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# Welcome, capable, valuable? A salutogenic approach to social inclusion of immigrants through volunteering.

Doctoral thesis

**NTNU**
Norwegian University of
Science and Technology

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Thesis for the Degree of Philosophiae Doctor

Gjøvik, juni 2024

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Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences
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# Sammendrag

*Velkommen, kompetent, verdifull? En salutogen tilnærming til sosial inkludering av innvandrere gjennom frivillighet*.

Samfunn over hele verden opplever en økning i mangfold på bakgrunn av økt innvandring. Dette krever en særlig oppmerksomhet mot å inkludere innvandrere i samfunnet de bosetter seg i. I denne sammenhengen er inkludering av innvandrere som frivillige i frivillige organisasjoner foreslått som en sentral strategi. Imidlertid, kan vi ikke bare anta at å inkludere innvandrere inn i frivillig arbeid vil føre til sosial inklusjon, men det er behov for å undersøke innvandreres egne opplevelse av å være frivillig. Forskning viser at innvandrere deltar mindre enn majoritetsbefolkningen i frivillig arbeid, og at vi trenger mer forskning på kontekstuelle faktorer som påvirker deltakelse. Denne avhandlingen har som mål å utforske på hvilken måte formelle frivillige organisasjoner kan fungere som en arena for sosial inkluderingen av innvandrere.

Avhandlingen bygger på en kvalitativ studie, som inkluderer en kvalitativ litteraturstudie av eksisterende internasjonal forskning (11 studier) og en empirisk del basert på individuelle dybdeintervjuer med 26 deltakere (16 med innvandrerbakgrunn) i en stor kommune, som har både urbane og rurale kjennetegn, i Norge.

Resultatene viser at å være frivillig har potensiale til å bidra til sosial inkludering og ha positiv innvirkning på innvandreres tilhørighet, språkkunnskaper, kulturell forståelse og deres følelse av mening. Det er riktignok individuelle aspekter som må ligge til grunn som for eksempel at personen må ha interesse for frivillig arbeid og den frivillige aktiviteten, og ha et ønske om å være en del av samfunnet. For at frivillige organisasjoner skal fungere som en arena som legger til rette for sosial inkludering av innvandrere, er det viktig at myndighetene og frivillige organisasjoner erkjenner at det ikke er tilstrekkelig å appellere til den enkelte innvandrers motivasjon og engasjement. Organisatoriske og strukturelle trekk som rekrutteringspraksiser, type oppgaver, organisasjonens struktur, holdninger til frivillige, sammensetningen av medlemmer samt deres kunnskap om kulturelt mangfold i frivillige organisasjoner spiller også en viktig rolle.

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**Finansieringskilde: Kunnskapsdepartementet**

Ovennevnte avhandling er funnet verdig til å forsvares offentlig
for graden Ph.d. i medisin og helsevitenskap
Disputas finner sted i 1/3 Eureka, NTNU Gjøvik
Torsdag 20. juni, kl. 12.15

## Summary

***Welcome, capable, valuable? A salutogenic approach to social inclusion of immigrants through volunteering.***

Continuously increasing migration trends and increasing diversity in societies all over the world make social inclusion a matter that needs attention. Including immigrants in volunteering is proposed as a central strategy for the social inclusion of immigrants. Even though volunteering is shown to promote beneficial outcomes, the immigrant experience of being a volunteer has so far received sparse attention. Immigrants participate less than the majority population in volunteering. Research has shown that this depends on more than the immigrants´ willingness to participate and that various contextual factors should be examined. This thesis aims to explore in what sense formal voluntary organizations function as an arena for the social inclusion of immigrants.

The thesis is a qualitative exploratory study comprising a qualitative review, meta-ethnography based on existing research (11 studies), and an empirical analysis of semi-structured individual in-depth interviews with 26 participants (16 with immigrant backgrounds) in a semi-rural municipality in Norway.

The results suggest that volunteering has the potential to improve social inclusion and well-being for immigrants by promoting belongingness, language proficiency, cultural understanding, and meaningfulness. However, for formal volunteering to work as an arena facilitating the social inclusion of immigrants, it is essential that authorities and volunteering organizations acknowledge that merely appealing to the individual immigrant's motivation, engagement, and commitment is not sufficient. Organizational and structural features in voluntary organizations also play an important role. For instance, the practices and instruments of volunteer management and recruitment, the task structure and field of activity, the organization's structure, attitudes towards volunteers, the composition of members, and their knowledge of cultural diversity.

## Acknowledgments

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## Selected acronyms and abbreviations

IMDi   The Directorate of Integration and Diversity (Integrerings- og mangfoldsdirektoratet)

OECD   Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

SDI      Stepwise Deductive Induction

EU       European Union

**List of papers**

Sveen, S., Anthun, K. S., Batt-Rawden, K. B., & Tingvold, L. (2023). Immigrants' Experiences of
    Volunteering; A Meta-Ethnography. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 52*(3), 569-
    588. doi:10.1177/08997640221114810

Sveen, S., Anthun, K. S., Batt-Rawden, K. B., & Tingvold, L. (2023). Volunteering: A Tool for Social
    Inclusion and Promoting the Well-Being of Refugees? A Qualitative Study. *Societies, 13*(1),
    12. doi: https://doi.org/10.3390/soc13010012

Sveen, S., Anthun, K.S. & Tingvold, L. Recruitment of Volunteers with Immigrant Backgrounds: The
    Impact of Structural and Individual Aspects. Voluntas (2024). Doi:
    https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-024-00653-8

## 1.0 Introduction

During the time spent working on this thesis, we have witnessed an escalation in international armed conflicts, economic adversity, and environmental crises, resulting in heightened migration trends. Many nations are working to accommodate immigrants and grappling with the complexities of integrating them effectively into their respective societies. These efforts to ensure the social inclusion of immigrants are crucial to ensure a safe and vibrant society for all. Failure to achieve integration puts immigrants at risk of marginalization. Less access to resources and opportunities is likely to limit participation in decision-making processes. It also increases vulnerability to poverty and discrimination and diminishes overall well-being. Over the last few years, several European countries have seen rising social tensions among immigrant youth, as well as instability within communities and societies. Strategies to promote social inclusion for immigrants have become pivotal, and in this debate, the voluntary sector is expected to play an important role.

In the following section, I will set the stage by introducing the background of the current doctoral project, immigrants, social inclusion, and the voluntary sector as an arena.

### 1.1 Migration and the need for social inclusion

Throughout history, human migration has taken place in almost every corner of the world. In 2021, about 281 million people were international migrants (International Organization for Migration, 2021). Migration patterns are diverse and influenced by various factors such as political stability, conflicts, environmental conditions, and economic opportunities (Hammar & Tamas, 1997; Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016). The specific countries experiencing emigration vary over time, but a central pattern among migrants is to move from less economically developed countries to more economically developed ones in search of better job opportunities and living conditions (Hammar & Tamas, 1997; Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016). As well, forced migration, rooted in political conflicts and persecution, leads to refugee movements. While many refugees often seek asylum in neighboring countries, some flee into regions farther away or to countries with totally new societal structures, languages, and cultures (Allen, Vaage, & Hauff, 2006). Family reunification represents a third type of

migration where individuals move to join family members who already reside in the country of migration (Costello, Groenendijk, Storgaard, Ioffe, & Büchsel, 2017).

Regardless of the reason for migrating and the distance involved, all migrants face cultural adaptation to the new country of residence. Even if physically leaving one country for another, the same 'shift' does not occur mentally, but identity, belongingness, and interests are being shaped and reshaped. At stake for migrants in setting up a new life is the acquirement of new knowledge, language, skills, and a good understanding of the new country to get a foothold to access education, employment, or resources to sustain a good life (Hammar, Brochmann, Tamas, & Faist, 1997; Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016). Migrants are exposed to factors that may impact health before, during, and after migration. This may include factors in their country of origin and factors leading to migration, such as socioeconomic situation, war, trauma, and political repression. The migration process, which may include physical and mental stress and post-migration tensions that may impact health, involves the adjustment to the social, economic, political, and cultural framework of the country of settlement. Uncertainty and waiting during the asylum process, language problems, isolation, social marginalization, barriers to health care, and discrimination are also factors that may impact the individual's health in the new country of residence (Spallek, Zeeb, & Razum, 2011). Immigrants, and especially refugees, experience more mental problems than the majority population (Kirmayer et al., 2011; Spilker et al., 2022). Much research on immigrants, especially refugees, and resettlement focuses on these stressors and obstacles. However, it is also crucial to better understand facilitators of successful migration processes, where immigrants resettle, develop, and thrive in the new country. On this background, I want to apply a salutogenic perspective, meaning exploring which factors may contribute to successful social inclusion and well-being despite the challenges they experience through their migration.

Research has shown that being a part of a community or social group and maintaining strong, positive interpersonal relationships are fundamental to humans (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Positive social relationships are associated with a strong impact on physical and mental health through providing social support, social influence, social engagement and attachment, and access to resources and material goods (Berkman, Glass, Brissette, & Seeman, 2000). Conversely, studies suggest that feelings of not belonging can lead

individuals to develop mental health problems (van Bergen et al., 2018) and adopt a negative and antisocial orientation (Schiefloe, 2019; Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001). Hence, belonging to a community is considered important both to the individual and society as a whole to build a safe, stable, and inclusive community (Wilcock & Hocking, 2015). The increased cultural and ethnic diversity in societies, where many people have left their social network and all they know, makes facilitating successful social inclusion processes for immigrants a crucial priority in many countries (Harder et al., 2018; Oliver & Gidley, 2015). Social inclusion is complex and may touch many sectors and arenas, such as introduction programs for immigrants, health services, educational institutions, and the labor market; however, in this doctoral project, I have chosen to focus on the voluntary sector.

**1.2 Voluntary sector as an inclusion arena**

The responsibility for the integration of immigrants has long been considered to belong to the public sector in many countries with a strong welfare state. The public sector often carries out efforts such as implementing the introduction program for refugees that includes, among others, language courses, education on societal knowledge, and employment-oriented measures (Brochmann, 2015; Carrera, 2006; Enes, 2017) However, the government increasingly frames the voluntary sector as ´a glue´ in the fellowship in communities and have high expectations to the voluntary sector to contribute to the integration of immigrants through building social networks, language training, and preparing immigrants for the labor market, and to activate them as an unused source of volunteers to contribute and benefit the overall society (Bendel, 2014; Christensen & Christensen, 2006; Ministry of Culture, 2018; Ministry of Education, 2021; Ministry of Social Affairs Housing and the Elderly, 2015; Smith, Ellis, Howlett, & O´Brien, 2004).

Volunteering is a multifaceted concept encompassing a diverse range of activities found across various sectors and organizations (Henriksen, Strømsnes, & Svedberg, 2018). Idealistic notions of volunteering have traditionally viewed volunteering as benefitting the weakest groups in society and conceptualized it as something carried out with selflessness, altruism, and solidarity (Seligman, 1995). Volunteering is defined as contributions carried out of one´s free will to benefit people or groups outside the family or social network without any

expectation of rewards or compensation (Snyder & Omoto, 2008). In research, volunteering is divided into formal and informal volunteering. Formal volunteering refers to efforts carried out through a voluntary organization. Informal volunteering refers to efforts carried out individually, like helping friends, family, and neighbors (Lee & Brudney, 2012; Wilson, 2012). Informal volunteering is often neglected in research, although in some communities, it is a more dominant type of volunteering (Dean, 2022). Such voluntary efforts are important and widespread in Scandinavia as well (Jegermalm, Hermansen, & Fladmoe, 2019). This doctoral project seeks to investigate formal volunteering, specifically examining whether and how voluntary organizations can serve as a platform to foster social inclusion for immigrants. The premise is that these organizations, by bringing together a diverse cross-section of the population, have the potential to contribute to social inclusion. Research has suggested that participation in voluntary organizations may be an arena to boost integration, democratic understanding, and social and political formation (Putnam, 2000; Selle & Kuhnle, 1992; Ødegård & Fladmoe, 2020).

Eimhjellen, Espegren & Nærland (2021) described four functions volunteering and voluntary organizations may perform for integration.

1.  Social integration: a central function of voluntary organizations is to be a social meeting point where people have the opportunity to be integrated into local social fellowships and, in turn, into society at large. Participation in volunteering may contribute to learning the language and building a broader social network. Through social networks, people may bond with others across differences, and it may lead to the emergence of trust.
2.  Political integration: from this perspective, engagement in voluntary organizations has some important democratic functions. Individuals with shared interests have the opportunity to congregate and make their interests known and serve as advocates for these interests in society.
3.  Economic integration: this involves calculating the monetary value of voluntary (unpaid) labor carried out for the benefit of immigrants, such as volunteers who visit and arrange activities at asylum centers, organizations running language cafés, etc.

4. Individual utility: participation in volunteering can be personally advantageous through such as gaining work experience, accessing knowledge and skills and building networks.

Volunteering is shown to have a multitude of benefits both for the recipients of volunteer activities (Grönlund & Falk, 2019) and for those who participate as volunteers (Nichol, Wilson, Rodrigues, & Haighton, 2023; Wilson, 2012). Reviews show a number of benefits associated with volunteering, such as reduced mortality, improved quality of life, better functioning, empowerment, increased social support, and increased belongingness in the community (Keefer, Steichele, Graessel, Prokosch, & Kolominsky-Rabas, 2023; Nichol et al., 2023; Wilson, 2012). Some have found an association between participation as volunteers and improved self-perceived health and positive effects on mental health (Casiday, Kinsman, Fisher, & Bambra, 2008; Detollenaere, Willems, & Baert, 2017; Jenkinson et al., 2013), and a positive effect on psychological well-being and increased social and human capital (Kragt & Holtrop, 2019). However, research regarding immigrants' experiences of volunteering is sparse, and volunteering may not hold standardized definitions across cultures and countries (Eimhjellen et al., 2021; Hobbs, 2001; Schwingel et al., 2017), and we cannot rely on studies conducted on the majority population to conclude that volunteering is socially inclusive and have a positive effect on health and well-being for all. Thus, knowledge about immigrants' experiences of being volunteers and under which conditions voluntary organizations have the ability to fulfill the expectations of function as an inclusion arena are exceedingly needed.

### 1.3 Immigrants´ participation in volunteering

Research states that immigrants participate less than the majority population in voluntary organizations (Eimhjellen et al., 2021; Qvist, 2018; Vrålstad & Wiggen, 2017; Wilson, 2012). Participation in volunteering is generally characterized by social inequality. This is expressed by the fact that resourceful, well-educated people with high incomes participate more than others (Eimhjellen & Fladmoe, 2020; Wilson, 2012). Immigrants tend to have lower levels of education, lower income, more stressful work, poorer housing, experience more discrimination and a more significant proportion of mental health problems compared to the majority population (OECD, 2017; Vrålstad & Wiggen, 2017). According to a review of

research in Norway, characteristics such as being a woman, having a lower education, high age, and low language competence are associated with lower participation in volunteering for immigrants (Eimhjellen et al., 2021). Hence, immigrants´ participation in volunteering depends on more than their willingness to volunteer. Southby et al. (2019) claimed that potential barriers to volunteering for immigrants might include access to opportunities, stigmatizing or exclusionary context, lack of appropriate support, skills, and qualifications, financial costs, and different conceptualizations and difficulties with the perception of volunteering. Other researchers state that the comprehension of volunteering may differ across cultures such as the volunteer role may be comprehended differently where some consider a volunteer as a gifted person with very high standards that seem out of reach (Schwingel et al., 2017), while others may consider volunteering as an inevitable and positive part of their religious ethos (Handy & Greenspan, 2009). Some immigrants may be used to a culture where volunteering was forced upon the population by their governments, and hence, voluntary organizations have been given a bad reputation and a function of governmental control (Eimhjellen, Bentsen, & Wollebæk, 2020; Khvorostianov & Remennick, 2017). The volunteer activity may also be comprehended differently, such as which criteria determine what counts as volunteer activity and what does not (Hobbs, 2001; Schwingel et al., 2017). In Norway, research has also found structural barriers within the organizations, such as the fact that voluntary organizations often might require commitment over time and competence in organizational democracy and the culture of volunteering (Ødegård, Loga, Steen-Johnsen, & Ravneberg, 2014). Immigrants have also reported that they have never been asked to volunteer and lack knowledge of how to enter volunteering (Eimhjellen & Segaard, 2010). It is time to direct the attention away from individual choice and explore structural factors that may impact whether immigrants participate in volunteering (Southby et al., 2019).

## 1.4 Recruitment of volunteers with immigrant backgrounds

It has been suggested that exclusion derives from failing to seek, recruit and find a suitable voluntary activity for potential volunteers (Acker, 2006; Bonnesen, 2019; Meyer & Rameder, 2022; van Overbeeke, Koolen-Maas, Meijs, & Brudney, 2022). The literature on volunteer management and recruitment efforts is limited (Einolf, 2018). However, research points to

the importance of matching recruitment messages to potential volunteers´ motives (Clary et al., 1998; Clary, Snyder, Ridge, Miene, & Haugen, 1994), promoting the feeling of pride in the organizations and emphasizing that the organization is open to newcomers and that members treat each other respectful. Recruiting a diverse workforce was considered more effective when the organizations acknowledged and specified the value of diversity (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2014).

Several researchers have suggested theoretical explanations for the inequality in participation in volunteering based on exclusionary practices. The integrated theory of volunteer work argues that human, social, and cultural capital are needed in volunteering, thus attracting individuals who fulfill these forms of capital (Wilson & Musick, 1997). In Norway, this is supported by research stating that volunteers are often recruited on the basis of education and skills that serve the organization's best (Folkestad, Fladmoe, Sivesind, & Eimhjellen, 2017). This theory views recruitment as a process that involves the exchange of objectively desirable resources between the demand and supply aspects. On the other hand, Bonnesen (2019) identifies exclusionary practices based on the framing of the 'ideal volunteer,' encompassing factors like volunteers' motivations and qualifications. Her work highlights three distinct recruitment practices that contribute to social inequality in volunteering, particularly concerning social class and age: non-recruitment, informal exclusion, and formal exclusion. Non-recruitment, as explored by Bonnesen (2019), involves limitations in advertising placement, reaching only specific demographics. This is crucial because direct requests to volunteer significantly influence individuals' decisions to become volunteers (Meyer & Rameder, 2022; Wollebæk, Sætrang, & Fladmoe, 2015). Network recruitment, a component of non-recruitment, is a well-known strategy where individuals tend to recruit others who are similar to them (Grubb, Holstein, Qvist, & Henriksen, 2022; Wilson, 2012; Wollebæk et al., 2015). Informal exclusion is associated with the economic costs of volunteering, including membership fees within organizations. Another aspect of informal exclusion is recipient retention, where efforts are made to transition service recipients into volunteers. However, this transition proves challenging as they are not fully considered as volunteers. Formal exclusionary practices, as outlined by Bonnesen (2019), involve dismissing volunteer applicants deemed unfit for their intended roles. These

exclusionary practices, identified within the recruitment process, shed light on the various ways in which social inequality can manifest within volunteer organizations.

More research is needed regarding structural and organizational factors that may impact recruitment and who is being recruited. It is necessary to conduct exploratory research about how volunteers and paid staff with recruitment responsibility reflect on and carry out the recruitment efforts in the organization's frame. This is crucial knowledge, given the extent of increased globalization and immigration and the underlying need for social inclusion.

## 2.0 Purpose, objectives, and research questions of this thesis

The overall aim of this thesis is to explore in what sense formal voluntary organizations function as an arena for the social inclusion of immigrants. This aim will be operationalized by bringing insights into immigrants' experience of participation in volunteering and how voluntary organizations recruit and involve those with immigrant backgrounds.

Social inclusion is understood as a process and a goal. The process aims to ensure equal access to resources, opportunities, and participation in education, employment, healthcare, and social activities. The goal envisions a society where everyone, irrespective of background, identity, or abilities, can participate, experience acceptance, and foster a sense of belonging (Baumgartner & Burns, 2014; van Bergen et al., 2019; Omidvar & Richmond, 2003). I chose to adopt a salutogenic perspective in exploring the research questions in this doctoral project. This approach emphasizes identifying and understanding elements that enhance immigrants' well-being and social inclusion through volunteering. It goes beyond identifying challenges and issues and seeks to highlight the factors and processes that lead to positive outcomes in terms of social inclusion for immigrants involved in formal voluntary activities.

The doctoral project is article-based, with three articles that can be read as a stand-alone project, and this thesis is going to show how these three articles relate and contribute to the bigger picture together. The thesis has an international lens (Article I) and a national lens with empirical research in Norway (Article II & III). Table 1 *Overview of the included article's objective and research questions* presents the specific objectives and research questions associated with each individual article.

| ARTICLE | OBJECTIVE | RESEARCH QUESTION |
|---------|-----------|-------------------|
| I | To explore, synthesize and interpret the existing international qualitative research concerning immigrants' experiences of being formal volunteers and how this may influence their health. | Which experiences related to participating in formal volunteering do immigrants have? |
| II | To apply a salutogenic perspective to explore how formal volunteering may contribute to developing a sense of social inclusion and well-being among refugees in Norway. | How do refugees experience volunteering as a contributor to their feelings of social inclusion or exclusion in Norway? |
| III | To investigate how volunteers with recruitment responsibility in five voluntary organizations that engage in welfare- and community-related activities recruit and reflect on the inclusion of volunteers with immigrant backgrounds. | How do volunteers and employees with recruitment responsibility recruit and reflect on recruitment of volunteers with immigrant backgrounds? |

## 3.0 The Norwegian Context

The empirical studies (Article II & III) are conducted in Norway; hence the Norwegian context has to be elaborated.

Norway has a population of just over 5.5 million people, and immigrants make up a growing proportion of the population. Immigrants accounted for 1.5 percent of the population in 1970, in contrast with 16 percent in 2022 (Steinkellner, Krokedal, & Andersen, 2023). Migration to Norway has been gradually evolving until it significantly increased after the European Union (EU) expansion and increased employment immigration in 2004. Immigration was, however, reduced to the minimum during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, immigration was back to the pre-COVID-19 level, and the number of immigrants reached an all-time high after Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Steinkellner et al., 2023). Statistics Norway´s national population projections show that immigration will ensure population growth by 2050 (Thomas, 2022).

Immigrants are defined as people who have migrated to Norway, were born in another country, and whose parents and all four grandparents were born outside Norway. The group labeled immigrants is heterogeneous and includes people of all ages, from different countries and socioeconomic backgrounds, and with different reasons for leaving their home countries. In Norway, immigrants consist of an eclectic group with backgrounds from 223 countries and self-governed regions. The largest group of immigrants comes from Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, and Sweden. However, 30 percent of immigrants come from Asia, with a predominance of refugees from Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. The age composition of the immigrant population differs from the majority population, with a larger proportion of immigrants belonging to the age group 30-49 years. There are different reasons for migration, and most immigrants migrate to seek employment or family reunification. Refugees, the group of immigrants that have been displaced forcibly due to violence, conflict, and disaster and have sought safety and protection, constituted 31.9 percent of immigrants in Norway in 2023 (Steinkellner et al., 2023).

Immigrants' different backgrounds and reasons for migration may impact their prerequisites for integration into the labor market and society (Eimhjellen et al., 2021). In Norway,

integration and inclusion efforts of immigrants are often considered to apply to people from other regions of the world with different cultures and ways of living than Western countries (Brochmann, 2010). However, in this doctoral thesis, we include immigrants regardless of country of origin.

## 3.1 The Norwegian society and welfare state

Due to the strong welfare state in Norway, the responsibility for immigrant integration has been considered a public sector area (Brochmann, Borchgrevink, & Rogstad, 2002; Enes, 2017). However, the government has set out increasing expectations for civil society and the voluntary sector in government policy and strategic documents on integration and inclusion (IMDi, 2022; Ministry of Culture, 2018). In the government strategy for ´everyday integration´, voluntary outreach organizations that are in contact with the local community and society around them are promoted to act as bridges and arenas for integration. Furthermore, the strategy emphasizes that civil society´s efforts and value for integration needs to become more visible. Moreover, public authorities need to empower civil society better to complement the public sector´s work on integration. The Norwegian government praises both the activities and efforts conducted by the voluntary organizations to promote integration, as well as highlighting their importance as an arena to integrate immigrants through including them as volunteers (Ministry of Culture, 2018; Ministry of Education, 2021).

Norwegian society is characterized by strong social welfare systems, democratic values, gender equality, and an emphasis on individual rights while maintaining a sense of community and solidarity. The development of the welfare state in Norway can be traced back to a combination of historical, political, and social factors (Kuhnle & Kildal, 2018). Industrialization and social strains in the late 19th century led to social changes, economic disparities, poor working conditions, and increased social inequality, which stimulated concerns about the population's well-being. Social security insurance was made accessible to meet the need for income in old age, illness, or accidents (Seip, 1991). Social reforms to address poverty and social unrest were developed further between the world wars and post-World War II. The Labour Party implemented an extensive welfare program that included

social insurance, healthcare, education, and other social services. Since then, the welfare state in Norway has been characterized by universal social policies, meaning that benefits and services are available to all citizens, regardless of their socio-economic status (Kuhnle & Kildal, 2018) . The welfare system in Norway includes universal healthcare, a comprehensive social security system, public education, and various other social services. In the Norwegian society, 'welfare' is a central concept that describes an ideal of society, the conception of quality of life, and values of equality and independence. One central value in Norway is the work ethic and the expectation that everyone should be useful and contribute to society (Brodtkorb & Rugkåsa, 2019). Additionally, the welfare state depends on high participation in the labor market (Brochmann et al., 2002), making the concept of ´active citizenship´ (medborgerskap) central. This concept relates to persons not dependent on the welfare state and willing to participate in a range of responsibilities for the self, the care of others, and the well-being of communities (Newman & Tonkens, 2011). ´Active citizenship´ (medborgerskap) describes citizens' rights, participation, and political culture, as well as membership in society and how citizens relate to others (Strømsnes, 2003).

Despite these egalitarian values and high and increasing standard of living, Norway experiences increasing social and economic inequality, where individuals at the lowest end of the socioeconomic gradient suffer multiple disadvantages and have much shorter lives and worse health (Goldblatt et al., 2023). In addition, with a decreasing number of jobs with no requirements for qualifications, the structure of the labor market affects the low-skilled and low-educated, lowering their employment rates and creating a hierarchy of occupations regarding pay, stress, and control over the workday (Goldblatt et al., 2023).

### 3.2 Voluntary Sector in the Norwegian context

The voluntary sector in the different countries in Scandinavia has many similarities, such as widespread civic engagement, stable levels of engagement, and dominant fields of volunteering (Henriksen, Strømsnes, & Svedberg, 2019). Voluntary organizations represent a significant and essential part of civic society, serving as vital intermediaries between citizens and the state (Enjolras & Strømsnes, 2018). Voluntary organizations have been carrying out activities and services that have contributed considerably to welfare and social economics, strengthened people's social networks, and contradicted loneliness (Wollebæk & Selle,

2002). Since the late nineteenth century, most voluntary organizations have been membership-based with a democratic structure connecting the local community to the national society. The newer picture shows the emergence of independent organizations without bonds to national organizations, including many organizations managed by and for immigrants (minority organizations). Membership in organizations is losing importance, and organizational attachment is declining, while volunteer activity is the center of attention (Qvist, Folkestad, Fridberg, & Lundåsen, 2019; Selle, Strømsnes, Svedberg, Ibsen, & Henriksen, 2019). However, participation in volunteering in Norway is extensive, and 64 percent of the population (above the age of 15) has been contributing as volunteers through a voluntary organization for the last year (Prestegård & Olsen, 2023).

Voluntary organizations in Norway have a range of orientations, such as culture and leisure, welfare, community orientation, and religion (Folkestad et al., 2017), where most are found within leisure, sports, and culture similar to the other Scandinavian countries (Qvist et al., 2019). The organizations also have different roles in civil society; some emphasize the importance of organizational life in ensuring community, belonging, and social interaction and consider democracy as an outcome of the values the organizations possess. Others are focused on voluntary organizations as democratic institutions involved in policymaking and as a voice for interest groups (Wollebæk, Selle, & Strømsnes, 2008). Voluntary organizations are also different in being members-oriented or community-oriented, focusing on problems and issues important to the members of the organizations or aiming to promote an inclusive approach to create shared understanding and agreement for the collective interests. The voluntary sector is portrayed as a dynamic force shaping social integration, building strong local communities, cultivating trust, and fostering democratic values (Wollebæk et al., 2008).

Even though voluntary organizations are important social institutions, as they have been recruiting broadly socially and counteracted social isolation and exclusion, this does not seem to be a stable characteristic that is maintained regardless of time and place (Wollebæk & Selle, 2002). New organizational structures and purposes affect the organizational ability to recruit and include in the community (Wollebæk et al., 2015). Traditional membership-based organizations are often considered to be key in integration as they facilitate access to the majority population, insight into the values and norms of society, and an arena to educate in democracy (Eimhjellen et al., 2021; Putnam, 2000).

## 4.0 Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

In this doctoral project, I employed several theoretical concepts to analyze the results from different perspectives.

Social inclusion is the first concept to be elaborated on in this section, as it is central to the aim and research questions of this thesis. In my view, participation and social capital can be seen in relation to social inclusion, hence I add them to my discussion on social inclusion. As I understand these concepts, participation is a central component of social inclusion, and social capital may be seen as a goal and outcome of both participation and inclusion. Furthermore, salutogenesis (Antonovsky, 1979) is included in this thesis as a central theory to add the health perspective in order to understand the social inclusion of immigrants through volunteering.

## 4.1 Social Inclusion

Social inclusion as a concept became central in Europe in the 1980s as a response to social divides occurring on the basis of new labor market conditions and the inadequacy of existing welfare provisions to meet changes resulting from a more diverse population (Omidvar & Richmond, 2003). However, it is not merely a response to social exclusion. In research, no consistent definition of social inclusion can be found (Baumgartner & Burns, 2014). Social inclusion may be described as both a goal and a process. The goal is a society where everyone, regardless of background, identity, or abilities, can participate and experience acceptance and belonging (Baumgartner & Burns, 2014; van Bergen et al., 2019). It can describe the process of ensuring that everyone within a society has equal access to resources and opportunities and participation in education, employment, healthcare, and social activities (Omidvar & Richmond, 2003). While the concept of social inclusion is complex and cannot be reduced to one definition, Omidvar and Richmond (2003) identified five critical dimensions or cornerstones of social inclusion. These illuminate the results, and they will be discussed in the discussion section of this thesis. The cornerstones are:

1. Valued recognition: conferring recognition and respect on individuals and groups.

2. Human development: nurturing talents, skills, and capacities as well as having the choice to live a life that the individual values and that allows them to contribute in a way that both the individual and others view as worthwhile.

3. Involvement and engagement: having the right and the necessary support to make or be involved in decisions that affect oneself, one's family, and the community, as well as being engaged in community life.

4. Proximity: access to shared physical and social spaces to provide opportunities for interaction, if desired, and to reduce the social distance among people.

5. Material well-being: having the material resources necessary to participate fully in community life, including being safely and securely housed and having adequate income (Omidvar & Richmond, 2003).

In my understanding, the social inclusion of immigrants is a broad concept that includes the complexity of the efforts of both society and the overall population including immigrants, encompassing both individual actions and context. I consider the cornerstones of social inclusion to apply to all parts of this study (Articles I, II, and III) and give an overall perspective that greatly enhances the societal value of the results. This constitutes the main reason for choosing this concept, rather than the concept of ´integration´. Integration is, however, also used in the literature as it holds some of the same meaning as inclusion. Integration may refer to many parameters, such as social integration in neighborhoods, political integration e.g. participation in elections, economic integration e.g. participation in the labor market, or cultural integration measured by the extent to which immigrants maintain traditions and identity connected to their country of origin (Rytter, 2019). Part of the basis for this doctoral project is that the Norwegian authorities promote volunteering as an arena for integration. Hence, it is necessary to refer to how Norwegian authorities frame integration. Integration is seen as a process by which individuals learn about and adapt to society's values and become economically and socially connected; this process is also considered to create belonging and loyalty (Brochmann, 2010).

In line with these reflections on inclusion and integration, it is relevant to include reflections on the theory of social capital. Social capital as an analytical concept has roots in Pierre Bourdieu's (1983) theory of social, cultural, and economic capital and has been developed by

many scholars. Bourdieu defined social capital as the 'aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu, 1983, p.249). As I understand this definition, social capital is a collection of resources, such as information, support, opportunities, and belongingness, that a person can access through established social networks and relations. In this doctoral project, I consider that Robert Putnam's (2000) theory of social capital offers the most suitable approach. Social capital is then considered a civic good where social interactions build social trust and reciprocity, and volunteering is central to building this social capital. Putnam defined social capital as the networks of relationships and social connections that people build through interactions in communities. These social connections may be informal, such as connections to family, friends, and neighbors, and formal such as connections through civic and social organizations. It is the latter that are in focus in this doctoral project. Putnam (2000) claims there are two different types of social capital: bonding and bridging. Bonding social capital refers to connections within homogenous groups that are inward-looking and reinforce exclusive identities based on strong ties. This bonding capital supports specific reciprocity and mobilizes solidarity for in-group persons. These connections may be crucial for social and psychological support for groups in the community but may hamper inclusion and integration in a local community. Bridging social capital includes outward-looking networks encompassing people across diverse social divides. These connections rely on weak ties, and Putnam claims that they are essential for community cohesion and societal well-being. High social capital is associated with greater participation in civic and political activities such as volunteering and voting (Putnam, 2000). Conversely, a decline in participation in community groups and an increase in solitary activities are claimed to be related to social problems such as crime, marginalization, and exclusion (Putnam, 2000). This theory is in line with research stating that all people need to belong and to be central to a diverse population to live and function together (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Schiefloe, 2019; Twenge et al., 2001; van Bergen et al., 2018). I understand the Norwegian government´s strategy and goal of including immigrants in terms of ´bridging´ volunteering to enhance integration.

Putnam (2000) promotes weak ties as important for bridging social capital, and Granovetter (1973) has developed a theory of these ties. The theory of the Strength of Weak Ties (Granovetter, 1973, 1983) is a sociological concept about the role of social networks and social connections and how these networks and connections impact opportunities and the spread of information. Granovetter distinguishes between strong ties, which are close and intimate relationships, and weak ties, which refer to more casual acquaintances or connections. He suggests that strong social ties provide social support and cohesion within existing groups such as family and close friends. Granovetter proposes the concept of the strength of weak ties, as he claims that casual acquaintances play a significant role in social networks by providing access to new information, new perspectives and opportunities for engagement, as well as to resources that are not readily available within close-knit groups. These interpersonal interactions may provide a micro-macro bridge and may contribute significantly to information distribution and access to opportunities, linking members across different small groups (Granovetter, 1973, 1983). I chose to apply Granovetters´ theory to volunteering because it elucidates ´bridging´ volunteering but primarily provides a lens to understand parts of the recruitment processes of volunteers. It highlights the importance of strong and weak ties in creating robust and diverse volunteer network recruitment; hence, weak ties can be crucial in recruiting volunteers with immigrant backgrounds. However, it contributes to only one fragment of the complex recruitment process.

The issue of majority and minority relations within the nation-state is undoubtedly about political processes and issues of power (Kaufmann & Haklai, 2008). Social structures and power relations strongly impact the inclusion and exclusion of minorities (Allman, 2013). Issues of social status, power, and hierarchies come into play whenever there are questions of determining forms of exclusion, requirements for inclusion, discrimination of certain groups based on cultural, ethnic, or religious characteristics, and these groups' access to participation at different arenas in the greater society. Even the act of labeling someone as a majority or minority is a manifestation of power relations and power differences between groups. Minoritization and majoritization processes occur through social relations shaped by power, resources, interests, language and discourse (Predelli, Halsaa, & Thun, 2012).

I have chosen to use the labels ´majority´ and ´minority´ in this doctoral project, exactly because embedded in them is the issue of power relations, and because these terms designate two complementary groups that form a whole; a minority cannot exist without a majority, and likewise, majority cannot exist without minority. Social inclusion is determined by the members of the minority, but also by the members of the majority. Social relations within the voluntary sector, the social arena being studied here, are also shaped by power relations manifest in language and other symbolic and social practices (Stein, 2022). In the current doctoral project, power relations are addressed indirectly at various times. For instance, in Article III, when recruiters discuss requirements for inclusion and label some forms of skills useful and others not, and when they categorize immigrants as in need of help instead of seeing them as contributors on equal footing with the majority population. The fact that some immigrants ´have made it´ by volunteering, have joined the labor market, and are experiencing social inclusion are also signs of power dynamics and power relations among immigrants. Despite that, power and power dynamics are not at the center of my attention in this project, nor has it been so in the data collection phase or data analysis. Instead of focusing on power structures placing some people in minority status and a marginal position and others in a majority position or looking into how the power plays among members in voluntary organizations, I have directed attention towards experiences of volunteering among immigrants and the recruitment of immigrants to voluntary organizations. I have done so because I find it more interesting to explore how voluntary organizations can contribute to the social inclusion of those in marginal positions, given inequalities in social status and power.

## 4.2 Salutogenesis

The traditional biomedical perspective has primarily focused on the question ´What makes people sick´ and documented factors that are destructive to health, and viewing health as a dichotomy between health and disease. In contrast, the salutogenic perspective has been central to also asking the question, ´What makes people healthy?´ (Antonovsky, 1987). Conceptually, salutogenesis is defined as the process of movement toward health in a continuum of ease to dis-ease (Antonovsky, 1993c). This orientation proposes that we study each individual, at any time, on this continuum (Antonovsky, 1987). I find this perspective

valuable in relation to immigrants in a social inclusion process. Immigrants experience many challenges settling in a new country, and many experience this process as destructive. What then contributes to a positive experience of this process of resettling? Which factors may be promoted to help more immigrants experience well-being through these processes? This forms the argument for including Antonovsky´s theory of salutogenesis in this doctoral project.

Salutogenesis and the continuum between ease and dis-ease build on the assumption that a person is born and raised in a certain socio-cultural and historical context, with positive and negative influences. Different factors will influence the person, but people stay healthy if they regulate and cope with the tension. In the case of coping, the conflicts or tensions enable psychological processes of development, personal growth, and mental health. This self-regulatory process is explained by two concepts: Generalized Resistance Resources and Sense of Coherence. Generalized resistance resources represent ´dispositional orientations´ (Antonovsky, 1992; 1987) within the person, the group, or the surroundings that can contribute to managing tension. These characteristics help the person cope with stressors and may be material (e.g., money), genetic (e.g., intelligence), knowledge (e.g., coping strategies), and social (e.g., social network). Sense of coherence is a life orientation that reflects the ability to identify internal and external resources and use them to promote and enhance health and well-being (Eriksson, 2017). Sense of coherence does not refer to a specific type of coping strategy but to factors that are the basis for successful coping with stressors (Antonovsky, 1993b).

Sense of coherence consists of seeing the world as manageable, comprehensive, and meaningful (Antonovsky, 1987, 2005). Manageability is described as an instrumental dimension defined as the degree to which one feels that resources are available to handle the challenges one meets. Immigrants that have learned the language in the new country and rebuilt their social network may experience a high degree of manageability. Comprehensibility refers to a cognitive dimension linked to the extent to which one perceives what is happening as rationally understandable and whether the information is clear, structured, and coherent (Antonovsky, 1987, 2005). Immigrants resettling in a new country that experience that the expectations from the society are intelligible and who have insights into different cultural values, norms, and the social structure of the society may

experience a high degree of comprehensibility. Meaningfulness is described as a motivational dimension that refers to the extent to which one feels that life has emotional meaning and that problems are seen as challenges worth commitment and dedication (Antonovsky, 1991). Immigrants may experience meaningfulness in many different ways, but it is reasonable to assume participation in meaningful activities and building social networks that increase their belongingness to a group or society increases this dimension of sense of coherence. Meaningfulness is related to decision-making power in socially valued contexts (Antonovsky, 1991). In Norway, this is most likely related to employment in the labor market. However, other researchers have also found that meaningfulness may be related to other paths, such as religion and helping others. Moreover, the feeling of belongingness may strengthen meaningfulness (Slootjes, Keuzenkamp, & Saharso, 2017). Sense of coherence and generalized resistant resources are seen as a cross-cultural construct, such as being meaningful across gender, social class, religion, and culture (Eriksson & Lindström, 2005).

Antonovsky recognized the importance of being culturally integrated (Antonovsky, 1967), as he considered the culture to give its members clear and understandable answers and structure that provide meaning and comprehension of life (Antonovsky, 1979). Furthermore, he noted that it is challenging for people who are not integrated because they are constantly confronted with new, unknown information and often do not have the legitimacy to be heard (Antonovsky, 1993a). Benz, Bull, Mittelmark & Vaandrager (2014) examined how Antonovsky has worked with culture, identifying both cultures as stressors and as generalized resistant resources. Stressors were associated with having a minority background, rapid cultural change, and experiencing discrimination, as well as whether the culture had high complexity and signaled many norms and rules. Culture as a generalized resistant resource was described as experiencing cultural stability, integration, adaptability, and being equipped by the culture to reach their aspirations, all of which play an important role in the sense of coherence of refugees, displaced individuals, labor migrants, or international students. Riedel et al (2011) combined salutogenesis with Berry's (2005) acculturation model. According to Berry (2005), acculturation is a dual process of cultural and psychological change resulting from contact between individuals from different cultural groups. Berry (2005) claimed that immigrants seek to acculturate in several ways and proposed four patterns or strategies: integration (adopts the receiving culture and retains

the heritage culture), assimilation (adopts the receiving culture and discards the heritage culture), separation (rejects the receiving culture and retains the heritage culture) and marginalization (rejects both the heritage and receiving culture). The connections between the acculturation strategies and their impact on health and well-being have been studied extensively and yielded complex results, but integration is often argued to be the most favorable outcome (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). Riedel et al. (2011) claimed that migration experiences are not necessarily a stressor and depend on the individual´s subjective appraisal. In other words, the individual migrants´ generalized resistant resources and sense of coherence aid in coping with acculturation stress (Riedel et al., 2011).

Based on the research both by Antonovsky and by others regarding Antonovsky´s work, I consider salutogenesis a central perspective to the social inclusion of immigrants through participation in volunteering. Health is a central factor in participation (Jdid, 2021; Sundeen, Raskoff, & Garcia, 2007; Townsend, Chen, & Wuthrich, 2021), implicitly meaning that some people cannot participate due to reasons such as poor health. It is important to acknowledge this. In contrast, for many people, volunteering is considered an activity that promotes health and well-being. In this doctoral project, I have emphasized the concept of ´well-being´. Well-being has many different definitions; however, in this context, I chose to include the definition ´Good mental states, including all of the various evaluations, positive and negative, that people make of their lives and the affective reactions of people to their experiences´ (OECD, 2013). This is a broad definition that includes three elements (OECD, 2013):

- Life evaluation – an individual reflection of life or some aspect of it.
- Affect – the individuals´ feelings or emotional states in a given time.
- Eudaimonia – the individual's experience of meaning and purpose in life or good psychological functioning.

This aligns to some extent with research on well-being and salutogenesis, where Eriksson & Lindström (2014) define well-being as ´the process where people perceive a good life based on their own merits´ (p.87) and suggest that the salutogenic approach may lead to well-being and quality of life, and health is a means to produce well-being.

In my view, the degree to which immigrants perceive the world and events as comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful significantly impacts the potential for social inclusion and well-being. Although the salutogenic approach is central in the current data collection and analysis, I find it central to bring research on obstacles and stressors that other scholars have identified to impact immigrants' opportunities and social inclusion into the discussion chapter. Much of the research that uses salutogenesis as a theoretical framework is criticized for pathogenic outcome measures (Hochwälder, 2019), and it is necessary to strive for the exploration of the data in a salutogenic manner and include aspects that influence the individual toward both ´ease and dis-ease continuum´ in the discussion chapter.

## 4.3 Concepts and theories into a framework

The concepts and theories of social inclusion, social capital, strength in the weak ties and salutogenesis have been chosen because they are related and complement each other and form a theoretical framework that can shed light on the findings of this doctoral project. They revolve around an understanding of humans as inherently social beings; that social relations are crucial to well-being, and that human beings cannot thrive in isolation.

Social inclusion is a relational concept, meaning that it depends on and is determined by both the individual´s attempts to be included in a group and the group to which he or she wishes to belong. In this lies the recognition that social inclusion cannot be studied by focusing solely on the characteristics and behaviors of the individual. Nor can it be studied by looking at the characteristics and behaviors of the group alone. Both parts of the relationship must be seen together. In the current doctoral project, this has been operationalized by exploring both the immigrants' experiences of volunteering and the formal voluntary organizations' side of it (through the recruitment practices carried out by volunteers and employees in the chosen organizations).

The concept of social capital and the theory of strength of weak ties are valuable to this study because they underscore the significance and value of networks and interpersonal relationships, directing attention to what strong and weak social ties can provide for the individual and the public once social relations and networks have been formed. Hence, the concept of social capital can take us one step further in the investigation of what

participation in formal voluntary organizations can provide of gains, both for the individual immigrant, and for the local community or the public. It also highlights the accumulation of an individual's social ties and how being part of social networks can provide openings into additional social networks. This is especially relevant in the case of immigrants as it takes time and effort to develop social ties when settling in a new country.

Lastly, salutogenesis adds to the framework an attentiveness to how being able to make sense of the world, feel capable and valuable, and take part in something that is meaningful (Sense of coherence) come into play in volunteering among immigrants. The concept of salutogenesis also brings the issue of health and well-being into the analysis and zooms in on how the individual's resources, earlier experiences, strengths, and cultural values form an important foundation for how the individual engages with and gains from participating in formal voluntary organizations. As such, it adds valuable insight into the individual side of the relational concept of social inclusion.

The three concepts focus on related aspects of what can be gained through successful participation in voluntary organizations, as put forward in policy documents. Social inclusion acknowledges that it is not up to the individual alone, social capital and the strength of the weak ties acknowledge the various potentials that lie in the strengths of social ties, and salutogenesis brings in a narrower focus on the health and well-being of the individual.

## 5.0 Methodology

This doctoral project is grounded in phenomenology and social constructivism. I have applied a multimethod qualitative approach to explore how volunteering in voluntary organizations is accessible to immigrants and whether it may contribute to social inclusion. **Article I** is a meta-ethnography (a qualitative interpretive review) of international research on immigrants´ experiences of volunteering and how this may impact their well-being. **Article II** is an explorative study of refugees' experiences of volunteering in Norway and how this may impact their social inclusion and well-being. **Article III** is an explorative study of how recruitment and reflections on the inclusion of volunteers with immigrant backgrounds are carried out in different voluntary organizations in Norway. This chapter presents the philosophical foundation of this thesis, the choice of study design, and further elaboration on the methods used in the qualitative review (Article I). Furthermore, this chapter will describe the recruitment process, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations on the empirical research that forms the basis of Articles II and III.

### 5.1 Philosophical foundations and research design

Qualitative explorative design is used in this doctoral project. Qualitative research is characterized by seeking to explore complex phenomena (Flick, 2022). I chose to conduct a meta-ethnography and individual in-depth interviews.

Phenomenology and social constructivism describe the view of the world and the nature of knowledge production and constitute the foundation of this doctoral project. Phenomenology is based on how phenomena are perceived by each individual, also through their interactions with others, whereby each subjective experience and opinion is important (Husserl, 2002). Social constructivism emphasizes the role of social interactions and cultural contexts in shaping knowledge and understanding. This creates a more nuanced and complex understanding of how knowledge is constructed rather than assuming there is one ´correct´ or objective version of reality. Social constructivism emphasizes foundation and recognizes the importance of including marginalized perspectives in research. It also acknowledges that different individuals and communities may have unique ways of understanding and experiencing the world and how some understandings attain dominance

over others against the background of social processes (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Glaser & Strauss, 1999; Tjora, 2019). By combining social constructivism and phenomenology, we can explore more of the complexity of how individual experience and social context interact. In this doctoral project, it was important to have a phenomenological approach to the first readings of the included studies in the meta-ethnography and as a point for departure for individual interviews. This made it possible to explore the individual statements and experiences in as open and neutral a manner as possible. Moreover, it was important to adopt a social constructivist approach during the analytical phase. Recognizing the significance of the cultural and social context is essential, especially as it becomes explicit due to the participants' experiences spanning the period before, during, and after migration. The social constructivist perspective also directs our attention toward understanding the social practices that generate and sustain social inequality.

Participatory observation was planned as a data collection method at an early stage in the project planning. The reason for planning for participatory observation was to explore implicit meaning and tacit knowledge and how people may say one thing and do something else (Flick, 2022). However, as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic and lack of access to the field, the observational studies had to be removed as an independent data collection strategy. This meant that participation in some activities in the field was only included in order to supplement and support the understanding of context.

Meta-ethnography was chosen to provide an overall picture of different international qualitative studies on immigrants' experiences of volunteering. The sparse literature on this theme was explored and connected across the single studies and analytically connecting them to health.

Qualitative in-depth interviews were chosen on the basis of the research questions on how people with immigrant backgrounds experience being a volunteer, how recruitment of volunteers with immigrants is conducted in practice, and which considerations are taken in this process. Since our questions involved how people experience and consider their lives and the world around them, the best way is to ask them. Through conversation, we have the opportunity to get to know people and learn about their experiences, feelings, values, attitudes, and how they see the world (Flick, 2022; Kvale, Brinkmann, Anderssen, & Rygge, 2009). The interviews were chosen to create meaning and understanding about immigrants´

participation in volunteering and the recruitment of volunteers with immigrant backgrounds. We must acknowledge that every individual is impacted by their context, discourses, power relations, and comprehensions in their choice of what they talk about and how (Flick, 2022; Kvale et al., 2009). Individual interviews were chosen rather than group interviews in order to obtain the individual stories, experiences, and perceptions of each participant. The aim was to avoid introducing any implicit competition regarding which voluntary organization was doing it ´the best or right way´, and to prevent volunteers with immigrant backgrounds from being influenced by each other. Each voice was equally interesting and valuable in the data collection.

The thesis consists of three scientific articles based on the inclusion of immigrants in volunteering (see Table 1 *Articles in this thesis*).

| Study | Title | Design | Selection | Data collection | Analysis | Journal |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I | Immigrants' Experiences of Volunteering; A Meta-Ethnography | Qualitative interpretive review | 11 studies | Systematic literature review in six databases | Meta-ethnography | Nonprofit and voluntary sector Quarterly (2023) Published online 2022 |
| II | Volunteering: A Tool for Social Inclusion and Promoting the Well-Being of Refugees? A Qualitative Study | Qualitative explorative | 12 volunteers with a refugee background | Qualitative interviews | Stepwise Deductive-Induction | Socieites (2023) Published online 2022 |
| III | Recruitment of volunteers with immigrant backgrounds: The impact of organizational and individual aspects. A Qualitative Study. | Qualitative explorative | 18 volunteers and 3 employees with recruitment responsibility in voluntary organizations | Qualitative interviews | Stepwise Deductive-Induction | VOLUNTAS (in review) |

Table 1: *Article in this thesis*

The method section that follows below will describe the methods for Article I and, secondly, the methods for the empirical research, which is the basis for Articles II and III.

## 5.2 Article I: Meta-ethnography

When starting this doctoral project, I was aware that immigrant experiences with volunteering were sparsely explored (Torres & Serrat, 2019; Wilson, 2012). Existing research forms the foundation of knowledge in a field, and to achieve a deep understanding and

contribute to the development of the field (Aveyard, 2018) a qualitative interpretive review was a natural starting point as the first article in this doctoral project. The aim was to explore and synthesize the existing qualitative research on immigrants' experiences of being formal volunteers and how this may influence their health. The reason for this choice is that although each published study tells a story from one perspective, synthesizing these existing studies and interpreting them may contribute to increased knowledge and understanding of immigrants' experiences with volunteering and how this may impact health (Noblit & Hare, 1988). Meta-ethnography is a well-established form of interpretative review that synthesizes concepts to develop further conceptual meanings based on heterogeneous samples and contexts (France et al., 2019). In this manner, we aimed to contribute new interpretations beyond the synthesized findings and enable new insights and understandings that emerge from a collective analysis of diverse qualitative data (France et al., 2019; Noblit & Hare, 1988). Meta-ethnography is theoretically based on the concept of thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973), in which it is necessary to include descriptions and analytical reflections about the context when researching a cultural phenomenon. Furthermore, it is based on Turner´s (1980) idea that explanations are essential comparative and takes form of translation. Noblit & Hare (1988) extended this idea by creating synthesis through translating multiple quantitative studies into each other's terms. They all acknowledge that the researcher is interpreting the studies from their own perspective. Geertz (1973) suggests that all ethnography is essentially an interpretation of interpretations, and meta-ethnography creates yet another interpretation. When I applied this interpretive approach, I followed the seven steps developed by Noblit and Hare (1988). These steps are elaborated on under ´data synthesis´ (page 30-31). Meta-ethnographies are rare in this research field; hence, this article contributes a method that contributes to new approaches that may increase the quality and generalizability of existing research.

### 5.2.1 Search Strategy

Preliminary and general searches for background and the discussion section were conducted in general databases such as Scopus and Google Scholar. I discussed the databases to include in the systematic search with a librarian and one supervisor. The databases chosen indexed health-related journals due to the health perspective in the review's aim. Hence, electronic

searches of six databases were performed in June 2020 by the first author under the guidance of a research librarian. The following databases were included: MEDLINE, Embase, PsycINFO, CINAHL, Global Health, and Amed. I searched with subject headings and used all search terms as keywords in each database. Search 1, "minority group", and search 2, "volunteers", were combined with the Boolean operator AND (see the search strategy in the published Article). The search was limited to qualitative studies and resulted in 3,642 hits. Thirteen articles were obtained from manual searches of the reference lists of the included articles, contact with experts, and other singular searches. I performed the first screening, which included duplicates and the inclusion and exclusion of studies based on the title and abstract. One co-author (co-supervisor) screened a sample of the articles. I downloaded the full texts of 50 articles for further screening. In discussion with one of the co-authors (co-supervisor), we agreed on which to include or exclude. In total, 11 articles were included in this review.

*5.2.2 Inclusion Criteria*

The inclusion criteria were as follows: qualitative articles concerning volunteering among immigrants and ethnic minorities with minority status in their country of residence on the basis of their place of birth, language, ethnicity, or cultural differences (18 years of age or above) and their experiences of being volunteers in organizations in high-income countries; full-text empirical studies published in peer-reviewed journals in English, Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish; and articles published from the inception of each database to June 2020.

*5.2.3 Exclusion Criteria*

Studies in which immigrants were only a part of the study samples or the qualitative results of the groups were not differentiated were excluded. Any study that did not report the data collection or strategy for analysis was also excluded.

*5.2.4 Data Extraction and Quality Assessment*

The data extraction was conducted independently by one co-author (co-supervisor) and me, and then I used a data extraction sheet to compile and organize the data relevant to my

research question. I extracted information from the full primary studies and included both first- and second-order constructs together with one of the co-authors (co-supervisor). Descriptive information, such as the author, year, title, and publication, and information concerning the aim, methods, design, data collection, sampling, theoretical framework, analysis, findings, themes, and discussion were noted. The results related to immigrants' experience of volunteering were the main interest. Information concerning the participants, context, and culture of voluntary work was also extracted.

*5.2.5 Data Synthesis*

The included studies were read and reread to discover the main concepts by the co-author (co-supervisor) and me to determine the main concepts (step 3). Common themes and concepts were identified through reading and highlighting the results sections. I used a grid system in Excel to organize the themes and concepts (step 4). The common themes and concepts were compared and matched across the articles. After discussion with the other authors, I chose Wood et al. (2019) as an index study based on the quality and richness of the article. The studies were analyzed using the following categories from Wood et al.'s article: ´sense of self and self-worth´, ´belonging in a new community´ and ´work, health and illness´. The meanings of the themes and concepts identified were matched, compared, and organized in a table by the first author. All authors collaborated on the translations (step 5). The analysis included several steps. The first-order interpretations involved identifying and interpreting the meanings of the themes, concepts, and metaphors in each study, while the second-order interpretations included interpretations of how the identified concepts related to each other. In discussion with the co-authors (supervisors), I grouped the concepts from the articles and developed four themes that covered the concepts. These were ´Sense of self and self-worth´, ´Social relations´, ´Skills and knowledge´ and ´Community involvement´. Figure 1 *Grouping of concepts* illustrates this step. Reciprocal interpretations, which are meanings of themes and concepts that were similar, were synthesized. All authors collaborated to synthesize the themes further and developed the concepts of ´meaningfulness´, ´belongingness´, and ´capacity building´. The different aspects of the experiences of volunteering related to health in the different studies made it possible to develop a line of argument. The line of argument is described as ´wholeness in a set of parts´

(Noblit & Hare, 1988) (step 6). I wrote the article and the coauthors commented and contributed (step 7).
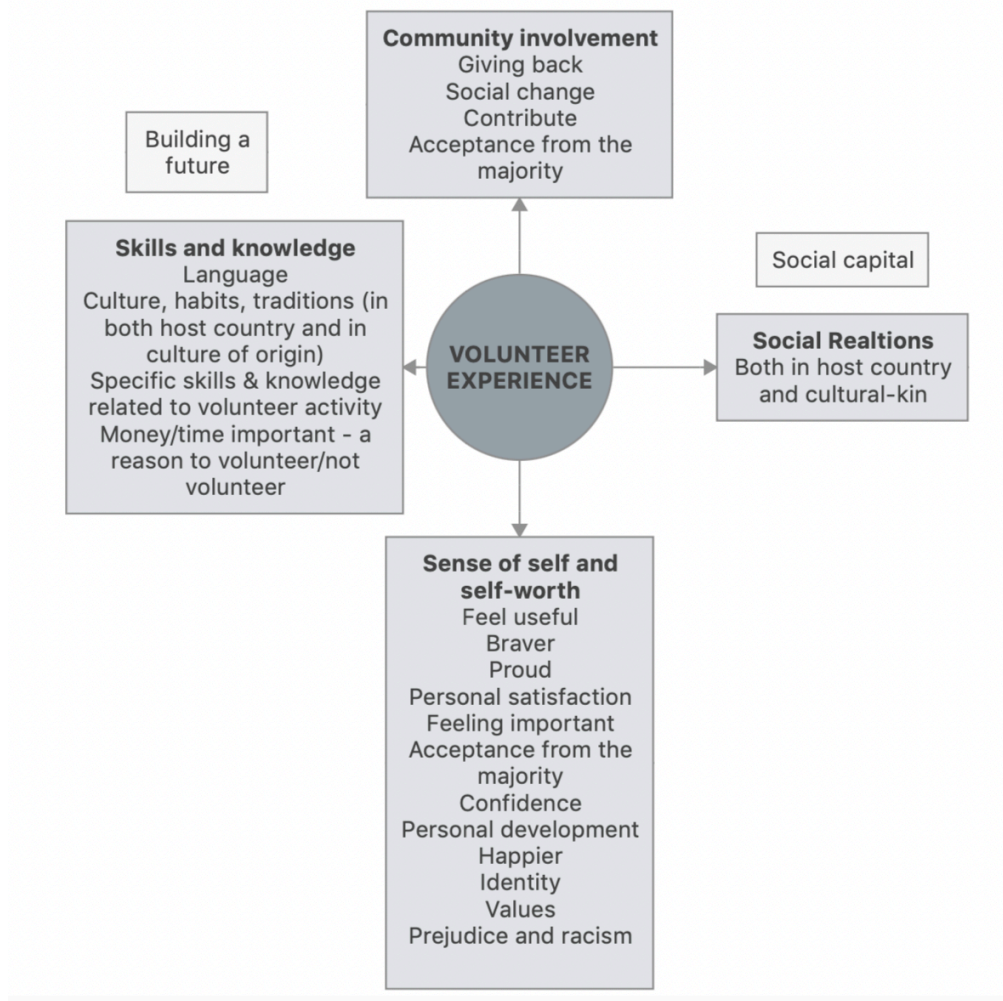


Figure 1: *Grouping of concepts*

## 5.3 Article II & III: Qualitative Studies

In this section, the methods for the empirical research that form the foundation of Articles II and III will be elaborated.

### 5.3.1 Cross-cultural Interviews

Doing research across cultures demands a sensitivity to diversity. Cultures may be defined as a complex set of habits, including knowledge, beliefs, values, and behavior patterns that characterize a social group (Hoffman & Verdooren, 2019). People are socialized into a culture that might be quite the opposite of other cultures. This may apply to behavior that is taken for granted in the specific culture. One example may be eye contact, which is considered polite and respectful in many cultures, while in others, it is considered disrespectful to look someone straight in the eye (Birman, 2005; Hoffman & Verdooren, 2019). Because my doctoral project involves people of many different cultures, there is no single set of cultural guidelines that can be identified (Ellis, Kia-Keating, Yusuf, Lincoln, & Nur, 2007); thus, I had to rely on meeting differences with curiosity, openness, and exploration (van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2013). This aligns with the foundation for qualitative research (Flick, 2022).

### 5.3.2 Study Context

Existing research on immigrant volunteering in Norway has mainly been conducted in large cities (Espegren et al., 2022; Loga, 2011; Ødegård, 2010). On that basis, we chose to broaden the contextual frame in this field and conducted our research project in a semirural community, an area with urban and rural characteristics. The area is characterized as a large municipality [containing more than 20,000 residents] (Langørgen, Løkken, & Aaberge, 2015).

The population in Norway comprises about 16 percent of immigrants from different countries of the world. The municipality comprises about 14 percent of immigrants, with some districts having more settlements than others (Statistics Norway, 2023).

*5.3.3 Voluntary Organizations*

In the project planning phase, I considered which voluntary organizations to include in collaboration with my supervisors. Sports organizations are a central area of the voluntary sector in Norway and Scandinavia (Qvist et al., 2019), with the highest number of immigrants as volunteers (Enjolras & Wollebæk, 2010). Sport is the voluntary activity that gathers most majority- and minority youth in a common leisure activity, and can be socially inclusive in itself (Walseth & Fasting, 2004). However, in this study, the main focus is volunteer contribution, and sports organizations were excluded based on existing research's attention to the field and the fact that volunteering in sports clubs is largely associated with having children active in sports clubs (Hagelund & Loga, 2009; Segaard, 2011; Ødegård, 2010). In this study, organizations with welfare- and community-related activities were chosen based on the lack of existing research about immigrants in these organizations in Norway. First, three organizations (two large and one small) mostly associated with ethnic Norwegians were recruited. I chose to include two voluntary organizations chiefly associated with people with immigrant backgrounds due to the need for more participants with immigrant backgrounds. The reason for this was to acquire a broader spectrum of perspectives and experiences with volunteering and to obtain a more complex view of the inclusion of immigrants in volunteering. Both organizations had a diverse pool of volunteers, as they came from different continents and countries. We considered these organizations to be closely linked to the Norwegian culture of volunteering.

The organizations included in the study were chosen to reflect a broad spectrum of humanitarian and social voluntary organizations. The organizations differ significantly with respect to size, years of operation, economy, contracts with the public sector, catchment area, organizational structure, etc. Although these differences make it problematic to compare the organizations on an equal basis, this sample of different organizations may give a unique level of comprehensiveness as they include different aspects of Norway's voluntary sector. See Table 2: *Organizational Characteristics* for more information about the organizations.

| Org | Years active | Impact field | Mandate | Volunteers | Governing | Activities |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 20-30 years | Local group of a national organization | Foster a positive and inclusive community | 200-250 volunteers, most ethnic Norwegians | Majority-driven | Visiting services, social group events, activity opportunities, etc . Directed toward both the whole community and specific groups. |
| 2 | > 50 years | Local group of a national organization | Strengthening the local community, and supporting vulnerable groups (and others) | 150-200 volunteers, most ethnic Norwegians | Majority-driven | Visiting services, social group events, activity opportunities, etc . Directed toward both the whole community and specific groups. |
| 3 | 10-20 years | Local group | Promote an active and safe settlement for residents in a local area | 20-30 volunteers, most ethnic Norwegians | Majority-driven | Social events, community development, and youth clubs etc. Directed toward the local community and groups. |
| 4 | 5-10 years | Local group | Inclusion and integration of immigrants, especially girls and women | 10-20 volunteers, most immigrant backgrounds | Minority-driven | Social events, information seminars to introduce the Norwegian society, celebration of religious holidays etc. Directed towards immigrant women. |
| 5 | 2-5 years | Local group | Integration and an active life for all immigrants | 10-20 volunteers, most immigrant backgrounds | Minority-driven | Social events, information seminars to introduce the Norwegian society, job search guidance, activity opportunities etc. Directed toward immigrants. |

Table 2: *Organizational characteristics*

Two of the organizations are large (between 150-250 volunteers), and they are local divisions of national organizations. They are mostly associated with volunteers with a majority background representing the traditional voluntary organizations in Norway and are referred to here as large-scale organizations. These organizations have a national superstructure, and activities are largely based on their national activity provision, with some local adjustments. Three organizations are small (between 10-30 volunteers) and locally affiliated, with a closeness to the board and management, and are referred to here as small-scale organizations. The activities are based on a local need and are fully administrated by the local group. One organization is mostly associated with volunteers with majority backgrounds, and two are associated with volunteers with diverse minority backgrounds.

*5.3.4 Recruitment Procedure*

To recruit participants for the empirical research in this doctoral project, a purposive sampling approach and ´snowball sampling´ were used. In this context, purposive sampling refers to sampling that is based on the participant's knowledge of and experience of the matter investigated (Patton, 2014). This meant I included the eligible participants with experience and knowledge related to my research questions. Furthermore, I used the

´snowball sampling´ method (Henry, 2009), in which study participants helped recruit other eligible participants.

To recruit participants with knowledge relevant to my research questions, I needed to include volunteers with an immigrant background to acquire their experiences of joining and contributing as well as volunteers responsible for recruiting new volunteers. Immigrants in this context are described as people who have left their country of origin and settled down in the municipality for one reason or another. I did not stipulate any restrictions regarding country of origin or reason for migration because the aim was to learn about immigrants' experiences of being a volunteer regardless of background information. However, they needed to be first-generation immigrants to have first-hand knowledge about migration and the process of inclusion in the new society. I chose the perspective of what volunteers with immigrant backgrounds experience in their volunteering and how they became involved in volunteering. In addition, I applied a salutogenic perspective and chose not to focus on barriers to participating. Hence, I did not include immigrants who are not volunteers and their reasons for not participating.

Furthermore, I needed volunteers and employees responsible for recruitment in the included organizations to collect data about how recruitment and inclusion of volunteers with immigrant backgrounds evolved for the recruiters in the context of their organization. I chose to include participants in the local organizations to explore how the recruitment was carried out in the context and did not include national staff or rely on reviews of written organizational guides and regulations. I did not stipulate any restrictions about the position they possessed in the voluntary organizations as long as they had some responsibility for the recruitment of new volunteers.

Initially, managers of the voluntary organizations were contacted by e-mail and asked if their organization would like to contribute to the project and if the manager would like to participate. Furthermore, I asked for permission to contact the volunteers in the organizations. The leaders suggested suitable participants, such as volunteers with immigrant backgrounds, leaders of different activities in their organizations, especially of activities where immigrants participate, board members, and volunteers with engagement in recruitment and diversity. In cases where the leaders suggested participants, some biases may occur. It is likely that eventual volunteers who did not engage in diversity or who held

known xenophobic attitudes were probably not suggested as participants, while volunteers with immigrant backgrounds that the leader considered resourceful and as ´good´ representatives were probably suggested rather than those with, for instance, less language competence. The ´snowball sampling´ may, to some degree, overcome some of the biases as the participants suggested others they knew.

All participants needed to be above the age of eighteen. The eligible volunteers and employees were contacted and informed about the study, and they then decided whether to participate.

*5.3.5 Participants and Data Collection*

In this doctoral project, twenty-six participants were included. A total of sixteen of the participants had immigrant backgrounds, and twelve of these were refugees and had migrated due to violence and war. Twenty-one of the participants had some responsibility for recruitment in the organizations, and we did not stipulate any restriction on how formal this recruitment responsibility should be. Nineteen of the participants were women, and seven were men. This reflects a noticeable gender imbalance that might raise the question of how these participants can represent the broader population. Many of the participants in this project are active volunteers with immigrant backgrounds, and following statistics, I should have met more men (Eimhjellen et al., 2021). However, gender inequality generally in volunteering in Norway has been reduced, but it exists in some types of voluntary organizations, e.g. more men volunteer in sports organizations and more women in welfare-oriented organizations (Fladmoe, Sivesind, & Arnesen, 2018). This may be one explanation for the number of women in this study. However, the recruited participants were not selected based on gender, but every volunteer with an immigrant background and volunteers or paid staff with recruitment responsibilities suggested by the leader of the organizations or through ´snowballing recruitment´ were included. The age ranged from 20 to 69, with a mean of 46 years of age. The immigrants' residence time ranged from 3.5 to 33 years, and the mean was 15. I acknowledge the fact that the reason for migration, life experiences, and individual characteristics may impact the person's ability and opportunities to participate in the community and contribute to their own social inclusion. As mentioned above, twelve of sixteen of the participants in the group of volunteers with immigrant

backgrounds in this doctoral project were refugees, and because refugees stand out as a group with an increased risk of health problems and risk of social exclusion, this group was given particular attention in Article II. See Table 3a and 3b *Participants characteristics for more information about the participants.*

| Pseudonym | Years (range) | Place of origin | Residence time (range) | Education employment | Family situation | Recruitment responsibility |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Emira | 35-40 | Africa | 5-10 | 3 years higher education, employed | Separated, children | Yes |
| Bianka | 30-35 | Europe | 10-15 | 5 years higher education, employed | Cohabitant, children | Yes |
| Abiya | 35-40 | Africa | 5-10 | 2 years higher education, employed | Married | No |
| Sana | 50-55 | Middle-East | 20-25 | 6 years higher education, employed | Married, children | Yes |
| Zoran | 55-60 | Middle-East | 30-35 | 5 years higher education, employed | Married, children | No |
| Mariam | 40-45 | Middle-East | 15-20 | 6 years higher education, employed | Married, children | Yes |
| Zubayda | 55-60 | Middle-East | 30-35 | 5 years higher education, employed | Married, children | Yes |
| Bashir | 30-35 | Middle-East | 5-10 | Unemployed | Single | No |
| Berna | 50-55 | Asia | 10-15 | 3 years higher education, employed | Married, children | Yes |
| Parvin | 50-55 | Middle-East | 20-25 | Vocational education, disabled | Divorced, children | Yes |
| Rosita | 20-25 | Europe | 5-10 | Student | Parents, siblings | Yes |
| Francine | 45-50 | Africa | 15-20 | Vocational education, disabled | Married, children | Yes |
| Yana | 20-25 | Middle-East | 0-5 | Student | Parents, siblings | Yes |

Table 3a: *Participants characteristics*

| Pseudonym | Years (range) | Place of origin | Residence time (range) | Education employment | Family situation | Recruitment responsibility |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Michel | 30-35 | Africa | 10-15 | 4 years higher education, employed | Separated, children | Yes |
| David | 25-30 | North-America | 0-5 | Student | Cohabitant, children | No |
| Sonia | 60-65 | Middle-East | 20-25 | Disabled | Married, children | No |
| Anna | 50-55 | Norway | - | Employed | Married, children | Yes |
| Bjarne | 55-60 | Norway | - | Employed | Married, children | No |
| Rita | 40-45 | Norway | - | Employed | Married, children | Yes |
| Per | 55-60 | Norway | - | Retired | Married | Yes |
| Vera | 30-35 | Norway | - | Employed | Married, children | No |
| Lily | 50-55 | Norway | - | Employed | Married, children | Yes |
| Roger | 50-55 | Norway | - | Employed | Cohabitant, children | Yes |
| Karen | 20-25 | Norway | - | Retired | Widow, children | Yes |
| Tiri | 45-50 | Norway | - | Employed | Married, children | Yes |
| Mia | 20-25 | Norway | - | Employed | - | Yes |

Table 3b: *Participants characteristics*

Qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted, supported, and supplemented by participation in some volunteering activities and informal discussions with volunteers in order to increase the understanding of the context and activity as well as to elicit questions or unclarities that might arise after interviews. The data collection started in the spring of 2019 and finished in the autumn of 2022 (with a parental leave June 2019-July 2020).

In the collection of information on immigrants' thoughts about and understanding of volunteering as well as their experiences, the interviews consisted of elements drawn from the ´life story interviews´ approach. This approach focuses on the essence of what has happened to a person through a timeline from birth to the present. It includes important events, experiences, and feelings through the person's life (Atkinson, 1998). The interviews in this study allowed the participants to elaborate on their upbringing in their country of origin, how voluntary work and volunteering were comprehended, and to what extent volunteering was central to society and their own lives. Moreover, they were asked about their reasons for migrating and if relevant, how they had fled, how they ended up in Norway, and their experience of this journey. This was followed by their experience of arriving in Norway and their way into Norwegian society. The main theme in the interviews was their experience with the voluntary sector, how and why they joined as volunteers, which tasks and activities they had volunteered in, and what volunteering has meant for them. The interviews were semi-structured, meaning that the researcher covered a list of themes in each interview, and every participant was asked some key questions. Nevertheless, the interviews differed since the interview method gave the opportunity to follow up on interesting themes shared by the participants and to explore what participants meant by different statements. Sufficient time was provided to allow the researcher to become familiar with the participants and develop a relationship with them prior to the interviews, making a good and safe setting for the participants to share their experiences.

To collect information regarding how participants with recruitment responsibility consider recruitment of volunteers with immigrant backgrounds, the participants were initially asked about their personal experience in volunteering, which activities they engaged in, and information about the organization for which they volunteered (or, in three cases, worked for). The main focus of the interviews was on how new volunteers are recruited in their

organization and in particular, how new volunteers with immigrant backgrounds are recruited. Furthermore, they were asked about their views on the importance of having volunteers with different cultural backgrounds and their thoughts on volunteering to promote the inclusion of immigrants in society and local communities.

All the participants agreed to individual interviews that were audio-recorded. The duration of these interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 2.5 hours, with most interviews having a duration of 1.5 hours. All the participants agreed to be contacted again if the researcher needed to ask follow-up questions. The interviews were conducted at locations chosen by the participants to ensure their privacy, safety, and personal preferences in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviews were conducted in the participants' homes, at the researchers' office, at public cafés, in public parks, at the participants' workplaces, at a public library, and digitally via Zoom. After the interviews, the researcher had several meetings (approximately ten meetings) with some participants at different voluntary activities to become familiar with the research context, supplement the interviews with informal conversations, and get a direct impression of the context. These meeting points contributed to the fact that the researcher was able to conduct research in the context. I noted or recorded some reflections immediately after these meetings, but these reflections were not analyzed in the project. Their function was to enlighten me about the context and help me understand how the organizations worked.

*5.3.6 Data Analysis*

All the interviews were transcribed verbatim, and identifying characteristics were anonymized simultaneously. The transcriptions of the interviews were analyzed by a stepwise-deductive induction analysis (SDI) (Tjora, 2019). SDI is inspired by grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1999) an inductive approach. However, this is combined with a deductive approach, making it abductive as it starts inductive, but theories and perspectives are drawn in advance of the research process (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018). The main motive for applying the SDI method was the systematic and structural notion of the analysis and the use of inductive empirical close coding, which allows the researcher to be data-driven in the interpretation and analysis. Moreover, the methods allow the researcher to include existing research and theories in the analysis, being more

abductive. Tjora (2019) developed the method to contribute to increase transparency and strengthen the structure of qualitative research, which proved useful in my doctoral project.

The first step was to code the data inductively ´in vivo´, such that the codes were grounded in the empirical data, a process similar to the coding used in grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). Codes should correspond closely to participants' statements. This process aims to ensure that the codes are drawn from the data rather than from theories, hypotheses, research questions, and previously chosen themes (Tjora, 2019). First, I performed the empirical inductive coding of all text included in the transcripts; however, I divided the interviews into their respective groups (one group with immigrant´s experience of being a volunteer and one with people with recruitment responsibility). Some participants contributed to both groups. In these cases, the interviews were divided so that the parts about personal experiences were included in one group, and the segment related to recruitment was included in the other. This coding resulted in many thousand codes, as the interviews with volunteers with immigrant backgrounds were extensive interviews with parts that included ´life story´ telling. This led to numerous codes being irrelevant to answering the research questions and being grouped in the next step as irrelevant. The next step was to group the codes that exhibited internal thematic connections. At this stage, the codes were investigated inductively and incorporated theories, previous research, and interest, making the approach more abductive. The first round with this grouping of codes led to twelve central code groups in the two groups of participants: volunteers with immigrant backgrounds and volunteers and employees with recruitment responsibility. However, many rounds of reading the transcript, the codes, and re-categorization formed the basis for the two empirical articles included in this thesis. When the code groups relevant to writing the article on immigrants' experiences with volunteering were identified, the analysis process of bringing in theory and existing research continued. The same procedure was carried out with the article on recruitment and inclusion of volunteers with immigrant backgrounds (Article III). I carried out the analysis process in close discussion with my supervisors. The coding process was conducted using the NVivo software to administer codes and categorization.

See Table 4 and 5 for examples of codes and code groups/themes from Articles II (Table 4) & III (Table 5) in this thesis.

| Article II: **Themes/concepts** | **Codes (examples)** |
|---|---|
| 1. Feeling safer due to increased knowledge regarding cultures, values, and systems and achieving mutual acceptance | · Volunteering creates a positive feeling of being acknowledged and a feeling that my voice matters.<br>· Volunteering enables you to become familiar with Norwegian culture and norms and vice versa.<br>· We will grow old here, and our children may become mayors here.<br>· I focus on how I can be included; I need all the information I can get.<br>· My culture is totally different from the culture here, so I´ve learned a lot about other perspectives.<br>· I felt safe enough to ask about the school system.<br>· They never consider volunteering because they think that it´s exhausting and they´re not sure whether to stay. |
| 2. Feeling more confident when communicating in Norwegian and contributing to society | · If my daughter is coming here, I have to learn the language to communicate.<br>· Language is a crucial tool for integration.<br>· It is harder to learn the language for adults and elderly people.<br>· I can both give and receive – you need others, and others need you.<br>· I love to help people; it's soul-related.<br>· I can work without speaking the language.<br>· I think that it´s important to help others; it is a two-sided process.<br>· I thought: Do I have something to contribute? |
| 3. Feeling more connected via social relations. | · Volunteering is fun, and you get to know many people.<br>· I know many people, both from volunteering and work; you acquire a large social network when you participate here and there.<br>· When I volunteer, I get to know many people with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.<br>· We need to be together here in Norway or else life is going to be hard.<br>· In Norway, you can´t just knock on your neighbor's door and ask for a coffee. |

Table 4: *Example of themes/concepts and codes Article II*

| Article III: **Themes/concepts** | | Codes (examples) |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Organizational aspects of recruitment | - Balancing the willingness to recruit and the resources at hand | · We have to use resources for recruitment and knock on doors.<br>· It is positive to call them, but then we need someone to do it.<br>· Face-to-face communication is crucial.<br>· The best way is still to believe that those who want to volunteer to take the initiative and register. |
| | - The flexibility or professionalism of volunteer task | · They need to have some basic qualifications.<br>· Everyone has something to contribute.<br>· Without language competence and mandatory courses, we can't send a person to a one-to-one activity. |
| 2. Aspects linked to the individual who recruits. | - Considering immigrants as contributors or as a group in need of help | · Immigrants are seen as a group in need of help.<br>· Integration is a two-way street – openness and contributions.<br>· Someone must take care of them. |
| | - The impact of the social network of the persons who recruits contributing to society | · We are dependent on a connection to multicultural groups.<br>· We have to show other immigrants that we are capable.<br>· Recruitment happens through the people you know |

Table 5: *Example of themes/concepts and codes Article III*

## 5.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethics is an important part of all research. In qualitative research, research ethics are essential to protect the participants as we explore human behavior, experiences, perspectives, and attitudes, maintaining integrity in the research process and upholding the trustworthiness of the findings (Flick, 2022).

Procedural ethics refers to the ethical actions considered universally necessary by larger organizations, institutions, or governing bodies (Tracy, 2010). In this project, all the participants signed informed consent forms prior to the interviews. They were informed about their right to withdraw from the study without stating a reason. They were assured that confidentiality would be maintained in respect of the transcribed data (anonymized systematically) and any publications resulting from the study. The participants' confidentiality in publications was secured by assigning them pseudonyms, presenting their ages in age intervals, and dividing the organizations into ´large-scale organizations´ or ´small-

scale organizations´. The different organizations have also been assigned code names, and the years operative in range and the number of active volunteers are given in range. The study was approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data prior to the beginning of the data collection process [reference number 888539].

*5.4.1 Reflexivity and Researchers' role*

The researchers are close to the study participants, and the researcher is the research instrument (Tjora, 2019). The researcher has an impact on data collection, the study sample, and the analysis; hence, the research is a product of the participants, the researcher, and their relationship (Finlay, 2002). My educational background in public health, with a particular emphasis on health promotion, has shaped and informed my approach to research. This perspective has given me an understanding of the multifaceted aspects of public health and provides a lens for promoting and enhancing overall well-being in communities. This is the underlying motivation for my research project, and I wanted to contribute a salutogenic perspective on social inclusion in the research field. My educational background may have contributed to a greater focus on positive statements and resilience, but I have done my best to be open to both negative and positive results. The interview guide and the analyses has been thoroughly discussed with my supervisors, who are qualified in other academic disciplines.

The Norwegian Research Ethics Committee Research (Fossheim & Ingjerd, 2015) has stated that research that includes ethnic minorities must consider their status as a potentially vulnerable group and the researcher has a responsibility to handle it with care. I would like to share some reflections on my role in this research study and what initiatives I took to mitigate the diversity between the participants and me. I am an ethnic Norwegian woman, and my upbringing and background are characterized by stability and no dramatic experiences. When planning for the research project, I developed a semi-structural interview guide in discussion with my supervisors. My main supervisor has experience with carrying out interviews with people with immigrant and refugee backgrounds, and we developed and revised an interview guide carefully based on the research literature on minority groups (Birman, 2005). Since the research project aimed to include immigrants regardless of background and reason for migration, it was difficult to prepare for each of the immigrants'

specific backgrounds. It was, however, central for me to focus on the aim of the project, ´Immigrants' experiences of participation in volunteering` and the ´recruitment and inclusion of immigrants as volunteers in voluntary organizations´. I sought to establish a connection with the participants on a universal level, meaning a connection that transcends individual differences, cultural backgrounds, and personal experiences. I was focused on finding a common ground, being an active listener, wanting to understand, and being empathetic. This resonates with the title of the book by Hoffman & Verdooren´s (2019) ´Cultures don't meet, people do´.

In this context, I belong to the majority population, which will automatically create an unequal power relationship between me as a researcher and the participant. I reflected on this power relationship and tried to mitigate it by giving them control of parts of the interview. In the invitation to participate, the participant decided where and when to meet. I suggested different locations to conduct the interview and asked about their preferences. Their choice varied from meeting at my office, at a public café or library, or in a public park. A couple of the participants preferred that I visit them in their home. I was flexible if anyone needed to meet on evenings and weekends. When we first met, we spent some time on small talk to get to know each other. I told them about myself, asked some easy questions, and answered their questions about me. We talked about the research project, the right to withdraw at any time, and that I was interested in their story. All the participants with immigrant backgrounds expressed gratitude for my focus on this theme. I asked about how they experienced coming to Norway, and I reassured them that they were experts on their own story, experiences, culture, and country of origin. I knew the participants were going to educate me, and I learned a lot about culture, communication, and different perspectives through the data collection. The participants in this project had different backgrounds, but many of them (12) had refugee backgrounds. Through the interviews with elements of life story interviews, they were asked about their country of origin, migration, and time here in Norway. As a researcher, I was open and curious but assured them that they needed only talk about things they wanted to share. I tried to read body language and create an atmosphere conducive to asking questions. Many of the participants shared some insights into experiences and traumas that they had been through. In the cases when I perceived that the participants needed therapeutic help, I asked directly and was reassured that the

participants had access to health care and a social network according to their needs. I have also been in touch with several of the participants multiple times, and many of the participants have said that they were pleased to share their stories and grateful that the research focuses on immigrants. I spent considerable time on these interviews, ensuring that the participants experienced the interview as a unique conversation and that they knew that everything they said was interesting and valuable. I recognize the inherent power dynamics and potential imbalance when seeking to establish a safe and trusting environment to engage the participants in a compassionate manner that allows for open and honest sharing of experiences. At the same time, I was aware of the need to withdraw once the data collection is complete. To some extent, this may seem a departure from the relationship built during the interview process. It is crucial to acknowledge the ethical implications of this approach. While my primary objective is to contribute to academic knowledge and pursue my degree, I also believe that there is a larger purpose for this research. My aspiration is that the insights gained from these interviews can contribute to a broader understanding of the experiences of individuals with migration backgrounds, ultimately leading to positive changes in policies or practices that benefit people with immigrant backgrounds and society as a whole in the future.

In this doctoral project, immigrants, especially refugees, are described as a vulnerable group due to their life experiences prior to, during, and after migration (Kirmayer et al., 2011; Kumar & Diaz, 2019; Spallek et al., 2011). Through this project (Article II), I have sought to give these people with refugee backgrounds a voice through their words, and implicitly, based on their background, the participants are portrayed as `powerless, ´vulnerable, ´marginalized,´ and suggests a degree of social exclusion. I do not think the participants in this project identified with vulnerability at the times I met with them. However, many shared reflections of vulnerability in different phases of their life (such as in different situations when newly arrived), but all were clear about being a voice for vulnerable immigrants and believed they would help other immigrants through participation in this research. The individuals I encountered in my research left a lasting impact as resilient and actively engaged in their own lives, demonstrating resourcefulness and enthusiasm that challenges the idea of inherent vulnerability. These are also important characteristics of the

participants. Nevertheless, refugees as a group are referred to in discussions as vulnerable, even though this does not include every individual with a refugee background.

Language is another aspect of uneven power relations, as the interviews were carried out in Norwegian. Early in the interview, most of the participants with other ethnic backgrounds said that they considered their Norwegian competence to be low or poor, but this was not my opinion. A couple of participants used some English words to help express what they wanted, and only one participant had difficulties expressing what he/she wanted to say in Norwegian or English. I offered this person the opportunity to review the information and consent scheme to ensure that the participant understood what the research was about and their right to withdraw. I also tried to explain interview questions in other words when it was clear that this was necessary. I experienced these as successful strategies in the interviews.

## 5.5 Methodological Consideration

This doctoral research project was conducted in accordance with Lincoln and Guba´s criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These criteria consist of an assessment of the research in regard to credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. In addition, reflexivity is considered a central quality criterion for qualitative research (Flick, 2022), which I have elaborated on in the previous section.

**Credibility** refers to choosing an appropriate method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This thesis includes three articles: one interpretive qualitative review with new comprehensive interpretations of existing literature conducted in line with meta-ethnography (Noblit & Hare, 1988), and two articles based on the empirical study carried out in a semi-rural area in Norway and analyzed in line with Stepwise Deductive Induction (Tjora, 2019). The strength of combining an interpretive qualitative review based on international research with empirical studies in Norway is creates a comprehensive and holistic understanding of immigrants´ experiences of volunteering.

Qualitative studies are recognized as essential to understanding experiences and thick descriptions of complex phenomena. All volunteers with immigrant backgrounds and all volunteers and employees with responsibility for recruiting new volunteers that were available to me were included. This may contribute to the reduction of selection biases. This

provides an insight into how recruitment is reflected on and carried out, but a review of strategic documents and participative observation to explore the tacit knowledge of recruitment and inclusion of immigrants in volunteering would have strengthened the study.

**Dependability** relates to transparency regarding the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The whole research process has been carried out by me as a PhD candidate, in close discussion with my four supervisors to ensure the dependability of the research. Moreover, both analytical methods provide structured and rigorous analytical processes, which enhance the reliability and validity of the research.

**Confirmability** refers to the extent to which the researcher is able to understand the data as it is presented rather than in terms of the researcher´s preconception. I have an academic background in health promotion and this perspective may have impacted the research process. However, I have had cross-disciplinary discussions with my supervisors to include different perspectives. The analytical methods used in this doctoral project start with inductive coding, ensuring closeness to the empirical data both in the meta-ethnography and the empirical analyses. However, it is impossible to be totally objective since you are your own research instrument in qualitative methods (Kvale et al., 2009).

**Transferability** relates to the extent to which the research can be applied to other settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this doctoral project, I started out with an international lens, including different studies from different countries and places in the meta-ethnography. Furthermore, Article II applied a national (Norwegian) perspective, where the lines to the meta-ethnography were apparent. The inquiry focused in-depth on a relatively small number of participants. Of the total of twenty-six participants, nineteen were women. This gender inequality in research participants may impact the results due to the fact that gender makes differences in how much volunteering people carry out, what kind of volunteer tasks they do, and how volunteering fits into their social lives (Wilson, 2012). The participants chosen in this doctoral project were all active in volunteering, and if immigrants who did not participate had been included as participants, the findings could point out barriers to participation. However, with a strength-based perspective, this thesis contributes valuable knowledge on how volunteers with immigrant backgrounds experience their volunteering and knowledge of how recruitment is being carried out in welfare- and community-oriented organizations. The participants in Article II, representing refugees, exist mainly as a group of

people with overall high education and employment and are considered to be socially included in Norwegian society If the participants had included more people who had recently arrived in Norway or who lacked a connection to society by being uneducated and unemployed, the results might have been different. The results may appear different in other types of organizations, as the activities and tasks and what is needed to become a volunteer may differ. This also relates to recruitment approaches and practices.

## 6.0 Main Findings

This chapter gives an overview of the main findings in the three articles included in this thesis and a synthesis across the articles.

## 6.1 Article I: Immigrants´ Experiences of Volunteering: A Meta-Ethnography (2022)

This meta-ethnography provides insight into international qualitative studies on immigrants' experiences of volunteering and how volunteering may impact health. Furthermore, the interpretive review contributes to exploring themes across the single studies and finds interesting connections.

In the interpretive investigation of existing research, I found that volunteering may promote health and well-being for some immigrants, as it can provide a sense of meaning and purpose and enhance self-conception. The study also showed that volunteering contributes to capacity building through the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Language competence and language use were the main factors that may lead to empowering immigrants to reach the goal of paid work. Developing a sense of belonging was also central to the findings, which was related to the fact that participants built social networks and a deeper understanding and knowledge of the cultural traditions of the society and the local community. The study showed that volunteering may represent altruistic and instrumental dimensions. The altruistic dimension involves the value of helping others, social relations, and creating purpose in their life. Instrumental dimensions involved, such as building capability by developing skills and knowledge that may facilitate paid employment. Both dimensions could positively impact health. It is, however, important to acknowledge that immigrants are not a homogenous group and that not everyone wishes to participate in the larger society. Moreover, factors that impact this experience include how the individual attributes meaning to volunteering and the quality of social interactions that ensure the building of social networks and access to people belonging to the majority population, enabling immigrants to use the language. The extent of support and guidance in the context of volunteering plays a crucial role in determining whether volunteering may promote health and well-being or not.

## 6.2 Article II: Volunteering: A Tool for Social Inclusion and Promoting the Well-being of Refugees? A Qualitative Study (2022)

On the background of the review (Article I), Article II addresses whether and how formal volunteering contributes to developing a sense of social inclusion and well-being among refugees in Norway. Article II contributes to the purpose of the doctoral project by connecting the refugees' experiences with the strength-based salutogenic perspective, which focuses on how the person manages the tensions and challenges they meet and their social inclusion in the local society.

The empirical investigation in this study shows that volunteering may be an arena for the refugees to increase the feeling of being safe in their new country of settlement through increased knowledge regarding cultures and values both for the immigrants in Norway and also sharing knowledge on their own culture to develop mutual acceptance. Furthermore, volunteering may contribute to refugees feeling more confident by practicing and communicating in Norwegian and contributing to society, as proficiency in the host nation´s language is crucial for becoming a part of society. Contributing to society enhanced the feeling of meaningfulness as the participants all described themselves as ´other-oriented´. Lastly, the findings show that the refugees experienced being more connected in the new community through the social relations they built in volunteering.

This study concludes that participation in volunteering may contribute to social inclusion and increased well-being. However, these experiences depend on whether volunteering is considered meaningful and whether the social milieu is perceived as inclusive and helpful for those learning the language. The volunteer arena has to be a place where it is possible to ask questions and people are willing to explain unclarities. It is also a precondition that the immigrant is dedicated to being a part of the new society.

## 6.3 Article III: Recruitment of volunteers with immigrant backgrounds: The impact of structural and individual aspects. (2024)

Article III focuses on how recruitment is carried out in the included voluntary organizations and how volunteers involved in recruitment reflect on including citizens with immigrant backgrounds. My aim was to examine the recruitment and inclusion practices regarding immigrants in volunteering by exploring how volunteers with recruitment responsibilities carry out these practices and reflect on them.

The inclusion of immigrants in volunteering is highlighted as important for integrating immigrants into the larger society. This study indicates that structural aspects within the organizations and aspects linked to the person who recruits may impact the recruitment of volunteers with immigrant backgrounds. Large-scale organizations have a formalized structure, with many professionalized volunteer tasks that require qualification, such as tasks connected to services for vulnerable groups. Volunteers and employees who are engaged in recruitment in these large-scale organizations run general recruitment campaigns but have limited time and resources for individual follow-up. Small-scale organizations have more flexibility, use their social networks, and customize recruitment to the potential volunteers, often by approaching new volunteers personally and adapting volunteer tasks to suit the individual volunteers. The person who recruits new volunteers may impact who is being recruited through their social network. Hence, a diverse pool of volunteers is needed for diverse recruitment. In addition, the recruitment of immigrants as volunteers depends on the recruiter's consideration of immigrants as a group of potential volunteers or a group needing help.

The study concludes that to recruit volunteers with immigrant backgrounds more effectively and make volunteering accessible to more people, voluntary organizations need more diversity-sensitive recruitment approaches and low-threshold tasks. This will strengthen access to volunteering for a diverse population and may ensure the active civil society that many government policies target.

## 6.4 Synthesis of the results across the three articles

The three articles included contribute different perspectives to the thesis's overall aim: to explore in what sense formal voluntary organizations function as an arena for the social inclusion of immigrants. In the following I present a brief synthesis of the findings on the basis of the overall aim.

The findings show that volunteering can contribute to both social inclusion and well-being for immigrants. Volunteering may contribute to increased belongingness through social relations, building language competence in the host nation's language, and learning about culture, values, and society. This may help immigrants navigate the social system and create meaningfulness and self-efficacy through helping others and being active in society. The findings underscore that we cannot merely assume that volunteering in a voluntary organization will lead to social inclusion and well-being for all immigrants. The findings show that if formal volunteering is to contribute to the social inclusion of immigrants, not only are there individual aspects related to the immigrant that need to be satisfied, but also contextual aspects dependent on organizational structure. The individual aspects involve the immigrant demonstrating a commitment to the volunteer activity through an interest in the organization and the volunteer tasks and becoming a part of their new society. This entails being motivated to learn the host nation's language and taking an interest in learning about the cultural traditions and society. The contextual aspects involve having access to volunteering opportunities through tailored recruitment and flexible tasks, being in an inclusive milieu that supports knowledge sharing, language training, and the opportunity to establish social relations. This depends on mutual respect and the fact that the volunteer pool recognizes immigrants as volunteers who make crucial contributions.

## 7.0 Discussion of the Findings

The synthesized findings of the three articles in this thesis show that volunteering may be a contribute to promote social inclusion and the well-being of some immigrants. However, the findings also acknowledge that we cannot simply assume that immigrants seek and choose to join a voluntary organization and become socially included through this activity. As I have described in the theory chapter, social inclusion is a relational concept that will not just happen alone, even when immigrants are recruited into the organization.

The empirical part of the doctoral project (Article II & III) takes place in the voluntary sector in Norway. The voluntary sector is characterized by being broad and comprehensive. Wollebæk et al. (2008) described the different roles of voluntary organizations, ranging from emphasizing organizational life and social relations to belonging to democratic institutions involved in policymaking and acting as a voice for interest groups. Wollebæk et al (2008) also divide organizations into members-oriented and community-oriented organizations. The organizations included in this research project are involved in welfare and community-related activities. The three majority-driven organizations may be described as community-oriented as they contribute to the collective good by carrying out services for different vulnerable groups or developing the community, all with the aim of fostering an inclusive community. The minority-driven organizations in this project may be described as having a member-oriented approach that targets immigrants as members but reaches out to the collective good through efforts to integrate and include immigrants in society.

Eimhjellen et al. (2021) (see page 11 in this thesis) have described four functions volunteering and voluntary organizations may perform for integration: social integration, political integration, economic integration, and individual utility. This doctoral project mainly focuses on the social integration function of voluntary organizations, which are viewed as social meeting points where people can be included in the organizations and society by developing necessary resources, such as language competence and social relations. However, individual utility is also a central function, as I have explored how immigrants themselves experience being volunteers and the personal benefits they perceive. Political integration is not directly addressed in this project but is mentioned as an implicit function since volunteering offers a valuable platform for learning about democracy and the political

system by promoting active citizenship, fostering civic engagement, and providing opportunities for experiential learning and collaboration within diverse communities. Economic integration is not covered here.

In the following, I will discuss in what sense formal voluntary organizations function as an arena for the social inclusion of immigrants, drawing on the findings in this thesis, the theoretical framework, existing research, and government expectations.

**Access as a prerequisite for social inclusion.**

Feeling welcome and having access to participation in voluntary organizations is a prerequisite for immigrants to experience volunteering as contributing to social inclusion, and this resonates with the cornerstone of proximity (Omidvar & Richmond, 2003). The findings of Article III showed that all the participants who contributed to the recruitment of volunteers stated that immigrants were welcome as volunteers in their organization. However, the findings show that actual access to volunteering opportunities may vary due to different recruitment practices. These practices may be structural in the organization, e.g., whether new volunteers must have certain qualifications to participate in voluntary activities (e.g., visitors services for the elderly or activities carried out for people with mental disorders which demand qualifications such as Norwegian language competence, understanding the volunteer role and the duty of confidentiality). The practices may also include aspects related to the individuals who recruit, such as the recruiter's social network. Recruitment practices are described as one central factor contributing to upholding social inequality in volunteering (Meyer & Rameder, 2022; Wollebæk et al., 2015). Social inequality in volunteering refers to the fact that the most resourceful people, such as well-educated people with a higher income, participate more than others (Eimhjellen & Fladmoe, 2020; Wilson, 2012). Eimhjellen et al. (2021) found some characteristics that are associated with lower participation in volunteering among immigrants, such as having a lower level of education, less language competence in the host nation's language, and being a woman, thus confirming the social inequality among immigrants. Notably, the participants with immigrant backgrounds in this doctoral project were well-educated, most were active in the labor market (see Table 3a & 3b: *Participants characteristics* page 45 and 46), and had proficient language skills, thus underlining the social inequality in volunteer participation. The dimensions of social inequality in volunteering lead to questions about how democratic

values and gender equality will be ensured in the society of the future. If immigrants with lower education, especially women, are not represented in volunteering and miss out on learning about democracy and political processes, acquire less training in the host country's language, and have limited social networks, how can representation and democratic values be upheld? In turn, this might also reduce some immigrants´ sense of belonging to society, which may have a negative impact on the immigrants´ health (van Bergen et al., 2018). It may also contribute to the individual´s lack of resources to handle challenges they meet (manageability), e.g., not learning the language and lacking social networks. A further consequence may be that the immigrant does not experience information and expectations in the new society as understandable (lack of comprehensibility) and that the marginalization may decrease the experienced meaningfulness in life and influence the person toward dis-ease (Antonovsky, 1987). However, there was a predominance of immigrant women in this doctoral project. This may be explained by the choice of voluntary organizations representing welfare and community-related activities where women generally participate to a greater extent than men (Boje, Hermansen, & Møberg, 2019; Fladmoe et al., 2018). The immigrant women participating in volunteering in this project (Articles II and III) exhibited great enthusiasm, which was not only positive for them as individuals but also led to the involvement of several other immigrants in volunteering and society in general. They acted as crucial bridge-makers and took the initiative to be role models. Moreover, immigrant women will have an extremely significant impact on their families as they have a crucial role in the upbringing of the children and may lay the groundwork for the children to be active in and included in society (Crul, Schneider, Keskiner, & Lelie, 2017). Ensuring the inclusion of immigrant women in volunteering and immigrants with lower socio-economic standing is crucial for their participation in a democratic society.

Even though volunteering is considered a door-opener into society and the labor market and a lifestyle choice that promotes the health of vulnerable groups such as minority groups (Yeung, Zhang, & Kim, 2017), the inequality in volunteer participation shows that it seems difficult to reach people who have less access to opportunities and resources. The observed difficulty may be attributed to organizations not customizing their recruitment strategies and activities for immigrants but rather passively waiting for individuals with immigrant

backgrounds to register online, attend information meetings, and join volunteering (Article III). Research states that direct request to volunteer is a crucial factor in the decision to become a volunteer (Meyer & Rameder, 2022; Wollebæk et al., 2015). In addition, when arriving as an immigrant and settling in a new country, many background factors may impact the opportunity to sign up as a volunteer. For instance, immigrants in general, but especially the group with refugee status that migrated due to war and conflicts, may have traumatic life experiences affecting their health (Kirmayer et al., 2011; Spallek et al., 2011; Spilker et al., 2022), and extensive language difficulties especially in Scandinavian countries which have languages with low global familiarity (Capps et al., 2015).

Furthermore, we cannot expect a universal comprehension of volunteering. Existing research points to clear differences regarding the volunteer role and what is considered volunteering or not. Schwingel et al. (2017) found that the volunteer may be comprehended as a person with outstanding qualities – an altruistic person capable of putting their own needs aside for others. Some may describe a volunteer as a charismatic leader with time and interest to share their talent, someone who is fit and healthy, or a sociable extrovert with exceptional language skills. This is a set of traits that may be difficult to identify with (Schwingel et al., 2017). Furthermore, the understanding of which activities are considered as volunteering may differ; researchers have found that people within some cultures defined a number of criteria that need to be fulfilled to determine what counts and what does not as a volunteer activity. These criteria may apply to how much time is required to carry out the activity or how the activities differ from daily helping behavior (Hobbs, 2001; Schwingel et al., 2017). Others again may have experienced formal volunteering in the past as a forced activity controlled by the government, leading to volunteering having a bad reputation and not an activity to which one wishes to contribute (Eimhjellen et al., 2020; Khvorostianov & Remennick, 2017). Even though most immigrants get some insight into the Norwegian voluntary sector through education and introductory courses in the Norwegian language and culture (IMDi, 2021; Ministry of Labour and Inclusion, 2021), it is important to acknowledge that different comprehensions of volunteering may impact whether immigrants volunteer. This may also be related to informal volunteering, which may be described as ´small helping behaviors outside of organizations for people outside the household´ (Ramaekers, Verbakel, & Kraaykamp, 2022). Such informal volunteering is often not considered as volunteering in

the research field either (Dean, 2022). Notably, the benefit to society and the individual of informal volunteering is clearly understudied (Dean, 2022; Jegermalm et al., 2019).

The Norwegian government promotes volunteering through the traditional voluntary organizations mainly associated with the majority population. These possess the factors that are expected to facilitate integration, such as increased belongingness and trust in the Norwegian society and crucial social networks making it easier to enter the job market or gain further organizational career opportunities (Ministry of Culture, 2018; Ministry of Education, 2021). Putnam's (2000) states in the theory of social capital that majority-driven organizations have opportunities to build both ´bonding´ and ´bridging´ social capital where democracy, values, and skills to prepare for the labor market can be achieved. Other organizations, such as the newer minority organizations, e.g. voluntary organizations based on ethnic background or religion that have emerged in recent years, are mainly associated with strong ties and social cohesion within groups, connected to bonding social capital (Granovetter, 1973; Putnam, 2000). Bonding social capital is promoted as significant and valuable social and psychological support for the immigrants that participate, but it is claimed that it may hamper inclusion and integration in a local community (Putnam, 2000). Both ´bonding´ social capital, which strengthens ties within homogeneous groups, and ´bridging´ social capital, which connects people across diverse groups, are important, but the balance between them is crucial for maintaining a healthy and vibrant community. The voluntary organizations in this doctoral project consist of two traditional voluntary organizations mainly associated with the majority population, referred to as large-scale organizations, and three organizations labeled as small-scale organizations. Two of these small-scale organizations are mainly associated with immigrants but are organized with boards, elections, and membership. These organizations do not represent one ethnic background or religion but consist of immigrants with diverse backgrounds who carry out activities to benefit other immigrants. These organizations may be seen as a middle ground between the traditional majority-driven organizations on the one hand and those consisting of somewhat homogenous groups of immigrants based on country of origin, for example, on the other. These organizations may, at first glance, be considered a resource for mainly `bonding` social capital, based on their commonality, which is a migration experience. However, they consist of people of different countries of origin, different languages,

different religions, and reasons for migration, also pointing to some `bridging´ capacities. These organizations successfully recruited and included immigrants as volunteers by tailoring recruitment to immigrants and having flexible activities (Article III). They had difficulties recruiting Norwegians into their organizations, so access to the majority population was limited. The majority-driven large-scale organizations had recruitment strategies that may make it hard to recruit immigrants, and they required certain qualifications to carry out some of the volunteer activities. Thus, immigrants have easier access to small minority-driven organizations. This raises some questions as to what will happen to the intention to socially include immigrants through volunteering to prepare for the labor market and to build social capital if the organizations to which immigrants have access are small organizations mainly associated with other immigrants. If the organization offers an inclusive volunteer context and insight into the country´s culture and values, how will this contribute to the experience of handling life´s challenges as understandable, manageable, and meaningful compared to the majority-driven traditional organizations? It is reasonable to believe that language practice may be hindered in these organizations, since they have limited access to ethnic Norwegians with Norwegian as their mother tongue. Ødegård & Takle (2018) found in their analysis of voluntary organizations for children and young people of immigrant background that integration processes in Norwegian society and transnational ties are complementary processes that make migrant organizations potentially important arenas for social and political integration. They underline that organizations with transnational ties and transnational practices are most likely to focus on Norwegian network building (Ødegård & Takle, 2018). However, if immigrants without proficiency in the host nation's language only access these minority-driven organizations, this may contribute to making a hierarchy in volunteer participation, where minority-driven organizations function as a preparation for the immigrants to volunteer in the large-scale organizations or maybe never join them at all. This may hamper or slow down the process of social inclusion, creating a society with exclusionary or qualifying processes that again may harm the values of the democratic society (Brodtkorb & Rugkåsa, 2019; Kuhnle & Kildal, 2018).

**Acquiring (and possessing) skills and competencies.**

Many immigrants who volunteer gain different skills and competencies spanning from language competence, knowledge of cultural values and norms, to specific skills related to their volunteer activity (Article I & II). This may apply to human development, one of the cornerstones of social inclusion, where the importance of nurturing talents, skills, and capacities is highlighted (Omidvar & Richmond, 2003). These factors also resonate with both manageability and comprehensibility in the sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1987) and might also impact meaningfulness through experiencing that their volunteering contributes to their development and well-being (Antonovsky, 1987). This suggests that among the immigrants participating in this research project, engaging in volunteer activities may lead to positive factors that enhance both well-being and social inclusion.

However, the findings in this thesis indicate that large-scale organizations have a professionalized and formalized structure in both recruitment strategy and volunteer tasks (Article III), which leads to a need for a certain number and type of qualifications and skills to enter as a volunteer. This is said to be necessary for understanding the volunteer role and providing good-quality services for the recipients in these welfare- and community-related activities. At the same time, it may exclude people without the capacity or opportunity to acquire the needed qualifications, such as sufficient language skills. Due to the complexity of the volunteer tasks and the lack of resources to tailor recruitment efforts, participation in traditional large-scale voluntary organizations may only be relevant for immigrants who have already been able to learn the language and the cultural values and norms. Ambrosini & Artero (2023) show that most of the immigrants who volunteer have secure legal status, acquired citizenship, hold employment, and have high or medium-high education. According to them, volunteering is more a way to achieve a higher level of social integration and practice active citizenship rather than for newly arrived to start their social inclusion process (Ambrosini & Artero, 2023). Paradoxically, immigrants need language skills and cultural knowledge to become volunteers (Article III) but are expected to achieve language and cultural knowledge through participating in volunteering to qualify for the labor market (Ministry of Culture, 2018; Ministry of Education, 2021). This paradox makes the promotion of volunteering as a strategy for social inclusion challenging. Immigrants, and especially refugees, experience a tremendous change in their lives through being forced to leave all

that is familiar, culture, language, family and friends, and face an adaption in the new country of settlement that creates a need for learning a new language, new cultural values and norms, and a whole social system (Hammar et al., 1997; Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016). Refugees is a group that is characterized as particularly vulnerable, with a higher risk for health problems and poor living conditions (Kirmayer et al., 2011; Spilker et al., 2022). Refugees with extensive traumas also face challenges such as difficulties with learning the host nation's language due to cognitive difficulties, making the adaption to the new society even more challenging (Khan, Kuhn, & Haque, 2021; Schick et al., 2016) This makes it crucial to establish social inclusion efforts to reach these groups of people, both for their individual benefit and for society. This is the reason why refugees are focused on in Article II. It is, however, difficult to understand how the voluntary sector can function as an arena for social inclusion if the persons needing access the most are disqualified due to factors such as lacking proficiency in the host nation's language. Therefore, we need to acknowledge all the voluntary efforts that are carried out to benefit immigrants, and especially refugees, where they can join as recipients. Over the years, the voluntary sector has been active in offering activities and meeting points where immigrants are targeted as recipients (Wollebæk & Selle, 2002). In a review of the research literature, Grönlund & Falck (2019) found that being a recipient of voluntary efforts may reduce loneliness, reaffirm a positive self-image and view of life, and create an experience of participation. This may contribute positively to the process of social inclusion. However, it upholds the relationship Ambrosini and Artero (2023) describe as ´the one-way solidarity flow emanating from the native European or North American population to migrant people in need´.

This leads us to some of the power dynamics in this research project – whether immigrants are considered possible contributors on an equal footing with the majority population or a vulnerable group needing help (Article III). The philanthropic idea of volunteering implies contributing freely to the weakest in society, and today, it is expressed as carrying out activities and helping to secure good communities for all with activities directed towards vulnerable groups. As immigrants are defined as vulnerable groups, it is not difficult to understand how immigrants are considered a group in need of help. This is partly in line with Gullestad´s (2002) description of ethnic Norwegians´ notions of themselves as ´hosts´ and immigrants as ´guests´, denoting that only the guest needs to adapt. Furthermore, ethnic

Norwegians consider themselves helpers rather than equals. This may also reflect the power dynamics, where the majority considers it their mission to help the minority. However, there is a need to approach this differently if volunteering is to function as a strategy for social inclusion for immigrants. To quote one of the participants with an immigrant background in Article III: *´It isn't like members are the ones who get help and volunteers are the helpers, because you can do both! Someone can help you with one thing, and you can help others with something else´.* This aligns with the goal of social inclusion, which is that everyone, regardless of background, identity, or abilities, can participate and experience belonging (Baumgartner & Burns, 2014; Omidvar & Richmond, 2003; van Bergen et al., 2018). Although, it is also a recruitment strategy to recruit among recipients in the voluntary activities, according to Bonnesen (2019), these people will most likely not be considered ´actual´ volunteers on an equal footing with the majority population.

The cornerstone of social inclusion including material well-being is not explicitly studied in this doctoral project. However, some participants consider their volunteering to favorably impact their access to the labor market (Articles I & II) that relates to this cornerstone. The work ethic in the Norwegian society is based on the idea that all should be active in the labor market as it is a salutogenic factor for people by reducing depression and psychological distress (van der Noordt, IJzelenberg, Droomers, & Proper, 2014). Furthermore, it is important for upholding the welfare of society and democracy through productivity and the payment of taxes (Brochmann et al., 2002; Newman & Tonkens, 2011). International research, however, is not conclusive as to whether volunteering may be a stepping-stone to paid employment. While some scholars state that volunteering may contribute to this (Paat, 2022), others show that immigrants experience being excluded from the labor market due to having work experience from other countries on their CV or because of a foreign-sounding name (Birkelund, Rogstad, Heggebø, Aspøy, & Bjelland, 2014; Oreopoulos, 2011) or skin color and religion (Wollscheid, Alne, Bergene, Karlstrøm, & Fossum, 2022). Recent research points out that being a volunteer merely in the hope that it will lead to paid work is not volunteering but should be considered as ´unpaid´ work they are forced to undertake due to the lack of paid work opportunities (Bontenbal, Calo, Montgomery, & Baglioni, 2024). Furthermore, Bontenbal et al. (2024) found that migrants often got trapped in a continuous cycle of volunteering, most often in voluntary organizations concerned with including

migrants. This might transform volunteering into a meaningless experience regarding access to the labor market (Bontenbal et al., 2024). Given increasing social inequality, where people at the lowest end of the socioeconomic gradient have fewer opportunities as there is a decreasing number of jobs with no requirement as to qualifications (Goldblatt et al., 2023), it is a challenging task to integrate immigrants into the labor market.

**Being acknowledged and accepted as a worthy part of the group and society**

The context of volunteering has to be inclusive and with mutual acceptance, and the immigrant must be acknowledged as valuable to contribute to the experience of social inclusion (Article I & II). This resonates with the cornerstones (see the chapter on the theoretical framework page 15): valued recognition, human development and involvement, and engagement. This refers to the importance of experiencing mutual respect and having the opportunity to contribute and engage in community life in a manner that is considered valuable by both themselves and others (Omidvar & Richmond, 2003). This supports the concept of meaningfulness in sense of coherence, which refers to the motivational dimension of the theory of finding meaning in how they live their lives (Antonovsky, 1991).

The reality is, however, that not all experience acceptance and are considered a worthy part of society. Racism and discrimination are highly prevalent. Statistics Norway states that in 2022 about one in four immigrants in Norway have experienced discrimination based on ethnic background (Oppøyen, 2022). Discrimination and racism are associated with mental health problems (Dadras & Diaz, 2024) and hamper human development (Idemudia & Olonisakin, 2022). This counteracts the process of social inclusion, as social inclusion is dependent on both the individual and the society. Furthermore, it may affect the person's manageability, comprehensibility, and meaningfulness by making what is happening irrational, not understandable, difficult, and meaningless. Noting that immigrants, and especially refugees, are a group that experiences many dramatic changes and is at higher risk for developing health problems, it is necessary to acknowledge that the social inclusion of immigrants is a complex matter needing a multifaceted approach on different levels, such reidentifying inclusionary practices is a starting point and this thesis focuses on the volunteering arena.

In addition to structural measures such as laws and frameworks to counteract discrimination and exclusion, there is a need for general empathy from everyone and acknowledgment that we are different but that everyone's voice and experience matter, and we live together, shape our fellowship, and help each other (Nussbaum, 2013). The findings of the thesis underscore the necessity for diversity competence to enhance the integration of immigrants into voluntary organizations (Article III). Bonnesen's (2019) research further elucidates the challenges in recruiting immigrants as volunteers, outlining various exclusionary factors. These factors range from non-recruitment practices, such as not actively reaching out to immigrants, to more formal exclusion based on qualifications. To address these challenges, fostering diversity competence becomes crucial.

Recognizing the complexities in interactions between individuals from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, there is a need for proactive approaches to mitigate potential negative effects. Diversity competence emerges as a central concept, denoting the ability and readiness of organizations or individuals to engage and support volunteers from varied backgrounds. Hoffman and Verdooren (2019) posit that this competence involves not only understanding and appreciating cultural distinctions but also valuing differences in language, experiences, and perspectives. By transforming the perception of 'strangeness' into an experience of familiarity, diversity competence enables participants to interact with and understand each other better.

While ´intercultural competence´ has traditionally been used in research, the thesis argues for the broader concept of diversity competence. Hoffman and Verdooren (2019) highlight that not all differences are solely related to culture, making diversity a more appropriate and inclusive term. Therefore, organizations that actively promote diversity competence and strive to cultivate diversity among volunteers are likely to contribute significantly to a more inclusive volunteering context. In doing so, they move beyond compliance with legal frameworks to create environments that genuinely embrace and celebrate the richness of human diversity.

**Welcome, capable and valuable?**

Through this discussion, I have covered different aspects of the extent to which formal volunteering may function as promoting social inclusion among immigrants. The overall contribution of this thesis may be summed up in the concepts of ´Welcome´, ´Capable´, ´Valuable´ that emerged in Article III. Are immigrants considered welcome, capable and valuable in the new country of settlement, and to what extent do they consider themselves welcome, capable and valuable? The findings in this thesis emphasized that volunteering may provide health benefits and contribute to social inclusion for immigrants and refugees by contributing to making them feel welcome, capable, and valuable; however, context and other factors have to be present for these benefits to be activated. Hence, being a volunteer may benefit the social inclusion and health of some, but not all. **Welcome** refers to the fact that immigrants need access to volunteer opportunities and an inclusive context, together with a resolve to be a part of society. Voluntary organizations provide the foundation for individuals to make sense of their experiences, enable them to manage challenges and find meaning in their lives. **Capable** relates to recognizing and utilizing immigrants' skills, talents, and capabilities. This is connected to both the skills and knowledge the immigrants may experience from the volunteer activity. In addition, it is linked to the fact that the immigrant has to consider their activity meaningful and that the tasks are manageable. When individuals feel capable and competent; it positively influences their comprehension of situations, ability to manage stressors effectively, and sense of life's meaningfulness**.** **Valuable** involves acknowledging the worth and importance of immigrants in volunteering. Specifically, this may be connected to the social relations in the voluntary organizations, and these must be of good quality. Feeling valued enhances the comprehensibility of their surroundings, instills a sense of manageability in navigating challenges, and contributes to a meaningful connection to the community.

## 8.0 Concluding Remarks

Over the last years, there is an increasing number of migrants globally, and due to ongoing political instability, war and crisis, we have to prepare for continuously increasing immigration. Several European countries have experienced problems with integration or social inclusion and escalating levels of social unrest among young immigrants, expressed by increasing violence and crime. Analysis shows that the alarming situations result in part from failed integration and a lack of inclusion in society. Promoting the inclusion of immigrants is crucial for building diverse, harmonious, and thriving communities and promoting immigrants' health and well-being. Several factors and strategies contribute to the social inclusion of immigrants in society. This thesis sheds light on participation as a volunteer in voluntary organizations within welfare and community-related activities and acknowledges that this arena may contribute to the social inclusion and well-being of immigrants. Moreover, it singles out some crucial aspects impacting on whether it is a success. The benefits immigrants may experience from volunteering depend on structural and contextual support, leading to the need for diversity competence within organizations and culturally sensitive recruitment strategies. Organizations may have to consider changing structural components and involving immigrants in these developments, such as tailoring recruitment strategies to include diverse people, expanding the portfolio of tasks, and setting some low thresholds to suit the groups that one wishes to recruit. Also, language support should be provided, and organizations should make efforts to create inclusive social environments to ensure a more diverse pool of volunteers and actively facilitate diversity. This will contribute to strengthening immigrants' manageability, comprehensibility, and meaningfulness, which is important for both the process of social inclusion and the well-being of the individual immigrant. The diversity focus may also contribute to counteracting the social inequality characterizing volunteer participation.

## 9.0 Implications

This doctoral project's findings reveal that active participation as volunteers can contribute to social inclusion and well-being. By engaging in volunteering, individuals may find everyday life more manageable, comprehensible, and meaningful. Volunteers are encouraged to embrace diversity as a value, fostering inclusivity, support, and openness to new perspectives within the voluntary context. This, in turn, has the potential to contribute to creating a more inclusive and secure society.

On the organizational level, the primary implications emphasize the importance of prioritizing diversity and developing diversity competence. Organizations with strong diversity competence exhibit greater sustainability, which is crucial because of increased diversity in societies all over the world. This competence should encompass implementing diversity-sensitive recruitment approaches and providing accessible tasks that do not require prequalification.

Government expectations from the voluntary sector include its role as a service provider to alleviate the public sector's burden and its function as a social inclusion arena. However, it is essential to recognize that expecting immigrants to join volunteering as a one-size-fits-all solution for social integration and labor market participation may be unrealistic. The complexity of these outcomes is influenced by factors beyond individual willingness, and government policies should acknowledge this complexity. Encouraging and supporting organizations in developing diversity competence becomes crucial to enhance opportunities for immigrants to engage positively in volunteering. Moreover, policies should persist in promoting and supporting various social inclusion arenas, including labor market integration, recognizing the multifaceted nature of the integration process.

## 10.0 Future Research

Finally, directing attention towards future research endeavors is crucial. To enhance our understanding of immigrants' volunteering, we must delve into various aspects of this phenomenon. A particular area of interest is examining how different types of voluntary organizations in diverse contexts can serve as platforms for social inclusion. Research incorporating a gender perspective is needed. Comparisons with Norway's voluntary sector with other Scandinavian countries would be pivotal for addressing these research questions effectively. Furthermore, studies on family integration through parents volunteering for their children's sports organizations have also been neglected in research and would have given some valuable perspectives on social inclusion.

Additionally, exploring the role of minority organizations composed of multicultural volunteers in fostering social inclusion for newly arrived immigrants is another fruitful avenue for research. This exploration could involve categorizing immigrants based on the reasons for migration to facilitate meaningful comparisons. While the potential themes surrounding immigrants and volunteering are extensive, one noteworthy avenue for research is a project focused on individuals who do not engage in volunteering. This project could investigate their perspectives on social inclusion and the factors influencing their sense of belonging. Lastly, I want to bring attention to future studies on how a diverse population is contributing to the development of the voluntary sector.

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# Paper I

# Immigrants' Experiences of Volunteering; A Meta-Ethnography

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## Abstract

Among policy makers and governments in the Global North, the voluntary sector is considered a central arena for immigrant integration. The aim of this interpretive synthesis was to systematically review research to understand immigrants' volunteering experiences and explore how volunteering may influence immigrants' health. A systematic literature review was performed using six databases. Eleven studies met our inclusion criteria. Meta-ethnography was applied for the interpretive synthesis. Immigrants' perceived volunteering contributed to improving self-conception, engaging in the community, developing skills and knowledge, and building social networks. Under certain conditions, volunteering could be an arena for developing meaningfulness and belongingness and capacity building in the new community for immigrants. Our study indicates that volunteering may have a health-promoting impact that may contribute to immigrants' sense of belonging and positive well-being. However, this effect seems complex, and volunteering activities and contexts must be further explored.

## Keywords

immigrants, inclusion, volunteering

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## Introduction

The number of international migrants is increasing, leading to more social, ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity in many societies worldwide (Appave & David, 2017). In 2019, it was estimated that 272 million people lived in countries other than their countries of birth, representing an increase of 119 million people compared to 1990 (McAuliffe & Khadria, 2019). In the process of resettlement, acculturation, which, according to Berry (2005), is a dual process of cultural and psychological change resulting from contact between individuals from different cultural groups, occurs. Berry (2005) claimed that immigrants seek to acculturate in several ways. Preferences for acculturation strategies have been extensively studied, yielding various results, but integration is often argued to be the desired outcome (Berry et al., 2006). This outcome is central to government policies in the Global North but has been criticized for promoting specific imaginaries of culture, race, ethnicity, and belonging that cast immigrants inferior (Rytter, 2019). There are large differences among immigrants; immigrants are not a homogeneous group, but in this study, we included immigrants into one practical category (Brubaker, 2002) denoting that they for some reason left their countries of origin to settle in another country.

## The Voluntary Sector

In the Global North, governments are placing an increasingly high value on volunteering and the voluntary sector as an arena for integration. It is suggested that recruiting and including immigrants in volunteering may help immigrants learn about their new society and language and facilitate easier entrance into the labor market (Christensen & Christensen, 2006; Meld. St. 10, 2018-2019; J. A. Smith et al., 2004). Volunteering has various definitions, but in this study, we define volunteering as freely contributing without an expectation of a reward or other compensation to benefit individuals or groups outside one's household and social network in an organized context (Snyder & Omoto, 2008; Wollebæk et al., 2000).

## Immigrants' Volunteering and Health

Research related to volunteering among immigrants is primarily descriptive and mainly discusses participation compared to the majority population, volunteer hours, and motivation and barriers to participation (Eckstein et al., 2015; Gele & Harsløf, 2012; Lee et al., 2018; Wilson, 2012). Thus far, immigrants' experiences with participation in voluntary work have been sparsely investigated (Torres & Serrat, 2019; Wilson, 2012). Given that studies show that acculturation may be a stressful experience that can result in negative health impacts (Gonzalez-Guarda et al., 2021; Yeh, 2003) and that social support and social networks have been found to be beneficial to mental health (Berkman et al., 2000; Dominguez-Fuentes & Hombrados-Mendieta, 2012; Kim et al., 2012; Seeman, 1996), volunteering may be an arena to build social networks and exchange social support (Lidèn, 2001; Putnam, 2000; Wilson, 2012).

The objective of this review is to *explore and synthesize the existing qualitative research concerning immigrants' experiences of being formal volunteers and how this may influence their health.* Our research question is as follows: Which experiences related to participating in formal volunteering do immigrants have?

## Method

We applied a meta-ethnographic approach following the seven steps developed by Noblit and Hare (1988). We chose this method to interpret the existing research concerning immigrants' experiences of volunteering instead of conducting a narrative review aggregating findings based on a wide range of database searches. Meta-ethnography is a well-established form of interpretative review that synthesizes concepts to further develop conceptual meanings based on heterogeneous samples and contexts. The steps are as follows: getting started (step 1), deciding what is relevant to the initial interest (step 2), reading (and rereading) studies to discover the main concepts (step 3), determining how the studies are related (step 4), translating the studies into one another (step 5), synthesizing translations (step 6), and communicating the synthesis in text (step 7).

## Search Strategy and Selection of Studies

Electronic searches were performed using six databases in June 2020 by the first author under the guidance of a research librarian. The following databases were included: MEDLINE, Embase, PsycINFO, CINAHL, Global Health, and Amed. We searched with subject headings and used all search terms as keywords in each database. Search 1, "minority group" and search 2, "volunteers" were combined with the Boolean operator AND (see the search strategy in the appendix). The search was limited to qualitative studies and obtained 3,642 hits. The first screening, which included duplicates and the inclusion and exclusion of studies based on the title and abstract, was performed by the first author. The third author screened a sample of the articles. The full texts of 50 articles were downloaded for further screening by the first and third authors. Thirteen articles were obtained from manual searches of the reference lists of the included articles, contact with experts and other singular searches. In total, 11 articles were included in this review. A flow diagram is presented in Figure 1.

### Inclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria were as follows: qualitative articles concerning volunteering among immigrants and ethnic minorities with a minority status in their country of residence on the basis of their place of birth, language, ethnicity, or cultural differences (18 years of age or above) and their experiences of being volunteers in organizations in high-income countries; full-text empirical studies published in peer-reviewed journals in English, Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish; and articles published from the inception of each database to June 2020.
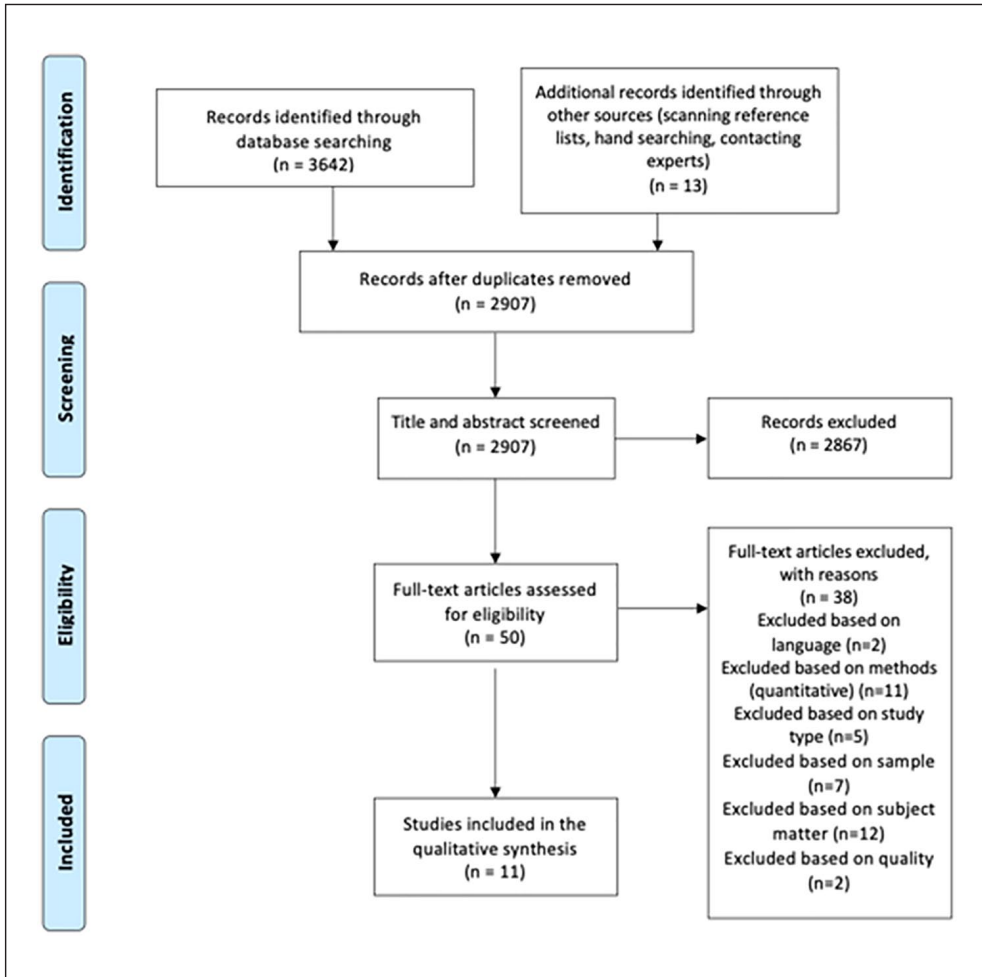
**Figure 1.** Flow diagram based on Moher et al. (2009).

## Exclusion Criteria

Studies in which immigrants were only a part of the study samples or the qualitative results of the groups were not differentiated were excluded. Any study that did not report the data collection or strategy for analysis was also excluded.

## Data Extraction and Quality Assessment

The data extraction was conducted independently by the first and third authors, and then, the extracted data were compiled and organized in a data extraction sheet. The two authors extracted information from the full primary studies and included both first- and second-order constructs. Descriptive information, such as the author, year,

title, and publication, and information concerning the aim, methods, design, data collection, sampling, theoretical framework, analysis, findings, themes, and discussion were noted. The results concerning immigrants' experience of volunteering were the main interest. Information concerning the participants, context and culture of voluntary work was also extracted. A short description of the included studies is presented in Table 1.

The evaluation of the quality of the studies was guided by a checklist covering aims, reflexivity (authors preconceptions and meta-positions), methods and design, data sampling and collection, theoretical framework, analysis, results, discussion, and conclusion (Malterud, 2001) and EPICURE (Stige et al., 2009). Any disagreements were noted and resolved by consensus among the authors.

## Data Synthesis

The first and third authors read and reread the included studies to discover the main concepts (step 3). Common themes and concepts were identified (step 4). The common themes and concepts were compared and matched across the articles. The first author chose Wood et al. (2019) as an index study based on the quality and richness of the article. The studies were analyzed using the following categories from Wood et al.'s article: "sense of self and self-worth," "belonging in a new community" and "work, health and illness." The meanings of the themes and concepts identified were matched, compared, and organized in a table by the first author. All authors collaborated in the translations (step 5). The analysis included several steps. The first-order interpretations involved identifying and interpreting the meanings of the themes, concepts, and metaphors in each study, while the second-order interpretations included interpretations of how the identified concepts related to each other. The authors grouped the concepts from the articles and developed four themes that covered the concepts. Reciprocal interpretations, that is, meanings of themes and concepts that were similar, were synthesized. The reciprocal relationship in the studies made it possible to develop a line of argument. All authors collaborated to further synthesize the themes under the concepts of "meaningfulness," "belongingness," and "capacity building" (step 6). This article is an attempt to express the synthesis. All authors collaborated in the writing of this article (step 7).

## Results

This review is a synthesis of qualitative literature concerning immigrants' experiences of volunteering. This review includes studies with samples from a range of ethnic backgrounds in different countries and regions. The participants volunteered for different organizations, such as student organizations, church organizations, immigration-serving agencies, festivals, and community services. The volunteer activities included operating health resource centers; creating cultural meetings, such as book clubs; creating groups for physical activities; cooking and serving meals; providing counseling to young people and different activities for children; developing and leading organizations for social change; and assisting newly arrived immigrants.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Details of the Included Studies.

| Study, location, and study design | Aims | Sampling strategy and recruitment | Sample size and brief description | Data collection methods and analysis |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Wood et al. (2019), Australia, regional area, qualitative study | Exploring how employment and volunteering influence the health and wellbeing of refugees in Australia and identify areas for appropriate service provision | Purposive sampling was conducted through community organizations using word-of-mouth referrals | 9 adults (7 men and 2 women) with refugee backgrounds; average age 38 | Semi-structured interviews; thematic analysis; strength-based theoretical framework |
| Chan (2011), USA, public university in a large Midwestern city, qualitative study | Exploring the impact of civic engagement on Asian American college students' social and academic development | Students from various student groups received a recruitment email, and the primary investigator visited all Asian American studies courses | 24 participants (10 women and 4 men); ages 18 to 22; immigrants and children of immigrants; Asian Americans | Semi-structured interviews; grounded theory |
| Safrit and Lopez (2001), USA, Cuyahoga County (Cleveland), Ohio, qualitative study | Identifying the attitudes, motivations, and barriers of Hispanic Americans regarding participation in volunteer programs | Leaders of Cuyahoga County Hispanic American organizations were contacted to identify potential study participants | 20 participants (8 men and 12 women); ages 20 to 70; Hispanic Americans | Face-to-face interviews, open-ended questions; constant comparative method |
| H. C. Smith (2015), United Kingdom, qualitative study | Exploring individuals' experiences of occupation before leaving their home countries, during the asylum process and after seeking asylum. Exploring the meaning given to the occupation by individuals | Recruitment was conducted sensitively, with two trusted link agencies used to promote trust. Staff and volunteers facilitated contact | 10 participants (6 men and 4 women); ages 25 to 45; various nations in Africa and the Middle East; time of settlement in UK of 1 to 8 years | Phenomenological method; conversational interviews |
| Daoud et al. (2010), Israel, qualitative study | Examining the benefits of volunteering through the experience of lay Arab and Jewish women in the Women for Women's Health Program in Israel | 42 Jewish and 25 Arab volunteers in the Women for Women's Health Program were contacted and invited | In this review, only Arab participants were included because of the minority perspective; ages 29 to 51 | Focus-group interviews; content analysis |
| Suárez-Orozco et al. (2015), USA, mixed method study | Describing the patterns of civic engagement of Latino first- and second-generation (immigrant origin) young adults and provide insight into the differences in these patterns | Recruitment was conducted through churches, community organizations, community colleges, and 4-year universities | 58 Latino young adults of immigrant origin residing in northeastern cities (56.8% women); ages 18 to 25; Dominicans, Mexicans, Salvadorans and Guatemalans | Semi structured in-depth interviews; analysis: analysis strategies derived from open coding |

*(continued)*

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**Table 1. (continued)**

| Study, location, and study design | Aims | Sampling strategy and recruitment | Sample size and brief description | Data collection methods and analysis |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Taurini et al. (2017), Spain, Andalusia, qualitative study | Exploring how the community engagement of Moroccan leaders in southern Spain contributes to their wellbeing in their new settlement context | Founders or official leaders of community organizations established and managed by Moroccan migrants were recruited | 10 participants (7 men and 3 women); ages 27 to 53; Moroccans | In-depth face-to-face interviews; open-ended questions; theoretical thematic analysis |
| Handy and Greenspan (2009), Canada, Halifax, Regina, Toronto and Vancouver, mixed method study | Examining whether and how immigrants participate in volunteering activities, the factors facilitating their decisions to volunteer, and whether this experience eventually helps them better integrate into Canadian society | Purposive sampling was performed in religious congregations in four major urban centers in Canada | 34 participants in individual interviews and 33 focus groups with 6 to 10 participants; participants of different ages, ethnicities, and gender and both recent and established immigrants; in a few cases, youths; ages above 18 | In-depth interviews, focus groups and surveys (the surveys were excluded in this review); grounded theory approach |
| Dudley (2007), Canada, mixed method study | Examining volunteering experiences from the perspective of adult immigrant second-language learners | Samples of two cohorts of adult immigrant students were enrolled in a 20-week English as a second-language program. Interview participants were recruited from among the questionnaire participants who reported having volunteered in Canadian settings | 8 participants (2 men and 6 women); ages 22 to 52 | Questionnaire (excluded in this review) and semi-structured interviews; analysis based on similar themes |
| Jensen (2008), USA, Washington DC, qualitative study | Examining the cultural dimension of immigrants' civic engagement or lack thereof and their conceptions of their civic engagement | Recruitment was performed through local religious institutions (Catholic churches and Hindu temples). Snowball sampling strategy | Included in this review: 40 participants, 20 Asian Indian and 20 Salvadorans (mean age 44); 30 women and 10 men | Semi-structured interviews; narrative analysis; content analysis |
| Yap et al. (2011), United Kingdom, London, Norwich & Portsmouth, qualitative study | Examining how volunteers talk about themselves and their work as volunteers | Sampling within a volunteer organization that provided orientation and emergency provisions to refugees. Interested volunteers responded to an advertisement | 9 volunteers (5 men and 4 women); ages 28 to 67; various countries of origin: Kenya, Liberia, Iraq, Chad, Eritrea, Cameroon, and Zimbabwe | Semi-structured interviews; Foucauldian discourse analysis |

## Second-Order Analysis

We first present our synthesis based on the second-order analysis with reciprocal translation of the main findings in the primary studies included. The following four main themes arose from our synthesis: (1) improving self-conception, (2) building social networks, (3) developing skills and knowledge, and (4) engaging in the community. Examples of the primary data that support each theme are presented in Table 2.

### Improving Self-Conception

The participants experienced personal growth and increased self-confidence through their volunteering (Chan, 2011). Some participants reporting becoming braver (Chan, 2011; Daoud et al., 2010), feeling more comfortable in social interaction with foreigners, and improving their interpersonal skills (Safrit & Lopez, 2001). Others reported that volunteering increased their sense of importance, usefulness, and self-worth (Chan, 2011; Daoud et al., 2010; Dudley, 2007; Safrit & Lopez, 2001; H. C. Smith, 2015; Wood et al., 2019; Yap et al., 2011). Some participants discussed philanthropic values, the ability to be a part of something larger than their own lives (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015), and the opportunity to focus on others' needs and not their own problems (H. C. Smith, 2015). Volunteering also created a sense of purpose for their lives (Handy & Greenspan, 2009; Taurini et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2019; Yap et al., 2011). Being busy and having some degree of daily structure were important for some participants (H. C. Smith, 2015). Seven studies reported that the participants who experienced volunteering had a better self-image and self-esteem and a more positive view of themselves (Chan, 2011; Daoud et al., 2010; Safrit & Lopez, 2001; H. C. Smith, 2015; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015; Wood et al., 2019; Yap et al., 2011). The participants also reported improved connection with their original culture by establishing social relations with people from similar ethnic backgrounds. Some participants also found that they learned about and explored their own ethnic background. Some felt that this process helped them understand their development and contributed to a feeling of normality (Chan, 2011).

### Building Social Networks

Some participants found that volunteering contributed to a sense of belonging in the new country and community (Chan, 2011; Dudley, 2007; Safrit & Lopez, 2001; Wood et al., 2019). In eight studies, the participants reported that volunteering could build strong social relations and friendships (Chan, 2011; Daoud et al., 2010; Dudley, 2007; Handy & Greenspan, 2009; Jensen, 2008; H. C. Smith, 2015; Taurini et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2019). Building a social network in the new society was important, and some participants emphasized the value of making new social relations since they left their families and felt socially isolated (Dudley, 2007; Jensen, 2008). Group interaction in volunteer activities could also promote a sense of mutual respect, trust, and fellowship within the volunteer organization, which helped the participants establish

**Table 2.** Examples of Quotes From the Included Studies That Support Each Theme.

| Themes | Examples of quotes |
|---|---|
| Improving self-conception | "I have become a lot braver; I am willing to try different things; whereas before (volunteering) I would just ignore every opportunity that would come to me" (Chan, 2011, p. 201) |
| | "I feel now that I am worthy. When someone asks me for help filling out a job application and that person gets the job, I feel great, and more important" (Safrit & Lopez, 2001, p. 13) |
| | "I always like volunteering, since when I was young, they brought us up like that. To try doing something for people" They spoke of the value of "helping" (H. C. Smith, 2015, p. 617) |
| | "I feel healthier . . . I feel good about myself that I can give to others" (Daoud et al., 2010, p. 213) |
| | "(. . .)It is not an obligation, but more like I want to do (these things). (They make) me feel better. It's sort of my calling" (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015, p. 90) |
| | "Giving help to others is for me essential! It makes me feel good and it makes the others (who received help) feel good" (Taurini et al., 2017, p. 9) |
| | "Because it's a beautiful thing to feel that you are able to help, to feel that one serves someone else. It comes from our tradition and religion" (Jensen, 2008, p. 79) |
| | "I like the fact that I'm helping people, yeah, to see them, to see their problem solved and to see them leave happy, that gives me good, good feeling, good sense really . . . to know that you're helping someone" (Yap et al., 2011, p. 166) |
| Developing knowledge and skills | "Volunteer, that could have a huge impact on my career . . . Even if they help you write your resume, and you are going to look for the work where they require for experience, it is still nothing. What I mean, I am trying to say that experience they are requiring, how can I get it?" (Wood et al., 2019, p. 8) |
| | "We learned about breast cancer, something (cancer) we were afraid to even mention . . . now we talk directly about it and encourage other women to go and be examined" (Daoud et al., 2010, p. 211) |
| | "It gave me the experience to put on my resume. Volunteerism is a very respectable way to get into job here. It shows that you are responsible and good person" (Handy & Greenspan, 2009, p. 972) |
| | "Through volunteer jobs, I have become involved in Canadian culture" (Handy & Greenspan, 2009, p. 973) |
| | "I feel I am contributing to the growth of my community" (Safrit & Lopez, 2001, p. 12) |
| | "I like to do volunteering well because I need to build my experience. I need to build my skills, so I'm happy to meet people, talk to them, and then after that, I know how, I have this experience if I get job" (Yap et al., 2011, p. 162) |

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**Table 2. (continued)**

| Themes | Examples of quotes |
|---|---|
| Building social relations | "Volunteering makes me feel I belong here. I live in a disadvantaged neighborhood and did not like this town and always wanted to leave. Now I have met these women, with whom I can talk and discuss things, this make me feel differently about the place" (Daoud et al., 2010, p. 214)<br><br>"Getting involved in a community activity means that a lot of Spanish people get to know you in a more direct way" (Taurini et al., 2017, p. 38)<br><br>"I think that's what we lose when we come here. When you come from countries that have very little, their people are more community oriented. When they come here, there is isolation and disconnection. So for immigrants it's almost critical. To me, it's the way to keep people healthy—mentally healthy. Because when they have left their families behind, coming to a place where they find that they cannot talk to family, you know, it makes a whole lot of difference. It makes the transition easier. People are just better faster" (Jensen, 2008, p. 80)<br><br>"In the group we have come closer to one other, made friendships and talked to each other about variety of things" (Daoud et al., 2010, p. 214)<br><br>"For Smith, he goes to church to meet God; for me, I go to church to meet Smith . . . This is true for more than two-thirds of the congregants who come for social and psychological needs, and the other third [come] for their theological needs" (Handy & Greenspan, 2009, p. 971) |
| Community involvement | "You, when you come here, the doors are open for you, you need to come and help to build a window so that other windows will be open for other people. It's like, what you give back . . . And that's why I tell people I'm always very proud of myself, right" (Wood et al., 2019, p. 7)<br><br>"I guess it wasn't really a decision; it was more . . . like a calling. It just felt like such a huge moral responsibility and . . . social responsibility, as a human being. I just couldn't stand and watch and not be in solidarity with people" (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015, p. 96)<br><br>"I like helping—I like being a part of something bigger than who I am, so I like giving to society . . . and to find myself . . . I want to give something to this world. So . . . I want to help out. . . . Community does that for me" (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015, p. 94)<br><br>"I am too an immigrant, and it hurts me to see that there are people that are really suffering here and are in need. (. . .)" (Jensen, 2008, p. 79)<br><br>"I think everyone has the right to a fair life and a fair opportunity to have this life, and also, a fair way of dealing with this case. According to the rules, and according to the law. And that's why I'm doing it (Yap et al., 2011, p. 166) |

networks and social capital (Daoud et al., 2010). Some participants described their fellow volunteers as a part of an extended family (Handy & Greenspan, 2009). In addition to fulfilling social needs, social relations could provide an important link in the community (Dudley, 2007; Handy & Greenspan, 2009; Taurini et al., 2017) or implied that the participants had someone to ask for advice in a nonthreatening environment, which could reduce feelings of anxiety in their new country (Dudley, 2007). The participants also reported that they became friends with other cultural kin through volunteer activity (Chan, 2011; Handy & Greenspan, 2009; Jensen, 2008; Taurini et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2019).

## Engaging in the Community

Many participants described volunteering as a way to engage with and contribute to society. The participants claimed that their engagement was a reciprocation of the support and help they received upon their arrival in the new community (Chan, 2011; Dudley, 2007; Handy & Greenspan, 2009; Jensen, 2008; Safrit & Lopez, 2001; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015; Taurini et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2019).

Volunteering also represented an opportunity to contribute to social change and support other immigrants (Daoud et al., 2010; Dudley, 2007; Handy & Greenspan, 2009; Jensen, 2008; Safrit & Lopez, 2001; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015; Taurini et al., 2017; Yap et al., 2011). In seven studies, the immigrants reported that their volunteering resulted in a form of acceptance from the majority population (Daoud et al., 2010; Jensen, 2008; Safrit & Lopez, 2001; Taurini et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2019; Yap et al., 2011). The contact established between the immigrants and the majority population was also considered important for reducing prejudice and racism (Daoud et al., 2010; Dudley, 2007; Taurini et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2019; Yap et al., 2011).

## Developing Skills and Knowledge

Volunteering also represented an arena for acquiring knowledge regarding the majority's culture, and the participants considered volunteering crucial for becoming a part of their new community (Daoud et al., 2010; Dudley, 2007; Handy & Greenspan, 2009; Jensen, 2008; H. C. Smith, 2015; Taurini et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2019). Some participants stated that volunteering increased their understanding and knowledge of the community needs (Safrit & Lopez, 2001), while others mentioned that they acquired general competences, such as organizing their day and respecting others' time. Knowledge regarding health and illnesses, health care rights and health care services in the new country was also reported as a benefit of volunteering (Daoud et al., 2010).

For many participants, developing and practicing language skills in voluntary organizations were considered important for facilitating integration (Daoud et al., 2010; Dudley, 2007; Safrit & Lopez, 2001; H. C. Smith, 2015; Wood et al., 2019; Yap et al.,

2011). The two-way integration process through which the participants encountered a mutual learning environment and could share knowledge with others was also a positive outcome of volunteering for some participants (Daoud et al., 2010; Safrit & Lopez, 2001; Taurini et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2019).

Volunteering was viewed by many immigrants as a way to obtain skills, knowledge, and work experience that could help them in their future careers (Chan, 2011; Daoud et al., 2010; Dudley, 2007; Handy & Greenspan, 2009; Safrit & Lopez, 2001; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015; Taurini et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2019; Yap et al., 2011). This included knowledge regarding the employment sector that could help them adjust better to it (Wood et al., 2019). Some participants emphasized that volunteering improved communicative skills crucial for entering the labor market (Taurini et al., 2017; Yap et al., 2011). Volunteering could also be included in the immigrants' resumés when applying for work, and the participants found volunteering a respectable way to obtain a paid job (Handy & Greenspan, 2009). Many participants clearly used volunteering as leverage into the employment force, which was their goal (Chan, 2011; Jensen, 2008; Safrit & Lopez, 2001; H. C. Smith, 2015; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015; Wood et al., 2019).

### Difficulties in Engaging in Volunteering

Although the participants reported many positive outcomes of volunteering in their new countries, some reported negative experiences. A few participants experienced difficulties practicing the new language while volunteering as some shared their mother tongue with other volunteers, making it natural to communicate in this language. Others found that people were too busy to talk to them or that people did not adjust the speed and clarity of speech to allow the immigrants to learn (Dudley, 2007). Some participants reported that knowing the language was crucial for being liked and accepted (Safrit & Lopez, 2001).

A few participants reported that they experienced prejudice and racism while volunteering (Daoud et al., 2010) and that it was difficult to be accepted and involved in the community (Jensen, 2008).

## Summary of the Line of Argument

A line of argument synthesis was developed to explain and link the four themes to health. The voluntary sector may be a health-promoting arena for immigrants as it can provide meaningfulness through improved self-conception and an experience of being worthy and engaged in a meaningful activity. Capacity building may lead to empowerment, and the study showed that capacity building was obtained through the acquisition of knowledge and skills that could be a door-opener to the labor market. The immigrants also experienced a heightened sense of belonging through social relations and knowledge regarding the culture and community. Volunteering may represent both altruistic and instrumental dimensions that could lead to a positive impact on health.

## Discussion

### Belongingness

In our meta-ethnography, volunteering was considered a contribution to building social relations. The link between social relations and health is complex. Berkman et al.'s (2000) conceptual model of how social networks impact health shows that this relationship involves factors, such as social structural conditions (macro level), social networks (mezzo level) and psychosocial mechanisms (micro level). Depending on the context, the characteristics of the social relations and how social support is given and received, social relations may impact a person's behavior, psychological processes and physiological functions (Berkman et al., 2000). The studies in our review indicate that social relations affect people in a positive way and may be a health promotive factor for immigrants. This finding is consistent with studies arguing that inclusion and social relations are particularly promotive of immigrants' mental health (Guruge et al., 2015; Miller et al., 2020). However, social networks may also be stressful if they act as a source of conflict, social support is lacking (Guruge et al., 2015) or social networks are difficult to access according to a few studies included in this meta-ethnography.

### Capacity Building

Governments promote the voluntary sector as a possible door-opener to language training, education and participation in the workforce for immigrants (Christensen & Christensen, 2006; Meld. St. 10, 2018-2019; J. A. Smith et al., 2004). In our meta-ethnography, volunteering is viewed as an arena for capacity building that may be a door-opener to practicing language and joining the labor market. Volunteering may be health promotive since employment is found to have a positive effect on mental health (Dalgard & Thapa, 2007; van der Noordt et al., 2014). It is increasingly accepted that volunteering can increase the chances for higher education and, consequently, a better job (Eimhjellen & Segaard, 2010; Paat, 2022; Wilson, 2012). However, it is not obvious that volunteering will lead to employment for immigrants as other structural factors might also have an impact. Immigrants may have difficulties accessing a volunteer activity to develop appropriate skills and networks (Allan, 2019), and even if they develop these skills and networks, some immigrants experience limited access to the labor market (Oreopoulos, 2011; Tomlinson, 2010).

However, this bold view of volunteering as an arena for building qualifications instead of a philanthropic activity based on altruism represents a shift in the role and understanding of volunteering.

### Philanthropic Activity or a Qualifying Arena?

The motivation for volunteering may also impact the benefits of volunteering. In this study, the intrinsic reasons to volunteer may be connected to meaningfulness and helping others without obtaining anything in return, and the extrinsic reasons may be volunteering with the purpose of building capacity to more easily obtain access to the labor market.

However, this issue is complex, and both intrinsic and extrinsic reasons may apply to many people. Volunteering for intrinsic reasons may be the most beneficial for volunteers (Degli Antoni, 2009; Konrath et al., 2012) and is stressed as important for sustained involvement in volunteering. However, extrinsically motivated volunteers may still have a considerable amount to offer communities and can be satisfied when their volunteer activity matches their motivation for volunteering (Stukas et al., 2016). Based on the government's perspective of promoting the voluntary sector as a qualifying arena, development toward a more instrumental dimension of volunteering makes it important to consider how the voluntary sector might change. What will be the experiences of volunteers and beneficiaries of volunteering if the voluntary sector becomes a time-limited steppingstone for marginalized groups to enter the labor market? Should the voluntary sector change from a philanthropic activity to an arena for the qualification of labor resources or should the labor market be such a qualify arena? This may be a development feature linked to the growing individualism in many high-income countries and could perhaps make us question the nature and sustainability of the voluntary sector.

## Strengths, Limitations, and Reflexivity

Meta-ethnography is criticized for not being standardized, and thus, the reporting of the analysis and synthesis lacks clarity and comprehensiveness (France et al., 2014). In this meta-ethnography, we followed Noblit and Hare's (1988) methodology and expanded efforts to clearly report the procedures to ensure the quality of the review (France et al., 2019). A limitation of such synthesis is the difficulty in ensuring that no relevant studies were overlooked because of the search limitations or the focus of the review. We chose to include health databases, which may omit relevant studies that are not indexed in these databases. The search and some screenings of the search results were performed by one reviewer due to time and resource considerations. The validity is supported by our presentation of examples of the studies contributing to the themes, our search strategy and the description of the methods.

The 11 included articles constituted a small sample but provided overall diversity in the participants' ethnic backgrounds, reasons for and time since migration, age, gender, and countries of resettlement. Some studies used terms that were broader than "volunteering" but included volunteering as an activity, such as "community engagement," "civic participation," and "occupation." We screened the results to ensure that we only extracted results related to volunteering. The quality of the included studies varied. Some studies provided a limited quantity of results, and some studies were mainly descriptive. Eight studies did not remark on reflexivity, and five studies did not include theoretical frameworks. Five studies did not discuss the shortcomings, limitations, or strengths of the study. This issue may have limited the quality of the meta-ethnography.

## Implications of the Review

The 11 studies included in this meta-ethnography largely support volunteering as an activity that has health-promotive impacts. However, it is important to stress that

volunteering occurs in different contexts and that variations exist in how volunteer organizations recruit, facilitate and support volunteers, which again might yield various outcomes (Greenspan et al., 2018). Moreover, immigrants do not constitute a homogeneous group. Some immigrants do not have any wish to participate in the larger society (Berry, 2005). People with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds might also have different comprehensions of volunteerism and volunteer roles (Eimhjellen et al., 2020; Hobbs, 2001; Schwingel et al., 2017). To determine whether people benefit from volunteering, it is crucial to study the type of meaning volunteers attribute to volunteer activities, the quality of social interactions in volunteer activities, and the support and guidance volunteers receive from staff and other volunteers (Morrow-Howell, 2010). The experiences and outcomes of volunteering seem quite complex, and the activity and context must be scrutinized to determine whether and how volunteering can be health promoting.

## Appendix

### Search Strategy: Medline

Database: Ovid MEDLINE(R) ALL <1946 to June 08, 2020>

Search Strategy:

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

1.  Minority Groups/ (13739)
2.  Minority group*.mp. [mp=title, abstract, original title, name of substance word, subject heading word, floating sub-heading word, keyword heading word, organism supplementary concept word, protocol supplementary concept word, rare disease supplementary concept word, unique identifier, synonyms] (17773)
3.  exp Ethnic Groups/ (152106)
4.  Ethnic group*.mp. (86570)
5.  Ethnicity.mp (66962)
6.  (Emigrants and immigrants).mp. (12133)
7.  exp "Emigrants and Immigrants"/ (12255)
8.  immigrants.mp (23948)
9.  immigration.mp. (32694)
10. human immigration.mp. (7)
11. exp "Transients and Migrants"/ (11521)
12. (transients and migrants).mp (11554)
13. migrants.mp. (19036)
14. exp Refugees/ (10098)
15. refugees.mp (12776)
16. Guest-work*.mp. (76)

17. Non-profit work*.mp. (1)
18. exp Volunteers/ (28729)
19. volunteers.mp (186026)
20. volunteers experiences.mp. (24)
21. volunteer workers.mp. (92)
22. voluntary.mp. (72306)
23. voluntarism.mp. (215)
24. non-governmental organizations.mp. (1414)
25. third sector.mp. (258)
26. voluntary work*.mp. (477)
27. 1 or 2 or 3 or 4 or 5 or 6 or 7 or 8 or 9 or 10 or 11 or 12 or 13 or 14 or 15 (283805)
28. 16 or 17 or 18 or 19 or 20 or 21 or 22 or 23 or 24 or 25 or 26 (257019)
29. 27 and 28 (3060)
30. limit 29 to "qualitative (best balance of sensitivity and specificity)" (632)

## Author's note

Laila Tingvold is now newly affilitated to Centre for Care Research East, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Gjøvik, Norway

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Funding

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# Paper II

*societies*

*Article*

# Volunteering: A Tool for Social Inclusion and Promoting the Well-Being of Refugees? A Qualitative Study

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**Abstract: Background**: The Norwegian government's increased expectations that volunteering can be used as a means of integration and the scarce research regarding refugees' experiences with volunteering is taken as the background for this study. Our purpose is to adopt a salutogenic perspective to investigate whether and how formal volunteering contributes to developing a sense of social inclusion and well-being among refugees in Norway. **Methods:** Qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted with 12 volunteers with refugee backgrounds in a semi-rural district in Norway. Stepwise deductive induction was used for analysis. **Results**: Three themes were identified as a result of the analysis: (1) feeling safer due to increased knowledge regarding cultures, values, and systems and achieving mutual acceptance; (2) feeling more confident when communicating in Norwegian and contributing to society, and (3) feeling more connected via social relations. **Conclusions**: Our study indicates that participation in volunteering may contribute to social inclusion and that the participants' resources and volunteering experiences may have a health-promotive impact under certain conditions.

**Keywords:** social inclusion; refugees; sense of coherence; community participation

## 1. Introduction

Increased cultural and ethnic diversity resulting from migration has caused the question of how to facilitate the success of inclusion processes to be a hot topic in many countries [1,2]. In Norway, where this study was conducted, integration has long been viewed as a public responsibility [3,4]. Increasingly, however, white papers highlight the expectation for the volunteering sector to be a key stakeholder in the process of facilitating integration [5–7]. As framed by Norwegian authorities, integration is viewed as a process by which individuals learn about and adapt to society's values and become connected to society both economically and socially; this process is also considered to create belonging and loyalty [8]. Moreover, it is also noted that the voluntary sector should promote fellowship and provide the minority with the opportunity to contribute on an equal footing with the majority [9]. We define volunteering as a contribution, given freely, in an organized context without any expectation of a reward or other compensation to benefit individuals or groups outside the context of preexisting relationships [10,11].

The extant research addressing immigrants' participation in voluntary organizations focuses on comparing the degree of participation by immigrants with the participation of the majority population, as well as immigrants' reasons for and barriers to volunteering [12–15]. Immigrants' experiences with volunteering and how it may impact their

well-being have received little attention. A meta-ethnography including 11 studies concluded that volunteering might be a health-promotive arena that can build meaningfulness, generate belongingness, and develop participants' capacities in terms of skills and knowledge in the new community, even though this process seems to be complex and to depend on factors such as how the immigrants are met by the people in the organization and the inclusivity and helpfulness of the social environment in the organization [16]. One Italian study reports that immigrants' motivations for participation in volunteering were achieving a higher level of social integration by finding employment and the desire to overcome social isolation, improve their language skills and obtain positive public recognition [17].

"Immigrants" constitute a heterogeneous group that includes people of all ages, socioeconomic backgrounds, and reasons for leaving their home countries. In this study, we chose to focus on refugees. Refugees share the characteristic that they have been displaced forcibly due to violence, conflict, and disaster and have sought safety and protection. This background of having fled from conflict and violence increases refugees' risk of psychological distress and often hampers their process of adaptation in exile. The task of coping with and processing the stress they have experienced before, during, and after their flight is simultaneous with refugees' attempts to adapt to a new culture and learn a new language [18–21]. The socioeconomic situation of refugees, which often features unemployment, low incomes, poor language skills, and a lack of social support in exile, is related to depression and, to some degree, anxiety [22]. Factors such as low levels of competence in the Norwegian language, higher psychological distress, lower education, and lower self-reported health and quality of life may also cause refugees to face more hassles and difficulties in the process of adapting to resettlement [23]. Individual resilience, coping strategies, and resource factors, such as access to an ethnically diverse network, social support, and good language competence, may counteract these adverse health impacts [23–25]. Participation in society may enhance resilience and social connectedness. It may prevent poor mental health, particularly for refugees who experience higher levels of formal exclusion in their country of settlement [26]. One review reports that the factors that promote the psychological well-being of refugees during the transitional phase could include scenarios that provide social support, opportunities for people to live a life as close as possible to the life to which they aspire, expanded social networks, participation in training or employment, and a sense of meaning regarding their experiences and current situation [27].

Overall, the government's increased expectation that volunteering should serve as a means of integration, the evidence concerning the promoters and inhibitors of refugees' mental health, and the scarce research about refugees' own experiences of whether volunteering is perceived as a positive arena and whether it contributes to social inclusion serve as the foundation for this study.

Social inclusion is a concept with many different definitions and meanings; however, in this study, we focus on refugees' feelings of social inclusion as well as the five cornerstones for social inclusion developed by Omidvar and Richmonds [28]. These cornerstones are valued recognition (recognition and respect), human development (the nurturing of talents, skills, and capacities as well as the choice to live a life that the individual values and to contribute in a way that both the individual and others view as worthwhile); involvement and engagement (the right and the necessary support to make/be involved in decisions that affect oneself, one's family, and the community as well as to be engaged in community life); proximity (access to shared physical and social spaces to provide opportunities for interaction, if desired, and to reduce the social distance among people); and material well-being (the material resources necessary to participate fully in community life).

The purpose of this article is to apply a salutogenic perspective to explore how formal volunteering may contribute to developing a sense of social inclusion and well-being among refugees in Norway. The salutogenic perspective contributes with a strength-based perspective to explore how refugees' sense of social inclusion may impact their well-being. Refugees are known to be a group that is characterized by a high risk of mental

problems and disease as well as a low socioeconomic status; however, it is interesting to investigate the factors that may strengthen individuals with refugee backgrounds and explore volunteering as an activity that can contribute to refugees' empowerment and well-being. The central concepts in salutogenesis are General Resistant Resources (GRR) and Sense of Coherence (SOC). GRR represents characteristics within or surrounding the person that can facilitate effective tension management [29]. SOC is a life orientation and reflects the ability to identify the internal and external resources to which one has access and to use these resources to promote health and well-being [30]. SOC considers the world as manageable, comprehensive, and meaningful [29]. More specifically, we ask the following research questions: How do refugees experience volunteering as a contributor to their feelings of social inclusion or exclusion in Norway? How might these experiences impact refugees' well-being?

## 2. Materials and Methods

Qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted to collect information regarding refugees' experiences with, thoughts concerning, and understanding of volunteering. The interviews consisted of elements drawn from the "life story interviews" approach, which focuses on "the essence of what happened to a person. It can cover the time from birth to the present or before and beyond. It includes important events, experiences, and feelings of a lifetime" [31].

### 2.1. Study Context

The study context is a semirural community in Norway characterized as a large municipality [containing more than 20,000 residents] [32]. The five volunteer organizations chosen for this study engage in welfare- and community-related activities. Three of these organizations are associated mostly with members of the majority population, while multicultural groups operate two organizations.

### 2.2. Participants and Data Collection

To recruit participants for this study, we used a purposive sampling approach. In this context, purposive sampling refers to sampling that is based on the participant's knowledge of and experience with volunteering. The leaders of the organizations included in the study were asked to participate in the research project. They facilitated contact between the researcher and volunteers with an immigrant background with whom the organizations were familiar. These volunteers were contacted, informed about the study, and decided whether to participate. Furthermore, we used the "snowballing" [33] sampling method, in which study participants helped recruit other volunteers with immigrant backgrounds. We did not stipulate any restrictions regarding country of origin or reason for migration and included persons over the age of 18. The participants were required to volunteer or to have previously volunteered for at least one of the organizations included in the study. Sixteen participants with various immigrant backgrounds were recruited for the research project. Twelve participants had refugee backgrounds. We chose to focus on the refugee group because they share some characteristics related to how they were displaced forcibly due to violence, war, and conflicts, and the general description of refugees as a group as especially vulnerable and in great need of social inclusion [18–23] (see Table 1 for participants' characteristics). To ensure anonymity, we have chosen to list participants' ages and lengths of residence as ranges. The participants agreed to individual interviews that were audio-recorded. The duration of these interviews ranged from 45 min to 2.5 h, with most interviews having a duration of 1.5 h. All the participants agreed to be contacted again if the researcher needed to ask follow-up questions.

**Table 1.** Study participant's characteristics.

| Nickname | Age Range (in Years) | Place of Origin | Residence Time Range (in Years) | Status of Employment or Education [1] | Family Situation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Emira | 35–40 | Africa | 5–10 | 2 years university, student and employed | Separated, children |
| Abiya | 35–40 | Middle East | 5–10 | 2 years university, employed | Married |
| Sana | 50–55 | Middle East | 20–25 | Bachelor's degree, employed | Married, children |
| Mariam | 40–45 | Middle East | 15–20 | Vocational education, employed | Married, children |
| Zubayda | 55–60 | Middle East | 30–35 | Master's degree, employed | Married, children |
| Bashir | 30–35 | Middle East | 5–10 | Primary school, unemployed | Single |
| Berna | 50–55 | Asia | 10–15 | Bachelor's degree, employed | Married, children |
| Parvin | 50–55 | Middle East | 20–25 | Vocational education, disabled | Divorced, children |
| Francine | 45–50 | Africa | 15–20 | Vocational education, disabled | Married, children |
| Yana | 20–25 | Middle East | 0–5 | Student | Parents, siblings |
| Michel | 30–35 | Africa | 10–15 | Bachelor's degree, student and employed | Separated, children |
| Sonia | 65–70 | Middle East | 20–25 | University (not recognized in Norway), disabled | Married, children |

Note: [1] Level of education refers to the highest completed level of education recognized by the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT).

### 2.3. Content of the Interviews

Semistructured interviews were conducted as part of this study. The interviews involved elements of the "life story interviews" approach [31] by allowing the participants to share their life stories based on open questions. The participants in the study were initially asked about their premigration life experiences related to their upbringings, education, employment, and volunteering in their countries of origin. They were asked about their paths from their countries of origin to Norway and their experiences on this journey. The main focus of the interviews was on the participants' involvement in voluntary organizations in Norway, how they were recruited, their experiences with volunteering, and their thoughts on the use of volunteering as a way of promoting the inclusion of immigrants in society and local communities. The interviews were conducted at locations chosen by the participants to ensure their privacy and safety regarding personal preferences in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviews were conducted in the participants' homes (2), at the first author's office (1), at public cafés (3), in public parks (1), at the participants' workplace (1), at a public library (3) and digitally via Zoom (1). Sufficient time was provided to allow the researcher to become familiar with and develop a relationship with the participants prior to the interviews.

### 2.4. Analysis

The first author transcribed all the interviews verbatim and imported the transcripts into NVivo software. The data were analyzed using stepwise deductive induction [34], in which the analysis progresses from an inductive interpretation and adopts a theoretical perspective through the analytical phase.

The first step was to code the data inductively "in vivo", such that the codes were grounded in the empirical data, a process similar to the coding used in grounded theory analysis [35]. Codes should correspond closely to participants' statements. This process aims to ensure that the codes are drawn from the data rather than from theories, hypotheses, research questions, and previously chosen themes [34]. The first author performed the empirical inductive coding of all text included in the transcripts. The next step in the analysis was to group the codes that exhibited internal thematic connections. At this stage, the codes were examined inductively and subsequently incorporated theories, previous research, and interest, such that the approach was more abductive. This step was conducted by the first author in a close discussion with the second and last authors. The main theme

relevant to the purpose of this study was "experiences with volunteering". This approach identified three concepts pertaining to the research question concerning how volunteering may impact feelings of social inclusion and well-being and was guided by the theory of salutogenesis [29]. The concepts were labeled (1) feeling safer due to increased knowledge regarding cultures, values, and systems and achieving mutual acceptance, (2) feeling more confident when communicating in Norwegian and contributing to society, and (3) feeling more connected via social relations. These three concepts and examples of some of the associated codes are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Codes and Concepts.

| | Concepts | Codes (Examples) |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Feeling safer due to increased knowledge regarding cultures, values, and systems and achieving mutual acceptance | • Volunteering creates a positive feeling of being acknowledged and a feeling that my voice matters.<br>• Volunteering enables you to become familiar with Norwegian culture and norms and vice versa<br>• We will grow old here, and our children may become mayors here<br>• I focus on how I can be included; I need all the information I can get<br>• My culture is totally different from the culture here, so I've learned a lot about other perspectives<br>• I felt safe enough to ask about the school system<br>• They never consider volunteering because they think that it's exhausting and they're not sure whether to stay |
| 2. | Feeling more confident when communicating in Norwegian and contributing to society | • If my daughter is coming here, I have to learn the language to communicate<br>• Language is a crucial tool for integration<br>• It is harder to learn the language for adults and elderly people<br>• I can both give and receive—you need others, and others need you<br>• I love to help people; it's soul-related<br>• I can work without speaking the language<br>• I think that it's important to help others; it is a two-sided process<br>• I thought: Do I have something to contribute? |
| 3. | Feeling more connected via social relations. | • Volunteering is fun, and you get to know many people<br>• I know many people, both from volunteering and work; you acquire a large social network when you participate here and there<br>• When I volunteer, I get to know many people with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds<br>• We need to be together here in Norway or else life is going to be hard.<br>• In Norway, you can't just knock on your neighbor's door and ask for a coffee |

### 2.5. Ethics

The participants signed an informed consent. They were informed of their right to withdraw from the study without stating a reason, and they were assured that confidentiality would be maintained both with respect to the transcribed data (which were anonymized systematically) and in any publications resulting from the study. The participants' confidentiality in publications was secured by assigning them nicknames, presenting their ages in intervals, and referring to their countries of origin only in terms of continents. The study was approved by the Norwegian Center for Research Data prior to the beginning of the data collection process under reference number [888539].

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Feeling Safer Due to Increased Knowledge Regarding Cultures, Values, and Systems and Achieving Mutual Acceptance

The participants in the study expressed their desire for integration and to become a part of the society in Norway and the local community. They noted their interest in contributing on an equal footing with ethnic Norwegians by participating in society, entering the labor

market, and earning their own money. Some participants had the ambition of creating a good life for themselves and their children. Francine discussed her approach to other immigrants who did not want to participate in Norwegian society due to specific cultural and religious factors: "We are here with our children. It is in this society that we will become old, and our children may become mayors here, or I don't know, but we are here. We can keep our culture, but we must be open to the Norwegian culture as well".

Norwegian culture and norms, as well as Norwegian traditions and political systems, were viewed by the participants in the study as crucial for immigrants to learn. Volunteering was considered a safe context to ask questions regarding the school system or the welfare system, as well as other practical questions related to Norwegian society and culture. The participants experienced other volunteers as very open and helpful.

Several participants in the study reported that cultural learning was not limited to immigrants' learning regarding Norwegian culture; rather, it was equally important for Norwegians to learn and accept the culture of the immigrants. This mutual acceptance was viewed as highly valuable for refugees as well as for the rest of society. Emira reflected on the volunteering context as a way of helping society accept and become a safer place for all: "If you participate in volunteering, you meet people, you learn about norms and values and the Norwegian culture . . . and you begin to accept the Norwegian culture as well, and the Norwegians also accept the foreigners' culture. Some are prejudiced . . . but when you meet them and talk to them and when they get to know you, they see you differently. ( . . . ) When he doesn't know you, he doesn't feel safe, but when we know each other, we both feel safe".

However, several participants in the study described immigrants as a heterogeneous group with varying interests. Not everyone considered volunteering as a meaningful activity, and not every immigrant had the same degree of interest in becoming a part of society. Some participants reflected on people they knew with immigrant backgrounds who were not eager to participate in volunteering. Abiya shared some thoughts regarding why it may be difficult to recruit and include more immigrants in volunteering: "( . . . ) They never consider being a volunteer because they think working as a volunteer is exhausting, and they ask me why they should do it. What will I get in return? And I answer that they have to integrate into society with Norwegians, other Africans, Afghans, Poles, and every other nationality that lives here. ( . . . ) But they don't want to, and I understand them. They have eight kids . . . they have voluntary work inside their own home. ( . . . ) And some are unsure if they are going to stay here, that one day UDI [the Directorate of Immigration] may come and take their passport and say 'you are not going to stay here in Norway anymore'".

Most participants in the study volunteered alongside people from many different countries and cultures, and they viewed the shared thoughts and perspectives across cultures as essential and valuable. The study participants reflected on the complexity of a society that features people from every corner of the world and noted that they found interacting with people from different countries and with other stories, cultures, and religions to be interesting and enlightening. Sonia was passionate about the possibility of achieving a good society: "We are all humans, and we are all equal. The world is one country. We have to like each other, and we have to help each other. ( . . . ) I believe in that".

Even though the participants in the study considered a multicultural society to be necessary, some also viewed Norwegians in general as skeptical and discussed the fact that other people with immigrant backgrounds did not want to engage in social interaction across cultures or even across social classes or religions, which prevented them from desiring to volunteer. Sonia said, "It is still like this today; we have women who do not want to mingle with others because of religion ( . . . ) it is not merely that they are not educated . . . but because of their conservative thinking". This conservative thinking or these doubts regarding people who are different from oneself was considered by some of the study participants to be natural. Still, they noted that it is important to overcome this tendency to become familiar with other people and discover similarities.

### 3.2. Feeling More Confident When Communicating in Norwegian and Contributing to Society

The participants considered learning the language to be one of the leading personal outcomes of volunteering that could support their social inclusion in Norway. The language was considered crucial for participation in society, education, and entering the labor market. Some participants noted that volunteering was a low-threshold context in which they could practice Norwegian. Rosita shared, "If someone feels a bit uncertain about their language skills, they may come and use their native language a bit and try to join the conversation with others in Norwegian. It is a good practice situation".

The need for contexts in which to practice Norwegian was viewed as important, especially in the context of Norway, where participants did not feel that it was natural and acceptable to speak with foreigners or even their neighbors. This situation was viewed as a sharp contrast to their cultures and countries of origin, where they had talked to everyone, including neighbors and people on the street or on the bus. Some participants noted that language courses arranged by public services were important. Still, learning and practicing the language in social contexts such as volunteering, or the labor market was considered crucial.

Francine reflected on the paradox that one must learn Norwegian to enter the labor market. At the same time, one can practice the language most effectively in the context of paid work and in other social contexts. She said, "I told them I can work even though I can't speak the language, and it went so well that summer, so I got a permanent job". Francine obtained a job working in the kitchen of a bakery and continued to improve her skills in the Norwegian language as time passed. She also reflected on the professionalized nature of the Norwegian labor market and noted that every occupation requires a formal education.

Participants did not commonly express the notion that volunteering could lead to a paid job. Still, some mentioned that volunteering contributed to their curriculum vitae, and a few experienced volunteering as a steppingstone to the labor market. Sonia and Bashir reflected on the difficulty accessing the labor market despite their volunteering, language practice, and employment training organized by NAV (the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration).

One common opinion held that it was challenging to learn a new language, especially for adults. Yana shared her thoughts regarding the differences between adults and children in the context of arriving in a new country and being required to learn a new language: "( . . . ) I look at my parents now, and it is not that easy for them to be included, or . . . it is difficult for them to learn the language, right. It isn't as easy for them as for us. I mean, my little brother speaks Norwegian fluently".

The opportunity to contribute as a volunteer also enhanced the participants' confidence because they all described themselves as "other-oriented". Many participants felt that volunteering and helping others were effectively a part of themselves and their personalities, and all the participants found volunteering to be a meaningful activity. Some participants mentioned the need to give back to society, and some posited a natural duty to contribute to society when they had the opportunity. Many participants considered participation to be a way of becoming a part of the Norwegian society and the local community in which they settled, and they noted that it was important for them to feel useful and needed by someone in their new society. Michel described the need to do something meaningful by reference to his experience as an asylum seeker: "It was so difficult to be in an asylum reception alone, with no social network and no opportunity to engage in activities. You couldn't work or go to school, you couldn't do anything, so you just had to sit there. I didn't stay there as long as many others, it was about 7 months, but it was long enough to destroy me mentally; it was very stressful. When I came out into society, it was much better".

On the other hand, some participants mentioned being unsure and exhibiting self-doubt when they were asked to engage in volunteering. Mariam said, "I thought . . . do I have anything to contribute? I think this is a common thought . . . and we think of coming from a different culture, with a different language. I don't know how they reflect; do I do

things the right way? Is it wrong? People worry . . . but when you see the reaction when you do something good . . . then . . . ".

The participants in the study all reflected on their experiences of being newcomers in society and noted the prominence of a feeling of uncertainty alongside a fervent desire to be included and to become a part of society.

*3.3. Feeling More Connected via Social Relations*

All the participants discussed acquiring social networks and social relations through their volunteering. A recurring theme was that volunteering could prevent or mitigate loneliness by allowing the volunteer to acquire social contacts and contribute to something positive, especially during the winter, which was viewed as dark and quiet. Many participants noted that they had developed an extensive social network through volunteering and work, and several mentioned they had more ethnic Norwegian friends than friends from their country of origin.

On the other hand, several participants described the difficulty of making friends in Norway. Norwegians were characterized as introverts with whom it is difficult to become familiar in the absence of any reason to initiate contact. Volunteering provided the participants with such a reason, and all the participants noted that they had established friendships and social relations both with Norwegians and people from other cultures through volunteering. Francine expressed a great appreciation for social relations across generations, a point that was closely connected to her culture. As she shared, "it feels inclusive meeting different people, right . . . you meet both young and elderly people!". However, not everyone felt they had made close friends through volunteering due to factors such as age and personal chemistry. Zubayda shared her thoughts as follows: "As I said, the difference in age was great, and of course you would rather be with people of your own age, but it was so much better than nothing. ( . . . ) At that time, I had to accept those who accepted me. ( . . . ) But after a while, I learned the language and chose my own social network. My network consists mostly of people who contribute and want to help others".

Some participants experienced that the social network acquired through volunteering did not necessarily carry over to the private sphere. Participants also noted that it takes some time to become familiar with people and that while volunteering may be a path toward inclusion, the timeline and context of the volunteering were to be considered a decisive factor in this context. Some participants also related the experience that the lives of Norwegians were often fully booked outside the volunteering context, and so it was not easy to be social with other volunteers apart from the act of volunteering itself.

## 4. Discussion

In this study, we have explored how some volunteers with refugee backgrounds experience their volunteering and investigated how these experiences may contribute to the development of the individuals' feeling of social inclusion and well-being. Participants volunteering activity caused them to feel safer, more confident, and more connected to their new society. They experienced volunteering as contributing to most of the cornerstones of social inclusion [28], such as mutual respect, human development in terms of nurturing skills and capacities, and the ability to make contributions valued by themselves and others. Furthermore, volunteering provided them with the right, the opportunity, and the necessary support to make decisions regarding their lives, as well as the opportunity and the support needed to engage in society in a shared space that could facilitate interaction and reduce social distance.

*4.1. Social Inclusion and Sense of Coherence*

The participants in this study consisted of a resourceful group of people with refugee backgrounds. Although they had experienced traumatic life events and fled from their countries of origin to settle in Norway, they all had resources that might impact participation in volunteering, such as university education obtained by 6 participants, or the vocational

education obtained by 3 participants as well as the ongoing employment or study in which 8 participants engaged. All participants expressed the motivation to make efforts to be included in society. These resources may be linked to GRR and SOC [29], which enable refugees to cope with the tension resulting from the challenges they have encountered pre-displacement, during displacement, and after resettling. It seems to be essential for the participants to be socially included and to participate in society, and they identified the knowledge and tools that were necessary to comprehend and manage the challenges they met on their way toward social inclusion; they also reported the processes, actions, and experiences they encountered in their new country to be meaningful. High levels of GRR and SOC result in reciprocal relationships, which may lead to better health [36], and people with high levels of GRR and SOC have stronger beliefs that they possess the resources necessary to cope with the difficulties they encounter in the process of acculturation than others. Our study indicates that refugees' participation in volunteering may promote their feeling of social inclusion. The refugees' personal resources and their experiences of volunteering causing them to feel safer, more confident, and more connected may have impacts on the promotion of health. These conclusions coincide with previous findings regarding volunteering [16,17] and social participation as a factor that can enhance resilience, allow individuals to reestablish their social lives, and potentially prevent poor mental health [26]. However, refugees and immigrants do not constitute homogenous groups and are likely to benefit from volunteering in different ways. Integration is a concept that may be problematic; the meanings of this term are diverse and often describe a social imaginary including the state, the nation, and the relationship between the minority and majority populations that are taken for granted [37]. For example, it cannot be presupposed that all refugees seek to integrate or participate in the activities and culture associated with their host country. Research has shown that immigrants acculturate differently during resettlement [38]. Some refugees may seek to maintain their cultural values in exile and may thus reject the values of the resettlement country (separation). Others may reject the values of both their own country and the new country in exile, leading to marginalization, while still others adopt the values of the culture that receives them and may thus discard their heritage culture (assimilation). Reflections on these differences must be taken into account. Volunteering may promote comprehensiveness, manageability, and meaningfulness for some but not necessarily for all.

### 4.2. Barriers to Social Inclusion and Participation

Another interesting finding of this study pertains to several paradoxes and contradictions that must be illuminated by further research. As Norwegian authorities promote volunteering as a means of obtaining labor market qualifications, on the one hand, it is necessary to consider how inclusive the labor market truly is. Immigrants need a context, i.e., a workplace in which they learn the language of their host country; however, workplaces require language skills before hiring, and the lack of such language skills may prevent immigrants from entering this arena. In addition, the Norwegian labor market is professionalized and requires education, which also makes it difficult to access for refugees who must both learn the language and acquire an education [39]. Other studies indicate that even when immigrants have acquired all these necessities, they continue to experience limited access to the labor market [40,41]. Since volunteering is an arena for social inclusion for some immigrants, it is also necessary to acknowledge that the context and the people encountered by immigrants are crucial for the success of this dynamic process. Previous research has also found that some immigrants experience difficulties accessing social networks because knowledge of the language is necessary for immigrants to be liked and accepted [42]; in this context, it is relevant that the participants in this study highlighted the potential difficulty of learning a new language as an adult as well as the challenges of transferring the social network acquired through volunteering to the private sphere. Social networks may be stressful if they represent sources of conflict or if social support is lacking; hence, the quality of social relations is crucial [43].

## 5. Strengths, Limitations, and Reflexivity

The participants in this study were diverse in terms of their countries of origin, lengths of residence in Norway, ages, and experiences. Of the 12 participants in this study, only two were men. The participants were resourceful and were not representative of the majority of refugees in Norway. This group may have reflected specific characteristics of the immigrants who volunteer in NGOs, as previous research has found that resourceful people volunteer at higher rates than others, except that women are generally underrepresented in this context [44]. The interviews were conducted by a white ethnic Norwegian, which may have influenced the content that the participants shared during the interviews [45]. The participants were all interviewed in Norwegian. The interviews were conducted with sensitivity to the participants, and sufficient time was allotted to the interviews to allow some degree of trust to be developed between the researcher and the participant as well as to clarify or explain any ambiguities. The researcher was open, curious, and interested in all the stories and experiences shared by the individual participants, which led them to relate detailed stories and experiences describing their lives. The researcher who conducted the interviews has an educational background in health promotion, and this latent focus may have caused the participants to give less attention to the challenging aspects of volunteering and to highlight mainly their positive experiences; however, the participants were also asked about the negative aspects of volunteering. One researcher conducted the empirical inductive coding alone, and it could have been a methodical strength if a second researcher coded some of the material. However, the analysis and grouping of codes were discussed thoroughly in structured meetings between the authors to strengthen trustworthiness.

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# Paper III

# Recruitment of Volunteers with Immigrant Backgrounds: The Impact of Structural and Individual Aspects

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**Abstract** Volunteering is associated with health-promoting benefits for both recipients and volunteers and may contribute to a more inclusive society. However, studies have shown a persistent pattern of social inequality among those who volunteer, and immigrants participate as volunteers less than the majority population. To date, approaches for recruiting immigrant populations have not been sufficiently examined, even though multicultural societies are becoming increasingly diverse. This study investigates how recruitment is carried out in voluntary organizations and how volunteers who are involved in recruitment reflect on the inclusion of citizens with immigrant backgrounds. Qualitative interviews were conducted with 18 volunteers and three employees with recruitment responsibility at five voluntary organizations engaged in welfare and community-related activities in a semirural district in Norway. Our findings show that different structural factors and individual aspects of the recruiter influence the recruitment of immigrants as volunteers. Large-scale organizations are more professionalized and more directed by fundings and frameworks and demand more qualifications due to their volunteer tasks. This might make inclusive recruitment more challenging. Small-scale organizations have more flexibility and less professionalized volunteer activities, making recruitment more inclusive. In addition, if the small-scale organizations are minority driven, it seems to positively influence the recruitment of immigrants through increased diversity sensitivity and more connections with immigrants through their social network.

**Keywords** Recruitment · Immigrants · Volunteering · Inclusion · Voluntary organizations

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## Introduction

Approximately, 281 million people are international migrants worldwide (International Organization for Migration, 2021). The increasing cultural and ethnic diversity resulting from migration has made successful inclusion processes for immigrants a priority in many countries (Harder et al., 2018; Oliver & Gidley, 2015). Experiencing a lack of belonging can adversely affect mental health (van Bergen et al., 2018) and lead to negative social orientation (Schiefloe, 2019; Twenge et al., 2001). Thus, community belonging is deemed crucial for both individuals and society, making the topic of social inclusion relevant. Social inclusion involves ensuring equal access to resources and opportunities for everyone, with the goal of enabling participation, acceptance, and a sense of

belonging, regardless of background, identity, or abilities (Baumgartner & Burns, 2014; Omidvar & Richmond, 2003; van Bergen et al., 2018).

Governments in the Global North frequently advocate that immigrants´ participation in volunteering is a positive strategy for social inclusion. This approach is assumed to enhance the integration of immigrants through the building of social networks, language training, and preparations for the labor market and utilizing an unused source of volunteers to contribute to and enrich the society (Bendel, 2014; Christensen & Christensen, 2006; IMDi, 2022; Ministry of culture, 2018; Smith et al., 2004). Research has partially found support for these assumptions (Ambrosini & Artero, 2023; Handy & Greenspan, 2009; Sveen et al., 2023a, 2023b).

Following conceptions of volunteering, these contributions are made freely to benefit people or groups outside one's family or social network without any expectation of rewards or compensation (Snyder & Omoto, 2008). Idealistic notions of volunteering have connected it to the benefit of the weakest groups in society and conceptualized it as actions carried out with selflessness, altruism, and solidarity (Seligman, 1995).

## Social Inequality in Volunteering

Research has shown that immigrants participate less than does the majority population in voluntary organizations (Eimhjellen et al., 2021; Qvist, 2018; Wilson, 2012). People with more resources, such as higher education, higher income, and a larger social network, tend to volunteer in voluntary organizations (Eimhjellen & Fladmoe, 2020; Hustinx et al., 2022; Musick & Wilson, 2008; Wilson & Musick, 1997).

Immigrants´ lower participation in formal volunteering is associated with factors such as being a woman, having lower education, being older, having weak language skills, and lacking the networks and knowledge of how to start volunteering (Eimhjellen & Segaard, 2010; Eimhjellen et al., 2021). Furthermore, stigmatizing or exclusionary contexts, lack of appropriate support, skills, and qualifications, financial costs, and different conceptualizations of volunteering are found to be barriers to volunteering for immigrants (Greenspan et al., 2018; Southby et al., 2019). Some voluntary organizations might also require commitment over time and competence in organizational democracy and the culture of volunteering, which may make it more difficult for immigrants to participate (Ødegård et al., 2014).

## Volunteer Recruitment

The literature on volunteer management and recruitment efforts is limited. However, some research based on

participants' hypothetical likelihood of volunteering has suggested best practices (Einolf, 2018). These practices include aligning recruitment messages with potential volunteers´ motives (Clary et al., 1994, 1998), anticipating feelings of pride in the organization, expecting respectful treatment, and perceiving openness to newcomers (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2014). According to Haski-Leventhal (2010), organizations vary in their ability to recruit volunteers, known as ´recruitability,´ comprising accessibility, resources, networks, and cooperation.

The recruitment process is documented as one of the main mechanisms for reproducing differences in volunteer participation (Acker, 2006; Meyer & Rameder, 2022; van Overbeeke et al., 2022). Several researchers have suggested theoretical explanations for the inequalities in participation in volunteering. The integrated theory of volunteer work argues that human, social, and cultural capital are essential for volunteering, and that recruitment is based on individuals possessing these forms of capital (Wilson & Musick, 1997). In Norway, research supports this view, indicating that volunteers are often recruited based on education and skills that are beneficial to the organization (Folkestad et al., 2017). While this theory views recruitment as a process involving the demand and supply of objectively desirable resources, Bonnesen (2019) argues that various social practices produce different types and degrees of inequality. She identified three exclusionary recruitment practices—non-recruitment, informal exclusion, and formal exclusion—that contribute to social inequality in volunteering based on social class and age. Non-recruitment involves advertising in places that do not reach everyone (Bonnesen, 2019), and being directly asked to volunteer is a major influence on becoming a volunteer (Meyer & Rameder, 2022; Wollebæk et al., 2015). Network recruitment, a strategy where recruitment tends to occur among similar individuals, is a key aspect of non-recruitment (Bonnesen, 2019; Grubb et al., 2022; Musick & Wilson, 2008). Informal exclusion is associated with the economic costs of being a volunteer, such as organizational membership fees. Another practice within informal exclusion is recipient retention, which aims to transition service recipients to volunteers. However, this transition is challenging because these individuals are never fully considered volunteers. Formal exclusionary practices involve dismissing volunteer applicants who are deemed unfit for the volunteer role (Bonnesen, 2019).

However, this topic has not been sufficiently explored. Given the increasing globalization and immigration, there is a need for additional research on recruitment and inclusion practices within organizations to advance the inclusion of diverse social groups. Norway faces similar challenges to those reported globally in recruiting immigrants to voluntary organizations. This study addresses this

research gap by examining the recruitment and inclusion practices of immigrants in volunteering by exploring how volunteers with recruitment responsibilities carry out these practices and reflect on them. The research questions are as follows: How is the recruitment of volunteers with immigrant backgrounds carried out, and what influences the recruitment?

## The Norwegian Context

In modern times, immigration to Norway has occurred in waves, driven by factors such as employment opportunities, the consequences of war and conflict in the immigrants´ home countries, and family reunification (Steinkellner et al., 2023). Most immigrants in Norway seek employment or family reunification, and approximately, 32% of the immigrants have a refugee background. The largest immigrant populations originate from countries such as Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, Sweden, Syria, and Somalia (Steinkellner et al., 2023). We acknowledge that immigrants´ diverse backgrounds and reasons for migration may impact their prerequisites for inclusion in society (Eimhjellen et al., 2021; Ichou, 2014). However, in this study, the term 'immigrant' denotes all first-generation immigrants, regardless of country of origin or reason for migration.

Voluntary organizations play a crucial role in civic society, acting as intermediaries between citizens and the state (Enjolras & Strømsnes, 2018). Since the late nineteenth century, most voluntary organizations have been membership based and democratic, connecting local communities to the national society. However, a contemporary shift is observed with the rise of independent organizations without bonds to national organizations, including organizations managed by and for immigrants (minority organizations). Membership in organizations is losing importance, and organizational attachment is declining, and the focus is now on volunteer activity (Qvist et al., 2019; Selle, et al., 2019).

In Norway, voluntary organizations span various orientations, including culture, leisure, welfare, community orientation, and religion (Folkestad et al., 2017), with a concentration in leisure, sports, and culture similar to that of other Scandinavian countries (Qvist et al., 2019). The different organizations fulfill different roles in civil society; some prioritize organizational life for community, belonging, and social interaction, considering democracy as an outcome of values. Others view voluntary organizations as democratic institutions involved in policymaking and advocating for interest groups (Wollebæk et al., 2008). Voluntary organizations are important social institutions, because they have been recruiting broadly socially and

have counteracted social isolation and exclusion; however, these characteristics are not stable over time and place (Wollebæk & Selle, 2002). New organizational structures and purposes impact their ability to recruit and foster community inclusion (Wollebæk et al., 2015). Traditional membership-based organizations with a national structure and local associations are often considered crucial for integration because they provide access to the majority population, societal values, and norms (Eimhjellen et al., 2021; Putnam, 2000).

## Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

Various factors influence voluntary organizations' strategies for recruiting and training new volunteers. Organizations differ regarding which groups they target, their access to resources, leadership and management structure, organization of volunteer tasks, need for qualifications, and cultural context (Grubb et al., 2022). In addition, the professionalization and formalization of volunteer management practices have been well documented (Grubb et al., 2022; Hill & Stevens, 2011). Hill and Stevens (2011) present four typologies of organizational strategies that are used to recruit and train volunteers. These four typologies are as follows: (1) volunteer-led and volunteer-run organizations are small organizations with no paid staff or informal organizational structure and aims that are often related to campaigning and mutual support. (2) Staff-supported organizations are relatively small and have a handful of paid staff supporting day-to-day activities, but volunteers handle the strategic management. (3) Volunteer-supported organizations are characterized by volunteers involved in day-to-day volunteer management, but paid staff make strategic decisions. (4) Volunteer-involving organizations involve volunteers in operational and service delivery, but paid staff make management and strategic decisions. In this study, we draw on this typology of voluntary organizations to explore how structural factors may influence recruitment practices among recruiters at the five voluntary organizations we investigated.

We also chose to include a theoretical lens of social networks, as this became important through our analyses. According to previous research, social networks are central to recruiting volunteers (Paik & Navarre-Jackson, 2011; Wollebæk et al., 2015). ´The strength of weak ties´ theory (Granovetter, 1973, 1983) is a sociological concept that suggests that strong social ties provide social support and cohesion within existing groups such as family and close friends. Weak ties, or acquaintances, play a significant role in social networks by providing access to new information, new perspectives, opportunities for engagement, and resources that are not readily available within close-knit

groups. These interpersonal interactions might provide a micro–macro bridge (Granovetter, 1973, 1983). Janoski (2010) suggested that these ties leading to being asked to volunteer are socially constructed in formal or informal groups and potentially facilitated by a volunteer opinion leader who influences volunteering through the layers of civil society.

## Methods

This study has a qualitative explorative design, and qualitative interviews were employed as the data collection method.

### Study Context

The study context is a semirural community in a large municipality (over 20,000 residents) in Norway (Langørgen et al., 2015). The five volunteer organizations in this study engage in welfare- and community-related activities because of their centrality to the community and the lack of research regarding these organizations. Two of the organizations are large (150–250 volunteers), and local divisions of national organizations are mostly associated with volunteers with a majority background representing the traditional voluntary organizations in Norway referred to as large-scale organizations. These organizations have a national superstructure and activities are largely reflected by the national activity provision, with some local adjustments. Three organizations are small (10–30 volunteers) and locally bound, with closeness to the board and management, these are referred to as small-scale organizations. The activities are based on a local need and are fully administrated by the local group. One organization is mostly associated with volunteers with majority backgrounds, and two are associated with diverse minority backgrounds. The different organizations were chosen to reflect a spectrum of the diversity of organizations operating in the municipality. For details, see Table 1.

### Participants and Data Collection

To recruit participants for this study, we used a purposeful sampling approach (Patton, 2014) and ´snowball sampling´ (Henry, 2009). In this context, purposeful sampling refers to sampling that is based on a participant's role in a voluntary organization. Snowball sampling refers to the way in which study participants help recruit other eligible participants (Henry, 2009). The inclusion criterion was that participants had to have some responsibility for recruiting new volunteers for their voluntary organization. This

includes leaders of organizations, board members, volunteers with recruitment tasks, and leaders of volunteer activities. The leaders of the organizations were asked to participate in the research project and facilitated contact between the researcher and other eligible participants within the organization. Individuals who met the inclusion criteria were informed about the study and decided whether to participate. Twenty-one individuals (18 volunteers and three employees) were included. Ten were ethnic Norwegian, and eleven had immigrant backgrounds (Africa, Middle East, Asia, and Europe). The participants' ages ranged from 20 to 70 years, with 46 years as the average. The participants agreed to participate in individual interviews that were audio-recorded. These interviews ranged from 45 min to 2.5 h, with most interviews lasting one hour. The interviews were conducted at locations chosen by the participants to ensure their privacy and safety regarding personal preferences considering the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviews were conducted in person (18) and digitally via Zoom (3). One interview was conducted with two participants simultaneously, following the participants' choice. Sufficient time was provided in the interviews for the participants to become familiar with the researcher and to be assured that the researcher wanted to learn about their reflections on recruitment, not to make an evaluation of right or wrong.

The participants agreed to be recontacted for follow-up questions. After the interviews, the researcher had several meeting points with some participants at information meetings and board meetings to become familiar with the research context, and the interviews were supplemented with informal conversations to increase the quality of the research. COVID-19 limited access and opportunities for these meetings.

### Interview Content

Semi-structured interviews were conducted based on a guide with themes and questions posed to everyone. Nevertheless, the researcher had the opportunity to explore themes and responses during the interviews. The participants were initially asked about their personal volunteering experience and the activities they engaged in. The interviews focused mainly on the recruitment of new volunteers. The participants were asked about their experience with recruitment, what they considered success factors, and what they experienced as challenging when recruiting volunteers with immigrant backgrounds. They were asked about their thoughts on the importance of diversity in volunteering and on whether and how volunteering could promote the inclusion of immigrants.

**Table 1** Organizational characteristics

| Org | Years active | Impact field | Mandate | Volunteers | Governing | Activities |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 20–30 years | Local group of a national organization | Foster a positive and inclusive community | 200–250 volunteers, most ethnic Norwegians | Majority driven | Visiting services, social group events, activity opportunities, etc. Directed toward both the whole community and specific groups |
| 2 | > 50 years | Local group of a national organization | Strengthening the local community and supporting vulnerable groups (and others) | 150–200 volunteers, most ethnic Norwegians | Majority driven | Visiting services, social group events, activity opportunities, etc. Directed toward both the whole community and specific groups |
| 3 | 10–20 years | Local group | Promote an active and safe settlement for residents in a local area | 20–30 volunteers, most ethnic Norwegians | Majority driven | Social events, community development, and youth clubs, etc. Directed toward the local community and groups |
| 4 | 2–5 years | Local group | Inclusion and integration of immigrants, especially girls and women | 10–20 volunteers, most immigrant backgrounds | Muli-cultural driven | Social events, information seminars to introduce the Norwegian society, celebration of religious holidays etc. Directed toward immigrant women |
| 5 | 2–5 years | Local group | Integration and an active life for all immigrants | 10–20 volunteers, most immigrant backgrounds | Multi-cultural driven | Social events, information seminars to introduce the Norwegian society, job search guidance, activity opportunities, etc. Directed toward immigrant |

## Analysis Method

The first author transcribed all the interviews verbatim and imported the transcripts into NVivo software. The data analysis process was inspired by stepwise deductive induction (Tjora, 2019), in which the analysis progresses from an inductive interpretation and adopts a theoretical perspective through the analytical phase.

The first step was to code the data inductively "in vivo" such that the codes were grounded in the empirical data; this process is similar to the coding used in grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). Codes must correspond closely to the participants' statements to ensure that the codes are drawn from the data rather than from theories, research questions, or previously chosen themes (Tjora, 2019). The first author performed the empirical inductive coding of all the text in the transcripts. The next step was to group the codes that exhibited internal thematic connections. Based on these code groups, the main theme relevant to this article is ´Recruitment to volunteering´. Through our analysis, four themes related to recruitment emerged. At this stage, the codes were examined inductively, and then we incorporated theories, previous research, and interest, making the approach more abductive. The first author conducted this step in a close discussion with the other authors. Upon examining the four themes, we observed that two were linked to the recruiters, while the other two were structural aspects of the organizations. The four themes were included as subthemes under the main themes ´Structural aspects of recruitment´ and ´Aspects linked to the individual who recruits´. The subthemes were categorized and are elaborated in the results section as follows: ´Balancing the willingness to recruit and the resources at hand,´ ´The flexibility or professionalism of volunteer tasks,´ ´Considering immigrants as contributors or as a group in need of help,´ and ´The impact of the social networks of the persons who recruits.´ Table 2 contains the themes and examples of some of the associated codes. Furthermore, we chose to use professionalization and formalization and ´the strength in weak ties´ as a theoretical and conceptual lens in the discussion of our results following the abductive phase.

## Ethics

The participants signed informed consent prior to the interviews. The participants were informed about their right to withdraw from the study without stating a reason. They were assured that confidentiality would be maintained concerning the transcribed data (anonymized systematically) and any publications resulting from the study. The participants' confidentiality in publications was secured by assigning them nicknames and dividing the

organizations to which they belonged into ´large-scale organizations´ and ´small-scale organizations.´

## Results

### Structural Aspects of Recruitment

#### Balancing the Willingness to Recruit with the Resources At Hand

The participants presented some dilemmas regarding the recruitment of immigrants to volunteers. As was the case for these participants, face-to-face recruitment and asking for a concrete task were considered the best or most ideal ways to recruit immigrants as volunteers. Potential language issues and the opportunity to explain information were some of the reasons provided for the need for face-to-face contact. Participants from one of the small organizations reported that recruitment was conducted by asking every person who wanted to benefit as a member of their activity to contribute as a volunteer as well. However, for participants with immigrant backgrounds, face-to-face contact was crucial for reasons other than language issues. They also thought that immigrants respond best to direct and personal communication, and that it is a matter of respect. Sana explained the importance of investing time in the strategy for recruiting newly arrived immigrants:

> We are good at recruiting new immigrants as members because we visit them at home and invite them. We try to use their mother tongue, we call them… People with immigrant backgrounds respond best to direct communication, not letters and such… The best way is to talk to them! (…) It is respectless only to send a letter!…But if you take your time to visit them and talk to them, you show more dignity… and they are more willing to participate. Small details like this that Norwegians do not necessarily know greatly impact recruitment. [Sana, small-scale organization].

Many of the participants reflected on such differences in communication and way of life and emphasized the need for cultural competency or diversity competency in volunteering.

Participants from large-scale organizations, especially ethnic Norwegians, described face-to-face communication in recruitment as a resource-demanding strategy. Anna, an experienced volunteer with an ethnic Norwegian background, said it was impossible to knock on people's doors to recruit volunteers for their organization. She explained:

> We do not have the capacity to work a lot with recruitment! (…) The best way is still to believe that

the people who want to volunteer register and join at their own initiative! [Anna, large-scale organization].

When someone registered on their webpage, they tried their best to contact the new volunteers to invite them to an information meeting as soon as possible. Nevertheless, it could sometimes take a couple of months due to the lack of volunteers dedicated to recruitment.

In addition to the question of resources, some participants found it challenging to recruit successfully face-to-face because it was crucial to ask the "right people," such as caring and social people that had the time and interest in volunteering.

A common reflection from the participants in organizations struggling to recruit immigrants was that they needed to be more proactive than they currently were. They had to provide information about volunteering at places where immigrants attended, such as the school responsible for Norwegian language courses for immigrants or asylum receptions. Bjarne, an ethnic Norwegian who had been an active volunteer throughout his life, said that he had experienced some success but also many difficulties recruiting immigrants as volunteers.

> (…) But I do not think we have a big enough commitment to recruit people with immigrant backgrounds either! …so many [of the board members] say: ´but they don't want to participate, and we don't manage to include them!,´ but I think it may be something wrong with our approach… [Bjarne, small-scale organization].

However, several participants with ethnic Norwegian backgrounds stated they could not be too proactive in their recruitment to ensure not to force anyone to volunteer. One ethnic Norwegian, Mia, who had been employed at one of the organizations for several years, shared her thoughts:

> [The recruitment] is self-propelled, really… if they have a good time [as participants in the activity], I believe they are joining [as volunteers], but it doesn't hurt to ask them, but we can't force them either! It is a balance between doing too much or too little. We can´t be too pushy! [Mia, large-scale organizations].

### The Flexibility or Professionalism of Volunteer Tasks

All of the participants were clear that their organizations welcomed everyone who wanted to join. Some participants highlighted that they recruit new volunteers in a flexible manner, based on what the newcomers want and consider themselves capable of contributing. On this matter, Michel

**Table 2** Themes, subthemes, and examples of associated codes

| Themes and subthemes | Codes (examples) |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Structural aspects of recruitment | We must use resources for recruitment and knock on doors |
| Balancing the willingness to recruit and the resources at hand | The best way is to believe that those who want to volunteer to take the initiative |
| The flexibility or professionalism of volunteer task | Everyone has something to contribute |
| | Without language competence and mandatory courses, we can't send a person to a one-to-one activity |
| 2. Aspects linked to the individual who recruits | Integration is a two-way street—openness and contributions |
| Considering immigrants as contributors or as a group in need of help | Someone must take care of them |
| | We are dependent on a connection to multicultural groups |
| The impact of the social network of the persons who recruits | We have to show other immigrants that we are capable |

elaborated on his experience of being both an immigrant himself and the founder of several voluntary organizations:

> It is important that people know they can be a volunteer! (…) We have people who don't speak much Norwegian who contribute to some activities, too. We try to lower our requirements and try to explain that you don´t need many skills and qualifications to join. Everyone can join our organization! [Michel, small-scale organization].

All the organizations have membership fees, making it possible to run them. In some organizations, volunteers must attend mandatory courses prior to volunteering. These courses included information on the Norwegian welfare and the voluntary sector, the values of being a volunteer, and the duty of confidentiality. This is regarded as a necessary preparation for volunteering. For instance, it was outlined how important it is to know something about the duty of confidentiality and what one's volunteering should or should not involve when, for example, volunteering in a one-to-one activity with people in vulnerable situations. Bianka, a woman with an immigrant background who worked with the recruitment and inclusion of immigrants in a large-scale organization, talked enthusiastically about how people have to build up their competence in volunteering:

> (…) you have to start by being a volunteer, and then get an activity leader position, and gradually… you need some time to learn about how Norway is organized and structured. It [volunteering] doesn't exist in other countries, and it is complicated! To me, it took about a year to learn and understand it. [Bianka, large-scale organization].

This reflects the participants' opinion that it takes time to become familiar with and comprehend the context for volunteering and obtain the necessary skills and competence to take volunteer roles with responsibility in organizations.

However, both membership fees and mandatory courses were considered obstacles to recruiting volunteers with immigrant backgrounds. Vera reflected on why it is difficult to recruit immigrants who must attend mandatory courses:

> We try to offer different courses, but few are interested in that. (…) I think the reason is language issues, and they do not understand what this is all about and why they must take courses. [Vera, large-scale organization].

The dilemma of volunteers needing qualifications combined with the desire to include everyone is strong among individuals who recruit for some of the organizations in this study.

Some of the participants with immigrant backgrounds also reflected on how professionalized volunteering is being presented and how people might be afraid of becoming volunteers due to the responsibility. Parvin, a refugee who volunteered in different organizations her whole life, shared her experience:

> I remember a man I tried to recruit to become a volunteer in the visiting services, but he thought everything was too difficult! The explanation of the activity from the organization's people was too advanced. So, I tried to say it in a simpler way, "It isn't that difficult…just consider it like visiting someone. It is like a new friend". [Parvin, large-scale organization].

### Aspects Linked to the Individual Who Recruits

#### Considering Immigrants as Contributors or as a Group in Need of Help

Some participants explicitly stated that people with immigrant backgrounds have the resources to contribute to volunteering and should not be seen as merely a group of

people needing help. The value of convincing them that all can contribute in one way, or another was seen as substantial by many of the immigrant participants. However, they shared that it was common for many immigrants to consider themselves as a group needing help instead of people who could help others. Michel, who had a burning passion for helping other immigrants become integrated into Norwegian society, stated this explicitly:

> Integration is a two-way street! We must do something to be a part of society (…) it isn't like members are the ones who get help, and volunteers are the helpers because you can do both! Someone can help you with one thing, and you can help others with something else. [Michel, small-scale organization].

In contrast, other participants shared the common opinion that people need qualifications to volunteer, such as language skills and an understanding of how Norwegian society is structured. This impacts who and where they recruit. It was mentioned that newly arrived immigrants might be recruited from schools with Norwegian language courses, but this would lead to recruiting people without the knowledge and language skills the organization prefers. Mia, who had worked with recruitment at a large-scale organization for many years, shared some thoughts on this:

> (…) it might be a bit early when they are in the introduction program, and they might be in different phases as the introduction program lasts two years. I don't think this is the best arena to recruit. (…) I would appreciate getting more people with an immigrant background as volunteers because I think the government is on to something when they say that volunteering may be inclusive, but then they have to participate in an activity that they handle because if they don´t…I´m afraid it would be the opposite. If you fail in that [volunteering], trying to get a paid job might be even harder! [Mia, large-scale organization].

Her colleague, Tiri, who was participating in the same interview, agreed and said,

> (…) We have to ensure that they have an activity they can manage to volunteer in and that we have the capacity to take care of them! [Tiri, large-scale organization]

### The Impact of the Social Network of the Person who Recruits

Recruitment was described as dependent on the person who recruits and their social connections. Having volunteers who represent many different cultural and ethnic backgrounds was considered an advantage for further recruitment and inclusion since it would be easier to connect with new immigrants. Per, who has volunteered at different organizations throughout his life, described the importance of accessing immigrant groups:

> It´s all different because we direct all the activities toward immigrants, so it is much easier to recruit immigrants to volunteer than in other organizations. We have people with immigrant backgrounds on the board and leading the activities. [Per, small-scale organization].

Conversely, in these organizations, the participants said they struggled to recruit ethnic Norwegians.

Some participants with an ethnic Norwegian background reported that they had to depend on an 'insider' in the immigrant community for direct contact. Some explained that they lost their relation to multicultural networks when their volunteer with an immigrant background quit.

'Word of mouth' was mentioned as an important recruitment approach by all participants, as volunteers recruited their friends and networks. Nevertheless, the participants with immigrant backgrounds understood "word of mouth" to function like a role model, showing other immigrants that they can contribute to equal footing with ethnic Norwegians. Francine, who engaged in much volunteering, explained:

> We talk a lot about how to recruit new volunteers for the organization, and when I got to know one Somali woman who understands a lot, I asked her if she could talk to the Somali group and show them that she volunteered and that they could also volunteer! [Francine, small-scale organization].

The participants with immigrant backgrounds spoke about using their own experience of being an immigrant to help others participate in Norwegian society.

Many participants said that the few immigrants they had recruited were resourceful, had lived in the country for many years, and knew much about Norwegian organization and culture. As Bjarne shared.

> (…) Ehh…I think that the ones [immigrants] we have recruited are familiar with Norwegian culture and systems. They have absolutely preserved their ethnic background, but they had a job and an understanding of 'the Norwegian' and maybe been a bit included, or maybe well-integrated as well! [Bjarne, small-scale organization].

The participants attributed this to better communication and understanding of volunteering and to immigrants being settled down in the new society.

## Discussion

This study reveals structural factors and individual aspects of recruiters having an impact on attracting and including immigrants as volunteers. Large-scale organizations are more professionalized and more directed by resources and frameworks and demand more qualifications due to their volunteer tasks, and this approach is supported by Hill and Stevens´ typology (2011). This might make inclusive recruitment more challenging. Small-scale organizations have greater flexibility and less professionalization of volunteer activities, leading to the possibility of more inclusive recruitment. In addition, if the small-scale organizations are minority driven, they may be better equipped to recruit immigrants as volunteers due to greater diversity sensitivity and more connections with immigrants through their social network.

### Accessibility is Crucial

Many factors influence whether voluntary organizations could be a central arena for inclusion (Handy & Greenspan, 2009; Sveen et al., 2023a, 2023b). Some have also noted the problem of using the voluntary sector as a qualifying arena to be ´good citizens´ and obtain access to the labor market (Yap et al., 2010) or as an ´imagined participation´ as it is the labor market they should have access to (Codó & Garrido, 2014). Accessibility is, however, crucial.

A diversity-sensitive approach may be needed to recruit volunteers with an immigrant background rather than to recruit the majority population. Our inquiry revealed that face-to-face communication and showing new immigrants that they are welcome, capable, and valuable resources were considered crucial for recruitment. Not all participants in large-scale organizations experienced having the capacity to conduct such recruitment efforts. The lack of resources and not wanting to force anyone to volunteer compelled them to rely on people's own initiative to register as volunteers. In the small-scale organizations examined in this study, the recruitment approaches were described as flexible and individually tailored. Research has shown that being asked to volunteer is one of the most important determinants of volunteering (Bowman, 2004; Musick et al., 2000; Wollebæk et al., 2015) and that immigrants may also experience a lack of opportunities, language skills, and the necessary understanding of volunteering (Greenspan et al., 2018; Southby et al., 2019). Hence, it is questionable how successful it is to recruit immigrants merely by waiting for them to take the first initiative to volunteer, contribute to society, and promote their social inclusion.

In our study, it seems that people with an immigrant background have another approach and access to different ethnic groups by either belonging to the same ethnic group or merely having their own experience being an immigrant and hence experiencing a greater comprehension of the need for joining volunteering. This is supported by Janoski (2010), who emphasizes opinion leaders and the recruitment in social networks across civil spheres, and Granovetters (1973), who emphasizes the strength of weak ties. Recruitment to volunteering has often been stated to occur primarily through social networks and weak ties, and volunteers recruit others who are similar to themselves (Musick & Wilson, 2008; Paik & Navarre-Jackson, 2011; Wollebæk et al., 2015). Ødegård et al. (2014) found that in these traditional majority-driven large-scale organizations, immigrants do not necessarily become volunteers upon arrival but have this bridge-maker role. This is mirrored in our study, where volunteers with a majority background experienced being dependent on an insider in the immigrant community to obtain access. It seems that diversity competence among volunteers is needed to obtain attractiveness and diverse recruitment.

### Different Activities and Goals?

The large-scale organizations in this study partly function as complementary service deliverers to ease the burden of the public sector in some areas and face increasing pressure and economic support to contribute to these public tasks (Stein & Fedreheim, 2022; Wollebæk et al., 2015). To carry out these types of volunteer tasks, these organizations depend on professional quality and, therefore, require potential volunteers to have certain qualifications. This creates a paradox in which voluntary organizations are considered central integration and inclusion arenas, but the need for qualified volunteers to pursue the community's tasks excludes people who may not yet have the necessary qualifications. This may lead to counteracting the goal of integrating disadvantaged groups through volunteering (Meyer & Rameder, 2022). For many years, some large-scale organizations have been central to organizing help for refugees (Hagelund & Loga, 2009; Ødegård et al., 2014), which may still affect the perceptions of immigrants as pure recipients of services or activities. However, immigrants are not a homogenous group, and it is necessary to reflect on immigrants' diversity, diverse backgrounds, different reasons for migration, and diverse personal and social resources. On the other hand, small-scale and especially minority-driven organizations include everyone regardless of prior knowledge and skills, and volunteers can contribute based on what they can and want to do as they are flexible in activities. This, however, may raise a discussion of how much these organizations contribute to

the social inclusion of the overall society, such as contact with the majority population (Putnam, 2000). Another reflection is whether these organizations end up functioning as steppingstones to the majority-driven organizations when the immigrants are qualified enough. This may create a hierarchy of voluntary organizations and be problematic because the goal is to enter the labor market, which might be even further away.

## Strength and Limitations

This study deepens the empirical knowledge of volunteering in a culturally diverse society and adds novel insight into how recruitment is thought upon and put into practice in various organizations. The study was carried out in a semirural context in Norway. Further studies, including studies of alternative locations and research methods, are needed to determine the transferability of our findings.

## Conclusion

The voluntary sector has had a pivotal role in securing the social welfare and humanitarian services of people by working to improve the well-being of individuals and communities and offering inclusion and support. This sector promotes civic engagement and fills critical gaps in social services. In the context of global migration, the inclusion of the immigrant population in voluntary organizations is highlighted as important for inclusion in the larger society. However, immigrants participate less than the majority population in voluntary organizations and having investigated the strategies employed to recruit volunteers in such organizations; we suggest that part of the problem, and therefore also part of the solution, lies within recruitment approaches. Changes in the voluntary sector and the increasing professionalization of volunteer tasks seem to make it difficult for large-scale organizations to recruit newly arrived immigrants and fulfill the expectation of facilitating immigrant inclusion through volunteering. However, small-scale minority-driven organizations apply more flexibility in their approaches and have a more suitable framework that better connects to recruiting immigrants. Thus, to succeed in recruiting immigrants, voluntary organizations should develop diversity sensitivity in their recruitment approaches and acknowledge that the social networks of those who recruit are crucial in recruitment. This is of particular importance for large-scale organizations in order to attract, recruit, and retain volunteers with different ethnic backgrounds and to ensure an inclusive civil society.

**Declarations**

**Conflict of interest** The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

**Informed Consent** The participants all signed informed consent prior to the interviews. They were informed about their right to withdraw from the study without stating a reason. The study was approved by the Norwegian Center for Research Data prior to the beginning of the data collection process under Reference Number [888539].

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