

# The Problem of Equal Opportunities of Housing

## *Immigrants in a Liberalized Housing Market*

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This chapter focuses on equality in the realm of housing, and the dilemma raised when universal policy objectives are combined with market mechanisms. More specifically, the focus here is on the equality of opportunities for adequate and affordable housing for immigrants<sup>1</sup> in the Norwegian housing market. The Norwegian Government's vision for its housing policy is universal in that all people are to have a good and safe home. This policy includes goals to promote housing conditions that further welfare and participation.<sup>2</sup> This is ambitious, but at the same time, it underlines that a home is a fundamental good that should be accessible for all, independent of both income level and background.<sup>3</sup>

Universalism is often connected to the Nordic welfare model where welfare policies are not targeted towards specific disadvantaged groups but include the entire population. The objective is to promote equality and solidarity between classes, regions and between men and women by establishing universal access to services.<sup>4</sup> The immigrant population is included in this universalism.<sup>5</sup> However, with respect to housing policy, the state has primarily left its implementation to the market. This includes free market distribution and defining the supply rates to market demands.

The inherent difficulties of combining a market system with the social ambitions of securing adequate and affordable housing for all lie in the fact that the market allocates housing through the ability to pay rather than human needs. A dilemma related to universal visions about good housing for all combined with market mechanisms are the difficulties of adjusting the market in times of increasing housing prices and inequalities in housing. This dilemma is manifested when looking at immigrants in the housing market.

The norm about equality of housing is easy to embrace, but difficult to examine. Is equality of housing about equal opportunities, equal treatment, or equal housing outcomes between immigrants and the rest of the population? Studies show that a stable and safe housing situation is sought by and highly-valued among immigrants in Norway.<sup>6</sup> This concerns security of tenure, affordability, as well as adequate housing and type of neighbourhood.

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<sup>1</sup> Immigrant is used as a common concept throughout this chapter, if not specified. It includes people with a legal residence permit: refugees, labour immigrants, people coming for family reunion or family establishment. The immigrant population includes immigrants and people born in Norway of two immigrant parents.

<sup>2</sup> Kommunal- og regionaldepartementet, *Meld.St.17 Byggje - bu - leve* (Regjeringa 2012-2013).

<sup>3</sup> Kim Astrup, 'Kan boligmarkedet temmes? Smartere boligpolitikk i et markedsbasert system' in Jostein Askim, Kristoffer Kolltveit and Per Gunnar Røe (eds), *En smartere stat Veier til bedre politikk og styring* (Universitetsforlaget 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Anneli Anttonen et al., 'Universalism and the Challenges of Diversity' in Anneli Anttonen, Liisa Häikiö and Kolbeinn Stefánsson (eds), *Welfare State, Universalism and Diversity* (Edward Elgar Publishing Limited 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Culture, *Act Relating to Equality and a Prohibition Against Discrimination. (Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act)* (2018).

<sup>6</sup> Susanne Søholt, *Gjennom nåløyet* (Universitetet i Oslo 2007); Susanne Søholt et al., *Bosetting av flyktninger i storbyene* (NIBR-rapport 2020:2); Susanne Søholt and Brit Lynnebakke, 'Do Immigrants' Preferences for Neighbourhood Qualities Contribute to Segregation? The Case of Oslo' (2015) 5 *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 1.

With this in mind, the term ‘equality of housing’ here refers to *the real opportunities of immigrants to influence their own housing situation in line with needs and preferences, adequate to duration of stay and life phases, compared to the rest of the population*. The aim therefore is to explore and reflect upon equality of housing for immigrants through this lens. The emphasis on *equality* points to comparison, in this case, with the non-immigrant population and between immigrant groups with different origins and migratory status and different times of staying.<sup>7</sup> The term *opportunities* refers to the capacity of immigrants to trade their resources and preferences into housing, given the structures in the housing market. To examine the extent of equal opportunities of housing I will look at the following factors:

- a) *Housing outcomes* included tenures, crowdedness, and neighbourhood quality relative to the majority.
- b) *Immigration, integration, and settlement policies*.
- c) *Formal rights* to housing and housing means.
- d) *Laws and regulations* aimed at hindering others to deny immigrants access to a satisfying housing situation.
- e) *Immigrants’ resources and preferences* relevant to pursue and acquire an adequate and stable housing and neighbourhood situation.

Immigration, settlement, and integration policies, together with formal rights to housing and laws and regulations, concern the societal and housing structures that frame immigrants’ equality of housing opportunities. Housing outcomes and resources and preferences look at the relation between individuals’ sum of resources and preferences and how they have managed to trade these into housing outcomes, given the specific housing market they are part of.

Using immigrants and Norway as a case for discussing equal opportunities of housing in a liberal and deregulated housing market opens a discussion as to the dilemmas inherent in these contradictory goals. Immigrants exemplify groups of people who are suited to test how real housing systems are developed to include people who do not automatically possess the ordinary tickets (stable job, income, savings, inheritance) to access the housing market, and who often start their housing career with a handicap because they are not born as part of the system.

A focus on equal opportunities is vital for the development of sound and inclusive multi-ethnic societies. In Norway the immigrant population counts for about 18 percent of the population, and one-third of the Oslo population.<sup>8</sup> In 2021, one out of two immigrants had stayed in Norway for less than ten years.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Migratory status refers to background for residence permit: refugee, labour immigrant, family reunion or establishment, student.

<sup>8</sup> Statistics Norway, *Innvandrere og norskfødte med innvandrerbakgrunn* (2021).

<sup>9</sup> IMDi, *Indikatorer for integrering. Tilstand og utviklingstrekk ved inngangen til 2021* (2021).

## 1 The Norwegian Context: A Liberal and Deregulated Housing Market

A controversial issue in Norway during 2021 is how to regulate a deregulated and liberal housing market in such ways that people with low assets can gain access to a satisfying home in line with the political goal that *all* people should be able to obtain a secure and safe home either as tenants or owners.<sup>10</sup> Housing systems and policies are national, and patterns and mechanisms for inequality/equality differ between nations and localities, even in Scandinavia. Immigrants' opportunities in the housing market therefore vary between the Scandinavian countries.<sup>11</sup>

There was a strong social norm in post-war Norway, as in the other Scandinavian countries, concerning decent housing for all as provided through a high degree of state interventions in markets. This included both tenure and housing conditions. The Norwegian Government prioritized co-operative homeownership to the advantage of social and private rental housing already in the 1950s on the grounds that no one should profit from the needs of others for housing.<sup>12</sup> Through the liberalization and deregulation processes of the housing market since the mid-1980s, this virtue about housing has been replaced in the public discourse by portraying housing more as an investment and less as a home. Norwegian social rental housing is one of the clearest examples of the cross-national trend of increasing market-orientation and means-testing. Market-like rents were introduced into the social sector in Oslo in the 1990s.<sup>13</sup>

The political intentions with the liberalization of the housing market are that regulations and planning should adjust the supply to meet peoples' needs, and that broad labour market participation should enable almost *all* people living in Norway to have access to and keep a safe and stable home. A safe home could principally be in either the rental or the owners' market. However, political means prioritize ownership. Tenancy is regarded as temporary for people in transitional phases. The supply of private rentals is mostly by small-scale landlords, letting out one or a few dwellings, often in their own house. Commercial landlords are found mostly in urban areas. Short-time contracts and market-based rents are widespread.

According to a 2017 study comparing rent levels in Scandinavia, rents in Norway exceeded rents in Sweden and Denmark significantly.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, Norwegians in general (homeowners) use less of their income on housing costs due to taxation and income levels. Housing costs are however increasing for tenants. They have no tax or other deductions. Across the EU Member States

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<sup>10</sup> Kommunal- og regionaldepartementet, *Meld.St.17 Byggje - bu – leve*.

<sup>11</sup> Roger Andersson et al., *Immigration, Housing and Segregation in the Nordic Welfare States* (University of Helsinki 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Trygve Bratteli, *Stortingsforhandlinger, bind 7a* (Stortinget 1951).

<sup>13</sup> Berit Nordahl (ed), *Boligmarked og boligpolitikk* (Akademika forlag 2012); and Jardar Sørvoll, 'The Dilemmas of Means-tested and Market-oriented Social Rental Housing: Municipal Housing in Norway 1945-2019' (2019) 6 *Critical Housing Analysis* 51.

<sup>14</sup> Report from Oxford Research by Mari O. Mamre 2017 on contract from the Danish Business Authority. Dis N 08.01.2017.

the most common and serious problems are rent increases and lack of affordable housing in urban areas.<sup>15</sup>

To support those who cannot participate under the market conditions, there is a residual and strongly means-tested social housing policy aiming to provide temporary, decent housing conditions for disadvantaged households.<sup>16</sup> There is no queuing, so allocation is unpredictable. When a dwelling is vacant, the most disadvantaged registered household adequate for the dwelling is prioritized. The decision of prioritization is discretionary. In 2020, only about 4.4 per cent of the housing stock was social housing in Norway and even less in Oslo, the capital of Norway.<sup>17</sup> Of households applying for social housing in Oslo, 65 per cent were declined, compared to 26 per cent in the rest of the country. Those who do not manage to be prioritized are left to the mercy of the market dynamics. Even though the social housing segment is a marginal part of the housing stock, it is of high importance for people in need competing for affordable housing.<sup>18</sup>

The lack of publicly accessible and affordable housing implies that the first settlement of refugees has to take place in both private and social rental housing, and that the majority of the immigrant population lives in the private housing market, either as tenants or as homeowners.<sup>19</sup> The most important issue with social and other housing means is that they are targeted towards people with difficulties with respect to access and retaining a satisfying home in the private market. When focusing on equal opportunities of housing for refugees and immigrants, the policy areas of immigration and integration, together with housing policy, are most important to examine. In various ways, these policy areas affect *immigrants' real opportunities for becoming able to influence their own housing situation in line with needs and preferences, adequate to duration of stay and phase of life.*

## 2 Approaching Equality of Housing

Equality of housing for immigrants is defined here as the ability of immigrants to influence their own housing situation, adequate to life-phase and duration of stay. Housing researcher Peter King argues that a focus on an adequate housing situation is linked to arguments about housing as a freedom right and as something absolute, while housing standards will vary across national and social contexts.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the material implications of freedom rights will vary correspondingly. Housing, a place to stay, is referred to as a necessary means for

<sup>15</sup> Max-Christopher Krapp et al., 'Housing Policies in the European Union' (2020).

<sup>16</sup> Because of its strong means-testing and prioritization of disadvantaged households, the notion social housing is used for municipal housing in Norway.

<sup>17</sup> KOSTRA key figures. Municipal dwellings. Statistics Norway: Families and Households. 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Jardar Sørvoll, 'The Dilemmas of Means-tested and Market-oriented Social Rental Housing: Municipal Housing in Norway 1945-2019' (2019).

<sup>19</sup> Sørholt et al., *Bosetting av flyktninger i storbyene*; and Susanne Sørholt et al., *Flere flyktninger bosatt raskere. Hvordan fikk kommunene det til?* (NIBR, OsloMet 2018).

<sup>20</sup> Peter King, 'Housing as a Freedom Right' (2003) 18 *Housing Studies* 661. In this article King discusses Martha Nussbaum's contribution about necessary human functions.

guaranteeing functions like human flourishing. The connection between housing and human flourishing is linked to what the home does and implies for the people living there, like fostering functions from security and shelter to social esteem and socialisation to self-actualization.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, what the dwelling or the home does for people is conditioned on life situation. One dimension that matters for immigrants is duration of stay. Taking these arguments down to the basics, one way to assess equality of housing opportunities for immigrants is to examine how housing is structured; that is production, distribution, and regulation of access to housing, and how individual resources and preferences interact to promote individual opportunities. According to several moral philosophers, the focus on individuals' opportunities concerns resources, rights, choices, and capabilities and not welfare and just distribution as such. Their view is that the state has the moral duty to further means, and remove constraints on individuals' pursuit of welfare, while achieving individual welfare and happiness is the person's own responsibility.<sup>22</sup> This view respects that people have individual preferences to achieve in their housing efforts as well as individual conceptions of what good housing is for them.

One argument for a focus on equal opportunity for access to adequate housing is that immigrants have to be allowed access into the dominating structures in the housing market to make this possible.<sup>23</sup> Another argument put forward by King, where equality of housing is the aim, is that differential treatment by the state is necessary if housing equality has not been agreed upon on a voluntary basis by the actors involved in the distribution of housing.<sup>24</sup> This argument highlights the contradictions between equality in outcome and equal treatment. For people with different resources, preferences, capabilities and positions in the housing market, there would possibly be a need for differential treatment to achieve equal opportunities for access to adequate housing. New studies from Norway conclude that the increasing reliance on market mechanisms and lack of geographic sensitivity in housing policies and means, fail to acknowledge the lack of efficiency in metropolitan housing markets. Escalating housing prices outpacing incomes, and unequal access to inheritance and the 'family bank' are driving urban inequalities.<sup>25</sup> These dynamics are most challenging for equality of housing opportunities for immigrants, as they are overrepresented in the metropolitan region.

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<sup>21</sup> Amartya Sen, *Equality of What?* (Stanford University 1979); and Abraham H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (Harper Collins Publishers 1954/1987).

<sup>22</sup> Reference to Dworkin, Nussbaum, Rawls and Sen in Hilde Bojer, *Distributional Justice: Theory and Measurement* (Routledge Frontiers of Political Economy, Routledge 2003).

<sup>23</sup> Friedrich Heckmann and Dominique Schnapper, 'The Integration of Immigrants in the European Societies' in Tom Kilton and Ceres Birkhead (eds), *Migration in Society, Culture and the Library* (The American Library Association 2005).

<sup>24</sup> Peter King, 'Housing, Equality and Neutrality' (2000) 15 *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 115.

<sup>25</sup> Lena Magnusson and Terje Wessel, 'Housing Market Filtering in the Oslo Region: Pro-market Housing Policies in a Nordic Welfare-state Context' (2019) 19 *International Journal of Housing Policy* 483; and Mary Ann Stamsø, 'Housing and the Welfare State in Norway' (2009) 32 *Scandinavian Political Studies* 195.

Another approach to the importance of location for equality of housing, is *geographic equality of opportunity*.<sup>26</sup> Location and neighbourhood qualities and preferences affect the conception of adequate housing. Unwanted ethnic residential segregation points to wider perceptions of how adequate housing is linked to the importance of opportunity of place for social inclusion and societal participation.<sup>27</sup>

### 3 Housing Outcomes

Housing outcomes indirectly describe how the immigrant population has adapted to the possibilities in the Norwegian housing market, compared to the rest of the population and in between immigrant groups. From the outset, it gives an important overview of how immigrants have succeeded or not with integrating in the housing market, seen in the light of the political goals about safe and stable housing for all.

In an ideal and non-discriminatory society, no kinds of ascribed status should impact on opportunities of housing. In the real world, housing outcomes give an overview of how immigrants have managed their housing situation in Norway compared to the rest of the population, given the interaction of the housing system, potential discrimination and structural racism and immigrants' sum of resources and preferences. The selected outcomes under scrutiny are development of tenure over time, crowdedness, and kind of neighbourhood when it comes to population composition. Unsatisfactory housing outcomes compared to the national goals for good housing can be explained by a lack of opportunities, but it could also be due to other preferences or priorities.

#### 3.1 Tenure

Tenure is vital since both housing and integration policies in Norway are directed towards homeownership. Rental housing is seen as temporary and political measures prioritize ownership. According to Statistics Norway, the general trend is that length of residence in Norway increases share of homeownership in the immigrant population.<sup>28</sup> In 2020, 58 per cent of households with immigrant background owned their home, compared to 76 per cent among the rest of the population.

Only 17 per cent of those with a short duration of stay (less than 10 years) have become homeowners. There are significant differences between immigrant groups. People from Pakistan, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, and Bosnia have achieved about the same or even higher level of homeownership as the non-immigrant

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<sup>26</sup> Casey J. Dawkins, 'Putting Equality in Place: The Normative Foundations of Geographic Equality of Opportunity' (2017) 27 *Housing Policy Debate* 897.

<sup>27</sup> Ministry of Education and Research, *Integration Through Knowledge. The Government's Integration Strategy for 2019-2022* (2018).

<sup>28</sup> Christian Hrafn Brovold, 'Høy formue blant norskfødte med innvanderforeldre' (*Statistics Norway*, 2020), accessed 01.09.2021. <https://www.ssb.no/inntekt-og-forbruk/artikler-og-publikasjoner/hoy-formue-blant-norskfodte-med-innvanderforeldre>.

population. The same development has not occurred among people with Somalian background.<sup>29</sup>

Homeownership in the immigrant population is increasing over the generations and is most widespread among young adults born in Norway of immigrant parents, of whom 63 per cent have become homeowners. They are also the group with the highest share of secondary homes, 15 per cent, compared to 11 per cent in the rest of the population. They possess more valuable dwellings, as they mostly live in and own secondary homes in high priced housing markets in the big cities and their surroundings. For this reason, they dispose over the highest housing wealth – at the same time as they on average have the highest debts.<sup>30</sup>

Even though home ownership has increased among the immigrant population with length of residence, this increase has stopped in almost all the population except for labour immigrants (2015-2018). This is most striking in Oslo where 26.5 per cent of the population are tenants, with the highest share among labour immigrants from the EU and other Western countries (47.3 %). But while their share of homeownership is increasing, it is decreasing for people from refugee producing countries in Africa and Asia and for the non-immigrant population.<sup>31</sup> According to Statistics Norway, the share of homeownership among low-income households have fallen from 39 to 29 per cent from 2003 to 2016, while the share of homeownership has been stable among those with higher incomes.<sup>32</sup> As the rental contracts have become temporary with the deregulations, increase in rentals imply that more people have difficulties to achieve a stable housing situation in this market segment. This quote illustrates how unpredictable and external conditions in the rental market affect peoples' possibilities to control their housing situation.

We are nomads and accustomed to moving. But as nomads we have our own tent and can decide when to move. Here we are forced to be nomads because we can't find stability in the rental market. (Somali couple).<sup>33</sup>

As to tenants, households with immigrant background are overrepresented in social housing. This is especially the case for immigrant families with many children.<sup>34</sup> Of such families with social security benefits, 40 percent live in social housing compared to seven per cent of the rest of the population.

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<sup>29</sup> Signe Vrålstad and Kjersti Stabell Wiggen, *Levekår blant innvandrere i Norge 2016* (Rapporter, 2017).

<sup>30</sup> Christian Hrafn Brovold, 'Høy formue blant norskfødte med innvandrerforeldre' (2020).

<sup>31</sup> Statistics Norway. <https://www.ssb.no/statbank/table/1103611036>, accessed 27.08.2021.

<sup>32</sup> Åsmund Gram Dokka, 'Mindre vanlig å eie bolig blant økonomisk utsatte grupper' (*Statistics Norway*, 2018) <<https://www.ssb.no/bygg-bolig-og-eiendom/artikler-og-publikasjoner/mindre-vanlig-a-eie-bolig-blant-okonomisk-utsatte-grupper>>, accessed 09.09.2021.

<sup>33</sup> Susanne Søholt, 'Pathways to Integration: Cross-cultural Adaptations to the Housing Market in Oslo' (2014) 40 *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 1637.

<sup>34</sup> Othilde Skjøstad, 'Store sosialhjelp-familier bor oftere i kommunale boliger' (*Statistics Norway*, 2019), accessed 02.09.2021. [https://www.ssb.no/sosiale-forhold-og-](https://www.ssb.no/sosiale-forhold-og)



### 3.2 *Over-crowdedness*

Over-crowdedness<sup>35</sup> is another way to compare housing outcomes between the immigrant- and the rest of the population. Studies of living conditions among immigrants show considerable differences between the non-immigrant and the immigrant population, but that over-crowdedness has been reduced over time. Overall, it has decreased from 53 per cent in 1995 to 23 per cent in 2019 among the immigrant population compared to 7 per cent among the rest of the population. Refugees and persons coming for family reunion experience a higher share of over-crowdedness than other immigrants. People from Somalia (52%), Syria (50%) and Pakistan (41%) experience the most cramped housing situations.<sup>36</sup> This quote illustrates how cramped dwellings reduces newly-arrived refugees' need for socialization as part of the accommodation;

The dwelling was so small that I couldn't invite people to my home. I could neither have overnight guests. I had to go out to meet people. (Refugee in his first home, assigned to him by a municipality).<sup>37</sup>

Unwanted over-crowdedness can affect everyday life and well-being negatively in many ways. The corona pandemic is a latest example of how it was anticipated that over-crowdedness and ethnic residential segregation increased infection and affected immigrants' possibilities for home-school, home-quarantine, isolation etc. negatively.<sup>38</sup>

### 3.3 *Neighbourhood and Location*

So far, I have looked at housing outcomes as if the dwelling and the home are isolated from their surroundings. They are not. A satisfying housing situation is most often linked to the quality of the neighbourhood and the location, and the life chances following the specific housing.<sup>39</sup>

In Oslo, citizens with immigrant background are overrepresented in the city districts in the north and south with a high share of co-operative and multifamily buildings from the 1970's and onwards, and in an old city district in the centre east. A study from Statistics Norway of ethnic residential segregation in 21 municipalities with a high share of immigrants, shows that even though the level of segregation is high in Oslo, there is a small decrease over time (2005, 2011,

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kriminalitet/artikler-og-publikasjoner/store-sosialhjelp-familier-bor-oftere-i-kommunale-boliger.

<sup>35</sup> Statistics Norway (2017) defines that a household is over-crowded if there are more persons than rooms in the dwelling, that one person only has one room and that there are less than 25 m<sup>2</sup> per person. In 2014 the limit was 20 m<sup>2</sup> per person.

<sup>36</sup> Petter Kristiansen Arnesen, *Innvandrere bor trangere* (SSB analyse, 2020) and Svein Blom and Kristin Henriksen, *Levekår blant innvandrere i Norge 2005/2006* (Rapporter, 2008).

<sup>37</sup> SØholt et al., *Bosetting av flyktninger i storbyene*.

<sup>38</sup> Ragnhild Skogheim et al., *Informasjon og tiltak rettet mot innvandrerbefolkningen i forbindelse med Covid-19. Delrapport 2* (2020).

<sup>39</sup> Dawkins, 'Putting Equality in Place: The Normative Foundations of Geographic Equality of Opportunity'.

2017), but with differences between local areas and immigrant background.<sup>40</sup> Of importance in Oslo is that several areas with a particularly low share of immigrants in 2005 have got relatively more immigrants in 2017. These studies indicate that a slow desegregation takes place parallel to increase in immigration. Still, studies show that for example refugees who have been settled in non-immigrant neighbourhoods and who want to remain in the area when they become responsible for their own housing after the initial settlement, must move to immigrant dense areas where housing prices are lower.<sup>41</sup>

#### **4 Explanations for the Differences in Housing Outcomes and Opportunities**

Looking at housing outcomes is an indirect way to assess immigrants' housing opportunities which can be explained in different ways. One way is to look at how the immigration, settlement and integration policies together affect immigrants' possibilities to take care of their housing situation. Another way is to look at the formal structure in the housing market and examine if and how it supports inclusion/exclusion of people with immigrant background. A third way is to focus on laws and regulations and if/how they are efficient in preventing parties from denying immigrants equal access to a decent housing situation. A fourth way is to look at the immigrants and refugees themselves to assess whether they have sufficient and adequate resources, preferences, and capabilities to cope with the housing market in a manner that is for them satisfying.

Together these four perspectives open for different answers and explanations for immigrants' equal opportunities of housing. Immigrants' own perspectives are valuable when assessing how they link housing and prospects for human flourishing, as well as social participation. Moreover, their experiences can shed light on the shortcomings of the regulations and means aiming at enhancing their access to adequate housing and hindering unwanted discrimination. All four explanations are explored in the following sections.

##### **4.1 Immigration, Settlement, and Integration Policies**

Adequate explanations are not found where equality of housing opportunities is studied solely in relation to housing policy and the housing market. For immigrants and refugees, opportunities for equal access to housing is embedded in immigration and integration policies. Immigration policy affects who can enter Norway and on what conditions. Rights and obligations of different categories of newly arrived immigrants differ and affect their housing and integration possibilities. The aim of the integration policy is that all immigrants with permission to stay in Norway become economically independent through

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<sup>40</sup> Tom Kornstad, Terje Skjerpen and Lasse Sigbjørn Stambøl, *Utviklingen i bostedssegregering i utvalgte store og sentrale kommuner etter 2005* (Reports, 2018).

<sup>41</sup> Søholt, 'Gjennom nåløyet'; and Søholt et al., *Bosetting av flyktninger i storbyene*.

work,<sup>42</sup> which is of high importance for equal opportunities in the housing market.

#### 4.1.1 Different Housing Possibilities for Different Migrant Categories

In Norway, labour immigrants are obliged to find their own housing from day one, if they are not accommodated by their employer. They are not entitled to social housing resources as their residence permit presupposes that they can cater for themselves. However, when registered in Norway with a work permit, they are entitled to the same social security benefits as Norwegian citizens.<sup>43</sup> Opposed to the system in Sweden, refugees in Norway who are not self-sufficient are assigned to a municipality in an agreement between the state and a municipality. The first settlement could be anywhere in the country. Important considerations are linked to refugees' possibilities for education and work in the settling municipalities and possibilities for social inclusion in everyday life.<sup>44</sup> In 2021, the settlement policy underscored that refugees should not be settled in neighbourhoods with a high share of immigrants. The municipality is obliged to provide refugees with their first accommodation, introduction programme and economic support. The refugees are obliged to follow the programme in order to receive the support. When the initial mutual obligations between refugees and municipalities have come to an end, refugees are free to remain or move if they can cater for themselves. People coming for family reunion are the responsibility of their family members. Exceptions are refugees who get family reunion within six months. These families can get adequate housing from the municipality. People who are admitted to Norway as family members have no individual rights to housing and residence before they have received a permanent residence permit.<sup>45</sup> Irregular migrants have no rights to housing and social services and must rely on informal networks and informal ways of securing their accommodation. If not able to get a bed for the night from their network, they might sleep outdoors or in temporary shelters for the homeless.<sup>46</sup> The state has no 'contract' with irregular migrants, except where in need due to a health emergency. They are left to themselves or expelled.

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<sup>42</sup> Ministry of Education and Research, *Integration Through Knowledge. The Government's Integration Strategy for 2019-2022*.

<sup>43</sup> NOU, *Velferd og migrasjon. Den norske modellens framtid* (Departementenes servicesenter 2011).

<sup>44</sup> Ministry of Education and Research, *Integration Through Knowledge. The Government's Integration Strategy for 2019-2022*.

<sup>45</sup> The conditions for family reunion for immigrants with different statuses are regulated in the Immigration Act (Act Relating to the Admission of Foreign Nationals into the Realm and Their Stay Here).

<sup>46</sup> Jan-Paul Brekke and Susanne Søholt, *I velferdsstatens grenseland. En evaluering av ordningen med bortfall av botilbud i mottak for personer med endelig avslag på asylsøknaden* (2005) and Evelyn Dyb, *Bostedsløs : politikk og praksis* (Gyldendal 2020).

#### 4.1.2 The Impact of the Local Housing Context for First Settlement of Refugees

The first settlement of refugees is targeted for differential treatment. They are prioritized in the queue of disadvantaged households, and they receive housing conditions better than if they could have catered for themselves on arrival to Norway. The intention is to support their integration. Studies show that the municipalities solve the first settlement of refugees very differently.<sup>47</sup> Factors that are decisive include local political assumptions and strategies about the first settlement of refugees, pressure in the local housing market, availability of affordable social or private housing to people being housed by the municipality, interpretations of the role of the dwelling and the neighbourhood for the integration prospects of the refugees, and the case workers' assessments of 'what is good enough'. The result of the local differences in housing markets, municipal housing resources and interpretations is that refugees' first places of settlement differ and might affect their future housing possibilities. To take one example. In Oslo, refugees can be distributed between 15 city districts with very different local housing markets, with varying pressure and prices, and with varying shares of social housing.<sup>48</sup> According to the Refugee Report from 2017 from the Oslo City Government, refugees should be treated as other citizens and be settled in the private rental market, which is the dominant segment, if there are no specific reasons to settle them in social housing.<sup>49</sup> However, being housed in private or social housing has implications for tenure security and economic support.

Tenure security is about predictability. Contracts are most often temporary in both social and private rentals, but it is easier for private landlords to end contracts and deny renewal than in social housing. In social housing it is easier to get renewals of the contract if the refugee is not ready to manage the private market.

If settled in social housing, refugees are entitled to a housing allowance from the state and the municipality. If settled in private rentals, they are only entitled to housing allowance from the state. If they need additional economic support to pay the rent, they will have to apply for social assistance. This sounds harmless, as the refugee is entitled to extra economic support if in need. However, being settled in a dwelling where there is need for social assistance over time to pay the rent, reduces possibilities for permanent residency and for family reunion, as these possibilities get reduced with receiving social economic support.<sup>50</sup> This implies that being first settled in a private rental might have severe impacts for refugees' future possibilities, while it has no such effects for refugees who are

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<sup>47</sup> Susanne Sørholt and Aadne Aasland, 'Enhanced Local-level Willingness and Ability to Settle Refugees: Decentralization and Local Responses to the Refugee Crisis in Norway' (2019) *Journal of Urban Affairs* 781; and Kristin Thorshaug et al., *Det er litt sånn at veien blir til mens en går* (NTNU Samfunnsforskning 2011).

<sup>48</sup> Sørholt et al., *Bosetting av flyktninger i storbyene*.

<sup>49</sup> Oslo City, *Refugee Report* (Oslo Municipality 2017).

<sup>50</sup> Rules for family reunion differ. Most important for refugees is that if they apply before six months after they were granted protection, there is no requirement of an income. In most other cases, there are requirements for income for the reference person living in Norway.

provided social housing.<sup>51</sup> These are examples of how immigration and integration policies crosscut with housing policy for immigrants of different migratory status.

#### **4.2 Housing Structures and Formal Rights in the Homeowners' Market**

Housing systems and structures differ, are contextual and affect immigrants' (equal) opportunities for housing. To be structurally integrated implies that immigrants have access to and experience the same formal conditions and possibilities as the rest of the population when they are searching for a home.<sup>52</sup> This implies that they get access to rights, memberships, and relevant positions in the country of immigration. In the Norwegian case, immigrants with a legal stay have rights to rent or buy a home on equal conditions as national citizens. Most important is that homeownership is universal and open for all. Conditions for entering the homeowners' market is not means-tested but demands individual purchasing power. Tax deductions are the same for all regardless of level of income. Housing co-operatives form an important segment of the homeownership segment. Immigrants can apply for membership in the housing associations, making it possible to buy a cooperative dwelling at the same conditions as other members, including seniority. In a former study this was articulated by a Tamil who said: '*the housing cooperatives saved us, [for the first time] we experienced being included on the same conditions as Norwegians.*'<sup>53</sup> Immigrants can apply for bank credit to buy an owner-occupied dwelling or a cooperative dwelling, however, the condition of the mortgage depends on employment status, income level, savings, and potential family support for the equity. As mentioned, the main trend is that the immigrant population is entering the homeowners' market, though in varying degrees. This is an important indicator of immigrants' access to this segment in the housing market.

Immigrants have the same rights in the housing market as the majority, but it is the developers who define the supply. So far municipalities do not have the possibility to instruct developers on the kind of tenure in new constructions nor on the building of non-profit rentals. This implies that the supply of affordable housing to people with modest or weak incomes is scarce in high-priced housing areas and affect immigrants' possibilities for adequate housing.

Social housing means is a response to market dysfunctions when it comes to distributing good and safe homes to all, in line with housing policy goals.<sup>54</sup> Social housing means are universal in the sense that they are targeted, but means-tested towards all people, who have difficulties accessing the housing market on their own. In principle immigrant background has no relevance, except for irregular migrants who are excluded. Social housing means are about treating people differently to obtain not equal, but decent housing conditions for people

<sup>51</sup> Anne Staver Balke, 'Hard Work for Love: The Economic Drift in Norwegian Family Immigration and Integration Policies' (2015) 36 *Journal of Family Issues* 1453.

<sup>52</sup> Heckmann and Schnapper, 'The Integration of Immigrants in the European Societies'.

<sup>53</sup> Sørholt, 'Gjennom nåløyet.

<sup>54</sup> Kommunal- og regionaldepartementet, *Meld.St.17 Byggje - bu - leve*.

who are unable to cope with the housing market on their own. Thus, social housing means show the need for differential treatment – as opposed to equal treatment – to achieve opportunities for adequate housing.

The most important means are social housing, housing allowances, loans for deposits in the private rental market and municipal start-up loans from the Housing Bank to buy a dwelling. The start-up loans do not require the 15 per cent equity to get the mortgage but ability to have a down payment. The last restrictions (2014) in the start-up loan arrangements excluded people with low/moderate incomes who have prospects for better incomes in the future. This limitation hampered both low-income labour immigrants and any single person with moderate incomes living in high priced areas like Oslo.<sup>55</sup> Refugee families with low incomes are included in the start-loan criteria, as they in most cases will need (too) many years to save and earn enough money to buy their home. Supporting their way into a stable home is part of the wider integration and housing policies. To facilitate transfer to homeownership, some municipalities have worked out different possibilities for ‘rent to buy’. This implies that a household living in social housing pays down on the mortgage through the rent to become owner and take over the mortgage over time. A study showed that this arrangement was highly valued among refugees and other immigrants. It was predictable and secured them a stable home as they did not have to move to become homeowners.<sup>56</sup>

### 4.3 *Laws and Regulations*

In the introduction I brought up the view that the state has the moral duty to further means and remove constraints on individuals’ pursuit of welfare. For people in marginal positions, it is vital that there are social norms, laws and regulations to protect them from discrimination in housing, and to secure their possibilities to acquire a decent home.

The principle about equality and non-discrimination is included in the Constitution of Norway (§ 98). Norway has further ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CEDAW). The Norwegian Act about Equality and Prohibition against Discrimination is founded on CEDAW.<sup>57</sup> However, Norway interprets the right to housing as stated in CEDAW differently from the UN.<sup>58</sup> Norway does not recognize a universal right to housing, but a right to temporary housing in emergency cases, and a right to get assistance to manage the housing market

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<sup>55</sup> Mari O. Mamre, ‘Boligkjøpekraften til en representativ lokal førstegangskjøper’ (2021) 4 *Tidsskrift for boligforskning* 7 and Husbanken, *Municipal Start-up Loans* (2021) <https://www.husbanken.no/english/start-up-loan/>, accessed 21.10.21.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas Hugaas Molden and Melina Røe, *Fra kommunal leietaker til boligeier. Erfaringer med leie til eie i Trondheim* (2019).

<sup>57</sup> Ministry of Culture, *Act Relating to Equality and a Prohibition Against Discrimination. (Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act)*.

<sup>58</sup> International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Article 5, e, iii.

when in difficulties.<sup>59</sup> As mentioned, first settlement of refugees is a part of this obligation. How the municipalities interpret and attend to these duties are decentralized to municipal autonomy, but the offer should be in line with public norms (§ 4).

The lack of a right to housing makes it difficult for immigrants and others to get predictable support when encountering difficulties in the housing market, either because of a lack of purchasing power, lack of social housing, possible discrimination, or not coping with the system for allocation. The exception is as mentioned first settlement of refugees and temporary housing for those who are not capable of finding a place to stay by themselves.

The purpose of the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act is to promote equality and prevent discrimination based on for example ethnicity and religion.<sup>60</sup> The law is to hinder that a person (in our case refugees and immigrants) is treated more negatively than others in similar situations in the housing market and without valid reason. There are similar regulations in the Tenancy Act.<sup>61</sup> The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act includes prohibitions of both direct and indirect discrimination (§§ 6, 7 and 8).<sup>62</sup> Even if there are widespread experiences where one suspect discrimination, few cases are taken to the court. A request to the Tenants' Organisation and to the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud in March 2021, brought forth few cases. According to an overview of cases before the Norwegian Anti-Discrimination Tribunal over the last three years, 13 out of 62 cases included possible discrimination or harassment in housing because of ethnicity and/or religion or gender. Two cases are ongoing. Of the rest, seven cases were unprosecuted or dismissed, while three were closed because they were not followed up by the complainants. Only one case supported the complainant. According to the Tenants' organisation, there probably are a lot of unrecorded cases. This is believed to be the case even though the person accused of possible discrimination has the burden of proof.<sup>63</sup> One reason for few cases could be that there is little to gain for complainants in the private rental market. If they do not receive a contract because of their ascribed status, such as ethnicity, skin colour, religion, or origin, they still will not get a new contract if they win the case if the dwelling is already rented out. There are very seldom any sanctions against landlords.

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<sup>59</sup> Act of Social Services in the Labour and Welfare Administration 7 NAV (Lov om sosiale tjenester i arbeids- og velferdsforvaltningen) §§ 15 and 27.

<sup>60</sup> § 1. All included categories: gender, pregnancy, leave in connection with childbirth or adoption, care responsibilities, ethnicity, religion, belief, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, or other significant characteristics of a person. 'Equality' means equal status, equal opportunities, and equal rights. Equality presupposes accessibility and accommodation.

<sup>61</sup> Lov om husleieavtaler §§ 1-8.

<sup>62</sup> § 7. *Direct differential treatment* means treatment of a person that is worse than the treatment that is, has been or would have been afforded to other persons in a corresponding situation. § 8. *Indirect differential treatment* means any apparently neutral provision, condition, practice, act or omission that results in persons being put in a worse position than others on the basis of factors specified in § 6 (Bases for discrimination). Ethnicity includes national origin, descent, skin colour and language.

<sup>63</sup> Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act § 37.

Examples of direct discrimination may be easier to discover at aggregate levels. For example, a study concluded that immigrant tenants had to pay a premium in rent compared to tenants born in Norway. The premium was largest for tenants of African origin.<sup>64</sup> Another study comparing treatment of immigrant groups in the rental market concluded that there are sorting mechanisms which contribute to different rental trajectories for immigrants of different origins.<sup>65</sup> For example, house hunters of Somali and Iraqi backgrounds had to apply for a lot more rentals before they got a contract, compared to house hunters with a Chilean or Bosnian background. While the two first groups interpreted this as discrimination, the two others perceived their experiences as part of the market system.<sup>66</sup> In another study of tenants with immigrant background and private landlords, tenants with immigrant and especially Somali background more often experienced that they had to pay more rent than was stated in the contract, they experienced frequent increases in the rent and in their opinion, unfair terminations.<sup>67</sup> Another conclusion was that small-scale private landlords preferred what they called ‘suitable tenants’, meaning that they would pay the rent, would take good care of the dwelling and cause few disturbances for the landlord. Moreover, they preferred households with none or few children because children create more need for upkeep and importantly, they preferred tenants they thought they could communicate with. With these preferences, tenants with a Norwegian, Nordic, or Western background were often prioritized.

The commercial landlords were first and foremost concerned about solvency, decent conduct, and the housing environment. A quote represents the prioritization of tenants: *‘the more social assistance, the less prioritized in the pile of applicants.’* One was concerned about the building’s reputation in the neighbourhood and prioritized tenants who would not contribute to stigmatization. A recent study confirms that immigrants/refugees still experience discrimination in the private rental market.<sup>68</sup> This specifically hampers newcomers who are not familiar with the system. It is uncertain if the individual cases producing the sorting mechanisms would have been deemed as direct discrimination. However, the individual experiences form a pattern that indicates potential structural racism; that is sorting mechanisms in the system which are produced by laws, rules and practices and embedded in the organizational and economic system as well as in cultural and social norms.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Timothy Beatty and Dag Einar Sommervoll, ‘Discrimination in Rental Markets. Evidence from Norway’ (2012) 21 *Journal of Housing Economics* 121.

<sup>65</sup> Susanne Søholt and Kim Astrup, *Etniske minoriteter og forskjellsbehandling i leiemarkedet* (Norsk institutt for by- og regionforskning 2009).

<sup>66</sup> Blom and Henriksen, *Levekår blant innvandrere i Norge 2005/2006*.

<sup>67</sup> Søholt and Astrup, *Etniske minoriteter og forskjellsbehandling i leiemarkedet*.

<sup>68</sup> Sindre Bangstad, Edvard Nergård Larsen and Lise B Grung, *Strukturell rasisme i Bergen*, (2021).

<sup>69</sup> Definition of structural racism derived from Zinzi D. Baily, Justin M. Feldman and Mary T. Bassett, ‘How Structural Racism Works - Racist Policies as Root Cause of U.S. Racial Health Inequalities’ (2021) *The New England Journal of Medicine*.



Another direction to increase equality in access to housing is to use the anti-discrimination law to enhance changes in behaviours. In line with the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act, the Norwegian Association of Real Estate Agents has developed ethical rules and codes of conduct to avoid discrimination when having commissions in either the rental or the home-ownership market. It can be argued that more use of estate agents in transactions in the unprofessional private rental market may reduce unequal treatment of house hunters with immigrant backgrounds.

Based on the experiences mentioned above, it seems like the law is of limited use when there are suspicions of direct discrimination. It may seem that the law has more potential when it comes to signalling to society through action plans, etc., that all people, including immigrants, should have equal opportunities to access adequate housing.<sup>70</sup> Most important is that the law opens for differential treatment to reach goals about equal opportunities. That may be an important means when specific immigrant groups are experiencing long-term difficulties in the housing market. However, the focus on equal outcomes and how laws potentially affect outcomes does not take notice of resources and preferences. That is the focus for the next section.

#### **4.4 Resources and Preferences**

How outcomes can be explained by immigrants' own resources and housing preferences is the next aspect. To cope with a housing *market* is very different from adapting to housing systems based on distribution through regulations and queuing.<sup>71</sup> Ideally, housing distributed through market mechanisms builds on the premise that the house hunters understand the system in such ways that they can act adequately and develop the necessary economic and other resources to be able to do so in the future. Former studies have shown that this is not always the case. Immigrants learn to navigate the housing system without necessarily knowing the language nor the housing system. Since housing is a fresh produce, they would have to act before understanding the conditions and developing experiences about how to cope over time. Resources and preferences are discussed here together. Preferences give directions to people's efforts when striving to acquire a housing situation decent for them. Housing preferences can be linked to hopes and dreams about what kind of life people find meaningful to

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<sup>70</sup> There are a number of action plans against racism, discrimination and harassment on national and local level, like for example, *Regjeringens handlingsplan mot rasisme og diskriminering på grunn av etnisitet og religion* (Departementene 2020-2023). The last initiative on national level is an initiative from members in Parliament to fight against racism <https://www.stortinget.no/nn/Saker-og-publikasjoner/publikasjoner/Representantframlegg/2020-2021/dok8-202021-160s/>, accessed 21.10.21.

<sup>71</sup> Rikke Skovgaard Nielsen et al., 'The Interaction of Local Context and Cultural Background: Somalis' Perceived Possibilities in Nordic Capitals' Housing Markets' (2014) *Housing Studies* 1; and Andersson et al., *Immigration, Housing and Segregation in the Nordic Welfare States*.

strive for, thus pushing people to try to convert their resources to valuable assets in trying to obtain a home.<sup>72</sup>

#### 4.4.1 The Importance of Resources

The increasing gap between incomes and housing prices might explain at least in part the recent decrease in homeownership among some immigrant groups. Most immigrants need to build up housing capital in Norway through work.

Key is the kind of employment and level of income. Persons with immigrant background are overrepresented among the unemployed, those with part-time or temporary jobs, low payment and among the continuing poor.<sup>73</sup> Women, especially with refugee backgrounds, have low participation in the labour market, hampering immigrant families' economic tackling of their housing situation, which in Norway is based on two-income families. Persons with immigrant backgrounds are three times more likely to have economic problems or poor housing conditions than are people of a non-immigrant background.<sup>74</sup> Low and unstable incomes imply difficulties to saving money for the 15 per cent equity demand to buy a home, and it reduces the banks' willingness to give credit.

The Norwegian labour market is increasingly based on qualifications. Completed high school/upper secondary school has proven to have more importance for employment status than immigrant background. Still, discrimination in the labour market is well-documented, even among the well-educated.<sup>75</sup> People born in Norway of immigrant parents resemble the rest of the population and perform much better than their parents in education and income. Apart from increasing economic resources facilitating homeownership in this group, experiences, and stories about possible discrimination in the rental market, together with temporary contracts, might have pushed this generation to invest in housing. As noted in the section above about housing outcomes, they have the highest share of secondary homes, mostly in the Oslo area, which again fuels their incomes if rented out.

Another aspect of the resource argument is the above-mentioned demand for equity. The Norwegian Association of Real Estate Agents states that 51 per cent of first-time buyers got help from the 'family bank' in the beginning of 2021.<sup>76</sup> Considerable inheritances and the 'family bank' are believed to be less widespread among immigrant groups compared to the rest of the population, for reasons explained above. However, immigrants with a long duration of stay and

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<sup>72</sup> Søholt, 'Pathways to Integration: Cross-cultural Adaptations to the Housing Market in Oslo'.

<sup>73</sup> IMDi, *Indikatorer for integrering. Tilstand og utviklingstrekk ved inngangen til 2021*.

<sup>74</sup> Kristian Rose Tronstad, Marit Nygaard and Miia Bask, *Accumulation of Welfare Problems Among Immigrants in Norway* (2018).

<sup>75</sup> Lincoln Quillian and Arnfinn H. Midtbøen, 'Comparative Perspectives on Racial Discrimination in Hiring: The Rise of Field Experiments' (2021) 47 *Annual Review of Sociology* 391; and Kristin Fredriksen, 'Slik er livet for norskfødte med innvandrerforeldre' (*Statistics Norway, 2018*), accessed 01.09.2021. <https://www.ssb.no/sosiale-forhold-og-kriminalitet/artikler-og-publikasjoner/slik-er-livet-for-norskfodte-med-innvandrerforeldre>.

<sup>76</sup> NEF and Ambita, *Førstegangskjøpere 2021 Q2* (2021).

who have had the possibility to buy a home in previous years, have seen the value of their property multiplying and might be able to help their offspring into the housing market. In immigrant groups prioritizing the collective before the individual, there are many examples of co-operation in the wider families and networks for mutual support.<sup>77</sup> Examples are valuable sharing of how to navigate in the housing market, from social housing to ownership, knowledge of possible landlords and public means, letting secondary homes to acquaintances, accommodation in private homes, participation in closed saving clubs, etc. Other examples are extended families living together and thus profiting from more incomes and less economic vulnerabilities if someone in the household loses a job. In sum, this is about transferring and adjusting ways of resource allocation from country of origin to Norway and stands out as valuable supplements to means-tested public means. These private and collective means are exclusive and only accessible because of belonging to either kin, ethnic or religious networks. The premise is reciprocal expectations about social commitments to help and support each other as being part of the specific network.<sup>78</sup>

#### 4.4.2 The Importance of Preferences

Among some of the immigrants interviewed in earlier studies, preferences are perceived as a luxury they do not have because they have no choices.<sup>79</sup> They neither had the negotiating power to access a decent rental dwelling nor the economy to enter the homeowners' market. Regardless of economic position, there is a dominant wish to be able to take care of oneself, without being subject to means-testing to get a place to stay. For people without the hope of doing so, this quote represents widespread feelings, '*You know, beggars can't choose.*'<sup>80</sup>

However, most of the immigrants develop preferences over time as they increase their resources and gain more knowledge about the housing context where they live. For those adapting to preferences in correspondence with the supply side where they live, articulated preferences are about being able to live like ordinary Norwegians. However, many immigrants are part of transnational networks and have obligations and dreams about the future which do not match a constrained economic situation in Norway. Many, regardless of economic constraints, feel obliged to remit to family as they are in a worse position than themselves, some even remit beyond their capacity.<sup>81</sup> Often, the obligation is prioritized before their own housing needs in Norway. Another preference colliding with 'the main road to homeownership in Norway', is the dream about going back to the country of origin and meanwhile investing in a second home

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<sup>77</sup> Søholt, 'Pathways to Integration: Cross-cultural Adaptations to the Housing Market in Oslo'.

<sup>78</sup> Søholt, 'Gjennom nåløyet.'

<sup>79</sup> Skovgaard Nielsen et al., 'The Interaction of Local Context and Cultural Background: Somalis' Perceived Possibilities in Nordic Capitals' Housing Markets'.

<sup>80</sup> Søholt, 'Gjennom nåløyet.'

<sup>81</sup> Jørgen Carling, Marta Bivand Erdal and Cindy Horst, 'How Does Conflict in Migrants' Country of Origin Affect Remittance-sending? Financial Priorities and Transnational Obligations Among Somalis and Pakistanis in Norway' (2012) 46 *International Migration Review* 283.

there. Yet, most of the immigrant population do not own another dwelling in addition to their primary home,<sup>82</sup> but many dream about returning.<sup>83</sup> The highest share of dwellings abroad is found among new and former labour immigrants. Among Poles, one-third report having a dwelling outside of Norway, while this is case for more than one-fourth of those with origins in Turkey, and a little more than one-sixth of those originating from Pakistan. While many Poles are circular migrants, the former migrants from Turkey and Pakistan are well-established in Norway.

Several studies have proven that immigrants prefer a stable and safe home. However, while housing policy links this to homeownership, some might prefer a stable rental situation if they could choose. This priority coincides with the religious Muslim-norm forbidding taking a mortgage with interest. The norm is especially widespread in the Somali community and may be in other Muslim groups with a low share of homeownership.<sup>84</sup> The consequence of the norm is that Somalis stay within the private rental market even though it is unpredictable, expensive, and unstable. This is especially difficult for families with children. Opposite to this norm, some families with possibilities to buy a dwelling do so because not buying has too many negative effects for their children. Others are locked in by social control. This quote illustrates the dilemma between the need for social inclusion and acceptance in one's primarily ethnic group and the need for an individual and stable home:

I would prefer to own my dwelling, but the propaganda against interest on loans is unpleasant. People talk....More people could afford to buy a dwelling but they don't because of the talk. (Man of Somali origin. 18 years in Oslo).<sup>85</sup>

Complying with the expectations of the community is associated with the need for good standing, but conflicts with housing needs. Even though the share of Somali homeowners is small compared to other groups in Norway, it is higher than in the other Nordic countries.<sup>86</sup> This fact underlines that local context intertwines with cultural background and shapes housing behaviour in order to adjust to needs relevant to phase of life, even though it may conflict with one's own convictions. However, as seen in the outcome section there is an increase in rentals among people from Africa and Asia. For some this could be due to an unwillingness to compromise on religious norms. But for most tenants who have had to remain in the rental market, a more plausible explanation is that they lack the economic resources to buy a dwelling. The preference for a stable and

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<sup>82</sup> Vrålstad and Wiggen, *Levekår blant innvandrere i Norge 2016*.

<sup>83</sup> Søholt, 'Gjennom nåløyet; and Skovgaard Nielsen et al., 'The Interaction of Local Context and Cultural Background: Somalis' Perceived Possibilities in Nordic Capitals' Housing Markets'.

<sup>84</sup> Kaja Borchgrevink and Ida Roland Birkvada, 'Religious Norms and Homeownership Among Norwegian Muslim Women' (2021) *Journal of Migration and Ethnic Studies*; and Skovgaard Nielsen et al., 'The Interaction of Local Context and Cultural Background: Somalis' Perceived Possibilities in Nordic Capitals' Housing Markets'.

<sup>85</sup> Søholt, 'Pathways to Integration: Cross-cultural Adaptations to the Housing Market in Oslo'.

<sup>86</sup> Skovgaard Nielsen et al., 'The Interaction of Local Context and Cultural Background: Somalis' Perceived Possibilities in Nordic Capitals' Housing Markets'.

predictable housing situation in the rental market deviates from the supply side and priorities in the housing policy.

Preferences in the housing market often link dwelling, kind of neighbourhood and location for those who can choose. Immigrants with limited resources, as others, will have to prioritize affordable housing. Still, in the public discourse it is believed that ethnic residential segregation is mostly due to voluntary segregation. Voluntary segregation builds on the freedom to move and is characterised by desired clustering defined by ethnicity, religion, language, lifestyle, or social capital as related to group distinctions.<sup>87</sup> Immigrant-dense areas in the suburbs are less expensive and access to homeownership through housing cooperatives is facilitated because of regulations to hinder discrimination.<sup>88</sup>

In a former study, we characterised immigrants' moving to immigrant dense areas as by constrained choice.<sup>89</sup> In addition to limited purchasing power, constraints can be defined as obstacles and pressures that prevent people from regarding parts of the housing market as opportunities because of fear of harassment and isolation. Another interpretation of constraint is finding new options inside one's own realm of perceived action. One example that is widespread in the earlier studies, is that immigrants' experience that they can get 'a lot more housing' for their investments in the immigrant dense areas. Of this reason it is also easier to convert their preferences for extended households into good housing conditions. On the other hand, opting for social integration into Norwegian society through casual interaction with Norwegian neighbours was more difficult. Most Norwegians did not share the same interest for such interaction.

This experience affected preferences in relation to social neighbourhood. To maintain casual socialization, a preference for *multi-ethnic* neighbourhoods was widespread. The preference neither prioritized Norwegians, nor neighbourhoods with only co-ethnics, they preferred mixed neighbourhoods. Avoidance of co-ethnics close by was due to fears of less privacy, social control, and gossip, and for some a desire for acculturation and anonymity. The mix of experienced opportunities and constraints implies that immigrants did not develop the same preferences and possibilities as the majority to access predominantly majority neighbourhoods. First and foremost, this was because of economic constraints, but also because they valued casual socialization difficult to find in urban neighbourhoods dominated by the majority.

When looking at equality of housing, equality of access to a preferred neighbourhood and location is still core because it is linked to (geographical) access to opportunity relevant to phase of life. Geographical opportunity can be

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<sup>87</sup> Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford University Press 2002).

<sup>88</sup> Hans Skifter Andersen, Lena Magnusson Turner and Susanne Søholt, 'The Special Importance of Housing Policy for Ethnic Minorities: Evidence from a Comparison of Four Nordic Countries' (2013) 13 *European Journal of Housing Policy* 20; and Hans Skifter Andersen et al., 'The Impact of Housing Policies and Housing Markets on Ethnic Spatial Segregation: Comparing the Capital Cities of Four Nordic Welfare States' (2016) 16 *International Journal of Housing Policy* 1.

<sup>89</sup> Søholt and Lynnebakke, 'Do Immigrants' Preferences for Neighbourhood Qualities Contribute to Segregation? The Case of Oslo'.

understood as being about ‘markets, institutions, and systems that act on and convert personal attributes into outputs affecting social advancements’.<sup>90</sup> However, a study based on data from Oslo reveals that there is no simple relation between socio-economic integration and spatial assimilation across immigrant groups.<sup>91</sup> A proposed explanation is the distribution of public resources across space. Progressive redistribution of resources to poor and immigrant-dense districts removes part of the rationale for spatial mobility because there is less to gain by moving to other neighbourhoods. Adding preferences for everyday socialization, this is even more true. Going back to the initial question of equal opportunity of housing, it is obvious that immigrants with poor or modest incomes cannot move to middle-class neighbourhoods. A new study confirms that the increased socio-economic residential segregation is linked to immigration.<sup>92</sup> However, compared to those who remain in the rental market, those who manage to enter the homeowners’ market, even in the immigrant dense areas, are in a better position to influence their own housing situation in line with needs and preferences, adequate to phase of life.

## 5 Concluding Discussion

The aim of this chapter has been to explore ‘equality of housing’ through looking at *the real opportunities of immigrants to influence their own housing situation in line with needs and preferences, adequate to duration of stay and life phases, compared to the rest of the population.*

The aspect of ‘real opportunities’ is explored indirectly through comparing housing outcomes. The outcomes picture how the immigrant population have managed to cope with the opportunities and constraints inherit in the Norwegian housing system as framed by immigration-, settlement-, housing- and integration policies, as well as anti- discrimination laws and regulations. Just looking at the outcomes, it seems like most of the immigrant population over time adjusts to the main tenure in Norway, homeownership. There is however a polarization between the immigrant- and the rest of the population when it comes to place of living, evidenced by ethnic residential segregation. There also seems to be an increasing polarization in the immigrant population between those who manage to adapt to the homeowners’ market and adjust their housing needs and preferences thereafter, and the increasing share of households who remain in the rental market. Those who remain in the rental market face limited possibilities to influence their own housing situation in desired ways and risk being locked in poverty traps.

When looking at the access criteria to the different housing segments, it seems that the housing cooperatives, followed by homeownership, offer the most equal

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<sup>90</sup> In Dawkins, ‘Putting Equality in Place: The Normative Foundations of Geographic Equality of Opportunity’.

<sup>91</sup> Lena Magnusson Turner and Terje Wessel, ‘Upwards, Outwards and Westwards: Relocation of Ethnic Minority Groups in the Oslo Region’ (2013) 95 *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 1.

<sup>92</sup> Øystein Hernæs, Simen Markussen and Knut Røed, ‘Økende inntektssegregering i norske byregioner’ (2020) 3 *Tidsskrift for boligforskning* 111.

access conditions. This is because the access criteria are neutral to background, skin colour, religion, etc., if the house hunters have the economic capacity. Moreover, it seems that the rental market, both social housing and private rentals, offer the least equal opportunities because access is discretionary on the part of the landlord and because of high rents and limited security of tenure. In social housing, discretion is linked to the social services' definition and prioritization of the most disadvantaged. In private rentals, especially among small scale landlords, discretion is linked to the individual landlord's understanding of a 'suitable' tenant.

Since homeownership is the prioritized tenure in Norway to obtain a secure housing situation, the critical point for equality of opportunities is the housing means to support people leaving the rental market and becoming homeowners. The demand for 15 per cent equity hampers households in the rental market with limited possibilities to save money. As it is today, mortgages in private banks and down payment of public start-up loans, are primarily adjusted to financial conditions and less to immigrants' economic situation. Since immigrants are overrepresented among people with low incomes, a weak connection to the labour market, many children, etc., they are disadvantaged when applying for mortgages when treated equally to applicants born in Norway. Compared to economic means, 'rent to buy' in social housing seems better adjusted to immigrants' resources and phase of integration in society. This is an example of differential treatment to increase ownership among households with low incomes. However, this arrangement is not universal, but dependant on the individual municipality. Thus, the opportunity to 'rent to buy', is conditioned on where one lives, and for refugees, where they were settled. Another example of differential treatment of refugees is also linked to their first housing. They are housed in better accommodations than they could have managed themselves, legitimized by the integration and housing policies that all people should have a good and safe home that foster integration. When later having to cater for their own housing, they are treated as other (disadvantaged) households.

Even though there is reason to believe that opportunities for housing means differ systematically between immigrants and others because of varying duration of stay and different relations to the labour market, indirect discrimination and structural racism have received little attention in research on immigrants and housing. For example, it has mostly been taken for granted that immigrants have housing preferences that match the supply side. Immigrants, who for different reasons, prefer a stable and predictable housing situation in the rental market, face limited opportunities to influence their own housing situation adequately to their phase of life. It is relevant to ask if this lack of opportunities for choice of tenure is due to structural racism because of presupposing preferences for homeownership. Another example is ethnic residential segregation which has mostly been explained by voluntary segregation by the immigrants themselves and not by insufficient housing means or supply of affordable housing across the city, sorting mechanisms embedded in the entire housing system or by mobility patterns of the non-immigrant population.

Equal opportunities as to housing are related to how structures and individual resources and preferences interact. If looking at structures, policies, and laws alone, the importance of the immigrants' own efforts to create and access opportunities disappear. Recognizing that most of the immigrant population are

entering the owners' market despite limited resources, points to the importance of individual drive. Preferences have proven to boost efforts to secure a home.

The solution to equalize immigrants' opportunities to influence their own housing situation adequate to life phase is probably not in improving the anti-discrimination law, but rather to uncover potential structural racism to improve equal opportunities of housing. Other ways forward are to improve immigrants' conditions in the labour market and increase the supply of affordable and stable housing in ordinary neighbourhoods, accessible for the immigrant population given their resource situation. Increasing the supply of affordable and stable housing in different areas and neighbourhoods would be a way to further means and remove constraints on individual welfare, in this case housing, in line with the inclusive welfare state, but may be in contradiction to a liberal market housing system.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my colleagues at NIBR, Kristian Tronstad, Tone Liodden and Kim Astrup for their valuable comments on the first draft of this chapter.



# **Enforcement**

