugees to transport the furniture.

Since the street-level bureaucrats of LIO were challenging the municipal leadership by resisting the austerity politics that it was subjected to, the office was the "black sheep" of social services in the local media and among the higher management level. My informants shared an incident where the local newspaper reported an incident where the office went beyond their officially allocated budget to cater to the needs of a large group of settled refugees and painted front-line workers as being careless with the money of Låsen's taxpayers. Such narratives re-iterate the negative image of refugees as an economic burden and can be read as social sanctioning for attempts of street-level bureaucrats to resist the neoliberalisation and choosing "the Other" (i.e., refugees) over "Us" (i.e., the citizens of Låsen).

The street-level bureaucrats of LIO resisted the impersonality and indifference which is inherent to the dehumanised system of Western bureaucracy (Herzfeld 1992; Weber 2006) by forming a community which took care of each other and was attentive of each other's emotional and physical well-being. Working inside a neoliberalised system of care in which LIO staff struggled to live up to their own imaginaries of *integration* work caused strong feelings of frustration among the street-level bureaucrats, which made it difficult to maintain work motivation. The family-like community of the office was the only space where the staff received recognition and could release

some of the stress and the frustration that characterised their daily work. Ole described their relations of care as followed:

“That is one of the strengths of this workplace, that there are great people who are kind to each other and care for each other. Compared to other workplaces I was at – I care a lot about my colleagues, I feel that they wish me well.”

While the LIO staff discussed their problems internally, they were reluctant to communicate them to other municipal actors out of loyalty towards their leader and fear of breaching the legally binding confidentiality clause. The importance of maintaining the “mask” of a well-functioning office may be explained through the Norwegian value concept of “imagined sameness”, which perceives open conflict as a threat and is maintained through a general culture of politeness and conflict avoidance (Gullestad, 2002a). The unwillingness to confront other street-level bureaucrats and office leaders in case of violations of legal regulations or unwillingness to cooperate created a “culture of silence” which contributed to the dysfunctional structure of the office. Dealing with the manifold obstacles, dead ends, and frustration moments that the day-to-day *integration* work included was challenging for the LIO staff. Combined with the high workload and constant stress, these factors eventually started affecting their work performance. Oda was struggling with the precarious situation of the office:

“I myself feel that I get frustrated and fed up and can't take it. I get tired of it. You also become - you simply lose energy. You become paralyzed: where do you start? And then you sit and can't do anything because you can't figure out where to start.”

The LIO staff ended up developing different coping strategies which ranged from working overtime and ruminations about challenging cases to “nine to five” mentality characterised by emotional detachment. Eventually, the spirit of resistance that had characterised LIO switched to resignation. The sentence *“That is just how things are”* appeared frequently in my conversations with the staff. The street-level bureaucrats had resorted to a strategy of survival in which everyone focused on their required work tasks and no longer did the “little extra” of helping each other out.

Chapter 7: Concluding discussion

What does *integration* mean in Norway? To answer the question posed by Athar at the beginning of this thesis, I examined the social imaginaries and bio-political goals which inform the creation and implementation of Norwegian *integration* policies, and how they shape the lives of those that enact and those are subjected to these policies. Through my analysis, I revealed how governmental policies conceptualise *integration* as a business model which commodifies refugees into trading objects to generate income for municipalities and satisfy Norway's need for vocational labour force. I also demonstrated that the introduction program combines technologies of discipline and control into an elaborate bio-political apparatus which aims to shape refugees' private and work lives in line with policy makers' imaginaries of *integration* and "ideal citizenship". My thesis is also an account of how neoliberal austerity politics, local power struggles, and conflicting social imaginaries on *integration* across different levels of bureaucracy shape the implementation of *integration* policies on the ground and push local *integration* infrastructures to the verge of collapsing.

I illustrated that the Norwegian *integration* system is shaped by neoliberal and bio-political agendas which aim to transform refugees and their families into ideal "citizen workers" that conform to Norwegian norms. The policies build on a neoliberalist ideology which constructs the refugee population as responsible for their unemployment rates and dependency on social welfare, framing them as "unmotivated", "too lazy to work", and lacking understanding of fundamental Norwegian values such as gender equality (Guilherme Fernandes, 2021). These problematisations are utilised to promote a social imaginary of *integration* as business model, which reduces refugees to human capital and ranks their worth based on their educational background and its applicability in the Norwegian job market. The policies commodify refugees into trading objects whose societal purpose is restricted to generating income for municipalities and solving Norway's need for vocational labour force. Norwegian *integration* policies utilise technologies of discipline and control to transform refugees into "ideal citizen workers" who are self-sufficient through employment and have adapted Norwegian values, norms, and ways of (work) life. The introduction program forms a bio-political technology which combines the supportive "left hand" of social and educational welfare with the penalising "right hand" of restrictive workfare policies (Derby, 2010). The goal of its measures of surveillance, education, financial sanctions, and rewards is to ensure refugees' transformation.

I also demonstrated how the policy creation process of the 2021 Integration Act was a tug of war between neoliberal reforms pushed by politicians and the needs from the street-level bureaucrats that implement the *integration* policies on the ground. The result is a patchwork of compromises which weaves neoliberally motivated policy changes into existing structures and introduced cosmetic changes of the introduction program, instead of targeting the structural

problems which sabotage the goal of producing suitable labour force. In their mandate as facilitators of state *integration* policies, IMDi bureaucrats are situated in a field of tension between the conflicting interests of the political leadership and the interests of the practical field. Since IMDi bureaucrats receive pressure from both sides and are dependent on the municipal goodwill to settle refugees, a crucial aspect of their day-to-day work is to balance these opposing interests in the material and policy recommendations they produce.

A crucial part of the work of IMDi bureaucrats is the translation of policy documents into concrete policy recommendations and resources which are supposed to support street-level bureaucrats in their *integration* practice. Although IMDi bureaucrats have the mandate to provide the government with professional advice and warn of potentially negative consequences of new policies, their role understanding as loyal servants of the state keeps them from challenging the government on controversial decisions. However, some IMDi bureaucrats feel a stronger obligation to safeguard the interests of municipalities and utilise a set of strategies to indirectly shape the municipal implementation of *integration* policies in line with their moral convictions and social imaginaries on *integration*. While these strategies attempt to improve the challenging work conditions that street-level bureaucrats experience in the practical implementation of the introduction program, the effect of these strategies is limited due to the web of legal obligations and slow working of bureaucratic processes which IMDi bureaucrats are embedded in. My analysis highlighted how the regional reform destroyed the communication structure which IMDi had maintained with municipalities and created a dissonance between IMDi's imagined reality of municipal *integration* work and the day-to-day experiences of street-level bureaucrats.

The case study of Låsen reveals how the implementation of biopolitics is determined by how street-level bureaucrats made decisions based on their discretion, their role understandings as enforcers of state policies, and their social imaginaries on *integration*. The macro-level power of *integration* policies exerts only marginal influence over micro-level processes and power struggles between municipal actors. I described how a crucial part of the state's *integration* biopolitics is enacted in the classrooms of adult education centres, where the content of the learning material language classes reinforces the biopolitical goal to channel program participants into the vocational ranks of the Norwegian workforce. The commodification of *integration* work clashes with the social imaginaries of street-level bureaucrats, who struggle to implement the *integration* bio-policies as their work is impacted by local power struggles and neoliberal reforms. The LIO staff conceptualised *integration* as a complex and time-consuming process beyond employment and a service which every refugee is entitled to irrespective of their ability to work. Their social imaginary of successful *integration* entailed refugees being able to navigate the local society and digitalised spheres of bureaucracy, thriving in their mental and physical well-being, and finding employment which

matched their competencies and ambitions. The street-level bureaucrats of Låsen experienced that the policies failed to acknowledge the heterogenous characteristics and changing needs of the settled refugees, which did not match the governmental expectation that refugees could quickly perform on the labour market.

For the employees of Låsen, the work of IMDi did not respond to the needs of their day-to-day life. They experienced the published material by IMDi as unrelated to their day-to-day challenges on the ground. As the legal framework and IMDi's online resource are almost exclusively focused on work and education-oriented measures, they disregard the social work and settlement tasks which municipal employees in integration offices conduct daily. For the LIO staff, a holistic approach to *integration* work that combined preventive social work and follow-up beyond the introduction program was crucial to fulfil their governmental mandate of transforming the identities of their clients from "unqualified" outsiders to "qualified" workers and participants of society. I illustrated how program advisors embody the technologies of discipline and power which discipline refugees into conforming to the customs and (un)written rules of Norwegian work life through the financial and educational tools tied to the introduction program. As "face of the law", the LIO program advisors were caught in a tension between the controlling and disciplinary approach of the state and their moral obligations to support refugees in safeguard their rights.

At the same time, social workers play a crucial role in transforming refugees into "ideal citizen workers" as they shape refugees' living conditions outside of the introduction program and function as cultural guide through the unfamiliar social, spatial, and digital surroundings. Although social work is not recognised as bio-political technology of discipline in the legal framework of the *integration* regime, LIO's social workers exerted huge influence over refugees' transformation process. They organised refugees' housing in line with Norwegian ways of life, taught them how to navigate the spatiality of their new homes, the digitalised spheres of Norwegian bureaucracy, and coordinate their access to medical services. The extensive control which the LIO staff exerted over refugees' lives made the local *integration* system vulnerable to human error, sometimes with profound consequences for refugees' quality of life and health.

The street-level bureaucrats of LIO occupied a position as "lone ranger" who was increasingly isolated through the re-organisation of the local *integration* regime and the tightening of local *integration* measures. As the street-level bureaucrats of Låsen lacked political power due to the hierarchical organisation of the local *integration* regime, they were unable to challenge other municipal actors, who prioritised their economic interests over the negative implications of their decisions on refugees' private lives and learning progress. The coming into force of the 2021 Integration Act brought Låsen's *integration* office to the verge of collapse as it intersected with

municipal austerity policies, the prolonged absence of leadership, and the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The neoliberal reforms that targeted LIO destroyed a previously well-functioning *integration* regime, as the street-level bureaucrats of Låsen were no longer able to handle the increased workload resulting from the downscaling of their office and strained resources. As the 2020 regional reform had deprived them of their support system through IMDi's regional office, the staff experienced being silenced, isolated, and abandoned in their daily work and could not relate to the material and information provided through IMDi's digital services. The street-level bureaucrats in LIO, who tried to resist austerity politics and live up to their social imaginaries on *integration*, ended up pushing themselves to the verge of mental and physical burn-out due to the malfunctioning system and heavy emotional toll of the job. Although the staff tried to maintain their work, the office was stuck in a dysfunctional cycle which was upheld through vague legal regulations, municipal austerity politics, absence of leadership, the hierarchical organisation of the office, and the prioritisation of municipal economic interests over refugees' needs. As consequence, the street-level bureaucrats were not able to tackle the structural challenges which they faced through the changing demographics of the refugees they settled, the reluctance of other municipal actors to engage with refugees, and the digitalisation of public services.

The neoliberal reforms of Låsen's *integration* infrastructure mirror a general trend of neoliberalisation of care services in Norway, which fixate street-level bureaucrats in increasingly dysfunctional work conditions. Policymakers, higher-level bureaucrats, and street-level bureaucrats such as program counsellors and teachers struggle to combine the protective "left hand" of social welfare policies and the restrictive "right hand" of neoliberal economic policies in form of budget cuts, financial incentives, and economic deregulation in their everyday work. This results in an integration practice that is characterised by a lack of accountability and control, vulnerable to political shifts and local power struggles motivated by economic interests. Refugees and frontline workers such as the LIO staff end up paying the "price" for an immigration and *integration* system which is constructed on neoliberal pillars and reinforces the "invisible fences" between refugees and the majority population (Gullestad, 2006). The legal framework underpinning the Norwegian *integration* regime exemplifies the ideological principles and inherent contradictions of neoliberalism: arguably with the goal to sustain the Norwegian welfare state, the law regulations promote Norway's shift into a workfare state which "invests" in the human capital of refugees by "activating" their self-reliance and commitment to paid work. The resulting Norwegian integration regime forms a neoliberal system which embraces laissez-faire policies at the top level of municipal management, while subjecting the refugee population to a regime that is interventionist, controlling, and costly, under the guise of *integration*.

While neoliberalism is usually conceptualised as an anti-welfare ideology and political project which re-organises markets, societies, and politics that seek to dismantle the welfare state (Kamali & Jönsson, 2018a), I argue that *integration* policies in Norway are a neoliberal project designed to maintain the welfare state in light of an ageing population. The notion of *integration* is used to legitimise an elaborate system of activation and education measures which aim to channel refugees into specific vocational sectors of the Norwegian labour market. The biopolitical goal of the neoliberal *integration* project is to maintain welfare and well-being for the majority population of Norwegian citizens at the expense of those who are subjected to the *integration* regime. The use of welfare policies as bio-political technologies to maintain the well-being of the majority population at the expense of others, arguably to solve “social problems” in the name of central goals of the welfare state, is not a new phenomenon in the Nordics. From the 1930s until the 1970s, the Scandinavian countries practiced eugenics in form of sterilisation which specifically targeted social groups that were regarded as “unproductive”, such as so-called “mentally retarded” and women displaying conduct such as “too many pregnancies, poverty, amoral, or asocial behaviour” (Broberg & Roll-Hansen, 2005, p. 13). The eugenics policies were justified as social reforms to safeguard the welfare and health of its citizens and elevated the interests of “the collective” above those of individuals (Lucassen, 2010). In Norway, sterilisation was introduced as part of general social policy reforms of the welfare state to prevent the “degeneration” of society in form of the 1934 sterilisation law, which was active until 1977. The law made it legal to sterilise people if there was “a considerable danger that children will inherit a serious illness or deformation” or if the person was considered incapable of providing for children – even against their will (Roll-Hansen, 2005). Around 44.000 sterilisation procedures were performed under the act – around 2.000 of them on people defined as “mentally abnormal” (Haavie, 2003).

Final reflections

The results of the present thesis question the role that refugees and their families are assigned in the wider context of Norwegian society and touch upon a general debate of the possibilities of self-realisation and development, which host societies grant to people that re-settle as refugees. How much space and resources are people that come as refugees allowed to take? The line between exploitation and work training measures for so-called “unskilled” immigrants is blurry, and neoliberal concepts of individual responsibility and work as core concept of human identity are deeply intertwined into the everyday lives of most, if not all, citizens of Norway and other countries around the globe. However, the handling of the recent refugee wave of Ukrainians, who were forced to evacuate their country due to the Russian-Ukrainian war, gives food for thought.

When the war broke out in February 2022, the Norwegian government implemented special regulations for Ukrainian refugees which deviate considerably from the legal framework that the rest of the refugee population is subjected to¹³. Ukrainian refugees have the right, but not the duty, to participate in the introduction program, and do not lose their right to program participation and the introduction allowance if they rejected or stopped participation at an earlier point. The program can be held in English and Ukrainian refugees are allowed to participate part-time in the program while receiving the full “introduction allowance”¹⁴. Contrary to other refugees, Ukrainian refugees have neither the right nor the duty to take social studies classes and participate in the “life coping skills” course. A possible explanation for these law changes, which requires further research to be debunked or affirmed, could be that the goal of Norwegian *integration* policies is to keep so-called “Non-Western” refugees in a permanent state of partial citizenship (Parreñas, 2001), which makes it challenging to fulfil the requirements for Norwegian citizenship and thereby restrict this refugee population to the margins of society. While it is too early to conclude whether the Norwegian *integration* regime systematically disadvantages racialised refugee populations over refugees with a European passport, academic research is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the processes which informed these law changes and how they shape the present and future lives of refugees on Norwegian soil.

¹³ <https://introduksjonsprogramt.imdi.no/introduksjonsprogram-for-flyktninger-fra--ukraina/inhold-i-introduksjonsprogramt-for-personer-med-kollektiv-beskyttelse/>

¹⁴ <https://www.imdi.no/kvalifisering/regelverk/juridisk-veileder-til-integreringslovens-midlertidige-kapittel-6a/>

Appendix A – Documents

I identified the documents that were relevant for the text analysis through the white papers which preceded the 2021 Integration and the 2003 Introduction Act. White papers are utilised by the government to present an issue to the Parliament in form of an overview of earlier and current policies and suggestions for future policy changes or measures (Regjeringen, 2020). White papers are usually written by bureaucrats in the responsible ministries and set the premises for the development of policies if they are approved by the political leadership, providing therefore valuable insights into the policy creation process (**Guilherme Fernandes 2021, p. 71**). The next formal step in the Norwegian legislation process are law bills, so-called Propositions to the Storting (*proposisjoner til Stortinget*), which are certain to become laws (Regjeringen, 2011). These proposals are formally answered by the Parliament, which determine the final enacted law (Regjeringen, 2020). Circulars (*rundskriv*) give detailed guidelines in the interpretations of laws and their specifications (Regjeringen, 2020). A political platform is a government document which is used to by political parties and organisations to promote positions on specific political issues (Gomberg, Marhuenda, & Ortuño-Ortín, 2004). Strategy papers provide a political roadmap towards achieving an overarching vision or goal, based on social imaginaries of what a “good future” looks like for a population (Getz, 2002). My text analysis builds on the documents that are listed below.

White paper:

Meld.St.30 From reception centre to work life – an effective integration policy (2016)
(Fra mottak til arbeidsliv – en effektiv integreringspolitikk)

Propositions to the Storting:

Ot.prp.nr. 28 (2002-2003) About the Introduction Act for newly arrived immigrants
(Introduction Law), 2003)

(Om lov om introduksjonsordning for nyankomne innvandrere (introduksjonsloven)

Prop. 89 L (2019-2020) Law about Integration through Training, Education and Work
(Integration Law, 2020)

(Lov om integrering gjennom opplæring, utdanning og arbeid (integreringsloven)

Laws:

Law about the Introduction Scheme and Norwegian Teaching for Newly Arrived Immigrants
(Introduction Law), 2003)

(Lov om introduksjonsordning og norskopplæring for nyankomne innvandrere (introduksjonsloven)

Law about Integration through Training, Education and Work (Integration Law), 2021)

(Lov om integrering gjennom opplæring, utdanning og arbeid (integreringsloven)

Circular:

Rundskriv H-20/05 The introductory and Norwegian language training act for newly arrived immigrants (2005)

(Lov om introduksjonsordning og norskopplæring for nyankomne innvandrere (introduksjonsloven)

Political platform:

Political platform for a government formed by Conservative Party, Progress Party, and Liberal Party (Jeløya Platform, 2018)

(Politisk platform for en regjering utgått av Høyre, Fremskrittspartier og Venstre (Jeløya Plattform))

Strategy:

Integration through knowledge. The Government's integration strategy 2019-2022 (2018)
(Integrering gjennom kunnskap. Regjeringens integreringsstrategi 2019-2022)

Appendix B - List of cited informants

Informants from the project team that created the law bill for the 2021 Integration Act and were affiliated with the Ministry of Education and Research (KD)

- Marcus: project leader, has been working with the legal framework of Norwegian *integration* policies and the implementation of the introduction program since the beginning of 2000.
- Andrea, one of the lawyers in the project team
- Guro, advisor, had been working in KD's "integration section" for several years prior to the project group, mainly focused on Norwegian language and social studies training for adult immigrants

Informants from the Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi)

- Ida, has a leading position in IMDi
- Sindre, works with the administration of municipal grant applications and had left IMDi for three years to work in a municipal *integration* office
- Anette, has worked in UDI and IMDi for over 15 years
- Beate, has worked with language training for refugees for over 15 years. She was involved in a project to create a guide for implementing new content of the introduction program and had previously worked as teacher in an adult education centre
- Edgar, had previously worked as municipal employee in an integration office
- Carmen, had worked with grant administration in a regional office prior to the reform
- Kirsti, has worked in IMDi for over 10 years
- Tobias, who was working on a project that promotes economic advantages of an ethnically diverse workforce
- Linda, who has been working with regulations tied to language training for immigrants for over 20 years

Informants working in the *integration* infrastructure of a small municipality (presented as Låsen)

- Brigitte, program advisor in Låsen Integration Office (LIO)
- Katja, professional leader, responsible for training interns and providing guidance for LIO staff
- Oda, social worker in LIO

- Ole, social worker in LIO
- David, staff member of LIO who worked with IT and
- Anton, the administrative leader, occupied a double function as middle management leader who was superior to the leaders of the adult education centre and the office for unaccompanied minors. Responsible for the office budget, personnel decisions, and communication with the municipal Head of Education.
- Paul, the municipal Head of Education in Låsen
- Line, language teacher at Låsen's adult education centre

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