

THE SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES IN GRONINGEN

BACHELOR'S THESIS

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ABSTRACT

Integrating as a refugee is met by many challenges, such as the quality of social ties to locals or access to housing and employment. Based on theoretical frameworks on integration three topics, mental health, housing and employment, were incorporated to research:

“How are refugees experiencing social integration in Groningen?”

Seven in-depth interviews were carried out, of which five participants were refugees. Two participants were Dutchmen, whose answers were used to provide an insight into Dutch cultural traits and the perception of the process of integration by locals.

The analysis shed light on the importance of language. Not only are good language skills indispensable to advance on the labour market, but they also help to establish contact to locals. Most interviewees found these interactions to be inadequate, as opposed to contact to internationals. An explanation for the difficulties of forming social ties could be Dutch cultural traits. Because of governmental support housing is not a matter of concern for any of the interviewees in Groningen. Further, from the perspective of the host society and as noted by the Dutch participants, it was suggested that the Dutch government needs to focus more on the mental support of refugees in order to ensure that reported loneliness does not develop further into mental health issues.

These findings complement former research on refugees in the Northern Netherlands and encourage to investigate experiences of female refugees.

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1.1 BACKGROUND

Since 2015, around 61.000 people have been granted asylum in the Netherlands (CBS Statline, 2020a). Integrating into a new host society after forced displacement is met by many obstacles, from the side of the refugee but also from the host society's point of view. People have been separated from their families, need to learn a new language and adapt to new surroundings. European countries are now entering the 'second refugee phase', after the arrival of refugees. In this phase, the host societies will have to deal with future developments to make sure that refugees adapt so they can participate in everyday life (Neis et al., 2018). It is therefore of societal relevance to investigate the issues they are facing in the host societies to come up with policies to support them during their integration.

In line with the foregoing background, this research seeks to address research gaps that have been identified in existing empirical works. Knappert et al. (2019) advised to focus research solely on refugees and not just migrants. Similarly, Richardson et al. (2019) proposed in-depth investigation into the far-reaching implications of the global refugee crisis. Recently, research by Barends (2017) and Huizinga (2016) on refugee integration and place attachment of male refugees in the Northern Netherlands was conducted. Huizinga (2016) concluded in his study on Syrians that language barriers and discrimination affect place attachment negatively. Furthermore, local social ties seem to be essential for improving wellbeing. Barends' (2017) main finding was that refugees residing in urban areas developed less profound relationships with neighbours.

The motivation for this choice of topic arises from personal interest. Some of my friends who hold refugee status in the Netherlands suffer from emotional problems, such as fear of the future and loneliness.

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

In their comparative study of refugee integration within the Netherlands and the UK, Bakker et al. (2016, p. 129) describe a "paradox between asylum and integration policy." This to a greater extent tends to contribute to exclusion rather than integration (Ibid.). Generally, refugees face many issues, such as language barriers or finding a social community in their host countries. This notwithstanding, the two major difficulties refugees continue to grapple with relate to housing and work (Neis et al., 2018). Countering, refugees holding a residence permit in the Netherlands benefit from a subsidy scheme, meaning that it will be less troublesome for them to find adequate housing (Government of the Netherlands, n.d.). Concerning employment, however, challenges arise. As observed by Knappert et al. (2019), refugees are confronted with stereotypes and strict language requirements at the organisational level of the Dutch labour market.

The social network also plays a role in determining perceived integration. Barends (2017), on one hand, notes that in urban regions male refugees struggle to form connections, as contact

to neighbours is limited. Nicholls and Uitermark (2016), on the other hand, argue that the anonymity of cities, caused by higher population numbers, creates lower social control and therefore facilitates the formation of subgroups. Generally, contact between refugees and members of the host society has positive impacts on integration. This effect gets diminished where the disposition towards refugees is negative (Simonsen, 2018).

A lack of social ties to locals interlinks with other challenges, such as not obtaining adequate housing or employment and not speaking the host society's language after some time. This could cause discontent and eventually lead to failed integration, also provoked by an unwelcoming host society. It is therefore important to detect problems early on in the settlement process in order to prevent a widening socio-economic gap between locals and refugees from arising.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This research adds towards the limited existing literature on the integration of refugees in the Northern Netherlands, whilst building upon the theoretical framework of Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas (2016). The socio-economic challenges refugees face on an individual scale in the quest to 'integrate' into their host societies will be identified.

"How are refugees experiencing social integration in Groningen?", will be answered with three sub-questions (RQ):

1. How does the success of social integration relate to mental health?
2. How does the access to housing and employment shape social integration?
3. In what ways do relations between the refugees and locals impact social integration?

The research area of interest is the city of Groningen, in the Northern Netherlands, as I wanted to carry out the interviews locally. 40% of its population is between 20 and 40 years old (Gemeente Groningen, 2019). This age group roughly coincides with what is referred to as 'Millennials' (Pew Research Centre, 2010). Discovered in an American study, their group is acceptive of immigrants and more tolerant of people from different ethnic backgrounds (Ibid.). 25% of Groningen's inhabitants are non-Dutch, making it a diverse city (Gemeente Groningen, 2019).

The research objectives are:

1. to identify in what way social integration influences mental health.
2. to establish how external circumstances, such as employment and housing, play a role in determining integration.
3. to ascertain if relations between refugees and locals facilitate integration.

1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

In chapter 2 the theoretical framework and the conceptual model will be discussed. Following that in chapter 3 the methodology, including data collection and analysis and ethical

considerations will be examined. In the results section in chapter 4 a short description of the participants will be provided, followed by an analysis of the results. Ultimately, the thesis will be concluded in chapter 5 with a revised conceptual model highlighting new findings. Suggestions for future research will be provided.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 THEORY

Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas (2016) have developed a comprehensive theoretical framework by examining past research and debates on integration and related aspects. They consider integration as a two-way process, built on cooperation between immigrants and host societies. They refer to integration as “the process of becoming an accepted part of society” (Ibid., p.14). It is neither a linear nor unidirectional process, as it is dependent on personal circumstances and political interventions. Due to its political power, the receiving society has more impact on the result of the integration process than the immigrant himself (Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas, 2016).

Samers and Collyer (2017, pg. 384) also agree that the path followed by migrants from being a foreigner to being fully integrated is not linear. They link ‘integration’ to multiculturalism, meaning that immigrants continue living under their home culture, while also following the western liberal and democratic standards (Ibid., pg. 350).

Bakker et al. (2016) in their definition of integration deviate from that of Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas (2016). Bakker et al. (2016) use the two dimensions of ‘social integration’ and ‘health’ to gain a deeper understanding of integration on an individual level. For them, ‘social integration’ is defined as the extent of participation by migrants or refugees in social networks. In particular, ‘(mental) health’ is of importance, as a lack of social integration can cause societal exclusion, apathy and even depression.

For the purposes of this research, integration will be defined as the multi-pathed process of migrants settling into their host society. Social integration can be seen as the refugees’ well-being, performance and career (Knappert et al., 2019).

When focusing on the cultural dimensions of integration, ‘acculturation’ and ‘assimilation’ are of importance: acculturation describing the cultural integration of the immigrant, e.g. language, religion and customs, and assimilation defining the extent to which one fails or fulfils the requirements of participating in one’s host society (Berry, 1997). Combining this with the approach on health issues of Bakker et al. (2016), similarities can be noted. Both acculturation and assimilation are seen to be stressful processes, causing psychological problems, as changes occur too quickly. Furthermore, prejudice and discrimination can affect an individual’s well-being negatively (Berry, 1997).

To the definition of assimilation other interpretations can be added, namely immigrants obtaining the same socio-economic status as the natives (Zhou et al., 2008), making them identical to members of the host society (Ager and Strang, 2008). Subsequently, the refugee’s home culture will be abandoned (Berry, 1997). It is open to discussion whether this should be the ultimate goal.

Apart from ‘integration’, more concepts are discussed by Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas (2016). They conceive the ‘host society’ as the homogenous social surrounding into which the immigrant needs to integrate. It was discovered that having social ties with Dutch locals caused immigrants to have a higher professional level (Lancee, 2010). Tying employment together with language skills, observations show that the status of employment in the host society is

often linked to language proficiency (Samers and Collyer, 2017, pg. 287). Also, a ‘refugee’ in the Netherlands is defined as someone who sought asylum ‘successfully’, and now holds refugee status and a residence permit for 5 years (Bakker et al., 2016).

2.2 CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The conceptual model which was applied for this research is based on the heuristic model developed by Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas (2016). All aspects mentioned in this model are of equal importance when explaining integration, as it is the end product of the interaction between all factors that impacts the “direction and temporal outcomes of the integration process” (Ibid., pg. 17).

This research focuses on the individual level of the immigrants and the socio-economic dimensions for the interaction (as highlighted in yellow in Figure 1), giving room for more in-depth analysis. For instance, access to education, housing, and the labour market are considered as socio-economic factors (Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016).

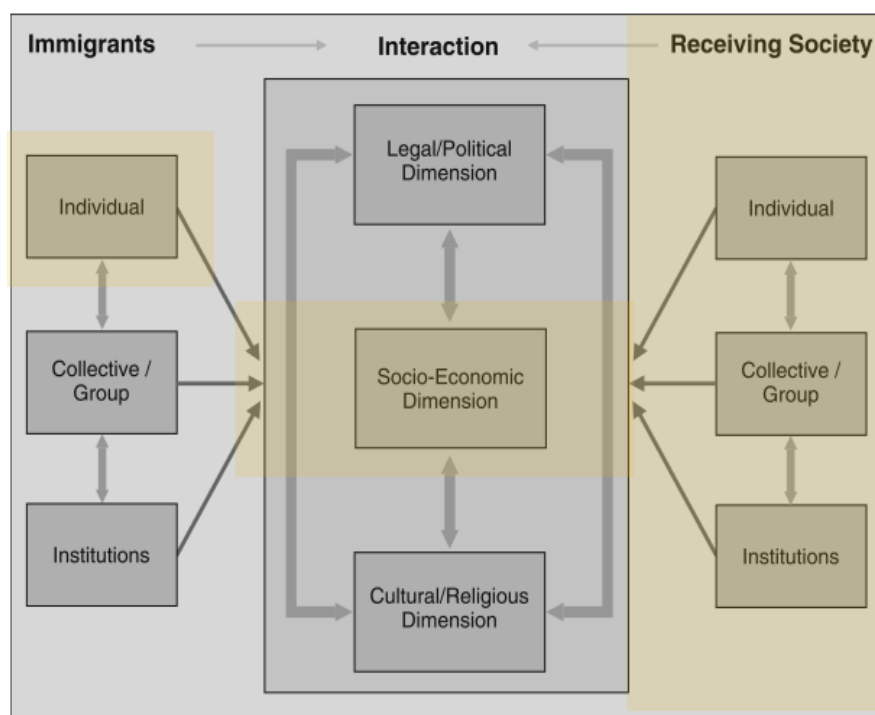


Figure 1 – Model for the empirical study of integration processes (Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016) – adapted

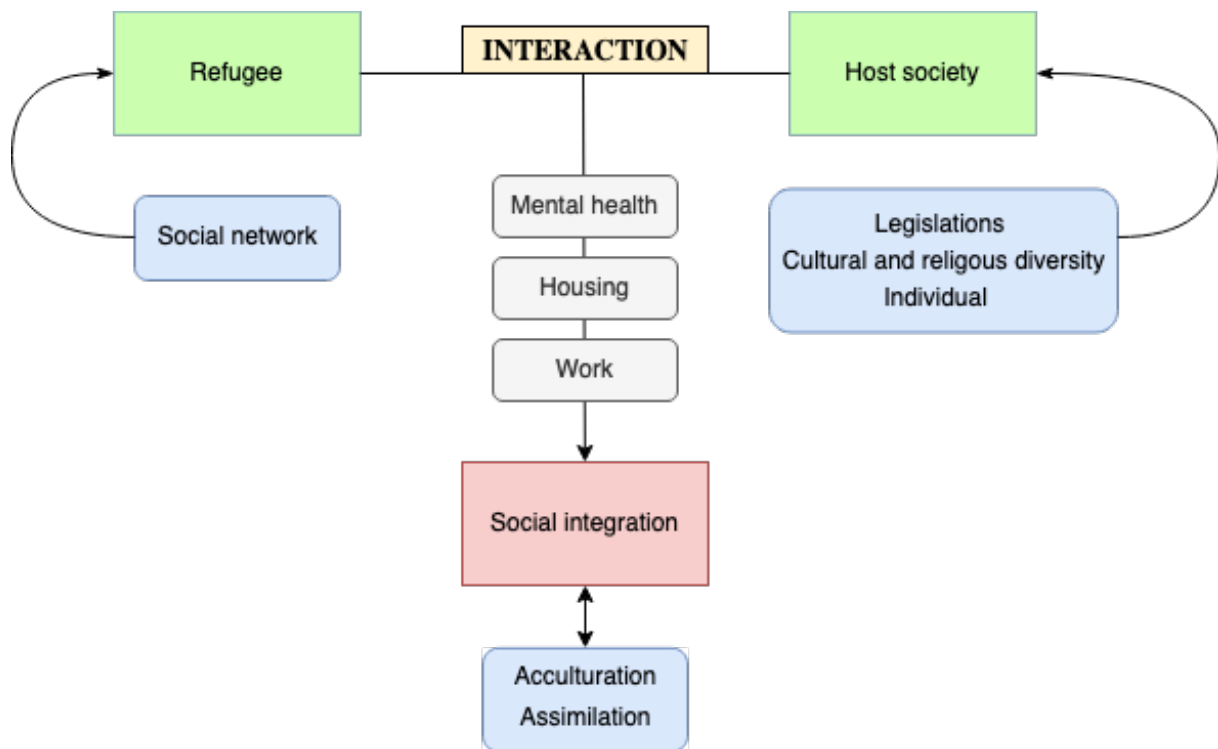


Figure 2 – Conceptual model

These concepts in relation to past research were adopted to form a conceptual model. Central stands the interaction between immigrants and the host society. The concepts highlighted in grey are seen by scholars as the most important aspects of influencing integration. ‘Host society’ is the homogenous social surrounding in which the immigrant needs to integrate. It is formed through three institutional arrangements: political system; labour market, housing, education and public health; and cultural and religious diversity (Penninx and Garcés-Masareñas, 2016). Both assimilation and acculturation can be seen as products of (un)successful social integration. For this research the focus was put on legislations (combining political system and education) and cultural and religious diversity. Integration is facilitated by the interaction of group members (Bohrer et al., 2019). Thus, the ‘individual’, as part of the host society, can be seen through the willingness of cultural interchange of locals and their acceptance of refugees. Legislations enforced by the host society impact labour market policies or housing plans. The refugee himself is influenced, amongst others, by the presence of social networks in his life (Barends, 2017).

2.3 EXPECTATIONS

I expect some of my interviewees to be struggling with mental health issues, linked to being separated from family members (Bakker et al., 2016) (RQ1). The more qualified refugees might experience a lack of satisfaction regarding job application processes (Richardson et al., 2019). High language barriers or stereotypes from the employer’s side might hinder opportunities for advancement (Knappert et al., 2019) (RQ2). Language issues might also be of relevance for RQ3. Passing the Nt2 exam¹ is required to enroll in higher education and to become

¹ The Nt2 exam is a language exam for non-native speakers, who want to enter the Dutch labour market or study (College voor Toetsen en Examens, n.d.).

naturalised, the final legislative step towards integration (Vluchtelingenwerk, n.d.). However, learning a language to such a high level might be seen as challenging by the refugees. Furthermore, as the characteristics of the population of Groningen can be linked to tolerance and openness, it can be expected that the refugees form social ties rather quickly and that the 'othering' of the refugees, a lack of integration, will not be observed (Samers and Collyer, 2017, pg. 350).

METHODOLOGY

3.1 DATA COLLECTION

The nature of this research was qualitative. Qualitative research encompasses a broad range of research practices (Punch, 2014, pg. 117). This approach was chosen as it helps to solve a research problem by analysing networks and relationships through people's experiences. This made it possible to investigate complex processes (Cope, 2010) and to focus on the participants' first-hand experiences and opinions. Qualitative research is located within the paradigm of Constructivism, as realities experienced by individuals or groups locally are being explored (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were chosen as the method of data collection. They present a good way of being in control of where the interview is going, while still giving the participants enough space to express their thoughts (Bernard, 2017). Anecdotes could reveal personal experiences (Jacobsen and Landau, 2003). Purposeful sampling was used, as I was only able to interview people who spoke decent English or Dutch.

Sample

The population of interest was refugees, as they could provide first-hand experiences. To find participants for this research, sampling was done via network sampling, starting off with refugees within my informal network. Furthermore, enquiries were posted into Facebook groups² and a note was put up in a supermarket, both to no avail. I decided to also include Dutch people working with refugees in my study to possibly provide more detail on claims made about the Dutch culture. Thus, four organisations working with refugees in Groningen were contacted. A detailed list is included in Appendix 1. One Dutch interviewee was encountered that way and the other Dutch contact was forwarded to me.

Originally, I planned on interviewing equal numbers of men and women, preferably even more women than men. This would have complemented research done by Huizinga (2016) and Barends (2017), who focused on social connections and place attachment of male refugees in the Northern Netherlands, respectively. Unfortunately, only one of the five refugee participants was female (20%). Even though requesting asylum is not the same as being granted asylum (the way I define my research group 'refugee'), a similar distribution can also be seen in the statistics of refugees applying for asylum. In 2015, only 26.8% of the asylum requests were submitted by women, increasing only slightly to 28.5% in 2019 (CBS Statline, 2020b).

Nevertheless, it needs to be highlighted that no generalisations can be drawn from this data set since it is a small-scale study. It is not representative of the whole population of refugees living in Groningen as the participants were not randomly selected (Jacobsen and Landau, 2003).

² "Refugees Welcome Groningen" and "Students welcome refugees"

Set-up of the interview

Because face-to-face interviews were not possible due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were carried out via the phone and recorded using an app. They lasted between 25 and 40 minutes. The interview guide may be found in Appendix 2. For every sub-research question multiple probing questions were asked during each interview.

The intention of **RQ1**, namely “How does the success of social integration relate to mental health?”, was to examine if effects of integration on mental health can be observed. Using a medical model to determine the mental health of refugees would have gone beyond the scope of my scientific field. Instead, questions were formulated based on past research. For instance, the support network was evaluated as several studies concluded that people with a substantial social support network are better off mentally (Korkeila, 2000). Further symptoms discussed were based on universal health guidelines. Amongst others, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety disorders can be associated with traumatic life events, to which the escape of refugees can be counted (World Health Organization, 2019). Statements regarding perceived (un)happiness were carefully investigated within the context of the answers provided. During the interview questions about circles of friends or the contact to family members were raised.

RQ2: “How does the access to housing and employment shape social integration?”, was answered by discussing the obstacles of finding housing and employment the participant faced. Lastly, **RQ3**: “In what way do relations between the refugees and locals impact social integration?”, was operationalised by asking about the contact to colleagues, local friends and welcoming neighbours.

3.2 DATA ANALYSIS

The recordings were transcribed and analysed using ATLAS.ti. A coding scheme was adapted (Appendix 3). The results are illustrated in a coding table in Appendix 7. The process of data analysis is explained and illustrated in Appendix 4. Most of the topics discussed were based on past experiences. Thus, a phenomenological interpretation of codes was used. This ensured that the reflection upon the refugees’ accounts was detailed and no underlying statements were lost (Bernard, 2017, p. 24).

The interviews were conducted in English, but I gave the participants the option to switch to Dutch if they were struggling with expressing themselves in English. This was done several times. Further, grammar was corrected for the displayed quotes to facilitate comprehension.

3.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The research followed the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (VSNU, 2018). Regarding privacy and protection of the research participants, it is important to be transparent and to ensure security and confidentiality. In this light, all participants were asked to sign an informed consent form via Google Forms (Appendix 5). The participants were free to withdraw from the research without having to provide a reason. Data was stored safely and was made accessible only to involved academic parties. To ensure anonymity made-up names were assigned to the participants in alphabetical order.

As the participants were a vulnerable group, due to possible traumatic experiences related to war and the journey to Europe (Bakker et al., 2016), they might have found some topics unpleasant. Whilst I was not aware of any likely power asymmetry between the respondents and myself, I attempted to critically reflect on it during the interviews. Since I am not a refugee, I might have been seen as an outsider by the participants. Hopefully, this was overcome by creating a trustful atmosphere during the interviews.

4.1 DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Seven people were interviewed, five of them being refugees. A detailed table can be found in Appendix 6. Four out of five of the refugees were male. All were below 30, the youngest being 24. Two were from Syria, and the others fled from The Gambia, Iran and Afghanistan. Furthermore, two Dutchmen, Frans and Gustaaf, were interviewed. Frans teaches Dutch to refugees voluntarily and Gustaaf set up an organisation to support children in Lesbos and raises awareness of the refugees' situation in the Netherlands.

4.2 FINDINGS

4.2.1 MENTAL HEALTH

Struggles

Overall, mental health was difficult to measure as no survey data was collected. This limitation does not impact the overall research results, though, as general themes were still observable from interpreting the interviews.

The findings suggest that some refugees experienced mental issues.

“The refugees that I have seen, they have some mental scars on them.” **Frans, 66,
language coach**

Those 'mental scars' can be associated with numerous stressors at different stages of the escape, such as war experiences pre-departure, mental and physical injuries during transit, as well as isolation during the arrival and integration process (World Health Organization, 2018). Mental health problems can impact integration negatively (Bakker et al., 2016; Berry, 1997).

Gustaaf found an Asielzoekerscentrum in Friesland (Asylum seekers' centre) (AZC) the “*most depressing place*”. There was no mental support for the refugees. “*The situation was completely fucked up*” shows his anger towards this issue. Even though the AZC is not located in Groningen and Gustaaf being only a bystander, this still suggests that the AZC may not fully account for the immigrants' psychological needs and possibly even negatively impact their immigration process. He thought that more focus should be put on the mental wellbeing of refugees by a legislative force from the host society.

Adding to the general theme of health impacting integration (Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas, 2016), Basit appreciated that health and sports are of importance in the Netherlands. As fitness might be perceived as rather significant in the Netherlands, mental wellbeing might be impacted positively (Korsik et al., 2013; Knappe et al., 2019), further

facilitating integration. However, since no other interviewee mentioned this, no clear conclusions can be drawn from it.

Loneliness

Loneliness was mentioned by several participants. Especially Diyar was very open about his struggles. He mentioned 'feeling lonely' three times during the interview. When he moved to the Netherlands he "*felt so down*". He acknowledges that he is keeping his feelings to himself, which might not be healthy. Limited interaction with individuals from the host society hindered his social integration, a process illustrated by the conceptual model (Figure 2). He seemed to be the most lonely out of all participants and was also the only one without family support, since he is an orphan, possibly indicating that deeper issues can intensify mental health problems, and that they are not solely linked to the presence of social networks.

Support

After carrying out the interviews two pillars of support could be observed: Family and religion. Alim, Basit and Carim all kept in touch with their families, with most members still living in their home country. None of them shared their problems with the family members, as to not make them worry. Those participants who received support from their family also seemed more content about their current situation. These findings coincide with the summary of studies by Korkeila (2000), which showed that social support networks might improve mental wellbeing. Alim is also supported by his partner's family, meaning that he has established a support network in Groningen through having a relationship with a local (Bohrer et al., 2019). Considering the conceptual model (Figure 2) this can be interpreted as interaction with the 'individual' of the host society, deepening one's social network and thus promoting integration.

Gustaaf, who experienced those connections first-hand through hosting a refugee at his house, said that family networks give the refugees the strength to carry on. This can be traced back to refugee camps in Lesbos, where he experienced as a volunteer that "*surviving in literally the worst place in Europe gives the families strength*".

Two refugees perceived the role of the family in the Netherlands as less important than within their home culture. This can be linked to a quote by Frans: "*Especially if you're from a family culture you always search for your roots*". It could be interpreted as a lack of acculturation, as the refugees do not abandon their home culture (Berry, 1997). Adjusting to a culture where family is not perceived to be as important can be difficult, further interfering with full integration. The stress this causes can cause mental health issues (Bakker et al., 2016).

Apart from counting on their families, Basit and Carim also received support from their religion. None of the interviewees mentioned any issues regarding the acceptance of their faith. For the refugee that Gustaaf hosted, who fled from Iran because of his faith, it was "*important that he could have beliefs and freedom and that there was no status about it*", with which he had no issues in the Netherlands. This is illustrated by the conceptual model (Figure 2), as religious diversity within the host society impacts integration through interaction.

4.2.2 HOUSING AND EMPLOYMENT

Housing

None of the refugees had difficulties finding accommodation in Groningen as they all received support from the government. The subsidy scheme which is successfully provided by the Dutch government highlights the legislative impact the host society has on the refugees' satisfaction with their housing (Figure 2), which in turn facilitates integration.

Even though Carim was offered a bigger house in Friesland, he decided to look for an accommodation in Groningen instead. He disliked that there *"is almost nobody, no international people there, no black people"*. The perceived lack of social network in Friesland could have impeded interaction with members of the host society, thus lengthening the integration process. Instead, he found a sense of belonging in Groningen, as it was considered a young and vibrant city by all participants.

Carim did not think that finding housing added towards his integration. Diyar used to be homeless on his journey throughout Europe, so he saw housing as being less important to him. These results contradict the findings of Neis et al. (2018), by showing that housing is not a necessity for good social integration. Alim, in contrast, felt stronger about having his own place: *"A private house is very important in your life. Your house is your identity"*. This is in line with what Gustaaf as a Dutchman thought about housing for refugees. According to him it is important that refugees have their own place where they can feel safe.

Neighbourhood ties

Regarding the contact to neighbours experiences of the participants differed. Nearly every morning Basit drinks coffee with his Dutch neighbor, which he found very important as he might otherwise feel lonely. This contrasts Barends' (2017) findings, which suggest that living in urban areas causes refugees to have limited relationships with their neighbours. Alim would like to have more contact but he was not sure *"if it's possible"*, as they are all Dutch. This could be interpreted as a lack of interaction between the refugee and the 'individual' of the host society, possibly affecting acculturation negatively (Figure 2). Bringing in the Dutch point of view, Gustaaf said that *"If you take some action on it, then it will change"*. Therefore, all newcomers have to take the initiative to become integrated into a neighbourhood (if that is what they desire).

Carim also experienced positive encounters in his neighbourhood. But just as Esin, he does not have enough time to engage with his neighbours regularly. He also noted that the neighbourhood culture is different in his home country. There, contact to neighbours is of greater importance. Frans provided a generalised explanation highlighting the difficulty to engage with neighbours in the Netherlands: In the past the Dutch had strong neighbourhood ties. Because of increasing wealth from the 1960s onwards it was no longer necessary to befriend neighbours to borrow equipment. He concluded that a lack of contact is not because they are refugees, but because of the Dutch culture. According to Frans, friendships will evolve if they are not making too much noise and if common interests are found.

Employment: integration

Diyar mentioned that his degree did not get accepted. He therefore had to start a completely new career path, which might also add to what could be perceived as overall discontent.

Another issue is the language. Alim said: *“It’s absolutely difficult for you to find a job if you’re not Dutch”*, supporting the expectations that language barriers might hamper advancement in the labour market (Knappert et al., 2019). Gustaaf also thought that language is the most important obstacle they have to face. For Carim it was easier to find a job because he already spoke some Dutch, supporting Samers and Collyer (2017, pg. 287).

Apart from overcoming language barriers, both Dutchmen agreed that more attention needs to be paid to differences in working environments. Frans gave the example of an Eritrean worker, whose way of working (only doing tasks after being told to out of respect for the boss) clashed with what his Dutch boss required of his employees (to work independently). Employers in the Netherlands should adapt to newcomers and show *“some sympathy for tolerance”*. Those barriers could be overcome by pooling refugees with a job coach, as Gustaaf suggested. Nevertheless, *“there must be internal motivation to live by our values”*, which was illustrated by the example of the Dutch’s appreciation of punctuality. This can be seen as acculturation, as Dutch customs would be adopted.

4.2.3 SOCIAL CONTACTS

Contact to locals

Overall, the refugees share more friendships with internationals than with locals. Diyar was upset that none of his classmates, of which he is the only international, reached out to him during the COVID-19 pandemic. He found internationals to be more caring, as he tried to establish contact with the Dutch, *“but they don’t accept me. You feel like they don’t have fun with you”*. This is one of the reasons for his loneliness and could even impact his mental health.

Carim also thought that it is easier to befriend internationals than locals, as he found himself in the same situation as the internationals, namely being far away from home. Because of that Groningen is a good place of residence as it is *“a small town with a lot of people from different countries”*, correlating with my expectations that social ties can be formed quickly due to the openness of the young inhabitants. Further, the internationals can also exhibit cultural diversity (Figure 2), which helps integration in the social sphere.

Esin thought her language skills were hindering her from making more Dutch friends. She met her other and international friends at Humanitas³ and at school. During her volunteering at Humanitas she came in contact with other refugees and Dutch volunteers.

³ Humanitas is a Dutch non-profit organisation supporting people who need support to deal with all kind of challenging situations (Humanitas, n.d.)

Reasons for a lack of contact to Dutch people

All participants noted cultural differences between their home culture and the Dutch culture. This might provide an explanation as to why contact to the Dutch is limited.

The reason why Carim only has two Dutch friends is that he perceived people not to be very open and that it is difficult to come in contact with them. The Dutch "*have their close group of friends*" which might make it difficult to build deep and meaningful friendships with them.

Gustaaf agreed by mentioning a lack of hospitality: "*We don't easily open our house or invite people*". This is what Diyar struggled with. To him hospitality was very important. Furthermore, Groningers are especially reserved, as noted by both Dutchmen. However, Frans also warned to not make generalisations. Other Dutch cultural traits he mentioned are being individualistic and not very subtle. This is in line with the impression two participants had of the Dutch culture. According to Diyar: "*In Dutch culture everyone does what he wants to do*" and Carim, similarly, associated personal freedom with Dutch culture: "*Do what you want, say your mind and be individualistic*". This can impair integration due to a lack of willingness of cultural exchange by members of the host society, as discussed by Bohrer et al. (2019).

Alim stated that "*You really have to change a lot to go with this culture*" by adapting to local customs and values. It might be an important step to take towards integration, as adapting the locals' traits defines assimilation (Zhou et al., 2008; Ager and Strang, 2008). According to Basit, contact to locals is very important when integrating as one can learn from them how to deal with day-to-day problems.

Language

A theme that emerged as a critical factor for social integration is language.

Some participants found that having a good grasp of Dutch facilitated integration. Gustaaf thought this is the case especially at the workplace when communicating with colleagues. Carim felt taken more seriously after learning to speak Dutch. Alim found it easier to express himself in his mother tongue, which is why he would prefer spending time with someone speaking the same language. This of course would hinder integration if refugees decide to only spend time with people who have the same mother tongue. Speaking Dutch at a very high level was nevertheless very important to him. It signals to locals that he is able to speak their language. This is a motivation for him to keep learning. Another reason could be that he thought that finding a job outside of the service industry is very difficult if one does not speak perfect Dutch. This ties in with previous findings suggesting that language barriers might stop refugees from advancing in the labour market (Knappert et al., 2019).

Not just being able to speak the language but also the process of learning it might impact integration. Diyar learned Dutch from fellow internationals. Especially the 'taalcafé' (language café) was a very important contact point for him to make new friends, mostly internationals. He felt that people there care about getting to know him.

Language is related to all parts of the conceptual model (Figure 2). If proficiency is high, the refugee is one step closer to acculturation and therefore being socially integrated.

CONCLUSION

5.1 ANSWER

The aim of this research was to identify how refugees are experiencing social integration in Groningen.

The first objective was to identify in which way social integration influences mental health. The presence of a social network can impact the level of contentment on the side of the refugee. A lack of contact to locals can cause a feeling of exclusion, hindering social integration. An indication for this is the apparent loneliness of one of the participants. Strong family support gives them fortitude to keep going. Further, from the perspective of the host society and as noted by the Dutchmen, legislations in the Netherlands need to focus more on the mental support of refugees.

Second, by establishing how external circumstances, such as employment and housing play a role it became apparent that opinions diverge. Some consider housing to be very important for integration, as a way of feeling part of the new culture, whereas others do not consider it to be impacting integration. The government facilitates the process of finding housing. Neighbourhood ties, influencing the social network, are rather limited, possibly due to Dutch culture. Regarding employment, language is seen as a major obstacle when wanting to make advancements on the labour market. An asymmetry in work ethics due to cultural differences needs to be tackled by not just the refugee, but also by the receiving society.

The third objective was to determine if relations between refugees and locals facilitate integration. This turned out to be one of the more important aspects influencing integration. Assimilation is seen to be necessary by one participant in order to fully integrate. They all have limited contact to locals, which might be caused by the lack of cultural commonalities and the generally more reserved nature of the Dutch. One participant struggled with the lack of contact to Dutch people and therefore also did not feel content about living in Groningen, showing that he is not well integrated. Nevertheless, all participants appreciated the high number of international inhabitants in the city and established contacts with them, which also constitutes as a form of integration.

5.2 REVISED CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Most participants found language to be the most important determinant when it comes to integration. Speaking the host society's language well facilitates friendships, which might help to get more involved in one's neighbourhood, and most importantly, helps to secure a more advanced job. Therefore, in the revised conceptual model of this research 'language' is included. In their commentary on the framework, on which my model is based, Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas (2016) discussed language, but only as a subitem for each determinant.

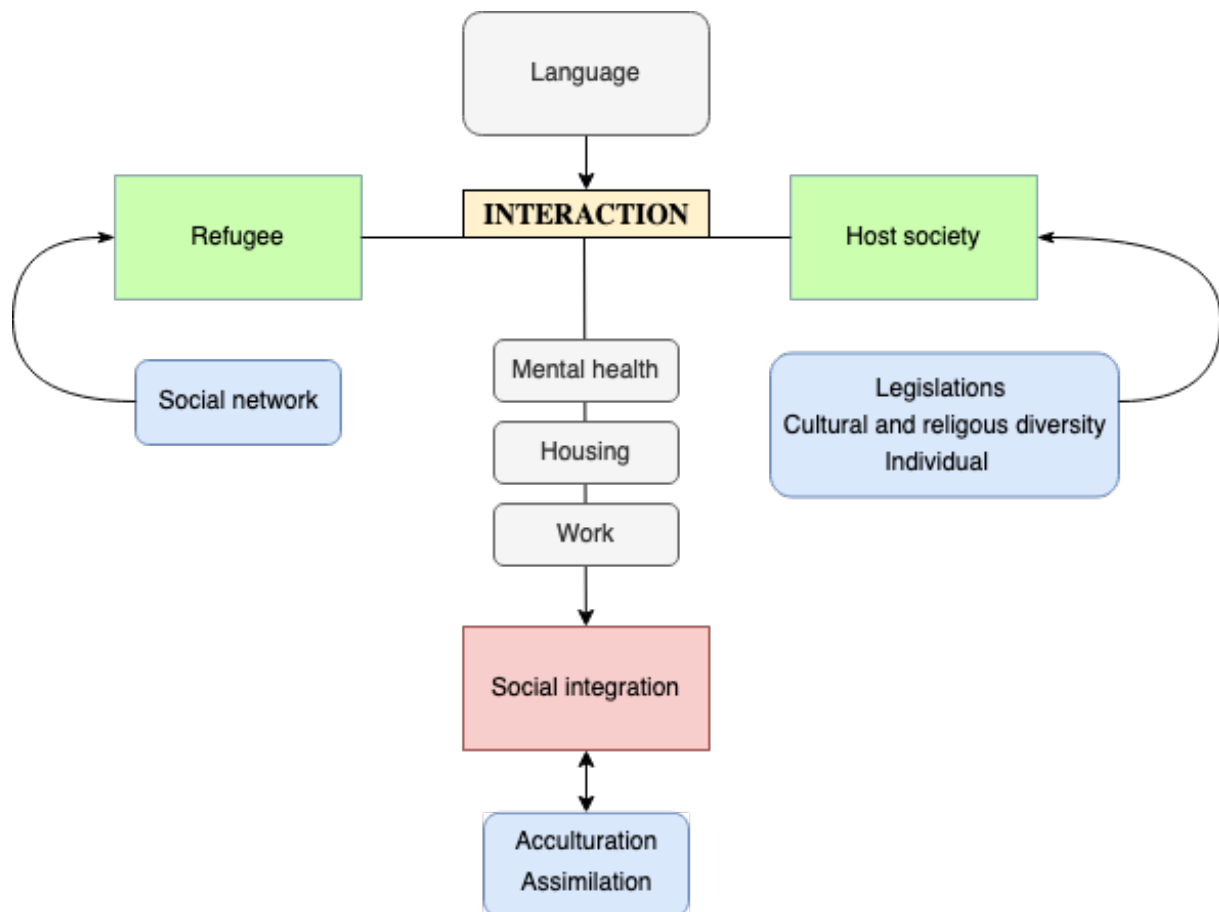


Figure 3 - Adapted conceptual model

5.3 STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES

A strength of this research is that the main findings were first-hand experiences, instead of investigating from the outsider's perspective on the perceived level of integration. In spite of the sample's limitations concerning representativeness, the small sample size allowed me to focus on each individual's narration by building an extensive list of codes. Incorporating Dutchmen provided insights into the Dutch culture that I, as an international student, was not aware of and which complemented the results.

A mixed methods approach, for instance including survey data to investigate which variables significantly affect integration would have provided more comprehensive results (Montuschi and Cartwright, 2014, pg. 128). Age diversity might also have provided new insights. The small sample size of women is unfortunate. An at least equal distribution of the sexes would have been more ideal in order to compare their different experiences. As only one participant was female, no clear suggestions can be drawn regarding the integration of women.

5.4 FUTURE RESEARCH AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

For future research a larger random sample could be chosen, possibly comparing different regions within one country or across countries. A longitudinal study could follow a certain cohort over the years, investigating how current events and changes in the political sphere and therefore also in the acceptance of the locals further impact integration. More work needs to focus solely on women as they are greatly underrepresented in refugee literature.

Two policy implications were established. A key policy priority should be to make mental health care support more accessible, especially to refugees who have just entered the country. To improve integration in the labour market, job coaches can reconcile motivated refugees who have adapted the host society's values with employers motivated to increase diversity at the workplace.

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6

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7.1 LIST OF ORGANISATIONS CONTACTED

Name	Dates of contact	Reply	Interview
Stichting Groningen Verwelkomt	1 May 2020 and 18 May 2020	Yes	No
Humanitas	15 April 2020 and 18 May 2020	No	No
Stichting Inlia	1 May 2020 and 18 May 2020	No	No
VluchtelingWerk Nederland	1 May 2020	Yes	Yes

7.2 INTERVIEW GUIDES

7.2.1 REFUGEE

Thank you for participating in this research. The aim of my bachelor project is to identify the socio-economic challenges refugees face on an individual scale when integrating in the host society in Groningen. I'm interviewing you because you are a refugee and are therefore part of my target group. You'll have to sign the provided consent form which states that your data will be treated confidentially. All answers will be made anonymous, so nothing can get traced back to you. You can always withdraw from the research. If you want to do so, let me know and your data will be deleted.

1. Opening questions

- 1.1 How old are you?
- 1.2 Since when do you live in the Netherlands?
- 1.3 For how long have you lived in Groningen?
- 1.4 What do you do (study, work etc.)?

2. Probing questions social life (RQ1 & RQ3)

- 2.1 How are you experiencing life in Groningen so far?
- 2.2 What do you like/don't like about living here?
 - feeling of loneliness? fears?
- 2.3 How often do you spend time with others?
 - Dutch/foreigners/same cultural background?
 - If only from same cultural background, why not with Dutch?
- 2.4 What do you associate with the Dutch culture?
 - food, norms, values, customs
 - What do you like/don't like about the Dutch culture?
 - In what ways was it easy/difficult to adapt to the culture?
- 2.5 Contact with Dutch people?
 - Who, how often, what kind of activities, how did you get to know them, what do you like about having Dutch friends?
- 2.6 Religion – Are you religious? If yes – continue.
 - In what way is being religious important to you?
 - Are you free to live out your religion?

- Do you feel like your religion is accepted or does it cause trouble in NL?

3. Probing questions mental health (RQ1)

3.1 Would you say that your family forms a big part of your life?

3.2 Where does your family live?

- Nearby? → How often do you see them?
- Far away? → How do you stay in touch?
- Are you worried about them/are they worried about you?

4. Probing questions housing (RQ2)

4.1 Was it easy to find housing?

4.2 What issues did you come across?

4.3 Are you happy with your current residence?

4.4 Do you keep in touch with your neighbours? → Is that important for you?

4.5 What does it mean for you to have your own safe home?

4.6 Does it make you feel part of Dutch society to have your own home here?

5. Probing questions employment (RQ2)

5.1 If they are working – How did you find your current job?

5.2 Was it easy to find work?

- Connections, self-initiative, help from e.g. Humanitas?

5.3 Did you come across any issues, e.g. relating to your refugee status, language barriers etc.?

5.4 Do you like your job? Yes, no – why?

7.2.2 VOLUNTEER

Thank you for participating in this research. The aim of my bachelor project is to identify the socio-economic challenges refugees face on an individual scale when integrating in the host society in Groningen. You'll have to sign the provided consent form which states that your data will be treated confidentially. All answers will be made anonymous, so nothing can get traced back to you. You can always withdraw from the research. If you want to do so, let me know and your data will be deleted.

1. Opening questions

1.1 What do you do (study, work etc.)?

1.2 Do you live in Groningen?

1.3 (How) Are you interacting with refugees?

- How often do you spend time with them?
- How did you get involved?
- What kind of activities?
- Why is it important to you?

2. Probing questions social life (RQ1 & RQ3)

2.1 Do you think Groningen is an open and welcoming city?

2.2 What do you associate with the Dutch culture?

- In what ways is it easy/difficult for refugees to adapt to the culture?

2.3 In what ways can refugees try to integrate more into the Dutch society?

- What difficulties are they facing when trying to get to know Dutch people/not people from the same cultural background as them?
- Why do you think they would be spending most of their time with people from same cultural background?

2.4 According to Dutch people, when is a person seen as being fully integrated into the society?

- What stereotypes are there?
- How can they overcome these barriers? E.g. language issues, legal issues

2.5 Religion

- In what way is religion important to the refugees?
- Do you know of any issues regarding "foreign religions"?
- Are they free to live out your religion in Groningen?
 - o Is there discrimination against them?

3. Probing questions mental health (RQ1)

3.1 What kind of mental health issues do you think refugees are experiencing when fleeing? And when they live here?

3.2 Is the support network in the Netherlands adequate? (E.g. counselling)

3.2 How do social ties play a role?

- Do people who flee without their families suffer more? Why, why not?
- How are children coping?

3.3 Can you think of any other health issues that the refugees might suffer from? And if yes, how are they getting helped?

4. Probing questions housing (RQ2)

4.1 What struggles do you think refugees face when having to find housing?

4.6 (As I've heard from many that they miss contact with their neighbours,) What's the Dutch's opinion on having refugees as neighbours?

4.7 Would you personally like to have refugees in your neighbourhood/as a neighbour?

5. Probing questions employment (RQ2)

5.1 What are the problems refugees might have to face when they look for a job?

5.2 Do you know if/where they can ask for help?

5.3 What is the general Dutch opinion on refugees regarding work?

- Stereotypes?

5.4 What could be done in Groningen/NL to make it easier for refugees to settle into the work environment?

7.2.3 MEMBER OF ORGANISATION

Thank you for participating in this research. The aim of my bachelor project is to identify the socio-economic challenges refugees face on an individual scale when integrating in the host society in Groningen. You'll have to sign the provided consent form which states that your data will be treated confidentially. All answers will be made anonymous, so nothing can get traced back to you. You can always withdraw from the research. If you want to do so, let me know and your data will be deleted.

1. Opening questions

1.1 What's the mission of your organisation?

1.2 For how long have you been working there?

1.3 Why did you choose to work there?

1.4 What was the reaction of the people close to you when you told them that you'll be working with refugees?

2. Probing questions social life (RQ1 & RQ3)

2.1 According to your experience, what do refugees like/not like about living in Groningen?

2.2 What difficulties are they facing when trying to get to know Dutch people/not people from the same cultural background as them?

- If only from same cultural background, why not with Dutch?

2.3 What kind of events take place to help them integrate in the society?

- Who, how often, what kind of activities, how do they get to know each other?

2.4 What do you associate with the Dutch culture?

- In what ways is it easy/difficult for refugees to adapt to the culture?

2.5 According to Dutch people, when is a person seen as being fully integrated into the society?

- What stereotypes are there?

2.7 Religion

- In what way is religion important to the refugees?

- Are they free to live out your religion in Groningen?

- o Have you heard of any issues they had to face because of their religion?

3. Probing questions mental health (RQ1)

3.1 What mental health issues have you noted that refugees are experiencing?

3.2 Are they getting the support they need? (E.g. counselling)

3.2 How do social ties play a role?

- Do people who flee without their families suffer more? Why, why not?

- How are children coping?

3.3 In what ways has the surrounding society an impact on the mental wellbeing of the newcomers?

3.4 What other health issues can be observed?

4. Probing questions housing (RQ2)

4.1 What struggles do the refugees face when having to find housing?

4.8 What could be done in Groningen/NL to make it easier for refugees to find housing?

4.9 (As I've heard from many that they miss contact with their neighbours,) What's the Dutch's opinion on having refugees as neighbours?

4.10 Do you think that having their own home is important to them?

5. Probing questions employment (RQ2)

5.2 Are the refugees experiencing difficulties finding work? If yes, why?

5.3 What initiatives are there to help them settle in?

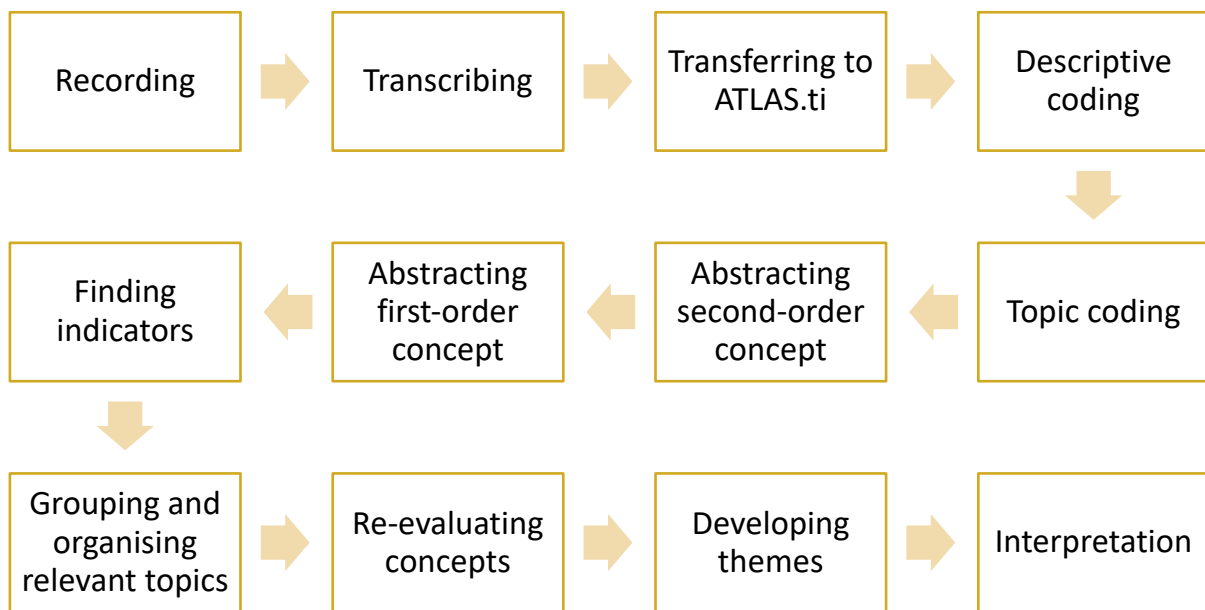
- Is this help used?

5.4 What could be done in Groningen/NL to make it easier for refugees to settle into the work environment?

7.3 CODING SCHEME

Theme	Sub-theme	Explanation	Words that might come up during interview
Social network (i.e. Ager and Strang, 2008; Bakker et al., 2016; Bohrer et al., 2019)	Family	People that the participant is either related with or shares some other sort of deeper bond	Missing, calling, important, support, asking for help, feeling safe, being yourself, siblings, aunts and uncle
	Friends	People that are seen as someone they spend time with, ask for help when they come across issues in NL	Asking for help, socialize, 'hang out', go out, feeling safe, being yourself
	Social ties	Can be friends and family, but also neighbours, colleagues etc. Someone that they spend time to socialize with	Colleagues, friends, foreigners, Dutch, asking for help, feeling safe, being yourself
Housing (i.e. Barends, 2017; Nicholls and Uitermark, 2016; Neis et al., 2018)	Residence	The place where the refugees live	Rental market, expensive, housemates
	Neighbourhood ties	The social contact they have with their neighbours	Lonely, welcoming
	Concept of home	The meaning the refugees give to their home	Safe space, important
Employment (i.e. Knappert et al., 2019; Lancee, 2010; Neis et al., 2018; Samers and Collyer, 2017)	Language barriers	As the refugees have to learn Dutch in order to obtain work permit, they might come across language barriers finding a job	Language requirements, Nt2, language courses
	Certificate issues	Often foreign certificates/diplomas don't get accepted in the Netherlands, meaning that they don't have any official qualifications.	University degree in home country, not accepted
	Stereotypes	A certain view individual members of the host society have on refugees	Racism, problems with customers, problems with colleagues
Mental health (i.e. Bakker et al., 2016; Berry, 1997)		Psychological well-being of the participant	Loneliness, fears, feeling of content, happiness, traumas, nightmares, depression, lack of drive, safety

7.4 DATA ANALYSIS SCHEME



Explanation:

Descriptive codes on the first level of the analysis gave an overview and summary of the data, for instance the participant's age and country of origin. Following, topic coding narrowed down the interpretation. In the third step, analytical coding helped to conceptualise the things said do draw conclusions from it (Punch, 2014). For instance, 'health' could be seen as an abstract second-order concept (Punch, 2014, p. 178). When moving down the level of abstraction, 'mental health' came up during an interview, a first-order concept. The indicators, even more specific, included 'loneliness' or 'no motivation' (Bakker et al., 2016). The variables were based on the main concepts of this research, illustrated in the conceptual model (Figure 2).

7.5 FORM OF CONSENT

Dear interviewee,

Below you can find the consent form that needs to be agreed with in order to participate in this research. The aim of this research is to identify how external circumstances influence social integration in the Dutch culture, the main research question being: How are refugees experiencing social integration in Groningen? With the interviews I hope to obtain an in-depth personal perspective on people's experiences which I can then analyse. The data will be processed anonymously and will only be used for educational purposes. The results of this study can be obtained upon request.

Thanks in advance for your participation!

What is your name? (This will only be used for the consent form and will not be linked to your interview)

[form to fill in name]

I have read the information (above) about the research project. I was able to ask questions and my questions were answered to my satisfaction. I had enough time to decide to participate in the research. My participation is completely voluntary. I can withdraw from the research at any time, without having to give a reason. I give my permission for using the interview data for the following purposes: scientific article and presentations and/or educational purposes. I agree to participate in this interview.

I allow a voice recording of the phone call.

[option to select yes or no]

7.6 OVERVIEW INTERVIEWEES

	Name	Gender	Age	Country of origin	In the Netherlands since	Employment
Refugee	Alim	Male	30	Syria	April 2018	In the past pizza maker and receptionist in a hotel
	Basit	Male	24	Syria	2016	Cook at take-away restaurant
	Carim	Male	26	The Gambia	January 2018	Delivery service
	Diyar	Male	25	Iran	May 2017	Cook
	Esin	Female	25	Afghanistan	April 2018	Registered at a temporary employment agency, volunteers at Humanitas
Volunteer	Frans	Male	66	Netherlands		
	Gustaaf	Male	43	Netherlands		

7.7 CODING TABLE

Groups	n	Second-order concept	First-order concept	n	
RQ1 Mental Health	17	● acceptance		4	
		● Family		23	
		● FAMILY in-vivo		2	
		● loneliness		12	
		● LONELINESS in-vivo		2	
		● mental health		7	
		● MENTAL HEALTH in-vivo		1	
		● personal issues		3	
		○ SUPPORT	○ family	6	
			○ healthcare	3	
			○ religion	1	
			● in-vivo	3	
			○ youth	2	
RQ2 Housing	30	● in-vivo		2	
		● CONTACT TO NEIGHBOURS:	● content	4	
			● culture	7	
			● importance	1	
			● more wanted	3	
			● no contact	2	
			● no interest	1	
			● no time	1	
			● education	7	
			● EMPLOYMENT	● certificates	2
				● colleagues	3
				● current job	2
				● cultural differences	5
				● finding job	6
				● language	3
				● socialising	3
				● work ethics	1
				● in-vivo	3
			● homeless		1
	● HOUSING	○ general	18		
		○ starting from scratch	1		
		● in-vivo	3		
	○ inburgeringscursus		1		
	● university		2		
RQ3 Social ties	51	● in-vivo		8	
		○ caring about others		2	
		● CONTACT TO INTERNATIONALS	● differences to Dutch	2	
			● friends and	8	
			● language	2	
			● similarities	1	
		● work environment	1		

		● CONTACT TO LOCALS	● difficulties	7
			● friends	3
			● importance	15
			● lack	4
			● relationship	2
		● CULTURAL DIFFERENCES	● family	5
			● food	2
			● friendship	2
			● hospitality	6
			● language	1
			● personal culture	16
			● religion	1
		● DUTCH CULTURE	● general	7
			● food	6
			● hospitality	8
			● neighbours	2
			● socialising	19
			● values	9
			● view on refugees	1
			● in-vivo	2
		● FRIENDS	● definition	8
			● Dutch	2
			● internationals	4
			● meeting	2
			● no time	4
		● klasgenoten		2
		● relationship		2
		● volunteering		1
Summary	5	● INTEGRATING	● in-vivo	1
			● initiative	2
			● issues	11
			● ways to	6
			● willingness	1
Language	4	● LANGUAGE	● integrating	21
			● language course	1
			● taalcafé	5
			● in-vivo	2
Other	16	● in-vivo		2
		● dealing with refugees		1
		● descriptive		14
		○ fragmentation		1
		● GOVERNMENT	● General	7
			● Support	1
		● Groningen as city		12
		● learning cycle		1
		● life as refugee		1
		● Living environment		14
		● other cities		10
		● VIEWS ON REFUGEES	● general	2
			● social bubble	1

			• stereotypes	1
		○ religion		14