Refugees’ Experiences Across A Life Span

A qualitative study of perceived resources and demands among Iranian refugees in Norway

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the experiences of Iranian refugees across their life span in Norway. More specifically, the aim was to identify what resources and demands were encountered in each period of the asylum seeking, the resettlement, and the present life of Iranian refugees and how participants perceived and experienced these resources and demands. A qualitative approach, was used to capture in detail the life experiences of individuals. Nine Iranian refugees coming to Norway as asylum seekers or ‘resettlement refugees’ were interviewed with semi-structured interviews. They were recruited by snowball sampling and had stayed between seven to 21 years in Norway at the time of the interview. Results show that this group of Iranian refugees experienced demands regarding the location of the reception centre, lack of meaningful day-to-day activity, legal status insecurity, and lack of safety in their asylum seeking period. Moreover, they perceived social support as a helpful resource during this period of time. Further findings show that Iranian refugees encountered demands in relation to employment, mastering the language, and discrimination and prejudice in their resettlement to present life period. In addition, they identified social support and education as a helpful resource during this period of time. Findings indicate the importance of examining the post-migration life experiences of forced migrants in the host societies.
INTRODUCTION

Increases in conflict since the end of the Second World War have resulted in escalating numbers of people being displaced from their homes (Silove, 2004). Recent estimates place the number of refugees worldwide at approximately 16 million, and in addition to 647,200 asylum seekers. Moreover, 21 million people are displaced within the boundaries of their homelands (UNHCR, 2007). Most of these refugees and asylum seekers have fled their homes because of fear of persecution for their beliefs, politics, or ethnicity (Williams & Berry, 1991), or war and famine (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001), in which they experienced significant physical and psychological injuries.

It has been recognized that relocation to the new society brings about additional challenges into forced migrants life (Colic-Peisker & Walker, 2003; Khawaja, White, Schweitzer & Greenslade, 2008; Miller, Worthington, Muzurovic, Tipping & Goldman, 2002; Ryan, Dooley & Benson, 2008a). However, much of the research that has been carried out among refugee populations has been influenced by a trauma-based psychiatric epidemiological perspective (Miller, Kulkarni & Kushner, 2006). This approach focuses primarily on assessing the prevalence of psychiatric symptomatology, specifically, PTSD and to a lesser extent, other mental health concerns, such as depression (Fazel, Wheeler & Danesh, 2005). While traumatic events may have a significant influence on psychological well-being of forced migrants, there is a growing recognition among researchers that such events need to be considered in the context of post-migration experiences. For example, Miller et al’s (2002) study suggested that social isolation, the loss of social and occupational roles, the loss of environmental mastery, and the loss of material and financial resources are the key challenges faced by Bosnian refugees in Chicago. However, only a handful of studies have examined the nature of post-migration demands and their impact on forced migrants psychological well-being (Khawaja et al., 2008; Pernic & Brook, 1996; Ryan et al., 2008b). Furthermore, less attention have been devoted to identify factors which are protective of psychological well-being of refugees in post-migration phase. Moreover, there is a significant gap in literature in examining the ongoing experiences of refugees across their life span in the host societies. The present study
addressed this empirical gap by examining the experiences of Iranian refugees across their life span in Norway. More specifically, this study aimed to identify what resources and demands were encountered in each period of the asylum seeking, the resettlement, and the present life of Iranian refugees and how participants perceived and experienced these resources and demands. Semi-structured interviews were used in order to allow participants to identify salient aspects of their experiences in the host society.

Before continuing, is necessary to make a distinction between asylum seekers, refugees, and forced migrants for better conceptual clarity. An asylum seeker is a person who on his or her own initiative, and without prior notification, asks the authorities for protection and recognition as a refugee. The person is called an asylum seeker until a decision has been made on the application. In the legal sense, the term “refugee” applies to those persons who have been granted asylum, protection or residence on humanitarian grounds (UDI, 2008). Forced migrants “are distinguished from voluntary ones by the greater level of push versus pull factors that determine their decision to migrate” (Ryan et al., 2008b, p. 37). The term forced migrant is used here to refer to both asylum seekers and refugees. The structure of the present study goes as followed: After reviewing theoretical approaches to the study of adaptation, I will outline Ryan et al’s (2008a) model which seems most suitable for the present investigation of refugees. In addition, I will briefly review the previous studies in the asylum seeking period, and the resettlement to present life period of refugees. In second step, I will provide the details of the participants, the semi-structured interviews, and the data analysis of the current study. In a next step, I will present the study’s results and discussion within the two stages of the asylum seeking period, and the resettlement to present life period in a common section. In the last section, I will finish this study with some conclusive remarks and recommendations.

**Theoretical approaches to the study of adaptation**

Migrant adaptation is an highly complex phenomenon which has been formulated from different perspectives including anthropology, sociology and psychology. According to Berry (2005), adaptation refers to the process of change that occurs among individuals or groups to
manage the demands of the social context. Searle and Ward (1990) have argued that despite the emerging theoretical models and empirical studies of cross-cultural transition among immigrants, sojourners and refugees, it is not clear which factors influence adaptation. In order to understand which factors contribute to adaptation, Searle and Ward (1990) have proposed a distinction between psychological and sociocultural adaptation. While psychological adaptation refers to emotional well-being and satisfaction, sociocultural adaptation concerns the acquisition of the culturally appropriate skills needed to function effectively in the new cultural context. This distinction reflects two major theoretical approaches in studying migrant acculturation and adaptation: stress and coping framework (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and culture learning (e.g., Furnham & Bochner, 1982).

Situated in the stress and coping framework (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), psychological adaptation emphasizes affective aspect of acculturation. Berry's (1997) acculturation framework is the most dominant model in this tradition which views cross-cultural transition as a stressful experience. He uses the term acculturative stress to describe the negative or disruptive experiences that can arise from the acculturation process. Within Berry's (1997) acculturation framework, the process of migrant adaptation are influenced by both societal variables (e.g., characteristics of society of origin and society of settlement) and individual variables (e.g., personality and sociodemographic characteristics) during pre- and post-migratory phases.

Sociocultural adaptation that is based on the culture learning framework highlights the behavioral aspects of acculturative experience. Furnham and Bochner's (1982) study on social difficulty of international students in the United Kingdom exemplify the culture learning tradition (as cited in Ward, 2001). The culture learning framework assumes that adaptation problems occur due to migrant's skill deficits with managing daily social interactions. According to this model, the adaptation process depends on both situational factors such as intercultural contact and cultural distance, and personal variables such as personality characteristics and motivational factors or expectations (Masgoret & Ward, 2006).

According to Ward and Kennedy (1999), analyses of the factors affecting adaptation reveal
generally consistent patterns: psychological adaptation, defined in terms of well-being or mood states (e.g., depression, anxiety, and tension), is predicted by personality, life changes, social support and coping strategies. Searle and Ward (1990) showed that extroversion, lower life events, and satisfaction with host national relations facilitated psychological adaptation in Malaysian and Singaporean students in New Zealand. On the other hand, external locus of control, greater incidence of life changes and homesickness associated with more psychological difficulties among New Zealand’s sojourner students (Ward & Kennedy, 1993). In contrast, sociocultural adaptation, defined in terms of social difficulty, is predicted by cultural knowledge, cultural distance, length of residence in the host society, amount of contact with the majority and language fluency (Ward & Kennedy, 1999).

After reviewing the indicated theoretical approaches to the study of adaptation, I argue that the concept of psychological adaptation fit more to purpose of my study rather than sociocultural adaptation. This is because the aim of my study is to analyze the impact of resources and demands on individuals. A major limitation of sociocultural approach is that it has been predominantly focused on the factors which facilitate or limit the effective interactions in a new cultural environment. As Ataca and Berry (2002) argued that another weakness of this approach is that it has been mainly studied among sojourners (e.g., international students, diplomats and international business workers). The acculturation framework provides a broad view of the diverse factors involved in the migrant’s adaptation process. It also associates the psychological adaptation of migrants to the wider social and cultural contexts of their societies of origin and settlement. However, this theoretical model has been also criticized for several reasons. For example, Ryan et al. (2008a) argued that the acculturation framework failed to conceptualize adequately the whole range of demands that migrants encounter during their adaptation process. It also neglects the nature of demands such as legal status insecurity or lack of meaningful day-to-day activity among asylum seekers in Western countries. Lazarus (1997) contends that Berry’s framework overstates the role of acculturative demands in the process of migrant adaptation (as cited in Ryan et al., 2008a). Therefore, I choose Ryan et al’s (2008a) resource-based model of migrant adaptation which seems most suitable for the present investigation of refugees.
A resource-based model of migrant adaptation

In the next section, I will review Ryan et al’s (2008a) model. It is important because I will use it as a framework in this thesis by interviewing refugees. When individuals relocate to a new sociocultural environment they have to make adjustments in how they meet their needs and pursue their personal goals. In addition, migrants may have to manage demands encountered in the new environment. The satisfaction of the needs, pursuing the goals and managing the demands depends on access to a range of resources. Furthermore, relocating to the new society inevitably brings about changes on the individual’s resource pool. According to Ryan et al. (2008a), the study of migrant adaptation is an examination of factors which assist or limit access to resources. They labelled their theoretical approach as a resource-based model of migrant adaptation which mainly encompasses experiences of forced migrants in Western countries. Migrant adaptation is thus defined as “the process through which individuals seek to satisfy their needs, pursue their goals and manage demands encountered after relocating to a new society” (Ryan et al., 2008a, p. 7).

Adaptation to the host environment presents the individual with a series of potentially stressful demands. The capacity to manage these demands depends on access to a range of resources. Resources are the key component of migrant adaptation process in Ryan et al’s (2008a) model and they are divided in four categories: (1) personal resources (e.g., mental and physical health); (2) material resources (e.g., paid employment); (3) social resources (e.g., social support) and (4) cultural resources (e.g., education). Although these resources can be divided into different categories, they influence each other considerably.

In the model, demands can be originated from individual’s needs or goals and external or unpredictable events and may cause stress. The stressful demands encountered by forced migrants are conceptualized as: (1) personal demands (e.g., lack of physical and mental health); (2) material demands (e.g., financial strain); (3) social demands (e.g., social isolation) and (4) cultural demands (e.g., perceived discrimination) (Ryan et al., 2008b).

Changes in the resource pool which can be conceived in terms of the level of available resources and of their relevance to the individual’s needs, goals, and demands, lead to resource
loss and resource gain. “Gains refer to increases in the amount of resources already present in a resource pool, as well as the acquisition of new resources. Resource losses refer both to decreases in levels and to outright losses of specific types of resources” (Ryan et al., 2008a, p. 10). According to the model, a thorough comprehension of the migrant adaptation process presupposes an accurate analysis of the resource pool of the individuals during the different stages of the pre-migration, migration (or flight) and post-migration. Since this study focuses predominantly on post-migration’s experience of individuals, I will limit this analysis to resource loss and gain in post-migration phase.

Ryan et al. (2008a) argue that in order to attain a successful adaptation, refugees in the post-migration phase should retrieve the lost resources and gain those which are more appropriate in their new environment. However, resettlement experiences of refugees come along with the additional loss especially in terms of cultural resources. This can happen because either their cultural resources are not anymore considered valuable or they are not recognized by different policies in the new environment.

Entering the process of resettlement with a low level of resources results forced migrants to adapt poorly to the new environment and exposes them to future loss of resources. Migrants whom have experienced torture or trauma, the elderly, unaccompanied minor asylum seekers, single mothers and persons from culturally distant societies are likely to adapt poorly in the new society. This low level of resources combined with stressful environment leads individuals to experience distress. Conversely, migrant groups with a higher level of resources are less likely to undergo resource loss. Young people, migrants with a good physical and mental health, and those who have access to financial resources are likely to have higher levels of resources. Furthermore, negative mental health can occur if either the host society constraints the existing resources of individuals or limit their opportunities of resource gain.

Unlike the sociocultural and psychological model of adaptation, the resource-based model of adaptation of Ryan et al. (2008a) offers a more comprehensive conceptualization of factors which limit or help forced migrants to adapt into the new society. In particular, the main advantage of this model is that it encompasses refugees ‘life experiences over the period of
threat in the home country, the time of flight and asylum, and final resettlement in the host countries. On the other hand, it seems that Ryan et al’s (2008a) model is too general. I argue that it seems ambitious to examine the individual’s resources, needs, goals and demands across their life span. Therefore, I will mainly investigate what resources and demands were encountered in the post-migration phase among refugees. More specifically, I cover experiences of refugees in the three stages of the asylum seeking, the resettlement and present life in the host country.

**Previous studies in the asylum seeking period**

The body of literature on persons who enter the asylum process is still small in comparison to the vast literature on refugee population in Western countries. Surprisingly, few qualitative studies have been conducted in the asylum seeking period. Among existing literature on asylum seekers, a number of studies have compared asylum seeker samples with samples of other immigrants (Gerritsen et al., 2006; Hondius, van Willigen, Kleijn & van der Ploeg, 2000; Ryan et al., 2008b; Silove, Steel, McGorry & Mohan, 1998; Steel et al., 2006; Werkuyten & Nekuee, 1999). Two separate Australian studies both reported stress to be higher in asylum seekers compared with those with refugee status (Silove et al., 1998; Steel et al., 2006), while three European studies also found insecure immigration status to be a significant risk factor for distress (Gerritsen et al., 2006; Hondius et al., 2000; Werkuyten & Nekuee, 1999). Recently, Ryan et al. (2008b) reported a longitudinal study in which those asylum seekers who granted refugee status between the study phases were the only group to show significant reductions in distress levels. These findings suggest that legal status insecurity is an additional demand which asylum seekers face in their host societies rather than refugees.

Legal status insecurity is a demand which can be experienced for several years, due to the strict asylum policy in many Western countries. To my knowledge, the study of Laban, Gernaat, Komproe, Schreuders & de Jong (2004) is the only one which investigated the negative consequences of the prolonged asylum procedure. They showed that Iraqi asylum seekers who had been in asylum procedure more than two years in the Netherlands had significantly higher overall prevalence of psychiatric disorder than those who had been in the country within six months. They further mentioned that a longer stay in the Netherlands was
associated with anxiety, depressive, and somatoform disorders.

Despite the limited number of studies which indicate that asylum seekers experience distress in the host countries, there are only few studies which examined the causes of distress among asylum seekers (Laban, Gernaat, Kompore, van der Tweel & de Jong., 2005; Ryan et al., 2008b; Silove et al., 1998). Silove et al. (1998) designed and administered a measure of post-migration living difficulties. On three of the instrument’s five factors asylum seekers reported significantly higher levels of concerns than refugees. These related to the following: (1) the refugee determination process (i.e., concerns regarding interviews with immigration officials and fear of deportation); (2) access to health care and welfare services; and (3) concerns regarding family members back home and difficulties in visiting their home country. Similar findings were observed in Laban et al. (2005) who reported that Iraqi asylum seekers’ worries related to asylum procedure, absence of work, and family related issues have been significantly linked with psychiatric disorders. Furthermore, Ryan et al. (2008b) examined predictors of distress among asylum seekers in Ireland. They found that female gender, an insecure legal status, separation from the children, discrimination, and post migration stress appeared to have a significant relationship with distress. However, they reported that social support and the presence of a partner acted as a protective factors among asylum seekers.

To my knowledge, there are only few qualitative studies which have been investigated demands of asylum seekers. Van Dijk et al. (2001) interviewed 22 asylum seekers in the Netherlands. They stated that “puzzling procedures, fear of future, empty existence, loss of supportive networks, discrimination, and turned into an object” were major concerns of asylum seekers (as cited in Laban et al., 2005, p. 830). Similarly, De Jonghe et al. (2004) interviewed 75 asylum seekers in the Netherlands. They reported that “awaiting a status, lack of privacy, being separated from family and friends, lack of useful daily occupation, and shared sanitary blocks” were major demands experienced by asylum seekers (as cited in Laban et al., 2005, p. 829). Moreover, in a pilot study, Silove et al. (2002) interviewing 33 East Timorese asylum seekers in Australia, found that they faced with prolonged insecurity, poor access to services, separation from the family, and fear of deportation. Likewise, Aunaas in her master thesis (2000) explored daily difficulties of seven asylum seekers in Norway. She
reported that discrimination and prejudice, social isolation, forced passivity, lack of knowledge of the language, sleeping impediments, loss of identity, and lack of control over life were major concerns of asylum seekers.

**Previous studies in the resettlement to present life period**

This section contains a short presentation of resources and demands in relation to employment, host language fluency, discrimination, and social support among refugees in the resettlement to present life period.

Problems in gaining employment can provide an additional demand among refugees. A number of studies found some evidence that unemployment is linked with higher levels of distress (Beiser, Johnson & Turner, 1993; Chung & Kagawa-Singer, 1993; Lie, 2002), whilst a number of cross-sectional studies highlighted the protective role of employment for refugees (Bhui et al., 2006; Pernice & Brook, 1996; Schweitzer, Melville, steel & Lacherez., 2006). In longitudinal study of South East Asian refugees in Canada, Beiser & Hou (2001) found that refugees experienced high rates of unemployment in the early years of resettlement which is a potent risk factor for depression. They further mentioned that refugees were more likely to obtain employment after ten years living in Canada. Furthermore, in a qualitative study of Bosnian refugees in Australia Colic-Peisker & Walker (2003) found that those refugees who their previous occupational skills were not recognized and not willing to accept low-status jobs seemed to suffer from social isolation and depression. On the other hand, those refugees who could regain their previous occupational status were more likely to integrate successfully into the host society. Although further research is needed to examine the psychological implications of employment for refugees, it does seem that success in obtaining a job is protective of psychological well-being.

Lack of social resources can result in loneliness and social isolation among refugees. Miller et al. (2002) interviewed 28 adult Bosnian refugees in Chicago. They report that the majority of their participants suffered from social isolation and loneliness in exile, in particular older refugees who lost their spouses during war. They assumed that lack of Bosnian community in Chicago and separation from family might cause refugees to experience social isolation and
loneliness. Similarly, Khawaja et al. (2008) stated that Sudanese refugees experienced social isolation and loneliness in Australia due to their limited knowledge of English and lack of social support networks. A number of studies have reported the protective role of social support against distress among refugees (Birman & Tran, 2008; Ghazinour, Richter & Eisemann, 2003; Schweitzer et al., 2006). Lie (2002) found evidence for a significant negative association between having friends and distress. Miller et al. (2002) described that family members were perceived by many refugees as a main source of emotional and instrumental support. Furthermore, a number of studies reported that the social support from like-ethnic networks reduce the distress among refugees (Beiser, 2006; Birman & Tran, 2008; Schweitzer et al., 2006). Similarly, in a qualitative study of Bosnian refugees in UK Djuretic, Crawford & Weaver (2007) suggested that establishment of an intra-ethnic social network can be protective in similar ways to presence of family in providing a means of maintaining culture and re-connection with cultural identity. Moreover, Simich et al. (2003) found that receiving social support from family, friends and members of like-ethnic community is perceived significantly important for newly arrived refugees in Canada. They further reasoned that “affirmational support provides not only emotional coping assistance for refugees but also a cultural bridge in adaption through shared experience” (p. 886). The overall evidence from studies of refugees suggests that social resources are protective of psychological well-being while a lack of them may lead to social isolation and loneliness.

Host language fluency is widely investigated among refugees. Empirical research of language fluency has yielded conflicting results. Some studies reported that lack of language fluency is associated with psychological distress (Chung & Kagawana-Singer, 1995; Ward et al., 2001), while others found no evidence for an association between language proficiency and distress (Ager, Malcolm, Sadollah & O'May., 2002; Westermeyer, Neider & Callies., 1989). In order to shed light on literature’s inconsistency, Beiser & Hou (2001) in a longitudinal study showed that the salience of language fluency is time dependent among refugees. They found that English proficiency had no relationship with unemployment and depression among refugees who had resided in Canada for two years or less. However, by the end of the first decade in Canada, English proficiency was significantly associated with both depression and employment, in particular for refugee women. Moreover, Miller et al. (2002) found that
having considerable difficulty in learning English was the most indicated theme by the majority of refugees, an obstacle which limited their access to obtain further education and adequate employment. They argued that suffering from war trauma and depression impeded the acquisition of the host language among the majority of their participants. In addition, they reported that the language courses were not designed to meet the needs of this group of refugees with impaired memory and diminished concentration. The empirical evidence reviewed here suggests that host language proficiency is protective of psychological well-being among refugees.

Refugees may also find themselves subjected to discrimination, prejudices and negative stereotypes in their host societies. Pernice and Brook (1996) found that discrimination experienced in daily life was the key post-migration factor associated with high distress levels among Southeast Asian refugees in New Zealand. Noh, Beiser, Kasper, Hou & Rummens (1999) found that refugees who had experienced discrimination had higher depression levels than those with no such experiences. Moreover, Werkuyten & Nekuee (1999) demonstrated that Iranian refugees who perceived discrimination had lower subjective well-being. They reasoned that perceiving discrimination was associated with higher level of ethnic identification which led to lower sense of mastery in the host society and consequently greater awareness of being defined as an outsider. Furthermore, in a qualitative study Fangen (2006) found that Somalian refugees perceived discrimination in their meeting with various government officials and in the housing and labor market in Norway. She further mentioned that for resourceful Somalis these treatments acted as a main barrier to integration into the host society and resulted in resignation and anger. Similarly, Khawaja et al. (2008) reported that Sudanese refugees perceived discrimination in their encounters with police and in the labor market in Australia.

Reviewing literature in the resettlement to present life period reveals that the majority of studies have been mainly relied on quantitative methodologies. Although such studies have contributed to identify post-migration demands and resources and their effects on psychological well-being of refugees, for example Miller et al. (2002) stated that they fail to capture the diverse experiences of refugees in the host societies. Moreover, Miller et al. (2002)
argued that “quantitative methods such as questionnaires rely on a priori assumptions about the range of relevant variables to be assessed, assumptions that may be problematic in understudied areas which relatively little is known” (p. 343). Since qualitative methods tend to make fewer a priori assumptions, they may help better understand post-migration related resources and demands and the varied ways in which they are perceived and experienced (Khawaja et al., 2008; Ryan et al., 2008a). Therefore, they pointed to the need of in-depth interviews to further explore the experiences of refugees across their life span.

**Objectives of the study**

An emerging field of psychological research is concerned with the experiences of forced migrants in Western countries. However, the body of research that has been conducted among forced migrants living in Western countries is marked by several limitations. First, most of the research carried on the experiences of forced migrants have largely examined pre-migration trauma and its psychiatric disorders. Our knowledge about the nature and impact of post-migration experiences of forced migrants is not adequate. Second, many national groups are under-represented or completely absent from the literature. Iranian refugees are one of these groups. Third, the vast majority of forced migrants studies have focused on populations with refugee status. Therefore, our knowledge about the asylum seeking experiences of forced migrants, who have first applied for asylum without official refugee status in Western countries is very limited. We also don't know about the nature and psychological impact of demands or resources faced by forced migrants in the societies where they seek refuge. Finally, utilizing qualitative methods have largely been absent from the forced migrant’s literature.

The present study was meant to address some of the gaps and limitations in the forced migrants literature. The purpose of this study, as mentioned, is to explore the experiences of Iranian refugees across their life span in Norway. More specifically, the study has the following research questions: What are the resources and demands encountered in each period of the asylum seeking, the resettlement, and the present life of Iranian refugees; and How participants perceived and experienced these resources and demands.
METHOD

The present study investigated the ongoing experiences of Iranian refugees across their life span in Norway. It used semi-structured interviewing and nine in-depth interviews are reported here. This approach was adopted in order to capture in detail how Iranian refugees perceived and made sense of different domains of their life experiences in Norway.

Participants

To explore my research questions, I have chosen a particular group of participants who are Iranian refugees. As I mentioned earlier, Iranian refugees are under-represented in the literature on forced migrants. Moreover, conducting interviews in their own native language-Persian and the first language of myself- allowed me to understand the salience of their life experiences in Norway. Participants had to meet certain criteria for inclusion in the present study. First, they have to speak fluent Persian. Second, they had to arrive in Norway under the asylum framework or as a ‘resettlement refugees’. Third, they should have resided in Norway at least for five years or more in order to secure that they had adequately experienced all the three phases of the present study.

Recruiting participants turned out to be difficult. Accessing to the contact addresses of refugees from Iran by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) was time consuming and bureaucratically challenging. Therefore, the author was forced to rely on snowball sampling. Attempts were made to approach Iranian refugees through their Iranian acquaintances and NGOs who are working with Iranian refugees in Oslo. An information letter to participate in the study was made and distributed to these contacts. Recruiting refugees through NGOs was dropped later, due to lack of support and interest. Regarding the recruitment of participants through Iranian acquaintances two major difficulties were encountered. First, the author had to wait a substantial amount of time until the prospective participants contacted her. Second, even though the prospective participants contacted the author, it was not clear whether this person would actively participate in this study. This was
due to the fact that there was a latent mistrust among some participants. In approaching prospective participants for this study, the researcher also had to stress the scientific nature of the research and reveal the summarized content of the interview guide. It was also important to guarantee anonymity and protection of privacy in order to attract participants into the study.

Little control over the demographic spread of the sample could be achieved as a consequence of snowball sampling (e.g., educational background, gender, and social class). However, an effort was made to cover participants across the age-span. Furthermore, approximately equal number of participants in relation to the duration of stay in Norway (e.g., long-term residents and short-term residents) were recruited.

Eleven participants fulfilled the mentioned criteria. Of these, two female participants refused to take part in the study one day before the interview’s appointment. The final sample consisted of nine (seven men and two female) refugees and they are referred to as Arman, Babak, Kiarash, Koosha, Roozbeh, Arash, Kamran, Donya and Sanaz. However, when sensitive information comes about, I refrain from using the explicit name of the participants in order to guarantee their anonymity. The majority of participants had come to Norway as asylum seekers and two were ‘resettlement refugees’. Those who had come to Norway as asylum seekers had been in asylum procedure from two months to three years. Present age ranged from 28 to 63, and the participants’ age at the time of arrival in Norway ranged from 20 to 54. Six of the participants were married, two were single and one was with a steady partner. They had lived in Norway between 7 to 21 years at the time of the interview. The majority of participants had postgraduate degrees, two had bachelor degrees and two had high-school diplomas. The majority of participants were students in their home country and three had engaged in semiskilled employment. At the time of the interview, six participants were employed in full-time jobs in Norway, one in a part-time job, one was student and one was unemployed. Most participants reported that they were fluent in Norwegian, while two stated some difficulty in understanding and speaking Norwegian.

**Data collection**

After receiving the information letter, participants contacted the author. Appointments were
made and the author gave full and complete information about the research. Despite mentioning ethical considerations of the study in the information letter, the author found it significantly important to reassure the participants about these issues. It was made clear for participants who were met face-to-face or contacted by phone that participation in the study was voluntary and they had a right to withdraw from the study if they wished to do so. They were also assured that interviews were confidential and their anonymity would be protected. Furthermore, they were informed that the interview would be recorded on a micro cassette player, and would be transcribed by the author. It was further assured that all the recordings and the transcriptions would be destroyed after handing in the thesis.

Participants were asked about the completion of background information age, marital status, prior and post migration’s education, pre- and post-migration employment, and language proficiency prior to the interview. Each participant was also asked to suggest a convenient time and suitable location for the interview. Five chose to be interviewed in their work offices, two preferred to meet in their own homes and one preferred to be interviewed in the author’s house.

All interviews were carried out by the author and lasted between one to two and a half hours. Before each interview, the participant was given an opportunity to raise any questions he or she had regarding the interview. However, the majority of participants were more eager to know about the author and her intentions of doing this study. Since this was a great chance to develop a trust with interviewees, the author didn't rush to start the interview and was engaged in various informal conversations with them. Finally, they were asked to sign the consent form. All interviews were conducted in Persian, recorded, transcribed verbatim and translated into English. The study was approved by the Norwegian Data Inspectorate and was performed in accordance with their suggestions.

**Interviews**

This study aimed to capture in detail how Iranian refugees perceived and made sense of different domains of their life experiences in Norway. In order to obtain a rich and detailed description of participants a semi-structured interview format was used. “This form of
interviewing allows the researcher and participant to engage in a dialog whereby initial questions are modified in the light of the participants’ responses and the investigator is able to probe interesting and important areas which arise”(Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 57). Therefore, participants are viewed as experiential experts and any novel areas of inquiry they open up are followed (Smith, 2004).

An interview guide was designed to cover three domains of life experiences of refugees in Norway: the asylum seeking period, the resettlement period and the present life. In addition, they were briefly asked about their experiences connected to coming to Norway and their future plans. More specifically, the asylum seeking domain explored refugees’ life experiences in relation to the reception centers and the status determination process. Next, the resettlement stage captured their experiences in terms of financial resources, employment, language, acquisition education and social relations. The present life domain investigated refugees’ current status in Norway in relation to employment, personal relationships, language proficiency and cultural preferences. The questions were redrafted several times in order to become less complex and more explicit. The interview guide was first written in English and then translated into Persian by the author (see Appendix).

Interviewees were first asked general question to describe their life during each of the three domains. However, the interviewer was not strict in following the sequence on the interview guide. Questions were used to guide rather than dictate the course of the interview.

When participants opened up an interesting area minimal probes were used to assist them to continue such as “Can you tell me more about this?”; “Can you give me an example?”; “What do you think about this?”, and “how did you feel about that?”(Smith & Osborn, 2008). Sometimes, interviewees were silent for moments while answering the question. For some this occurred because they couldn't precisely remember the thoughts or the feelings in relation to the questions. Others might find it uncomfortable to answer particular questions. In the first occasion, they were given time to reflect more on their thoughts. In the second situation, the interviewer either didn't follow the question or asked it again in a different way depending upon how far the area was uncomfortable for the participants. It is noteworthy to mention that
it was beneficial to conduct interviews in the participants’ native language. They could use a variety of expressions and words to describe different aspects of their life experiences in Norway. Therefore, the danger of misunderstanding caused by language between the author and participants was very low.

Analysis

Analysis of the interviews were inspired by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in order to explore the participants view of their life experiences in the host country. IPA is concerned with trying to understand lived experience and how participants themselves make sense of these experiences. Therefore it is centrally concerned with the meanings which those experiences hold for the participants (Smith & Osborn, 2008). In addition, “IPA is phenomenological since it attempts to explore personal experience and is concerned with an individual’s personal perception or account of an object or event, as opposed to an attempt to produce an objective statement of the object or event itself” (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p.53). However, it is also interpretative, since in order to get close to the participants personal world a researcher needs to engage in an interpretative activity.

Stages used throughout the analysis of this study were as follows: The transcript of each interview was thoroughly read several times and key issues were discovered in each interview. Afterwards, each transcript was read again to transform the initial notes into more specific themes which were considered to be expressions of the salient experiences and concerns of the participants. The second stage of analysis involved identifying shared themes across the interviews. It involved looking at the apparently different themes across transcripts and discovering broad categories that could explain them. Moreover, emergent themes were identified by noting similarities and differences in the content of the statements that were categorized throughout the analysis. As the clustering of themes emerged, it was ensured that whether the integrity of what the participant said has been preserved. It is necessary to mention that this analysis was done without taking research questions into consideration. The third stage consisted of further reducing the data by eliminating those themes which neither fit well in the emerging structure nor were very rich in evidence within the transcript. Afterwards, the remaining clusters were given a name which could capture the conceptual
nature of the themes. It is noteworthy to mention that despite of covering the three stages of life experiences of refugees in the interviews, data were analysed within the two stages of the asylum seeking period, and the resettlement to present life period. This decision has been made since emergent themes in resettlement and present life period were very much interconnected. This division is followed up in the presentation of the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participants were asked to talk as widely as possible about their experiences across their life span in Norway. Results are represented within the two stages of the asylum seeking period, and the resettlement to present life period. In the asylum seeking period, the participant’s accounts clustered around five superordinate themes: the location of the reception center; lack of meaningful day-to-day activity; legal status insecurity; lack of safety; and social support. Within resettlement to present life period also five superordinate themes were identified: employment; mastering the language; discrimination and prejudice; education; and social support. Moreover, in order to link participants experiences with a broader theoretical and empirical understanding I have chosen to integrate the results and discussion in a common section.

Asylum seeking period

The location of the reception center
Upon arrival to Norway, asylum seekers were sent to the reception centers. They may live there while their application is being processed and until they are settled in a municipality, or until the application is rejected. For a vast majority of participants, arriving in the reception center was a shocking experience. They all reported that these centers were located in isolated areas such as close to mountains, on an island or surrounded by hills. Others explained that due to the lack of awareness of their reception center’s location they had no opportunity to
prepare themselves psychologically. Therefore, some participants who came mainly from large cities, found it difficult to adjust to the living conditions in the reception centers. Sanaz’s account captured much of this concern:

*It was difficult. For example, when you come from a large city, suddenly, without telling you where you are going to..., without talking to you or giving you the readiness, they decide your place of living themselves that where you should be. Then you go somewhere that it is nowhere, there is nothing there, you can not communicate with anyone unless the asylum seekers who are living there (...). It is snow as far as the eye can see, you hear the wolf’s howling during the night, or you see a wolf behind the window of your room. It was very frightening, it was terrifying.*

Adjusting to the living conditions in the reception centres have been even more difficult for asylum seekers who enjoyed a high pre-migration standard of living. One participant explained:

*(..) they sent me from temporary camp to the ship, foreigners called it the zoo.
'I am sorry, I didn't understand, was there a camp?*

*Yes the ship was the camp (...). I was there two or three weeks. Then I told them, I can't stay here, send me somewhere else, because the room was so small, I was not used to live in the ship. I was living in the big house in Iran which had a big garden, then, here, one room in the basement of the ship, I had one small circle window, and my neighbors were fishes, it was under the sea. I told them I won't stay here, it was so horrible that I couldn't stay there.*

Moreover, some participants described how the location of the reception centers limited their opportunities for communication with the Norwegian society. The awareness of lack of contact with Norwegians was even more negative for young asylum seekers as Roozbeh explained:

*The most negative thing that I remember and affected me was that the city, the environment didn't give us the opportunity to communicate with the people who were in my age, from their own society (...). We needed to know that what their young people are doing, if we couldn't learn it in that period then when could we learn it? But, we were living in our world and they were living in their own world.*
In addition, Koosha reported that living in the mountains caused him to spend most of his time with other asylum seekers in the reception centre and prompted him to withdraw from social contact with Norwegians. This can be even more acute among elderly asylum seekers as Donya described:
I didn’t go outside (..), because the route had downhills, mountains and hills and returning home was difficult. I didn't go out.

Lack of contact with the main Norwegian society brought about other negative consequences, as indicated by Kamran:
We didn't take Norwegian course seriously, because we didn't have contact with the Norwegian society, because we were living in the mountains and there was not any Norwegian around us and we didn't see the necessity of learning Norwegian, studying, working.

It seems like the location of the reception center significantly impacted asylum seeker’s life. It may give them a sense that they have no control over their life, complicating their efforts in establishing a new life in the host country, consequently driving them to social isolation.

**Lack of meaningful day-to-day activity**
Asylum-seekers have to stay within the reception centers while waiting for a decision on their asylum application. During this time, they are not able to continue the activities which used to fill their daily schedule in their home country. Therefore, they all reported that a useful way of spending the day was often missing in their life. They explained that the only regular activity in the reception center was the Norwegian language course which they perceived as unstructured and not fruitful. For some this opportunity was not even accessible for a period of time.
Sanaz: *It took long, they didn't immediately send me to the language course, because I was at an age that I didn't fit to any group, there were no classes that could give me a place (..). I had to walk around in a building from the morning until the evening, just this. It was very bad, this was one the worst thing that I have ever experienced.*
Living in a reception centre for years without the possibility of having meaningful activities means that one is left alone with one’s own thoughts and worries. It also implies that one has too much time in his or her hands. Caught between the uncertainty and too much time, one can imagine asylum seekers stuck in their rooms- thinking and worrying about their situation. Some participants reported fooling around and laughing to reduce these feelings while others were preoccupied with being with friends and talking to them. One participant explained that he used drugs to distract himself from the negative emotions and thoughts:  

*I was mostly high in the camp. I was smoking joints from the morning until the evening. I didn't feel anything, believe me, it was one guy who was constantly giving us joints that we were smoking the whole day (...). I am telling you that my life in the camp was really weird, can you believe that I don't remember at all what I was doing there? I was listening to the music in the room and I was high. I didn't feel much.*

A limited participation in meaningful activities also brought about passivity into asylum seeker lives. For a vast majority of participants passivity was a dominant domain of their life in the reception centres, which becomes apparent in Koosha’s account:  

*In fact, our activity was gradually decreasing, because one of the issue in that period was the waiting condition until you could get your answer. Simultaneously the fact that people usually have the tendency to laziness or you need some motivations that could bring you back to the normal life. When you don't need to wake up early in the morning and go to sleep early in the evening, you gradually lose the sense when it is day and when it is night.*

In spite of the passive environment within these centers, some participants reported that they were able to engage themselves in meaningful activities and become active. Sanaz described that she got involved in one committee in the reception center which provided other asylum seekers with various entertainments.

However, these descriptions are mainly characterized by a sort of regret. It seems that forced passivity wasted away important years of their lives in the host country. It may also overshadow the lives of asylum seekers even years after they have left the reception centers as
indicated by following statement of Koosha:

(..) If there was a better Norwegian course and environment, I wouldn't aimlessly waste at least five or six years of my life, I would be more ahead than what I am now, my life would pass much easier, economically and emotionally.

**Legal status insecurity**

Asylum seekers may wait for an undetermined period of time while their asylum application is being processed. Therefore, they face the insecurity of not knowing whether they will be allowed to remain in their host country. The majority of participants described that they experienced prolonged periods of uncertainty. For some there was uncertainty regarding their family and friends left behind in the home country. For others this uncertainty is linked to their future life.

*Kamran: This period was really difficult because you didn't know if you can get a positive response or not. I didn't know if I can stay here or if I should leave, I didn't know what I want to do in my life (..). The most difficult thing was that you were in some sort of limbo.*

The negative psychological effects of this uncertainty are numerous. Some reported that they didn't have calmness during their asylum-seeking procedure. Sanaz explained that she felt insecure during this period of time.

*It is like limbo, you don't know anything, you don't know what will happen tomorrow, then definitely you don't feel secure when you don't know what will happen to you tomorrow, you don't have any psychological safety.*

Sanaz further explained that she lost control over her life due to this uncertainty.

*You don't ever have any stable thing in your life, everything goes up and down, your decisions, your plans, everything of you will be disarranged.*

Uncertainty combines with a lack of physical health can be even more stressful among elderly asylum seekers as Donya described:

*I didn't have a good feeling at all, my mental state was really bad, I was physically ill. Meanwhile, I went to the doctor and he told me that I should have a surgery, then I was*
worried, if the police wouldn't respond to us, if they don't accept us staying here. I was worried sick.

Legal status insecurity also brought about the constant fear of deportation into asylum seeker’s life. For one participant this fear was present because her daughter already had delayed her education for three years in Iran. The fear of deportation is more stressful for those who spent a large amount of material resources to arrive in the host country as articulated by Kamran: (...) my parents spent lots of money for me, this concerned me a lot.

Legal status insecurity had more negative consequences for those who had been in the asylum procedure for several years. Two participants reported that being a long time in the asylum procedure caused them to fall behind from their life goals and consequently dramatically alter their life’s destination. One participant who was working as a cleaning staff at the time of the interview described how the long procedure affected his chance to obtain a easier and more comfortable job.

*It was just this residence permit. If I could have it nine years ago, I could have done so many other things.*

[Like what?]

*Like driving, I just got a driving license this year. When you don’t have the residence permit, you are not allowed to have one.*

Sanaz articulated that since she was delayed by the long asylum procedure, she was forced to study a subject at the university which was against her initial interest.

*My goal in that period was to study, I really liked to study. I am studying now forcefully, perhaps it would have not happen in that period because I was really motivated and interested but it vanished. (...) I was studying law in Iran, and I really wanted to come here to study law. I had changed my whole life because of studying law, but after many years, you reach an age that you become a bit conservative, you become cowardly. Then I have reached the conclusion that I didn’t have the bravery of those past years anymore. I was forced to study something else instead of law, and this totally changes your life route.*
Legal status insecurity significantly affected the lives of the Iranian participants. It may lead them to feel stressed out and powerless. Those who experienced a long asylum process may lose their motivation to rebuild their life in the host country after several years that could have passed with less difficulty.

**Lack of Safety**

Within the reception centres, asylum seekers live with other asylum seekers who often have different nationalities and cultural backgrounds. For a vast majority of participants it was an unpleasant experience to live in reception centre with limited privacy. Some reported that they found living in there unsafe, because conflict often occurred between people.

*Arash: It was really bad there, very much. You know there were people from so many different nationalities, Somalian, Kurds, Arabs, African. It was also not safe, because people had conflict with each other.*

The lack of safety was even a more negative experience for the two female participants. Donya emphasized the distress she felt while struggling to keep her daughter’s safety in the reception centre.

*(..) I was worried sick, my daughter was young, the camp was crowded, full of men and young boys, I couldn't keep her in the room, she was in the corridor, I should go after her several times during the day. Sometimes I was telling her to come back to the room, she didn't always listen, I had to check her,- where she is, what she is doing.*

Sanaz reported that she feared going out of her room in the evening because her room was surrounded by rooms of desperate men from many different countries.

*(..) it was always one fear because.., one was that we were living in a place ...I mean we were three women. Our room was here and all around us were Romanian, Kurdish and other guys. You didn’t dare to go outside of your room after eleven p.m. I mean my mother was always sitting there and praying that .. you know they were constantly coming forth, with any reason, this was one of the fears.*

Sanaz further explained that this problem was not only caused by male residents of her
reception center, but also by indecent thoughts of employees who were working there. 

( .. ) each of them had misusing thoughts in every way, not only them, but also those who were working in the office there. Look, the camp is one of the dirtiest environments that you can think of.

It is likely that the lack of safety causes a sense of despair and helplessness in female asylum seekers. It can significantly affect their self-esteem, optimism and consequently prompted them to withdraw from applying any coping efforts even years after they have left the reception center as Sanaz accounted:

( .. ) It was like this: you feel kind of that you are contemptible, you are nothing, and this feeling would continue and the only thing that would remain is that you finally will give up to defend your rights there. Consequently, you will come to this conclusion that to show yourself contemptible, miserable and helpless because it will help you, because if you take a powerful stand, everyone, the people who are living with you or people who are working there, they treat you worse. ( .. ) Then you constantly strengthen this feeling inside yourself, more and more powerful, especially later on, when you are in this phase that you are coming out from there, you go to your house, you enter the society, it is like this that as much as you show yourself contemptible, miserable and helpless, you will gain a better result. Unfortunately, it is something that it remains in you because it results well.

**Social support**

For a vast majority of participants receiving social support was a helpful experience. They all reported receiving emotional support during this period of time. For some the Iranian community and friends have been a key social resources. Others received emotional support through Norwegian adults or staff from local NGO.

Likewise, receiving emotional support has offered asylum seekers diverse psychological benefits. Some reported that being with Iranian friends prevented them from getting bored and feeling lonely in the reception centers. This can be even more helpful for elderly asylum seekers as Donya described:

( .. ) After a while, some Iranian family came there, then it became really good. I was making
friends with them, I was going to the course with them, I was busy with them, it became good.

Moreover, Roozbeh explained that the emotional support of other Iranian asylum seeker substituted the support of his family in the reception center.

(…) I think if you can find such a friend during those times, this is a great gift, he is a very good friend, we totally trust each other: (…) You should be lucky to get to know people that become this much important for you, the trust we have towards each other we might not have it with our sister or brother, because you are experiencing something in one period of time that you never experience it with anyone else, this experience was that we were both foreigners.

Asylum seekers also received emotional support from the Norwegian population. Sanaz illustrated that talking for hours with one woman from a local NGO helped her to become relaxed. On the other hand, having personal relationships with some Norwegian families gave Roozbeh a chance to feel less isolated in a town where he perceived the majority were against foreigners.

At the same time, it was something interesting there. Although there were many people who were against foreigners, there were also many people who were against them as well, many ordinary and good Norwegian family who were feeling that this issue is not nice, were coming to the camp and were supporting us and were befriending with us. (…) I got to know some really nice families there, I was with them for a long time.

In addition, some participants reported that they have received instrumental support by other asylum seekers, Norwegian officials and members of a local NGO. They all reported that Norwegian officials provided them with money, a place to live, a language course and health facilities. However, Sanaz reported that she lacked this kind of support:

You are not supported that much, they help you financially, that I have never had this, - because I started to work, and when your are working they don't give you money anymore, you also have to pay for your place.

She further explained that members of a local NGO provided her with instrumental support.
They facilitated her access to expert legal advice after it had initially been rejected which caused her asylum case was processed again in the system.

They brought my case to the system again, they hired me a lawyer, I didn't pay a penny for the lawyer. (..) She really worked hard for me.

Having instrumental support can be more helpful for elderly asylum seekers as Donya explained:

(..) washing the floors is a periodical task in the camp, for example every day two or three persons should wash the floors. When the Kurds had seen that I was sick, they supported me and were doing my turns.

Furthermore, two of the participants reported that they could receive informational support. Roozbeh articulated that he got information about the Norwegian society and culture through his Norwegian teacher. Sanaz also received the same information through the staff of a local NGO. However, the majority of the participants experienced a lack of this kind of support of officials. Sanaz’s account captured much of the participants’ concern about this:

(..) The support many others and I wanted to receive was that let's teach us what are the expectations of us as a citizen, how we should live here. They didn’t do this at all for us.

It seems that having social support is considerably important for asylum seekers in the first years of their lives in the host country. It may give them a feeling of being loved and esteemed, and a sense of belonging to a community. It can also prevent them from being left alone and isolated in the reception centers.

**Discussion of the Asylum seeking period**

To summarize the first phase of analysis, the demands reported by participants in the asylum seeking period were location of the camp, lack of meaningful day-to-day activities, legal status insecurity, and lack of safety. In addition, social support was identified as a helpful resource during this period of time.

The location of the reception centre was reported to be a major source of stress by the
participants of the present study. This could be due to the fact that most of the reception centres are located in far-off places across Norway with modest facilities. Therefore, those asylum seekers who enjoyed a high pre-migration standard of living were more likely to experience distress at the reception centres. Furthermore, where the isolating features of these centres offers few opportunities for meaningful relationships, social interaction and rewarding activities, it is likely to result in feelings of distress among forced migrants. These feelings in turn may make the individuals less inclined to make the effort to interact or engage in potentially rewarding activities.

Furthermore, lack of meaningful day-to-day activities was found as a major source of stress for participants of the present study. From the participants’ accounts, this could be due the fact that the daily activities which rooted in the home environment have been lost such as working or studying. In addition, they didn't have access to resources which could enable them to structure their empty time at the reception centres. These findings are consistent with those qualitative studies to examine the life experiences of asylum seekers (De Jonghe et al., 2004 as cited in Laban et al., 2005; Khawaja et al., 2008). Furthermore, the stressful impact of lack of meaningful activities seems to be governed by experiencing forced passivity during this period of time. Consequently, asylum seekers whose condition should encourage them to be more active and productive are reduced to individuals who are passive and waste away the most fruitful years of their lives. Likewise, other qualitative studies have pointed to similar findings (Anuaas, 2000; Ghoreishi, 2005).

Legal status insecurity was also consistently described as a major stressful demands for participants. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), two of the temporal factors that influence the experience of stress are duration and event uncertainty (as cited in Ryan et al., 2008b). From the participants’ accounts, the stressful impact of legal status insecurity seems to be governed by experiencing prolonged uncertainty during this period of time. Consequently, those forced migrants who had been in the asylum procedure for several years were more vulnerable in experiencing distress and were faced with additional negative consequences. This finding is consistent with Laban et al’s (2005) study which investigated the negative consequences of the prolonged asylum procedure among different groups of
asylum seekers in Netherlands. Likewise, the stressful impact of legal status insecurity can be originated from constant fear of deportation in the daily lives of the study’s participants. This finding is in accordance with other studies which identified fear of deportation as a major source of stress among asylum seekers (Khawaja et al., 2008; Laban et al., 2005; Silove et al., 2002) and also support the view that the insecure legal status puts individuals at a higher risk of experiencing distress (Hondius et al., 2000; Ryan et al., 2008b; Steel et al., 2006).

Facing lack of safety during the asylum seeking period is an area which seems to be neglected in previous literature in Western contexts. In this study, it was described as a stressful demand, particularly by the two female participants. This demand might have a significant impact on female asylum seekers since they might perceive their situation as uncontrollable and unchangeable. This might be also due to the fact that they perceive that they have no way of influencing their current situation in a positive way, thus they end up applying certain coping efforts to change their situation. This finding is in accordance with Khawaja et al’s (2008) study which showed that asylum seekers face lack of safety in the camps in Kenya.

Despite facing stressful demands, participants also described that social resources were protective against experiences of distress. Some individuals were able to benefit from diverse social support networks such as Iranian friends, Norwegian adults, and members of local NGOs. The findings of the present study indicate that establishing social networks in the early years of the asylum seeking period would enable individuals to better access emotional, instrumental, and informational support and consequently prevent them to suffer distress. At the reception centres, such networks may also enhance the individual’s sense of belonging in the community. The findings of the present study are consistent with those of the only other study (Ryan et al., 2008b) which suggested that social resources were against experiencing distress among asylum seekers in Ireland.

These findings from participants’ experiences in the asylum process fit well with Ryan et al’s (2008a) resource-based model of migrant adaptation. They argued that the generally high levels of distress can be seen as a result of the increasing impact of multiple stressful demands in a situation where access to key protective resources is limited. In the asylum seeking
process, participants encountered demands such as the location of the reception centre, lack of meaningful day-to-day activity, legal status insecurity, and lack of safety. In addition, they reported that they had strong access to supportive social networks and poor access to other key resources such as employment, education, and private accommodation. Therefore, as the model suggests, the combination of a stressful environment with poor access to resources seemed to place Iranian forced migrants at a risk of experiencing distress. The main critique to Ryan et al.’s (2008a) model is that it failed to conceptualize which specific resources and demands are crucial in the asylum seeking period.

**Resettlement to present life period**

Here, I continue the presentation of the results in the resettlement to present life period. Within resettlement to present life period five superordinate themes were identified: employment; mastering the language; discrimination and prejudice; education; and social support.

**Employment**

Within the resettlement period, the majority of participants found it difficult to obtain adequate employment. They described that despite sending many applications to different employers, they often received no answers and were barely invited to job interviews. For some who had been in Norway longer, this problem was not only due to Norway’s economic recession during the early 90s, but also due to discriminatory employment practices in that period of time.

*Koosha: When we came here it was not like this that you could find a job everywhere. The majority was without a job and the employment rate was really high, and they didn’t prefer to hire foreigners, even for the worst jobs. This was another issue that caused difficulties.*

Discriminatory employment practices also acted as a significant barrier for those migrants who had been seeking blue-collar jobs in the present decade as indicated by the following statement of Sanaz:

*First, I have to say that I wrote 110 job applications, in only two cases they called me. My problem was that I was not invited to any job interview, because it had never happened that I*
went to the job interview and afterwards they didn't give me the job. (..) I feel that it would have been much easier to get the job, if my name was different, because once I applied for one job. The application ’s deadline had not finished yet but after one hour of sending my application they sent me an email that someone else got the job. Afterwards, I changed slightly the job application but I wrote my Norwegian friend ’s name on it and sent it again. Three days later they called me and invited me for an interview. This was really interesting.

Being faced with such practices were even more acute for educated migrants. Kiarash’s account emphasized his despair about not being able to find an employment. He further referred to surprising aggressive impulsives in himself towards people and the system in Norway.

When you apply for a job and you can't get one, you have a very tight budget, your mental status is bad, you reach a certain point where you would regret that you have left Iran. You would think that whoever you were there , you were in danger. OK, but at least if they would arrest you and kill you, you would be more comfortable but here it becomes like a gradual death, that is much worse than instant killing. I know many foreigners, those who have been in this situation or are in this situation, I think this happens more or less for everyone that you somehow reach a sense when disgust and aversion overwhelms in you that everything happens in your life you attribute to the system and Norwegian people.

Moreover, the non-recognition of occupational skills was perceived as a main barrier to obtain adequate employment for middle-aged migrants in this study. Arash described how the non-recognition of his former occupational skills and the lack of financial support of his county prevented him from regaining his previous occupational status and resulted in his acceptance of a low-status job.

I was working as a carpenter in Iran. I couldn't use it here because carpentering is very different here and you should take a course to work in this field. (..) I found a firm in Oslo that was working with carpentering and painting, they told me you should come here and do the vocational training here for three months, then we might hire you. I came here and was interviewed, the firm accepted me but my county didn’t accept to pay me for these three months, then I was forced to take a job where I distributed newspapers.
Despite facing challenging problems in obtaining the employment, the majority of participants reported that they are currently employed in higher level jobs. It is likely that achieving higher education and mastering the Norwegian language facilitated their access to white-collar jobs as Babak explained:

(,) the doors for me opened when I got my master degree, it was very important._my Norwegian also became more and more fluent which I think is very important.
Conversely, the two elderly participants who were not able to seek further education and master the Norwegian language reported more difficulties in getting a job.

**Mastering the language**

Unless the migrants could already speak the Norwegian language, when they entered the resettlement process, the majority of the participants were faced with mastering the new language during this period of time. Nearly half of participants reported that they found it difficult to master Norwegian. For some this problem was present because they were unable to understand and to be understood by Norwegians. Roozbeh emphasized the distress he felt while struggling to communicate with others.

*Since I was very interested, it was easier for me to learn it. But I had really difficulties with speaking. They couldn't understand me, I could not express my thoughts or feelings. (,) For example, I was among a group and we were discussing something, I could see that I was stuck down in the first sentence of Mr X. While I was thinking about this sentence, I suddenly notice that the topic had changed. This was one of the things which was very difficult. (,) Sometimes this made me angry and nervous, it was difficult that I wanted to talk like them but I couldn't.*

The awareness of the inability to communicate with others can be even more stressful for those migrants who perceived hostile attitudes while trying to speak the language. Koosha accounted:

*Norwegian is not a difficult language but one thing that was making it difficult was that I couldn't understand the different tones of vowels, because of this, either I couldn't understand them or they couldn't understand me. Moreover, their attitudes were very bad. Once, I remember that I went somewhere to rent a movie, I asked a young woman who was working*
there something about the movie, she said to me in front of all other people, talk Norwegian, in a very bad tone. Then you would feel extraordinary bad when you wanted to talk, it was a very bad feeling.

In addition, mastering the new language had been more difficult for elderly migrant Donya. She explained that being old prevented her from learning the Norwegian language appropriately. Age combined with suffering from depression caused more hardships for Arash when learning the language. 

It was so difficult for me to learn the language and understand it, you know when you have some psychological problems, you have lived several years in camps, you are away from your family, you don't have a proper residence permit, you can't study properly, this wastes all hours that you have studied. (..) The result was that I have been in the Norwegian course for 1700 hours.

On the other hand, some participants found mastering the new language quite easy. They described that knowing other European languages helped them to learn quickly.

Babak: I learned Norwegian very fast, I could easily speak Norwegian after couple of months. Of course, don't misunderstand me I couldn't go to a deep discussion but I found the Norwegian language ridiculously easy. Especially, if you know English, they are so similar, and they have the same logic. Of course, I had a very foreign accent and I didn't have much vocabulary to use but to express myself in Norwegian was very easy.

Language barriers were limited to early years of migrants’ life within the resettlement process for the participants. The majority who entered the host country at a young age assessed their Norwegian fluency on satisfactory levels at the time of the interview. On the other hand, elderly migrants reported that they still have difficulties with the Norwegian language.

**Discrimination and prejudice**
Although some refugees stated that they had been treated well within Norway, many described being subject to discrimination in the host society. They reported being shocked by the way they were treated by government officials. Some perceived their encounters with the police
humiliating, since they had to wait in long queues and were treated discourteously there.

Sanaz and Kiarash explained:

*Sanaz:* One of the best example is the police, they open the door at eight, you should queue from six in the morning, you wait so long for your turn, then when your turn comes you go to one person and then he/she says I can not help you, you ask why, I was waiting for such a long time here, then he/she says because you are so many, look, she says you (foreigners), you are so many or noisy that we don't have time to process your stuffs. This is a very bad thing.

*Kiarash:* I don't know if you have been to the Police here to renew your visa. [yes I have been.] Have you seen how is the situation there, how many people are working and how many foreigners are waiting there. (..) I mean it is not acceptable for me that the system in Norway is not aware about the situation in the police administration, that a poor foreigner who needs one document should waste his/her time for five hours there. He/she wants to attend his/her Norwegian course but he/she can't do this. It is humiliating there. Believe me, they don't dare to treat Norwegians like this.

Others reported that they perceived that local authorities had negative stereotypes towards them. They were seen as helpless refugees who can never make any progress in the host society. Roozbeh’s account captured this concern:

*When I wanted to move out from my county, I went to say goodbye to my responsible person in the county. She told me you are the best refugee I have ever seen. I told her when European were killing natives and captured their country in America, some of them were telling them you are the best native I have ever seen. Why do you say this? You are humiliating me. She told me, No, I have a good intention, I mean you came here some months ago, you went to high school and did your things yourself and now you are going to study at the university, you are the best refugee. I told her, what do you mean by this? Am I the second rate citizen? If one Norwegian did this, would you tell him or her that you are the best Norwegian I have ever seen? You shouldn't work here. They usually treated us like this.*

As it has been mentioned earlier in the analysis, some migrants perceived discrimination in
the labour market. Kiarash accounted that the employers’ racial prejudice have an impact on the exclusion of Iranians in the job market. He used the term kale-siyah (blackheads) to explain how he is perceived by employers. “Kale-siyah is an expression used by some Iranians living in Europe to express how they are perceived by Europeans in general, connotes being stupid, uncivilized and dangerous” (Ghorashi, 2005, p. 193).

*I mean they have really blind prejudice. If you are a kaleh-siyah (blackheads), the only thing that comes to their mind is that your are a burglar, a drug dealer, a terrorist, or you rape the women. They have these kind of stupid thoughts, it is still like this.*

The awareness of being subject to discrimination at the university was even a more hurtful experience as Koosha illustrated:

*I was even discriminated by students at the university. This happened for me when I had my first course in the laboratory. We were five people behind a long old table, then the professor said that each two students should start to work together. Two girls were standing on one side of me and two on the other side, as soon as they heard this, they all left and I was standing alone. I was working the whole semester alone.(..) This was very bad, this was a huge problem for me.*

Moreover, perceiving discrimination can be a more negative experience for those migrants who have been living a long time in Norway. Kamran who has lived more than 20 years in Norway emphasized the frustration he feels while he is still asked about his original nationality.

*It is frustrating here that they still ask me where are you from. This focus on where are you from, this is the hierarchy. They want to see as soon as possible in what extent you are culturally close to them, those who are closer are more equal to them in the hierarchy. Those who are more culturally distant, are lower in the hierarchy. This is an issue for a person who has lived here for 20 years and they still come and treat him like this.*

These descriptions are mainly characterized by a sort of soreness. It is likely that migrants confront these attitudes with dismay, feeling hurt and surprised. Those who mastered the Norwegian language, participated in higher education and secured good jobs might find this as an overwhelming obstacles to integration in the host society as indicated by the following
statement of Kiarash:

(..) Look, the first foreigners have come to Norway in 60s. Do you see any foreigner at the top of the system now? Do you see after all those years any minister with a minority background in Norway? Do you see any manager with a foreigner background in top position here? No, this is the reality here that you can promote to some extent in the system, the rest only belongs to Norwegians. Then it's crap what they are saying about integration, that foreigners should integrate, if you want this, it is the responsibility of the majority to make the environment ready for the minority that they can integrate.

Education
Young migrants who passed through initial phases of resettlement process have sought to obtain further education in the host society. They all reported that gaining an education had been a very encouraging experience in their life in Norway that facilitated their access to higher-level jobs and consequently enabled them to enjoy a better life.

Koosha: What was encouraging here was my education, that I could finish my study to have a better life, to have a positive and calm life, and to have a good job.

Others described that studying at the university gave them the opportunity to make Norwegian friends and become more familiar with the Norwegian society.
Sanaz: You enter the university, you find Norwegian friends, this is very important, it is not anymore like this that they would say she is a foreigner, a refugee, this and that, you become their classmate. I have got many Norwegian friends, I have started to learn very much about their life, my point of view has totally changed towards their life, towards their people, much distance has been removed since then.

Seeking education also resulted in exiting from refugee life and bringing new prospects into migrants’ life as Roozbeh explained:

(..)The main transition of my life in Norway was going to the university. I totally came out of refugee environment, I went to the student environment, I was with students, the refugee life ended.
In addition, Sanaz referred to positive feelings she had about herself since studying at the university, of being self-sufficient and esteemed.

(..) studying has given me self-confidence, because I could see that as much as one Norwegian makes effort, I attempt and I get the same mark. After this I have felt that I can do everything, nothing is difficult anymore. I mean you can reach everywhere that you want, everything that you want, it was very nice. (..) Because of this if anybody asks me how he or she can adapt into this society, the only thing that I can suggest is to go and study, whatever subject that is possible.

It seems like for migrants gaining education was an efficient way to acculturate as well as reconstruct the new identity in the host society. It also acted as a facilitator to bring back their self-esteem which they had lost in the passive years of living in the reception centres.

**Social support**
Similar to the asylum seeking period, for a vast majority of the participants receiving support was a helpful experience. Many reported receiving emotional support during this period of time. For some Iranians, Norwegian friends have been key social resources. Others received emotional support through their Norwegian language teacher.

Similarly, receiving social support brought about diverse psychological benefits for migrants. The majority reported that talking with their Iranian friends has helped them to empty themselves and become relaxed. Unlike the asylum seeking period, many could find Norwegian friends whom their relationship lasts until now. Kamran accounted:
*I have two very close Norwegian friends from that period of time. Especially, I am very close to Jon. He came with me to Iran for three weeks, I showed him many places there.*

Migrants also received emotional support from their Norwegian language teacher. They reported that their teachers invited them to their homes, restaurants and parties. Sanaz mentioned that she considers her language teachers as the most desirable experience in Norway.

(..) If you ask me what was your best experience here, I would say teachers who I have had here. I am saying this honestly. For example when I was in the course, my teacher invited me
to go to the movies with her. She told me that one interesting movie has recently being released and I would like to watch it with you. Perhaps, she was not allowed to do this but because she knew that I don’t have that much money she brought me to the movies.

This experience can be even more helpful for elderly migrants who didn't have a chance to find Norwegian friends due to their poor knowledge of the language as Donya described:

_The only relationship I had was with my Norwegian teacher. She invited us several times to her place, she came to our place as well. She was coming over and we were talking together. She invited us to her husband ’s concerts at the church around Christmas. When I became sick, she came and visited me and told me that she would pray for me. She was a very nice person, she was really kind to me. Unfortunately, she had left this town._

In addition, some participants reported that they could receive informational support through the Iranian community. Arman explained:

_(..) We started to get important information through Iranians in Oslo. So, we became friends with some of them and they told us about Norway, that we have to learn the language quickly and find a job._

However, the majority of participants experienced a lack of this kind of support from officials. Sanaz’s account captured much of the participants’ concern about this:

_When I started seriously to search for the university, I couldn’t find anyone in the system to advise me how I can enter the university. However, they advised me but it was the worst advice they could have done, they told me the wrong way. The advice which I got and it took eight moths until I could receive this advice, because I sent a letter to one advisor and it took eight months until I got the answer of my letter, was that you have to do two language tests, and for doing this I had to wait one year until I could have a place for these tests. But, this was wrong because I could have studied their last year of high school for a year and then enter the university. Then two years of my life happened to be in this process, two years that could be used in a different way._

It seems like the majority of migrants have social resources in the present life which give them a sense of belonging and prevent them to suffer from social isolation.
Discussion of resettlement to present life

To summarize, refugees in this study reported that they were faced with demands in relation to employment, mastering the host language, and discrimination and prejudice in resettlement to present life period. In addition, social support and education were identified as a helpful resource during this period of time.

Gaining employment was consistently described as a major source of stress for participants. They also experienced discriminatory employment practices which they claimed acted as a main obstacle in attaining employment in their early years of resettlement. This finding is consistent with Khawaja’s (2008) study that showed refugees were faced with discriminatory employment practices in Australia. The findings of this study indicate that exclusion from the workforce is more stressful for those refugees who made effort to obtain further education in the host society. This can be due to the fact that facing such treatments could severely diminish their hopes of beginning a new life and being accepted by the new society. The general reported experiences are consistent with other studies that found unemployment a good predictor for higher levels of distress (Beiser et al., 1993; Chung & Kagawa-Singer, 1993; Lie, 2002). However, the majority of participants of this study reported that they were employed in higher level jobs at the time of interview. It is likely that achieving higher education and mastering the Norwegian language facilitated their access to white-collar jobs. Conversely, the two elderly participants who were not able to seek further education and master the Norwegian language reported more difficulties in getting a job.

As already mentioned, some studies reported that lack of host language fluency was associated with psychological distress among refugees (Chung & Kagawa-Singer, 1995; Ward et al., 2001). Around half of the participants in the present study experienced distress while struggling to master the Norwegian language in the early years of the resettlement period, which suggests that the inability to speak the host language caused refugees to feel a certain degree of distress. This could be due to the fact that they had few opportunities to practice their Norwegian in that period of time. Moreover, the findings indicate that mastering the host language was more stressful for the elderly refugees. Similarly, some pointed to similar
findings (Beiser & Hou, 2006; Miller et al., 2002). However, the majority of refugees were less concerned with the language barriers in the present life. This finding supports the view that the salience of the host language fluency is time dependent among refugees (Beiser & Hou, 2001).

Experiencing discrimination and prejudice was also consistently described as a major source of stress for participants of the present study. Refugees described that they were faced with discrimination and prejudice in different situations in the host society which had a negative impact on their psychological well-being. This finding is in accordance with other studies (Pernice & Brook; Ryan et al., 2008b) which showed reported experiences of discrimination predict higher distress levels among refugees. The most likely explanation for the findings is that such incidents make them feel unwelcome in the new society. These feelings begin when they want to be accepted and treated as equals but continue to be treated as strangers and ‘the others’. This explanation is also supported by Werkuyten and Nekuee’s (1999) study that analysed perceived discrimination among Iranian refugees in the Netherlands. Moreover, the findings of present study suggest that such treatments may particularly act as a main barrier to integration into the host society for those resourceful refugees who have been residing in Norway for a longer period of time. This is also consistent with Fangen’s (2006) study that examined discrimination among Somalian refugees in Norway.

Participants’ reported experiences also indicate that gaining education is protective for psychological well-being of refugees. This could be due to the fact that education facilitates refugees’ access to higher-level jobs, thus affecting well-being by increasing income, occupational status, and social status. The other possible explanation is that education give them opportunity to build up new relationships with Norwegians and consequently may give them a sense of belonging to the host society. Finally, the findings suggest that education can play a positive psychological role in dealing with one’s minority situation, which is also consistent with Werkuyten and Nekuee (1999). It is noteworthy to mention that the possibility that education provides resources which have a more direct impact on psychological well-being has not attracted much attention in the previous literature. Most studies focused on the role of pre-migration education in providing resources for psychological well-being (Colic-
Several studies have shown that refugees suffer from a lack of social support and social isolation in the resettlement period (Khawaja et al., 2008; Miller et al., 2002). In contrast, the findings of the present study show that participants could receive diverse social support from networks such as Iranian and Norwegian friends, and Norwegian language teachers in this period of time. These findings are also consistent with those studies that reported the protective role of social support against distress among refugees (Birman & Tran, 2008; Ghazinour et al., 2003; Schweitzer et al., 2006). Moreover, the findings suggest that social support from like-ethnic networks reduced the distress among refugees. Similarly, some pointed to similar findings (Djuretic et al., 2007; Simich et al., 2003).

In conclusion, the findings of this study fit well with Ryan et al.’s (2008a) resource-based model of migrant adaptation. Ryan et al. (2008a) argued that improvements in psychological well-being are likely to depend on increased access to key resources and lower exposure to stressful demands. Within resettlement to present life period, participants managed to access a number of key resources such as social networks, education, host language fluency, and secure employment. Moreover, they were exposed to demands such as unemployment, language barriers, and discrimination which except the latter one had diminished in the present life. Therefore, as the model suggests, increased access to key resources may result in Iranian refugees to enjoy psychological well-being in the host society.

**SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION**

This study explored the experiences of Iranian refugees across their life span in Norway. The main goal was to identify what resources and demands were encountered in each period of the asylum seeking, the resettlement, and the present life of Iranian refugees and how participants perceived and experienced these resources and demands. In this study, the author used a
qualitative approach to capture in detail the life experiences of individuals across their life span in Norway. Moreover, in order to obtain the above goals the analysis of the interviews were inspired by the interpretative phenomenological analysis. Data were analysed within the two stages of the asylum seeking period, and the resettlement to present life period due to the interconnectedness of emergent themes in the resettlement and the present life period.

Results show that this group of Iranian refugees experienced demands regarding the location of the reception centre, lack of meaningful day-to-day activities, legal status insecurity, and lack of safety in their asylum seeking period. Moreover, they perceived social support as a helpful resource during this period of time. Further findings show that Iranian refugees encountered demands in relation to employment, mastering the language, and discrimination and prejudice in their resettlement to present life period. In addition, they identified social support and education as a protective resources during this period of time. Based on their experiences, one could speculate that combination of a stressful environment with poor access to resources cause distress in individuals in the asylum seeking period, while an increased access to key resources may result in psychological well-being of migrants in the resettlement to present life period.

This study contributes to a better understanding of the ongoing experiences of Iranian refugees in Norway. The use of the qualitative approach allowed participants to express salient demands and resources that emerged across their life span in Norway. This approach also facilitated a greater understanding of the nature and the impact of post-migration demands among refugees. Specifically, it shed on light into the ways each specific demand was experienced and how they caused distress among refugees. Moreover, refugee accounts clarify the positive role of resources during the adaptation process. It is also noteworthy that several stressful demands identified in this study were not devoted attention in previous literature. Specifically, themes such as the location of the reception centre, and lack of safety seems to have been overlooked. In accordance with previous research (Khawaja et al., 2008; Miller et al., 2002; Ryan et al., 2008b), the findings of the present study highlight the importance of examining the post-migration life experiences of forced migrants in their host societies.
Limitations

The major limitation of this study is the use of snowball sampling procedure in recruiting the participants. Little control over the demographic spread of the sample could be achieved as a consequence (e.g., educational background, gender, and social class). Therefore, I could recruit mainly male participants with higher educational background and socio-economical status. This limits the kind of generalization that can be drawn from this study. Refugees outside the sample of present study, particularly female forced migrants and those who had limited access to resources might have reported different experiences than those expressed in the current data, and thereby expanded our understanding.

Future research

There has been little psychological research on asylum seekers and non-quota refugees in Western societies that there is a great deal of scope for future research. Unlike the present study which retrospectively explored the experiences of individuals in their asylum seeking period, future research should investigate the experiences of asylum seekers while they are in the asylum seeking process. However, the findings of the present study underline the importance of post-migration factors in relation to the psychological well-being of forced migrants. Future research should focus more on investigating the nature and impact of life experiences of forced migrants in the host societies.

Implications

As a consequence of global migration, it is very likely that more refugees and particularly asylum seekers will arrive in Norway. It is therefore necessary to gain a knowledge about life experiences of forced migrants in order to help them in attaining a successful adaptation in the host society. The findings of the present study support the view that a high proportion of the distress experienced by forced migrants is rooted in their post-migration life conditions. Therefore, the prevention of distress depends to some extent on existing policies which can help to decrease the stressful effects of the social environment.
As I mentioned earlier, one of the most influential stressful demands experienced by forced migrants is legal status insecurity. Therefore, efforts should be made to decrease the length of time in which forced migrants have to live in this state of uncertainty. Needless to say, the quality of the determination procedure should not be compromised in any way by the faster processing of cases.

Despite the presence of public and private organizations that are designed to help refugees in Norway, many participants found difficulties in accessing the needed information in the resettlement period. Efforts should be made to provide refugees with a written user guide that could make them aware about their rights and their responsibilities in the host country. In addition, this guide should provide useful information in terms of how to apply for the university, find a job, or access to legal advice. However, it seems that some of these recommendations have recently received attention by developing an introduction programme by government for newly arrived refugees.

The findings of this study suggested that social resources were protective against experiencing distress. Therefore, efforts should be made to facilitate access for refugees to wider social resources. The NGO sector can make a valuable contribution in this respect. NGO staff and volunteers can build up trustful relationships with forced migrants, thereby strengthening their sense of belonging to the new society. Such relationships may be the first opportunity for forced migrants to interact with Norwegian persons, particularly at the reception centres or the early years of resettlement. They also can organize various entertainment programmes in the reception centres where asylum seekers suffer from social isolation and boredom. Furthermore, volunteers can design daily group activities such as doing sport or practising Norwegian language among asylum seekers at the reception centres. Members of NGO can also organize meetings where Norwegian people and forced migrants could meet to learn about each other’s culture.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX

Interview guide

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this interview. As you know, the interview will be about your resettlement experiences in Norway.

1. Before arrival to Norway
First, I would like to hear about your experience connected to coming to Norway.

Can you tell me how long have you been in Norway?
What brought you to Norway? Could you choose where to get asylum?
How did you come to Norway? Did you come alone or with others?

2. After arrival to Norway - the asylum-seeking process
Now, I want to know more about your experiences after arrival in Norway.

Camp
Can you explain me what happened after your arrival in Norway? Where did you live? In a refugee camp, a reception centre or in other places?
Whom did you live with?
What do you think about this?

Status determination process
What kind of procedure did you go through in order to obtain the refugee status?
How long did it take?
What did you do during this period?
How did you experience this period of time?
Can you remember how did you feel during processing your asylum application?
Would you say that this procedure affected your life in Norway?

3. After arrival to Norway - the resettlement process
As you told me, after ..... you got a resident permit to stay here...

Dispersal
Where did you live during that period? Which city? Which part of Norway?
Were many refugees there?
What do you think about it?
How did you finance your expenses?

Different programs
What kind of program ( like Norwegian course, job training) did they provide for you?
How did you find learning Norwegian?
What about the job training?
How did you find other courses?

**Personal experiences**
What kind of support did you have during this period?
Whom did you spend most of your time with?
Can you tell about your relationship with Norwegian during this period?

**4. Present status in Norway**
Now, I am interested to know what you are currently doing here. In order to understand this, let's take an ordinary day as the starting point...

Could you please tell me what did you do yesterday?
*(The following questions should be asked whether during the conversation about yesterday, or afterwards.)*

**Profession**
What is your profession?
How did you proceed to get the job here?

**Relationship**
Can you tell me about important people in your life?
Do you have any preferences to be with your co-nationals or Norwegian?

**Language proficiency**
How is your language proficiency in Norwegian? Your own language?

**Customs**
Do you take part in Norwegian celebration like Christmas, 17\textsuperscript{th} of May? How about your own celebration days?
How much do you use your own language, costumes in your daily life?
How about Norwegian language and costumes?
What kind of contact do you have with your home country?

**5. Future**
What kind of thoughts do you have for your future?

**6. Recommendations**
I would like to end this interview with asking you …

What have been encouraged or frustrated you to adopt to Norway?
Based on the experiences you have, what kind of advice would you recommend to improve the resettlement of refugees?