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Norway's Immigrant Population and the Educational System: Grounds for Optimism?

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SUMMARY

In this study, we analyse changes in the composition of the immigrant population in Norway and the educational achievements of various groups of immigrants. Our analyses use quantitative indicators to distinguish between the various sub-categories of the immigrant population, both with regard to reasons for immigration (such as labour, refugees, and family), as well as in relation to the immigrants' geographical origins. We also analyse the educational achievements of the descendants of immigrants, utilising a theoretical approach that is often used as a framework of interpretation in analyses of social mobility, as well as integrational and educational outcomes for various categories of descendants. Our empirical analyses show that the descendants achieve greater success within the Norwegian educational system than might be expected based on USA-developed theoretical frameworks. The paper discusses possible reasons for these better-than-expected achievements within the Norwegian context.

KEY WORDS: immigrants, descendants, education, Norway, educational achievement

INTRODUCTION

Norway has an extremely diverse and ever-changing immigrant population. Here, we will provide an overview of Norway's immigrant population and analyse how it has evolved over the past three decades. A primary objective is to present and discuss the highly heterogeneous nature of Norway's immigrant population, as well as to look at options for identifying subgroups within that population that may be relevant to our general analyses. Since

both the size and composition of Norway's immigrant population are undergoing rapid change, we will use the most recent available data and we will also discuss potential future trends.

Regarding the integration of immigrants into Norwegian society, in the long term, the most important issue is the situation of their descendants. At present, approximately one-fifth of Norway's immigrant population comprises Norwegian-born persons with foreign-born parents (often referred to as second-generation immigrants in American literature). For a long time, people in this category were very young and were included in few statistical analyses. Today, however, they are increasingly present at all levels of the educational system.

In this article, we will conduct relatively detailed analyses of the educational performance of both foreign-born people and their descendants. As demonstrated, the Norwegian-born generation is performing better than their parents, which is in line with findings from previous studies (Hermansen, 2016). This is unsurprising given that the Norwegian-born generation does not face the same challenges regarding language barriers and adjustments to the Norwegian educational system as newcomers do (Fekjær, 2006; Valenta, 2009; Lidén, 2017; Aarsæther, 2021).

Our analyses are kept at a relatively high aggregate level and consider "average" immigrants and their descendants. We do not take into account other socio-economic indicators relevant to the integration of immigrants, such as participation in the labour market, wages, and living conditions. Even so, it is reasonable to argue that educational success is perhaps one of the most important long-term indicators of successful social integration and that the positive picture of descendants' educational achievements provides reason for optimism.

Several theoretical frameworks may serve as a starting point when conducting analyses of immigrants' social integration. We will present a frequently used theoretical explanatory model developed in the US, regarding analyses of social integration and social mobility among immigrants and descendants (Portes and Zhou, 1993; Portes, Fernández-Kelly and Haller, 2009; Stepick and Stepick, 2010). We will further discuss the applicability of this model to the Norwegian context, in which the educational attainment of descendants appears to be better than suggested by the above-mentioned model.

This article is divided into several parts, which build on each other and are closely linked. In the first part, we will discuss changes in the immigrant pop-

ulation in Norway and identify the main categories of immigrants that have crystallised in recent years. We will then present the above-mentioned analytical model, which is often used in analyses of social mobility and educational attainment. Thereafter, we will present our methodology, data and the social integration outcomes among the various categories of immigrants and descendants. In the conclusion, we will analyse the educational outcomes of the various categories of immigrants and descendants introduced in the first part of the article and relate them to the theoretical explanatory model.

CHANGES IN THE COMPOSITION OF THE IMMIGRANT POPULATION IN NORWAY

In general, Norway's immigrant population is considered to comprise immigrants and their children (the latter being referred to as "Norwegian-born with immigrant parents" in the terminology used by Statistics Norway, SSB). According to this definition, as of 1 January 2021, Norway's immigrant population comprised almost one million individuals, accounting for 18.5 percent of the total population (Statistics Norway, 2021).[1] Typically, social analyses in Norway tend to apply formal definitions to what the American literature refers to as first- and second-generation immigrants, which together constitute the total immigrant population. These definitions, developed by Statistics Norway, currently state: "Immigrants are persons born abroad to two foreign-born parents and four foreign-born grandparents; and, their Norwegian-born descendants, who have two parents born abroad, and four grandparents born abroad" (Dzamarija, 2019).

The immigrant population is very heterogeneous and includes both senior researchers hired for positions at universities or at major industrial companies, as well as newly arrived refugees who have recently settled in Norway, often after a long and hazardous journey. Geographically, there are also great variations – the immigrants come from almost every part of the world. This great diversity usually results in significant differences in the living conditions of the various groups of immigrants.

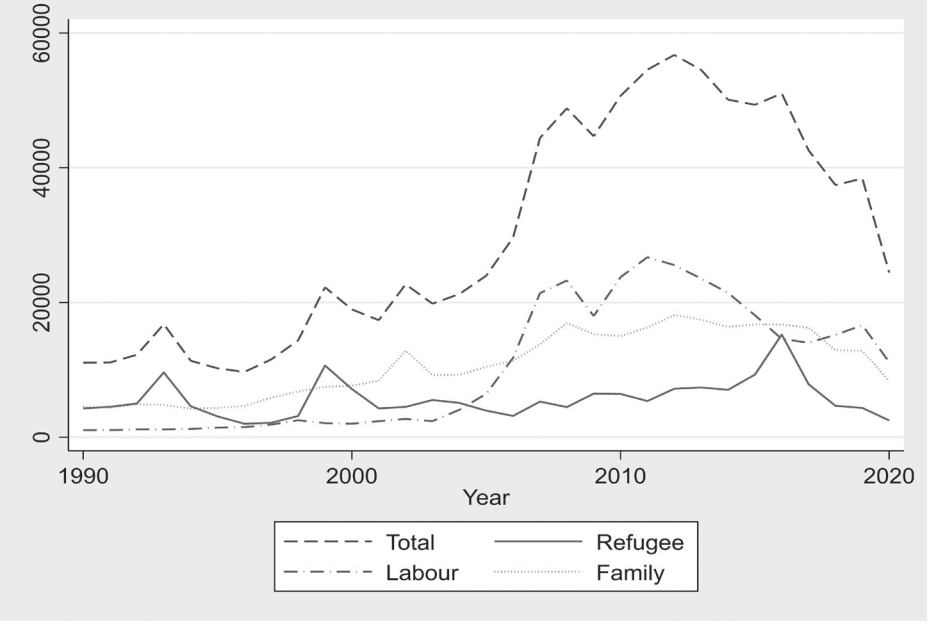
Consequently, it often makes little sense to consider the "immigrants" as a homogenous group. Therefore, it is common practice to distinguish between different subgroups within the immigrant population, both in everyday speech and in formal studies. Some of the most important dividing

[1] The precise figures are 800,094 immigrants and 197,848 Norwegian-born persons with immigrant parents, totalling 997,942 persons.

lines are based on the immigrants' geographical origin and their reasons for immigration. Regarding "geographical origin", several subgroups are frequently used: country of origin, global region, continent, etc. We will comment on these distinctions in more detail below. Regarding the reasons for immigration, certain subgroups are consistently used in analyses, many of which have been developed by Statistics Norway. Among these, the most important are labour, refugees and family reunification.[2]

We will focus first on some of the most relevant changes over time, starting with figure 1, which shows the annual immigration over a thirty-year period, 1990–2020. Figure 1 provides data on the total number of immigrants and further breaks down this number into the three largest categories of immigration reasons: "labour", "refugee", and "family" (Statistics Norway).

Figure 1. Immigration, by reason for immigration (1990–2020)



Source: Statistics Norway.

[2] In addition to the fact that the immigrant population is very heterogeneous, it is also characterised by rapid changes over time, both in terms of size and composition. For example, almost a quarter of the immigrants who were resident in Norway in early 2021 had lived in the country for less than five years (IMDi, 2021: 8). Time and social integration are often closely related. Together with differences in social background, nationality and reason for immigration, the length of stay in Norway adds an extra dimension to the heterogeneity of the immigrant population.

Immigration is often the topic of heated public debates, especially when it comes to "spikes" in refugee arrivals. That is to say, the number of refugees arriving in Norway varies greatly from year to year. Acute crises, such as the Balkan Wars and the Syrian civil war, have led to a rapid increase in the arrival of refugees. However, such rapid increases are often followed by an equally rapid decline. This presents a number of practical challenges for the receiving agencies and municipalities. Nevertheless, if we look at the figures for refugees over a longer time perspective, and in relation to the total number of immigrants, as presented in figure 1, a fairly clear pattern emerges. The figures are relatively low, which is the result of a consistently restrictive refugee-reception policy, but with a few clear "peaks", as mentioned, usually associated with major international crises.

One can argue that the most important event in Norway's recent immigration history concerns the expansion of the EU in 2004. This resulted in ten new countries joining the EU, seven of which were from the former Eastern Bloc. Due to the European Economic Area (EEA) agreement, this meant that citizens of the new EU countries could, with few restrictions, apply for work in Norway. The number of immigrant workers from these countries rose sharply.[3] This change had two important consequences. First, the total number of immigrants increased significantly. Second, the proportion of immigrant workers both within the immigrant population in general and when compared to the number of refugees also increased greatly. In other words, 2004 marked a clear dividing line in terms of the number and composition of immigrants, a trend that has largely persisted to this day.

If we return to the question discussed above, about how immigrants are classified, we have distinguished various sub-categories of the immigrant population based on "the reason for immigration" (labour, refugee, and family), and "the immigrants' geographical origins". Focusing on the relationship between these sub-categories, it becomes evident that a large number of immigrants from Europe, and from industrialised countries in North America and Oceania, migrate to Norway to find work (labour immigration). Conversely, a substantial proportion of immigrants from Asian and African countries migrate to Norway as refugees and asylum seekers.

Refugees and asylum seekers from countries outside Europe and immigrant workers from countries within Europe are subject to various immigration and integration policies. Various categories of immigrants are also

[3] A five-year "transition period" was introduced, but it did not prevent a rapid increase in the number of immigrants from the new EU countries.

integrated into different segments of the Norwegian labour market (Friberg and Midtbøen, 2018a; Snellingen, 2021). Furthermore, immigrants from different parts of the world often possess distinct features and characteristics, such as skin colour, ethnic markers and religious affiliation. The majority population's attitudes and actions towards immigrants can also be linked to these various features and characteristics (Zhou, 1997; Alba, 2005; Midtbøen, 2014; Bell, Valenta and Strabac, 2021, 2022, 2023).

Since there is often a correspondence between "geographical origin" and social integration outcomes, we can argue that a threefold division according to geographical origin can constitute a useful starting point for general analyses of the immigrant population.[4] For example, distinguishing between immigrants from 1) Western countries, 2) Eastern Europe, and 3) developing countries outside Europe reveals several significant aspects relevant to the social integration of immigrants. In addition, such a division is compatible with established theories in the field, including those that elucidate the individual and contextual factors that can possibly have lasting consequences for social mobility, integration, and educational outcomes of various categories of immigrants and their descendants. This will be discussed in more detail later in the article.

INDIVIDUAL AND CONTEXTUAL FACTORS IN THE RECEIVING COUNTRY

A central debate concerning the integration of immigrants, as well as in other areas of sociology, revolves around the extent to which people's actions are influenced by the interaction of individual and structural factors. Some researchers are more interested in how immigrants' integration is influenced by their personal experiences, social background, and other individual characteristics and resources. Other researchers attach more emphasis to contextual societal factors, both in the country of origin and in the receiving country (Portes and Zhou, 1993).

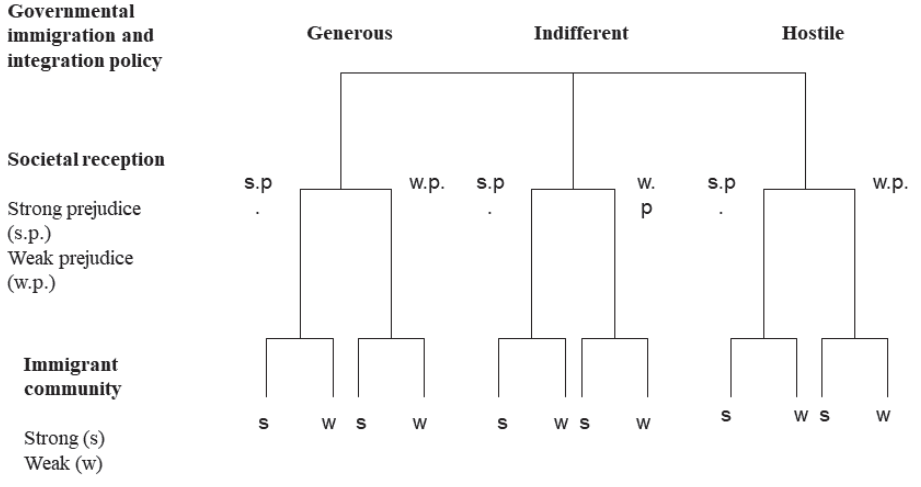
Several relevant theories and well-established typologies can help us in analysing the social integration of immigrants (Alba, 2005; Ager and Strang, 2008). Among the most cited contributions to this is the one made by the American

[4] Until around 2008, Statistics Norway categorised the immigrant population as "Western" and "Non-Western". This division was later abandoned for several reasons (Høydahl, 2008) and replaced with several different geographical subgroups. The current terminology used by Statistics Norway for what were formerly categorised as "Western countries" is often "Western Europe, etc." with a footnote specifying that the category includes "Western European countries (including the Nordic countries), North America and Oceania."

sociologist Alejandro Portes and colleagues (Portes and Zhou, 1993; Zhou, 1997; Stepick and Stepick, 2010; Waters et al., 2010). This theoretical contribution is best known for its typology of structural dimensions of long-term integration trends, including how the various contextual factors in the receiving country affect the integration of immigrants and their descendants.

In this model, the researchers distinguish between three contextual factors in the receiving country: (i) the receiving country's policies towards various immigrant groups; (ii) the majority's attitudes towards various immigrant groups, and (iii) the characteristics of the ethnic networks that welcome newly arrived immigrants. Each of these contextual factors is further divided into several analytical categories (Portes and Zhou, 1993; Luthra, Soehl and Waldinger, 2018). We have shown a simplified version of this model in figure 2.

Figure 2. Contextual factors in the receiving country



According to Portes and colleagues, different combinations of these structural factors will interact with the immigrants' individual resources, including their social background, family situation, and level of education (Portes, Fernández-Kelly and Haller, 2009). According to the authors, these combinations will have lasting consequences for the social mobility and integration of immigrants and their descendants into both the educational system and working life (Portes, Fernández-Kelly and Haller, 2009; Stepick and Stepick, 2010). The authors argue that different combinations of these factors can result in several long-term trends, including (i) the gradual integration of the immigrant population and their descendants into the ma-

jority's middle class, (ii) downward social mobility or integration into the majority's lower class, (iii) selective integration, where immigrants combine integration in their own immigrant networks and niches with different degrees of integration into working life and the educational system.[5]

While this theory springs from the American social and historical context, which differs in many ways from the European and Norwegian contexts, it can still be argued that it is also applicable in Norway. For example, using the theory's typology, we can discuss and analyse differences in integration trends among the above-mentioned categories of immigrants in Norway: those from Western countries, Eastern Europe, and developing countries outside Europe. The typology suggests that several combinations of factors can come into play, which can help explain differences in the integration indicators between the above-mentioned groups. While we are unable to discuss all these differences here, we can provide some illustrative cases.

For example, we can consider the various social integration policies aimed at various immigrant groups. For instance, immigrants from Eastern Europe (mainly labour immigrants) do not have the same access to the extensive integration programmes and settlement assistance available to refugees. Moreover, immigrant workers from Eastern Europe do not have access to free Norwegian language courses and other forms of integration assistance (Valenta and Bunar, 2010; Valenta and Strabac, 2011). On the other hand, regarding the social context, it can be argued that immigrant workers from Eastern Europe face fewer prejudices and less discrimination than refugees from developing countries outside Europe. Moreover, the geographical origin of Eastern Europeans can even be considered an asset in certain parts of the Norwegian labour market (Friberg and Midtbøen, 2018).

However, when it comes to social integration into Norwegian society, immigrants from Western countries have the most advantageous starting point. They often have a high level of education, a high socio-economic status, and experience relatively little prejudice and discrimination. Moreover, they are often anchored in resource-rich social networks. According to the above-mentioned model, both they and their descendants are likely to be smoothly integrated into the middle class of the majority population.

However, at the other end of the social scale, we find immigrant groups with the most unfavourable starting point for social integration. They often

[5] For a more detailed discussion of how these and other factors affect integration trends over time, see Luthra, Soehl and Waldinger (2018). See also Portes, Fernández-Kelly and Haller (2009).

perceive hostility from the Norwegian authorities and encounter prejudice and lack of acceptance in their everyday lives. Furthermore, their ethnic networks and communities lack the resources or motivation to provide adequate support for the integration process.

Within this category, we find immigrants with a low level of education from developing countries outside Europe, including asylum seekers whose applications have been rejected. These immigrants have often been in long-term conflicts with the Norwegian authorities, where they have struggled for several years to have the decisions regarding their application rejections overturned. This clearly hinders their social integration (Valenta and Berg, 2012). If, in addition, their skin colour, as well as their ethnic and religious markers, are viewed negatively by the majority population, resulting in discrimination, it can have long-lasting negative consequences for their social integration (Zhou, 1997; Alba, 2005; Midtbøen, 2014; Strabac et al., 2016).

However, we should also emphasise that the rather broad categories of subgroups of immigrants from Western countries, Eastern Europe, and developing countries outside Europe, are only one of many analytical approaches available when investigating the immigrant population in Norway. The advantage of using such subgroups is that they provide useful overviews of general trends, serving as a starting point for more detailed and advanced multi-level analyses (for example, see Luthra, Soehl and Waldinger, 2018). At the same time, it is important to remember that there are fairly large variations within some of the aforementioned broad categories, both in terms of contextual and individual factors, as well as in how they score on various integration indicators (Blom and Henriksen, 2008; Vrålstad and Wiggen, 2018). Moreover, positive and negative contextual and individual factors can also offset each other in some cases (Luthra, Soehl and Waldinger, 2018). In this context, it can often be useful and advantageous to distinguish between various nationality groups or carry out analyses at the micro level (for example, see Portes, Fernández-Kelly and Haller, 2009; Midtbøen and Nadim, 2019; Friberg and Midtbøen, 2018).

To sum up, several individual and contextual factors can influence the integration and social mobility of immigrants and their descendants. In the following sections, we will examine more closely the importance of education, a variable often used as an indicator in the theoretical explanatory model we have referred to (Portes, Fernández-Kelly and Haller, 2009; Stepick and Stepick, 2010; Waters et al., 2010; Luthra, Soehl and Waldinger, 2018). In

the longer term, success within the educational system is one of the most crucial factors for successful social integration and is also an important indicator for the prospects of immigrants' descendants in Norwegian society.

METHOD AND DATA

We use descriptive data sourced from Statistics Norway, SSB. The data is presented at a relatively high aggregate level and focuses on "average" immigrants and their offspring. Our primary emphasis is on evaluating the outcomes of immigrants and their descendants in the Norwegian educational system, differentiating between various categories of immigrants and stages within the educational system. All tables and figures presented in the article are our own compilations based on data from Statistics Norway.

For readers unfamiliar with the Norwegian educational system, a brief presentation of its main features is in order. Education in Norway is divided into four main stages: 1) Seven years of primary school (Norwegian: *Barneskole*, literally: "Children school"), for pupils aged six to twelve (1st to 7th grade); 2) Three years of middle school (Norwegian: *Ungdomsskole*, literally "Youth school"), for pupils aged thirteen to fifteen (8th to 10th grade); 3) Three years of secondary school (Norwegian: *Videregående skole*, literally "going further school"), for pupils aged sixteen to eighteen; 4) Higher education. There are several forms of higher education, but the most common division is between a three-year lower level ("bachelor's degree") and a two-year higher level ("master's degree"). In primary school, pupils do not get formal school grades but are regularly tested, including tests developed by national educational committees. These tests, known as *Nasjonale prøver* in Norwegian (literally: "National tests") are the same for all primary schools in the country. Compulsory education in Norway consists of primary and middle school (Norwegian: *grunnutdanning*, literally: "basic education"). We will refer to it using the English term "primary education".

With regard to education, there are several relevant indicators of "success" within the educational system, such as completion rates, school grades, type of education, etc. We will not undertake a systematic examination of all these indicators, as our objective here is to present a general overview, without delving into excessive detail. As we will see, however, the data reveals some reasonably clear-cut patterns.

Due to the limited quantity of available data, it is difficult to maintain a consistent approach to educational attainment across all levels, from middle

school to higher education. Therefore, our analysis is based on the results of national tests for the 8th grade (2021) and the average final assessment grades for middle school. Unfortunately, finding similarly detailed statistics for secondary education has been a challenge.

Nevertheless, we will investigate relevant statistics for secondary education that highlight the distinctions between ethnic Norwegians, immigrants, and their descendants without subgroup differentiation within the immigrant population. Concerning higher education, we will concentrate on the completion rate, utilising data related to credits earned at Norwegian institutions of higher education during the 2019–2020 academic year.

IMMIGRANTS AND EDUCATION: ANALYSIS OF EDUCATIONAL DATA

Regarding the level of education, as with many other aspects of the immigration population, substantial differences exist. This becomes clear when we examine educational data for immigrants as a whole, and then focus on the reasons for immigration. In table 1, we present a simple overview, distinguishing between immigrants, descendants ("those born in Norway to foreign-born parents"), and ethnic Norwegians (the non-immigrant population).[6]

Table 1. Education level in relation to immigration category (2020) (Percentage of persons of 16 years and older)

Educational level	Ethnic Norwegians	Immigrants	Norwegian-born to foreign-born parents
Primary	23.2	31.0	39.6
Secondary	38.8	28.6	28.7
University and university college ("short")	25.1	23.0	21.1
University and university college ("long")	9.5	16.2	9.3

Source: Statistics Norway.

[6] Methodological note: We have not conducted statistical significance tests for the differences discussed. This is due to tables being generated by an electronic tool provided by Statistics Norway, without us having access to the underlying microdata. Nevertheless, as the numbers concern the whole populations of immigrants and natives with valid educational data, the sample sizes are large and any differences greater than a few percentage points are likely to be statistically significant at conventional levels of significance.

Regarding the level of education, the table 1 shows that the differences between ethnic Norwegians and immigrants are not very large, although the distribution among immigrants is more polarised. In comparison to ethnic Norwegians, the immigrant population exhibits a somewhat higher proportion with only primary education but also a higher proportion with "long" higher education. The "descendants" are on average younger, which can partly explain why there is a higher percentage with only primary school education. However, the "descendants" score more-or-less the same as "ethnic Norwegians" in terms of "long" higher education.

However, when we break down the "immigrant" category by "reason for immigration", greater differences become apparent. Table 2 shows the levels of education among immigrants in relation to the three largest "reason for immigration" categories: labour, family and refugee. Since there is a larger proportion of immigrants who have not completed primary education (compared to ethnic Norwegians), this education category is also included in table 2. We can see that the level of education among labour immigrants is generally high, and is actually higher than that among ethnic Norwegians (cf. table 1).[7]

Moreover, table 2 shows that 45 per cent of labour immigrants have completed higher education which is roughly ten percentage points higher than the corresponding figure for ethnic Norwegians. The level of education among immigrants who have immigrated for "family reasons" is somewhat lower than among the labour immigrants but is nevertheless comparable to that among ethnic Norwegians (cf. table 1 and table 2). However, it should be noted that the "immigration for family reasons" category is very heterogeneous, encompassing family members of labour immigrants, refugees, descendants, and ethnic Norwegians. It is therefore difficult to provide a clear interpretation of the figures for this category, beyond the fact that their level of education is lower than that of labour immigrants.

Regarding the educational level of refugees, table 2 shows that a significant portion (roughly 55 per cent) have only completed primary education or lower. In other words, about half of the "refugee" category have education limited to the primary level, and only about five per cent have completed "long" higher education. The figures in tables 1 and 2 provide a good illustration of the problems that can arise when analysing immigrants as a single, homogenous category.

[7] By "generally high" we mean that labour immigrants have a low proportion of individuals with only primary education or lower and a high proportion of those with completed post-secondary education.

The conclusion we drew from table 1, that the differences in education levels between immigrants and ethnic Norwegians are not particularly significant, can largely be attributed to the notably higher educational level of labour immigrants compared to ethnic Norwegians, alongside the considerably lower educational level of refugees. Statistically, "family" immigrants fall between labour immigrants and refugees. However, as mentioned, the heterogeneity of this category, consisting of family members of immigrant workers, refugees and ethnic Norwegians, makes it challenging to draw any definite conclusions without knowledge of how the category is constituted.

Table 2. Level of education among immigrants in relation to "reason for immigration" (2020) (Percentage of persons aged 16 and older)

Level of education	Labour	Family	Refugee
No completed education	0.3	1.4	3.0
Primary education	18.3	37.8	51.6
Secondary education	35.7	25.1	22.2
University and university college ("short")	22.8	21.6	16.6
University and university college ("long")	22.0	13.1	5.5

Source: Statistics Norway.

In the above section, we have examined the educational levels of immigrants. However, in the long term, the educational attainment of descendants likely plays the most crucial role in social integration and social mobility. In the following empirical analyses, we will therefore focus on the educational attainment of both immigrants and descendants, differentiating between the two groups when the data permits. We will also attempt to distinguish between various subgroups of immigrants, as there are large differences among them.

EDUCATION AND DESCENDANTS: GROUNDS FOR OPTIMISM?

Table 3 shows the results of the national tests for the 8th grade in 2021, covering the subjects of English, reading (Norwegian), and mathematics. The tests are carried out relatively early in the 8th grade, primarily assessing knowledge acquired during primary school. We distinguish between five categories: ethnic Norwegians (the non-immigrant population); Immi-

grants, Group 1, mainly consisting of immigrants from Western and Eastern European EU countries; Immigrants, Group 2, encompassing individuals from "the rest of the world", i.e., those who are not part of Group 1. The vast majority of Group 2 are from Asia and Africa. The last two categories consist of descendants from Group 1 and Group 2. The vast majority of immigrants from Group 1 are either immigrant workers or their family members, while a large proportion of immigrants from Group 2 are refugees. Therefore, these groupings follow to a large extent the distinction between "immigrant workers/refugees" that we have discussed above.

Table 3. National tests in the 8th grade (2021) – English, reading and mathematics (%)

		Ethnic Norwegians	Immigrants Group 1	Immigrants Group 2	Norwegian-born to immigrant parents Group 1	Norwegian-born to immigrant parents Group 2
English	Level 1[a]	7.3	5.2	22.1	5.1	8.1
	Level 2	17.2	16.7	24.3	17.5	18.7
	Level 3	43.0	43.3	34.8	41.0	43.7
	Level 4	21.5	21.7	12.6	21.9	20.4
	Level 5	11.0	13.2	6.2	14.6	9.2
Reading	Level 1	7.8	14.4	30.0	10.3	16.7
	Level 2	15.3	25.0	30.9	19.1	25.7
	Level 3	42.4	38.1	29.0	43.2	38.2
	Level 4	23.5	16.2	7.6	18.3	14.7
	Level 5	10.9	6.3	2.6	9.1	4.7
Maths	Level 1	6.9	8.2	24.9	5.0	14.7
	Level 2	21.0	25.0	33.6	22.3	27.7
	Level 3	39.2	38.5	28.0	38.5	35.3
	Level 4	22.3	19.9	9.8	22.3	15.4
	Level 5	10.6	8.4	3.6	11.8	6.9

[a] Higher level means better performance.

Note: Group 1 includes immigrants and Norwegian-born individuals with foreign-born parents from the EU/EEA, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Group 2 includes immigrants and Norwegian-born individuals with foreign-born parents from Asia, Africa, Latin America, Oceania (except Australia and New Zealand), and European countries not in the EU/EEA.

Source: Statistics Norway.

If we use the category "ethnic Norwegians" (the non-immigrant population) as a basis for comparison, it appears that immigrants from Group 1 perform somewhat better in the subject "English", somewhat worse in reading (in Norwegian), and slightly worse in mathematics. The main impression is that the differences between ethnic Norwegian children and immigrant children from Group 1 are not that great. However, when we compare ethnic Norwegian children and immigrant children from Group 2, we observe substantial differences; ethnic Norwegian children perform significantly better in all three subjects.

Particularly worrying is the fact that approximately 60 per cent of immigrant children (Group 2) are at the lowest two levels in reading and mathematics compared to approximately 25 to 30 per cent of ethnic Norwegian children.[8] Regarding "descendants", Group 1 descendants perform about as well as ethnic Norwegian children. Group 2 descendants perform significantly worse than ethnic Norwegian children, but they still do significantly better than Group 2 immigrants. It is therefore clear that being born in Norway contributes to better school performance at the group level. The differences between immigrants and descendants from both groups in table 3 are not very substantial, but this is hardly surprising since we are mainly looking at immigrants who came to Norway at a young age (during primary school or earlier).

In table 4, we will only focus on the differences between ethnic Norwegians and descendants. We will also examine the data in relation to gender in order to find out whether boys and girls from the various categories perform equally well or not. The table shows the average final assessment grades[9] for lower secondary school (2021) in the subjects of English, mathematics and social studies, in relation to the various categories. Upon examining the data, a clear pattern emerges: descendants from Group 1 perform slightly better than ethnic Norwegians, while descendants from Group 2 perform slightly worse.

However, as demonstrated in other research, girls achieve better grades than boys across all three groups: ethnic Norwegians and both groups of descendants. Interestingly, gender seems to be a more important factor

[8] When referring to "immigrant children", we mean 8th graders who fall under Group 2 immigrants, not descendants. We assume that a large majority of these individuals are children, although it is possible that some/many of them are older, especially if they have experienced significant gaps in their schooling before coming to Norway.

[9] Also referred to as the "overall achievement mark" (source: Statistics Norway).

in explaining grade differences than immigration background. Girls from Group 2 descendants perform somewhat better than ethnic Norwegian boys in two of the three subjects but fall behind ethnic Norwegian girls in all three subjects. The overall impression from table 4 is that descendants generally perform well in lower secondary school. It is also important to note that the vast majority of children attend compulsory lower secondary school, so the minor differences observed are unlikely to be the result of the poorest-performing descendant children "dropping out" to a greater extent than ethnic Norwegian children.

Table 4. Final assessment grades for lower secondary school (2021)

	Boys			**Girls**		
	Ethnic Norwegian	Norwegian-born to immigrant parents Group 1	Norwegian-born to immigrant parents Group 2	Ethnic Norwegian	Norwegian-born to immigrant parents Group 1	Norwegian-born to immigrant parents Group 2
English (written)	4.0	4.3	3.9	4.4	4.8	4.3
Maths	3.8	4.0	3.4	4.0	4.3	3.6
Social studies	4.3	4.4	4.0	4.7	4.9	4.4

Note: Group 1 includes Norwegian-born individuals with foreign-born parents from the EU/EEA, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Group 2 includes Norwegian-born individuals with foreign-born parents from Asia, Africa, Latin America, Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand), and European countries not included in the EU/EEA.

Source: Statistics Norway.

Regarding upper secondary education, it has proved difficult to obtain statistics as detailed as those available for primary and lower secondary education. However, we will examine some relevant data that primarily emphasise distinctions between ethnic Norwegians, immigrants and descendants, without distinguishing between subgroups within the immigrant population. Concerning upper secondary education, the focus extends beyond grades. It also encompasses the degree of completion, since dropout rates in upper secondary education are perceived as highly problematic in terms of social integration and social mobility.

We define the completion rate as the proportion of young persons between the ages of 16 and 24 who have completed upper secondary education

within five years of starting. According to this definition, 79.5 per cent of ethnic Norwegians completed upper secondary education in 2019. The corresponding figures were 64.5 per cent for immigrants and 77.2 per cent for Norwegian-born individuals with foreign-born parents (IMDi, 2019). Thus, there are significant differences between immigrants and ethnic Norwegians, but fortunately, very small differences between ethnic Norwegians and descendants.

The figures are even more surprising when examined in relation to gender. Among women, the completion rate is as follows: ethnic Norwegians, 83.4 per cent; immigrants, 72 per cent, and descendants, 84.7 per cent (IMDi, 2019). Thus, women, in general, have a higher completion rate, with descendants having a slightly higher rate than ethnic Norwegians, while immigrants still have a somewhat lower proportion completing upper secondary school. The completion rate among men is 75.4 per cent for ethnic Norwegians, 70.3 per cent for descendants, and only 57.8 per cent for immigrants. In other words, the completion rate is consistently lower for men, reflecting a pattern similar to our other analyses. In summary, it can be said that descendants, in general, and descendant women, in particular, perform surprisingly well.

The above data does not distinguish between various groups of immigrants. However, there are compelling reasons to believe that significant differences exist within the immigrant population. Analyses of data from 19 immigrant groups, conducted between 2015 and 2017, show notable variations in average grades in upper secondary school among these groups (Bakken and Hyggen, 2018).[10] Students from the groups with the highest average grade were comparable to ethnic Norwegian students (achieving around 4.0 on average for the entire sample), while the immigrant groups with the lowest average grade were almost a whole point lower (with an average of 3.18 for the lowest-ranked immigrant group).

The data utilised by Bakken and Hyggen (2018) had several significant weaknesses. It was based on self-reported grades from a selected group of pupils, and not least, the authors did not distinguish between immigrants and descendants in their analysis. Nevertheless, their results provide an in-

[10] Previous research shows that students with immigrant backgrounds from China, India, Vietnam, Sri Lanka and Bosnia and Herzegovina tend to achieve better results than students from Somalia, Turkey and Iraq (Fekjær, 2006; Bakken and Hyggen, 2018; Kirkeberg et al., 2019). For more discussions on these differences, see Fekjær (2006), and Bakken and Hyggen (2018).

dication that the differences between immigrant groups are significant and align with the results we have presented above.

Regarding higher education, we will focus on the completion rate. We will begin by examining data related to credits obtained at Norwegian institutions of higher education for the 2019–2020 academic year (see table 5 below). In this analysis, too, we will distinguish between ethnic Norwegians, two groups of immigrants, and two groups of descendants, using ethnic Norwegians as our reference point. Among ethnic Norwegians, slightly over 40% achieved regular study progression (60 credits), while around 60% of this first group experienced a reduced rate of completion to varying degrees.

The corresponding completion figures (60 credits) were approximately 35 per cent for immigrants in Group 1 and just over 30 per cent for Group 2. Immigrants in Group 1 thus exhibit a lower rate of completion regarding study progression than ethnic Norwegians, while the study progression for Group 2 was notably poorer, with approximately 10 percentage points fewer in the "full progression or more" category (60 credits).

The pattern is also similar if we look at the percentage of students that did not obtain any credits – Group 2 exhibits the poorest performance, while ethnic Norwegians perform the best. Descendants, on the other hand, seem to outperform immigrants. The study progression of descendants from Group 2 is on par with ethnic Norwegians, while those from Group 1 actually perform slightly better than ethnic Norwegians, although the differences are minor.

Table 5. Credits obtained at Norwegian institutions of higher education (2019–2020) (%)

	Ethnic Norwegian	Immigrants Group 1	Immigrants Group 2	Norwegian-born to immigrant parents Group 1	Norwegian-born to immigrant parents Group 2
Zero credits	12.4	14.8	18.6	11.0	14.1
1–29 credits	17.4	22.6	21.0	15.4	15.3
30–59 credits	28.3	27.7	29.2	28.1	29.4
60 credits or more	41.9	34.9	31.2	45.6	41.2

Source: Statistics Norway.

In summary, the education-related analyses conducted above indicate highly encouraging outcomes for the descendants of immigrants. However, it is worth noting that our data does not distinguish between different categories of immigrants and their respective descendants, and some nationalities may encounter more significant obstacles than others. Nonetheless, the overall trend in the educational achievements of immigrants' offspring offers a promising outlook.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As we have argued in this article, the changes that have occurred in Norway's immigrant population now make it relevant to subdivide that population more clearly in studies of their levels of integration and opportunities for social mobility. Our discussion took its starting point in the two most topical and relevant analytical distinctions: between labour immigrants (who are mainly from Europe) and refugees (mainly from outside Europe); and between immigrants and their descendants. These categories resonate with established theories in the field that analyse how integration is affected by structural factors and individual immigrants' resources and education (Portes, Fernández-Kelly and Haller, 2009; Waters et al., 2010; Luthra, Soehl and Waldinger, 2018).

Even though we have limited our discussion in this article to general trends, several clear patterns emerge. Some of them can be linked to basic postulates in the theoretical approach we are addressing. Among other things, our analysis reveals significant differences within the immigrant population regarding levels of education and success within the educational system. Refugees are likely to encounter difficulties and, therefore, proactive measures should be implemented to support refugees' integration into Norwegian society. Labour migrants perform relatively well, with regard to both general educational attainment and success within the Norwegian educational system. But the most encouraging results of our education-related analyses concern immigrants' descendants.

Immigrants' descendants appear to perform much better than their parents and the differences between immigrants' descendants and ethnic Norwegians tend to be minor. This conclusion applies to the descendants of both labour immigrants and refugees. In addition, we observe that girls tend to perform well, generally achieving higher levels of educational attainment than boys. Accordingly, the gender gap in educational attainment among

descendants is similar to the gender gap between ethnic Norwegians. Our data, which does not distinguish between more than two groups of immigrants and their descendants, undoubtedly conceals the greater problems faced by people of certain nationalities. Even so, the general picture regarding immigrants' descendants is highly positive.

The generally high levels of educational attainment among immigrants' descendants in Norway go some way to refute the gloomy portrayal presented by American researchers regarding the experiences of descendants facing downward social mobility (Portes and Zhou, 1993; Portes, Fernández-Kelly and Haller, 2009). Parts of the immigrant population – people who were forced to flee their countries of origin – encounter adverse contextual and individual circumstances both in Norway and the United States. However, when their descendants in Norway perform better than one might anticipate in view of these circumstances, it may be attributed to some idiosyncrasies in the Norwegian context of reception.

One can argue that Norway's well-developed welfare system helps to minimise some of the disadvantages encountered by the descendants of refugees and partially compensates for their fragile social networks and socio-economic backgrounds (Hermansen, 2016). In Norway, public schools and universities are the predominant institutions within the education system, spanning all levels. They are egalitarian and inclusive, providing free education to all students, thus reducing the impact of family backgrounds and local socio-economic factors. Public education is also facilitated by affordable and easily accessible student loans provided by the state to students from all backgrounds. This combination of factors may have a positive influence on the educational attainment of descendants.

It is also conceivable to hypothesise that Norwegian welfare systems embody distinct societal reception contexts. Even though racism and prejudice based on ethnicity, skin colour and religion remain issues in Norway, negative attitudes towards immigrants are notably lower than in most other Western countries.[11] The sum of all these factors may contribute to outcomes for immigrants' descendants in Norway surpassing those described by American researchers. Immigrants' descendants in Norway give us reason to be optimistic. Even so, as already stated, it is important to maintain

[11] It appears that immigrants experience a relatively favourable societal reception context in Norway, as evidenced by a number of comparative studies demonstrating that the native population of Norway holds some of the most tolerant attitudes towards immigrants in Europe (Bell, Strabac and Valenta, 2022; Bell, Valenta and Strabac, 2021, 2022, 2023).

close monitoring of immigrant groups in Norway facing the most serious problems, enabling proactive measures to counteract such difficulties.[12]

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[12] For more on experiences relating to these measures, see Bakken (2007); Valenta (2009); Lidén (2017); Aarsæther (2021).

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Imigranti u Norveškoj i obrazovni sustav: razlozi za optimizam?

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SAŽETAK

U ovom se radu analiziraju promjene u sastavu imigrantske populacije u Norveškoj, kao i obrazovna postignuća različitih skupina imigranata. U analizama se koriste kvantitativni pokazatelji i analiziraju različite potkategorije imigrantske populacije utemeljene na razlogu za imigraciju i geografskom podrijetlu imigranata. Također se analiziraju obrazovna postignuća potomaka imigranata. U vezi s potomcima, prezentiran je teorijski pristup koji se često koristi kao okvir interpretacije u analizama socijalne mobilnosti i integracijskih te obrazovnih ishoda različitih kategorija potomaka. Rezultati ovoga empirijskog istraživanja pokazuju da potomci postižu bolji uspjeh unutar norveškog obrazovnog sustava nego što bi se očekivalo u odnosu na postavke korištenoga teorijskog okvira razvijenoga u Sjedinjenim Američkim Državama. Rasprava je usmjerena na moguće razloge za te neočekivano bolje rezultate u norveškom kontekstu.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI: imigranti, potomci, obrazovanje, Norveška, obrazovni uspjeh