

Micheline van Riemsdijk and Matthew Cook

# International talent recruitment to Norway

Opportunities, challenges, and lived experiences of skilled migrants





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## Abstract

Skilled workers are in high demand in the global knowledge economy. Companies vie to attract the best and brightest workers, and they recruit skilled migrants to meet their talent needs. This report investigates the recruitment of skilled workers to Norway and the lived experiences of these migrants. The study is set in Norway because it has weathered the global financial crisis better than most countries. The report focuses on the IT sector and the oil and gas industry, two international sectors that recruit foreign talent. The report presents findings from interviews with HR managers, migrants, policymakers, representatives for unions and employer organizations, and other stakeholders who are involved in international skilled migration. We also present results from a survey of foreign-born engineers and IT specialists in four companies in Norway. The study aims to provide information about recent developments in the global knowledge economy, and to contribute to policy debates about international competitiveness. The findings contribute to more effective strategies to attract and retain skilled workers, and to improve the lives of skilled migrants in Norway. These topics are of interest to companies, policymakers, and other actors in international skilled migration.

## Sammendrag

Kunnskapsmigranter er høyt ettertraktede i den globale kunnskapsøkonomien. Bedrifter konkurrerer for å tiltrekke seg de klokeste hodene, og de rekrutterer kunnskapsmigranter for å tilfredsstille kunnskapsbehov. I dette prosjektet har vi undersøkt rekruttering av kunnskapsmigranter til Norge og migrantenes erfaringer. Den norske økonomien har klart seg bedre gjennom den globale finanskrisen enn de fleste land. I rapporten ser vi nærmere på informasjonsteknologibransjen og olje- og gassindustrien, som er to internasjonale sektorer som rekrutterer utenlandske kunnskapsarbeidere. Rapporten presenterer funn fra intervjuer med HR-ledere, migranter, politikere, representanter for fagforeninger og arbeidsgiverorganisasjoner, samt andre aktører når det gjelder kunnskapsmigrasjon. Vi presenterer også resultater fra en spørreundersøkelse blant utenlandske ingeniører og IT-spesialister i fire bedrifter i Norge. Studien har som formål å bidra til politiske debatter om internasjonal konkurransedyktighet, og å gi informasjon om utviklingen i den globale kunnskapsøkonomien. Funnene kan bidra til mer effektive strategier for å tiltrekke og beholde kunnskapsmigranter, og til å forbedre tilværelsen for migranter i Norge. Disse temaene er av interesse for bedrifter, politikere, så vel som andre aktører i internasjonal kunnskapsmigrasjon.

## Preface

The findings in this report are based on fieldwork research conducted in Norway in Summer 2011, 2012, and 2013. This report is part of a larger project that investigates strategies to attract global talent and the lived experiences of skilled migrants. In particular, the project aims to add a migrant perspective to literatures on international skilled migration. The study focuses on two sectors that are in high need of skilled workers, namely the information technology sector and the oil and gas industry. The project aims to inform policy debates about international competitiveness and provide information about recent developments in the global knowledge economy. More information about the project can be found at <http://www.skilledmigration.net>.

This report will be launched at a seminar on international skilled migration at Fafo (Institute for Labor and Social Research) on November 14, 2013. We are grateful to the research participants for sharing their time and insights. We give a big thank-you to Line Eldring for providing feedback on the report and for co-organizing the seminar. We thank Fafo East Forum, the University of Tennessee's Exhibit, Performance and Publication Expenses Fund, the Department of Geography, and the College of Arts and Sciences for funding the report; and Sissel Trygstad and members of Fafo's Industrial Relations and Labor Market Policy Group for their suggestions for the project. We also acknowledge Marte Hult for her meticulous edits, and we thank our research assistants Benjamin Todd, Jaylyn Johnson, David Natvig, Grace Levin, Valerie Galloway, and Gareth Butler for their hard work.

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Knoxville, October 31 2013

Micheline van Riemsdijk and Matthew Cook



“We realize that clever people have choices. In order to be successful in the global competition for talent, we have to facilitate recruitment and living in Norway.”

- Gina Lund, former State Secretary in the Ministry of Labor.  
Presentation at Oslo Global Mobility Forum on October 18, 2012.

## 1 Introduction

Governments and companies in high-income countries compete intensely to attract the best and brightest workers (Kuptsch and Fong, 2006; Mahroum, 2001; OECD, 2008; Straubhaar and Wolter, 1997). The recruitment of skilled workers is becoming increasingly global, drawing from a wide range of source countries. These skilled migrants are essential for companies and countries to remain competitive in the global economy (Cervantes, 2004; Malecki, 2010; Rudiger, 2008; Saxenian, 2002; Williams et al., 2004). Government officials are highly aware of the importance of skilled migrants, including former State Secretary Gina Lund. She emphasizes the importance of living in Norway, which warrants more attention from migration scholars and policymakers.

Most studies of skilled migration have focused on global cities such as New York and London, which are key nodes in the global financial system with clusters of specialized financial and producer services. These global cities attract large numbers of skilled workers (Beverstock, 2011; Findlay, 1996; Sassen, 1991; Williams and Baláz, 2008). Studies of global cities have predominantly focused on “elite” migrants such as financial executives and CEOs, and low-skilled migrants in the service industries. Recently, migration scholars have turned to the experiences of “middling” skilled migrants who tend to come from middle class families, have a good education, and take a middling socio-economic position in their country of origin and destination (Conradson and Latham, 2005). These middling skilled migrants will be the focus of this report. We use John Salt’s definition of skilled workers as people who have completed tertiary education or who possess the equivalent in experience (Salt, 1988).

The primary goal of this research project is to advance understanding of factors that shape international skilled migration. In particular, this study investigates the following questions:

- How do human resources (HR) managers, recruitment agents, and private agents attract skilled migrants to Norway?
- How do skilled migrants conduct their job search, and why do they decide to migrate to Norway?

- What professional, institutional, and personal opportunities and challenges do skilled migrants experience in Norway? How do they try to overcome these challenges?
- What initiatives have been developed to welcome and retain skilled migrants in Norway? What more could be done to improve the experiences of these migrants?

Attention to these issues provides a more in-depth understanding of the operation of international talent recruitment. In particular, the report investigates opportunities and challenges in the recruitment and retention of foreign-born skilled workers in Norway, analyzing the experiences of HR managers, recruitment agents, foreign-born workers, and other stakeholders in international skilled migration. Favell (2006) has advocated for agent-centered studies that investigate the scope and specificity of international skilled migration. This research approach places a “human face on generalizations that often miss the human story behind [migration] theories, as well as empirically grounding some of the actual mechanisms that individually aggregate into broader social trends” (Favell 2006: 253). The findings provide insights into factors that attract or deter skilled migrants, and the professional, institutional, and personal obstacles that they encounter. We use a purposive sample that selects “information-rich cases” and a wide variety of informants for in-depth study (Patton, 1990).

This report focuses on Oslo, Kongsberg, and Stavanger, three Norwegian cities that are well-represented in the oil and gas industry. Oslo houses the majority of Norway’s IT companies. These three cities attract skilled migrants because of internationally recognized companies, professional opportunities, and a good work-life balance.

## 1.1 Talent shortages in Norway

Various industries in Norway are experiencing labor shortages. While shortages of engineers and IT specialists are not unique to Norway, the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration (NAV) has argued that the situation in Norway is particularly acute. Norway faced a shortage of 16,000 engineers and IT specialists in fall 2011, which was the largest shortage reported since the 2007 economic boom (NAV, 2011: 22). The 2011 shortage included 5,000 engineers in building and construction and 5,500 engineers in oil, mining, and other petroleum-related fields. By spring 2013, the demand for engineers and IT specialists had declined to 4,600 but employers project that this shortage will increase again in 2014 (NAV, 2013). These data indicate a continued shortage of engineers and IT specialists in Norway, but the severity of the shortage fluctuates by year.

Skill shortages are widespread in industries related to science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). These skill shortages are partly related to low student enrollment in STEM-related subjects. Many Norwegian students yearn for “self realization,” electing courses in the humanities instead. An HR manager in an oil and gas company noted that “we need more engineers [in Norway], but only one Picasso.” Free tuition in Norway’s universities may reduce commitment to a particular major, and students may be more likely to drop out of a degree program (for more information about student enrollment in STEM-related disciplines in Norway see Johnson, 2013). A review by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) found the following shortcomings in Norway’s tertiary education system: “delays in graduation; student dropouts; the need for a stronger emphasis upon quality teaching and upon student outcomes; and the need for a better follow-up of students” (OECD, 2004: 12). Thus, the OECD partly faults the Norwegian educational system for the skill shortage in the STEM-related disciplines.

The Norwegian government has implemented several initiatives to attract more students to the STEM disciplines. For instance, the Renate Center in Trondheim was established to recruit students to the STEM disciplines in middle and high schools. The Center launched an Internet site where educators can hire a “role model” to speak to students about a STEM-related career (<http://www.rollemodell.no>). In order to enhance the quality of teacher education in the STEM disciplines, the Department of Teacher Education and School Research at the University of Oslo develops standards for science education. The Ministry of Education and Research also created new guidelines for engineering education that were implemented in fall 2012. The guidelines aim to increase student motivation by placing STEM-related subject matter in a real-life context. These initiatives have been partly successful, as student interest in renewable energy sources has increased. However, student enrollment in Master and Ph.D. programs for the oil and gas industry has declined (Sasson and Blomgren, 2011). Interest in computer science has also dropped, especially after the “dot-com bust” and related job insecurity at the end of the twentieth century (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2007). These factors have contributed to skill shortages in the oil and gas industry and the IT sector in Norway, and companies are increasingly looking for foreign-born talent to fill job openings.

Norway is an attractive destination for skilled migrants because of its generous welfare benefits, high quality of life, and safe environment (except for the horrific domestic terrorist attack in July 2011). Norway has topped the United Nations’ Human Development Index for several years, which measures life expectancy, education, and GDP per capita. Norway ranked second highest after Switzerland in average annual wages at USD 81,475 in 2011 (OECD, 2013a), and second highest in annual per capita disposable income at USD 52,935 (OECD, 2013b) after Luxembourg. How-

ever, Norway also has one of the highest income tax rates in the world and a high cost of living, which makes it more difficult to retain highly skilled workers in Norway.

International skilled migration has gained increased interest from policymakers, HR managers, and scholars in Norway. Spearheaded by the Oslo Global Mobility Forum in 2011, several conferences have addressed how companies can attract more skilled workers to Norway. The forum brings together companies and academic institutions that aim to attract skilled migrants, and government agencies that regulate international skilled migration. The employer organizations Abelia and Virke have also discussed skilled migration at their annual member meetings. Abelia's 2011 "Miss Norway" member conference investigated how Norway could make the transition from a resource-based to a knowledge-based economy, and Virke allocated part of its 2012 XFactor conference to the recruitment of skilled workers. The Oslo Chamber of Commerce presented a report on international skilled migration with Abelia in June 2013 (Oslo Chamber of Commerce, 2013). Tekna, the Norwegian Society of Graduate Technical and Scientific Professionals, organized a member conference in October 2013 called "Borderless Opportunities in a Globalized World." These recent conferences indicate that skilled migration has become a topic of interest (and perhaps concern) for employers, trade unions, institutions of higher education, and policymakers.

Several scholars have studied the recruitment of skilled workers to Norway. Torger Reve and Amir Sasson's *Et kunnskapsbasert Norge* [a knowledge-based Norway] investigated the knowledge base in various sectors in the Norwegian economy (Reve and Sasson, 2012). The book and its related conferences received widespread attention in the Norwegian media. Scholars have also written about talent recruitment in the Norwegian oil and gas industry (Blomgren et al., 2007; Sasson and Blomgren, 2011; Seip, 2010), the information technology industry (Andersen, 2011), the health sector (van Riemsdijk, 2006; van Riemsdijk, 2010a), and Norwegian industries in general (Seip, 2007). The media has also paid increased attention to skill shortages and recruitment strategies of companies. In particular *Teknisk Ukeblad*, *Dagens Næringsliv*, and *Aftenposten* have regularly reported about shortages of engineers and IT specialists and related recruitment practices.

## **1.2 Talent needs in the Norwegian IT industry and the oil and gas industry**

This study focuses on the IT industry and the oil and gas industry because of their global reach, international work environment, contributions to the knowledge economy, and innovation. This section describes how technological and societal developments shaped the demand for skilled workers in these industries.

The demand for IT specialists is increasing worldwide. In the mid-1990s, the use of the Internet and e-commerce increased, and many companies started to use IT-enabled services. This development created a widespread demand for IT specialists, but local labor supplies were not sufficient to fill high-level IT positions. In addition, the number of students in IT and computer science has declined in developed countries in the past decade (OECD, 2010). The resulting labor shortages have sparked a global movement of IT specialists (Xiang, 2001). The global standardization of IT products and services makes IT skills highly portable across national borders (Iredale, 2001; Khadria, 2001; Salt, 2005). Migrants who possess IT skills that are in high demand have access to global job opportunities, especially if they are fluent in English.

Norway has a well-developed IT infrastructure and a high need for IT specialists (Hansen et al., 2009), but few young people are interested in pursuing a career in computer science or mathematics (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2007). These factors make it difficult to find enough IT specialists in Norway to fill all vacancies. Interestingly, the Norwegian IT industry was not as international as we initially expected. Some companies prefer to hire Norwegian and Swedish speakers to communicate with Norwegian clients. A few IT companies use English as their official working language, including Opera Software, Microsoft, Nokia, and Funcom. These companies hire a large proportion of foreign-born IT specialists. The relatively low number of foreign-born IT specialists in Norway may also be related to the outsourcing of IT-related services to lower-cost countries such as India, Russia, and Ukraine.

The oil and gas industry is the most international industry in Norway in terms of numbers of foreign-born workers and English-language companies. When Norwegian oil fields were developed in the 1970s, foreign experts (predominantly from the United States) were hired to fill senior leadership positions and to train Norwegian workers. This international legacy is still evident in the Norwegian oil and gas industry today. Many companies use English as the official working language and they hire foreign-born workers with specialized skills.

The oil and gas industry is a large source of revenue for Norway. The Norwegian government receives 30% of its revenue from taxes and dividends from the oil and gas industry (Economist, 2013). Oil and gas have added NOK 9 trillion to Norway's GDP since the production of oil began in 1971. In 2012, the industry contributed 23 percent of the nation's total value-added production (Alveberg and Melberg, 2013: 20). The petroleum industry's continued success has depended on the frequent approval of new fields on the Norwegian Continental Shelf. In 2011, Norway was the fourteenth largest producer of oil and the sixth largest producer of natural gas worldwide (Sasson and Blomgren, 2011: 14).

Norwegian companies have developed a high level of expertise in subsea engineering. In fact, Norway has established itself as a leader in subsea technology, and this knowledge is exported to other oil-rich countries. For example, Norwegian companies

export technology for horizontal drilling, as well as stabilization techniques for mobile rigs in rough weather (Economist, 2013). These advances in subsea technology help attract highly skilled workers to the oil and gas industry in Norway.

### 1.3 Migration to Norway under the global financial crisis

Norway's economy was negatively affected by the global financial crisis but rapidly recovered. Between 1 July and 31 December 2008, the Oslo Stock Exchange declined by 51.4 percent. This was the worst stock market crash since 1984. Economist Ola Honningdal Grytten attributed the crash to overvalued stocks and a decline in oil prices (Langved, 2008). Norway's export industry particularly suffered during the financial crisis. Demand for pulp and paper products and also the aluminum industry declined, resulting in job losses in these industries. In the first two quarters of 2009, the Oslo Stock Exchange regained 29 percent of its value, and the economy continued to improve thereafter. Statistics Norway attributed the quick recovery at the beginning of 2011 to low interest rates and a high demand for oil and gas related services (Statistics Norway, 2012a). Norway also has a large public sector and a well-established social security net, which helped stabilize the Norwegian economy during the crisis (Ministry of Finance, 2011). Despite the rapid recovery of the national economy, Norway's international trade remained negatively affected (Statistics Norway, 2010).

Norway's immigration rates closely followed the country's financial ups and downs. Immigration rates decreased between summer 2008 and late 2010 in response to rising unemployment rates. In 2011, when Norway's economy recovered, immigration numbers increased again. In that year, almost 27,000 non-Nordic labor migrants entered Norway. This was an increase of 13 percent over 2010 and the highest number of migrants ever recorded (Thorud et al., 2012). Of these immigrants, 24,000 were European citizens, and more than half came from Poland (9,100) and Lithuania (5,600).

The global financial downturn affected companies in the Norwegian oil and gas industry in several ways. Most companies reduced the number of new hires, and some employees were let go. An informant in Stavanger summed up the impact of the financial crisis as follows:

A lot of companies said, "We have to stop our active recruitment and we have to wait." . . . I do see that especially in Rogaland, companies are taking initiatives so, to make sure they are more streamlined, that they work more effectively now, so that the economic crisis in Europe won't affect as much. . . . [For Statoil] it's been a lot in the media . . . people that are being placed in different positions or being given [severance] packages (interview 50).

Companies tried to reduce their operating costs as much as possible, including human resources costs. For example, managers tried to make the workflow more efficient, and reduced the number of workers needed to complete a task. One company in our study reduced its travel budget, relying more on videoconferences for team meetings and job interviews. The company also put its trainee program on hold, but this resulted in a perception among Norwegian students that the company was not doing well. The trainee program was reinstated the next year to restore confidence in the company (interview 11). This change in public opinion is an example of how cost-cutting measures can negatively affect the image of a company.

The global financial crisis changed the geography of recruitment and hiring. Highly qualified engineers in southern European countries started to look for job security and better professional opportunities elsewhere. Norway was seen as a desirable destination because of job openings in the oil and gas industry and IT sector, its stable economy, and its generous welfare benefits. Companies and recruitment agencies in Norway tapped into this labor surplus. An Indian engineer noted that HR managers started to hire more candidates from Southern Europe:

Mostly they [HR managers] are preferring people from the European Union . . . rather than, uh, from getting someone from India. Even if that person has, uh, relevant experience.

MvR: And why do you think that is?

Um, I'm not quite sure. I think one of the reasons, of course, is that when you get people from India, then you first of all have to give them visa, then you have to give them sufficient pay, whereas uh, . . . the people who are – who are in the Euro – uh . . . Many of whom I came to know [in the company], they were mentioning that uh, there are absolutely no jobs [at home], and the qualified people are just sitting idle, so then in that case they get – if they are offered a job, they are ready to pay their expenses to come (interview 58).

In 2012, the company hired several highly qualified engineers with work experience from southern Europe. The company did not pay for their moving expenses and did not assist with housing, which it had offered new employees in 2011. The reduced benefits may have been the result of cost cutting measures, and not related to the dire financial situation of the job seekers. An engineer from Portugal describes the reasons for moving to Norway and the job offer:

We just have a life with a lot of sacrifices, you know? A lot of competition, and I'm a young person. I can, and I want to work, so . . . it's a big challenge. . . .

I know they . . . they said directly [in the job interview], "we cannot help you in anything in your relocation." I was a little bit surprised, but I didn't bother because

I didn't care. I could do that by myself. But I, maybe they have some issue about the budget. . . . I know they did, the year before, they helped people to, relocation costs and everything, and find a house (interview 55).

This employee was willing to pay for the moving expenses to start a better life in Norway. In this case, the financial crisis and related job insecurity in the country of origin clearly influenced the decision to move. We will discuss migrants' reasons to move to Norway in more detail in chapter three.

HR managers in the oil and gas industry received more applications from Southern European countries after the onset of the financial crisis. A line manager describes the change in applicants' countries of origin, and the increase in European hires in his company:

Before the financial crisis if you said, "I have an open position," 80, 90 percent of the applications would come from either India or Pakistan or China. Now you get far more from South Europe. Our last hire is from Croatia. I don't know if that is significantly enough samples for statistics, but . . . I mean, I think the problem is with hiring from Asia is that it's far away. You don't just invite the person in for an interview. And I know from different jobs that different people, they have burned their fingers, so they are very reluctant. At the University of Aalborg, we had [Asian] students applying, you talk to them on the phone, they speak perfect English, and when you meet up, they speak no word. So obviously you spoke to a different person. There's a lot of reluctance towards those countries because it's culturally really a big difference, where South Europe is closer (interview 14).

Companies are also recruiting engineering students at universities in Southern Europe. The high youth unemployment rate in Southern European countries pushes talented students to seek employment abroad. This labor force is particularly attractive for supplier companies that experience more difficulties in the hiring of engineers. An HR manager notes that students often lack work experience, but they can learn on the job:

So if you see that, how much youth unemployment in Spain and in Portugal . . . so it's a right spot to go to find youth.

MvR: And does that also explain partly why there are so many Portuguese in Norway?

For sure! You have one here that just hired a student this year. . . . They are highly qualified. But unfortunately, the Portuguese market is not able to give them a job right now. And the same is happening with Spain.

MvR: Yes . . . But with Spain, some people told me that the English is not that good, and that employers are . . .



[interrupting] Portuguese is the same. Brazil is the same. You learn. If you know how to build a robot . . . [laughing] you'll learn a language (interview 49).

Norwegian language proficiency is important for the long-term retention of skilled migrants, which is discussed in more detail in chapter five on personal opportunities and challenges.

## **Methods**

This report provides insights into the lived experiences of skilled migrants in the IT sector and the oil and gas industry. The migrants in this study are predominantly “middling” skilled migrants who tend to come from middle class families and have a good education (Conradson and Latham, 2005). The report aims to give voice to migrants in order to better understand their experiences with living and working in Norway. These insights can help reduce professional, institutional, and personal obstacles that skilled migrants face when they arrive and settle in Norway. The findings are based on interviews and participant observation in Summer 2011, 2012, and 2013, a survey, and secondary sources on international skilled migration.

The first author conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with fifty-two foreign-born IT specialists and engineers in the oil and gas industry, twenty-eight HR managers, ten recruitment agents, eight leaders of immigrant organizations, seven labor union representatives, six policymakers, five representatives for STEM education, and twenty-five other stakeholders in international skilled migration in Oslo, Kongsberg, and Stavanger. The informed consent form is included as an appendix. We use pseudonyms to protect the identity of informants and companies that participated in this study.

We also administered a survey in January and February 2013 to foreign-born skilled workers to investigate their living and working experiences in Norway. The survey asked how migrants found a job, what sources they used for the job search, why they decided to come to Norway, their experience with Norwegian migration regulations, their level of language proficiency, and their experiences with living and working in Norway.

The survey was administered in two oil and gas companies and two IT companies in Norway. The companies were selected because they employ a high proportion of foreign-born skilled workers. For each sector we selected one company with a large number of employees and one smaller company. The large oil and gas company is well-known and attracts skilled migrants because of its expertise in oil and gas technology. The other company is a lesser-known small service provider that uses highly advanced technology. One IT company is widely known globally, and has offices in many countries. The other company has fewer employees and fewer offices but its products are very popular. The four selected companies represent different kinds of companies in terms of number of employees, location, and international work environment. The survey

responses provide insights into place-specific and company size-specific opportunities and challenges for skilled migrants. Two of the companies are located in a large city, and two in a smaller city, which enabled us to investigate how location influences the lived experiences of skilled migrants. Although the sample size of four companies is relatively small, the open-ended responses provide insights into the opportunities and challenges that skilled migrants face in Norway.

After a company agreed to administer the survey, an HR manager forwarded an invitation email to highly skilled foreign-born employees. The invitation email included a link to an online survey hosted on the Internet site SurveyMonkey. To be included in the study, respondents had to be foreign-born (defined as being born outside Norway and not being a Norwegian citizen at birth) and highly skilled (defined by respondents' educational attainment and job title). Responses that did not meet these criteria were excluded from the study. Because HR managers invited employees to participate, we recognize the possibility of selection bias in our survey. This bias is reduced through multiple-method triangulation including interviews, participant observation, and the use of secondary sources (Baxter and Eyles, 1996).

We received 180 responses of engineers in the oil and gas industry, and we excluded 34 respondents who did not meet our selection criteria. Of the remaining 146, 136 work for a large oil and gas technology company, and 10 are employed with a small offshore service provider. One hundred nineteen of the respondents are male, and twenty-seven are female. This gender imbalance reflects a general overrepresentation of males in STEM-related disciplines (Kofman, 2000). The respondents are between twenty-two and sixty-two years of age. The large age range provides a challenge for companies to cater to the needs of their employees, which differ according to their stage in the lifecycle (Harvey, 2011; Ley and Kobayashi, 2005). Young, single people have different needs and expectations than employees who are accompanied by their family members. This issue will be discussed in more detail in chapter five on quality of life issues. Nine respondents hold doctoral degrees, and ninety-five respondents have a master's degree. The educational background of our respondents reflects the high educational attainment in the oil and gas industry in general.

The respondents came to Norway from thirty-four countries, which we grouped into ten regions of origin. These include Scandinavia (32), Western Europe (23), Eastern Europe (22), Southern Europe (20), Asia (20), North America (10), Middle East (8), Australia and New Zealand (4), South America (4), and Africa (3 respondents). These respondents arrived in Norway under different migration regimes. Norway is a member of the European Economic Area (EEA), and the free movement of workers is a fundamental right in all EEA member countries. Thus, an EEA national has the right to work in another EEA country. A job seeker from an EEA member state has to register with the police if he or she wishes to work in Norway for more than three months, but does not need a work permit (Norwegian Directorate of Immigration,

2013b). Nordic citizens can enter freely under the Nordic Passport Convention. These citizens do not need a residence permit to live in Norway and they do not need to register with the police. Third country nationals (i.e. non-EEA citizens) have to apply for a work permit in Norway or they can enter under the Family Reunification Program. They can apply for a skilled workers permit if they satisfy minimum requirements regarding educational attainment and salary, and the education must be relevant to the job (Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, 2013a). Since EEA citizens have the right to free movement, their access to the labor market cannot legally be limited. Only the migration of third country nationals can be restricted by, for example, a Specialist Quota. This quota was implemented in 2002 at 5,000 permits. The quota was never filled, perhaps because skilled migrants entered under other migration programs.

We also received twenty-four survey responses from employees in two IT companies. Thirteen respondents met our requirements. Eleven of these were male and two were female, which reflects male overrepresentation in the IT sector (Raghuram, 2004). The respondents' ages range from twenty-six to fifty, and nine are EEA nationals. One respondent holds a doctoral degree, five hold master's degrees, and five hold bachelor's degrees. Interestingly, two respondents only have a high school degree. This illustrates that IT specialists can be self-taught, and underlines the salience of Salt's (1988) definition of a skilled worker as someone who has a tertiary degree *or the equivalence in experience*. The hiring process of IT companies has adapted to this phenomenon, asking job candidates to solve problems and to write programming code.

We are aware of important critiques of research on elite, predominantly male migrants who face less exclusion, domination, or exploitation compared to other migrants (Kofman, 2000; Raghuram, 2004). However, skilled migrants in male-dominated professions also experience barriers to their migration and long-term settlement, which this report addresses. These obstacles are important to investigate because they may hamper the recruitment and retention of skilled migrants.

The following chapters address the opportunities and challenges that skilled migrants face in Norway. Chapter two investigates the recruitment of skilled workers to Norway, paying particular attention to recruitment agencies, private agents, international student migration, and the activities of European Employment Services (EURES). This chapter ends with a discussion of the (lack of) global mindset in Norwegian companies. Chapter three, four, and five investigate the professional, institutional, and personal opportunities and challenges that foreign-born skilled workers face in Norway, and how skilled migrants navigate these challenges. Chapter six presents initiatives by companies, private agencies, and immigrant organizations that aim to assist skilled migrants. The conclusion discusses collaborations between stakeholders in international skilled migration, and ways to improve the lives of foreign-born skilled workers in Norway.



## 2 Recruitment of skilled migrants to Norway

This chapter discusses the recruitment strategies of HR managers in the oil and gas industry and the IT sector in Norway. Insights into these recruitment strategies help us better understand how international skilled migration operates, and how HR managers, recruitment agents, and private agents help shape international migration flows. These actors play key roles in the recruitment of skilled workers, and they are highly aware of current developments in the global knowledge economy.

As discussed in chapter one, engineers and IT specialists are in high demand in Norway, and companies increasingly recruit talent from abroad. HR managers use “traditional” recruitment tools such as Intranet, print ads, and job seeker web sites. HR managers also use recruitment agencies to hire consultants for project work, and they increasingly use social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and the professional networking site LinkedIn to reach a global audience. This global reach can be beneficial if a company is looking for candidates with specialized skills. However, the wide reach of social media can result in a large number of applications from unqualified candidates.

HR managers in two IT companies in this study – which we will call Soria Moria and Scandia IT to protect the identities of our informants – use social networking tools to advertise job openings. Interestingly, both companies are so popular that they allocate few resources to recruitment. An HR manager in Scandia IT explains: “When we place a job announcement on our web site we receive a flood of applications from all over the world. . . . When we post one job opening we receive eighty applications in a few weeks” (HR manager 1). The attraction of this company’s products is so strong that an employee remarked to his manager: “If you use [the company’s product] you almost become religious.” Soria Moria’s software products have a similar appeal. However, this strong brand appeal is exceptional, and HR managers in most other companies have to work much harder to attract IT specialists.

HR managers in both companies look for very specific skills. They use recruitment agencies to hire employees for standard lower-level positions, but they rely on personal contacts to identify highly skilled candidates. They also use their contacts in foreign branch offices to locate workers with the necessary skills. One participant was hired through such an intra-company transfer (interview 14).

HR managers also use social media to locate potential job applicants. For instance, people who often update their LinkedIn profile by adding new contacts, posting updates, and endorsing the skills of colleagues can gain attention from HR managers who are looking for suitable candidates. An engineer from India explains how his connections on LinkedIn helped him land a job in Stavanger:

I had many connections on LinkedIn. . . . so that's how I got to know about a [job] opening in Norway. And I just applied to the person [who was posted as a contact for the job], and uh, that's how I got through.

MvR: And how did you hear about job opportunities through those connections?

Um, generally . . . they put a post somewhere that "I am looking for some engineers." So then you can send a message to them or on LinkedIn, and they come back to you. . . . The industries we would join – groups related to oil and gas . . . you can invite the members of those groups . . . so then – then it's easier. . . . The first 500 connections you need to take some effort . . . and once you reach around 500 to 1,000 . . . then you yourself start getting invites.

MvR: Really? So how many do you have?

Uh, I will be touching around 1,500 now (interview 58).

LinkedIn is widely used by HR managers and foreign-born workers in our study. In fact, it was evident that several informants had read our LinkedIn profiles before we met. We also used LinkedIn to search for potential informants for the study. Thus, LinkedIn has become a key tool for professional networking (for a discussion of the use of LinkedIn by HR managers and IT specialists in Bangalore, India, see van Riemsdijk, 2013b).

Several companies in our study have developed global talent recruitment initiatives. For example, one company now requires its HR managers to advertise all job openings in English. A job opening is first posted internally to encourage internal applications, followed by external postings. Since initiating the posting of jobs in English, HR managers have noted an increase in international applications. The company also allows selected employees to work in another branch for up to twelve months. These international employment opportunities and the global reach of the company are a big draw for job seekers. An employee explains the advantages of working for a global company:

[Working in a global company] that's also one of the . . . motivations, I guess, that I have for choosing a global company like this. . . . That if I decide just to go back to [my home country], then they have an office that's in there. Or if I just want to go . . . any other place, I have that mobility, which is . . . I think it's good (interview 16).

The global presence allows this engineer to take on employment in a sister branch in another country. He often works on multinational teams, and he travels internationally for team meetings. These international job opportunities are important recruit-

ment and retention tools. The company aims to continuously provide professional opportunities for its employees to enable them to grow within the company instead of seeking employment elsewhere.

Several companies offer referral bonuses to their employees, which is a cost-effective measure to attract new talent. One company offers a bonus in the amount of approximately half the cost of a print ad. This bonus scheme provides a considerable cost saving if the referral results in an employment contract. Referrals are likely to bring in highly qualified workers, as a recruiter explains: “Good people often recommend other good people” (interview 20).

Ståle Kyllingstad, CEO for supply company IKM, argued that the use of bonuses contributed to unfair competition. He argued that “the [bonus] arrangement gives a Statoil employee NOK 20,000 (approximately \$3000) for one of my employees” (Skarsaune, 2012). Statoil discontinued the practice while noting that other companies also offer bonuses. Mr. Kyllingstad’s complaint illustrates the mutual dependency between large operators and supplier companies. The operators rely on the supplier companies to deliver the materials, specialized knowledge, and services that are needed to run large-scale operations.

Referral bonuses can contribute to chain migration of skilled workers who join friends or colleagues (Vertovec, 2002). The literature on chain migration has traditionally focused on low-skilled migrants who would join relatives or friends in their new destinations. Chain migration among skilled workers is more complex because the qualifications of an applicant have to match a job opening. We found evidence of international chain migration in several companies in our study. One company in Stavanger stood out because three respondents mentioned that they heard about a job opening through a friend. The salience of personal networks for finding a job is well-established in the literature (Granovetter, 1971; Granovetter, 1974). An informant from South Asia describes the role of friends in his recruitment to Norway:

I had some of my colleagues, also friends, who came abroad. So through them also, I got to know that uh, there are lots of opportunities here.

MvR: So those friends already worked in Norway?

Yeah.

MvR: [Pause]. I’m starting to think friends should get commission [informant laughs] for bringing friends to Norway. Because pretty much everybody [whom I interviewed in this company] had a friend who said “Norway is great, you should come.”

Yes. [Laughs]

MvR: Did you tell any of your friends to come?

Yeah.

MvR: And did they come?

I think that uh, just this year, it's been a bit difficult to get jobs. Because, because of the [financial] problem in Europe (interview 58).

This interview excerpt illustrates the salience of international friendship networks for finding employment. The informant heard from an Indian colleague about employment opportunities in Stavanger. He then contacted an agent whom his Indian friend recommended, and started applying for jobs. This example also underlines the importance of job satisfaction of employees. When employees are satisfied in their jobs they are more likely to encourage others to come. Some companies have understood this very well while others focus predominantly on the recruitment of workers with less attention to their long-term retention. Company initiatives for skilled migrants will be discussed in more detail in chapter six.

## **2.1 Competition between operators, supplier companies, and business consulting firms**

There is fierce competition for engineers and IT specialists in Norway. Job seekers have a hierarchy of company preferences, with Statoil topping the charts with an average of 200 job applications per day (Buljo, 2012). Statoil and other operators are most valued by job seekers in the oil and gas industry, followed by supplier companies. A CEO of a large Norwegian-owned supplier company explained the hierarchy of businesses in the oil industry as follows: “The pecking order of the oil business is: operators, large suppliers (Schlumberger, Halliburton, BakerHughes, etc.) and smaller suppliers (IKM, etc.)” (cited in Sasson and Blomgren, 2011: 92). Business consulting firms and the public sector should be included in this hierarchy, as they also vie to attract the best and brightest workers.

Large producer companies lure engineering students and recent graduates with professional opportunities and high salaries. They place students on projects as soon as they start working, and team managers follow up regularly to ensure that their professional goals are being met. Municipalities attract recent graduates with high salaries and hands-on projects. Newly minted engineers earn most in Norwegian municipalities, but they are likely to be scooped up by private companies when they have gained work experience (Amelie, 2013). It is important to note that Norwegian language proficiency is often a requirement in municipal jobs.

Consultancy firms woo job seekers with short-term projects in well-known companies. They offer students well-paid internships, and try to hire the best students



after graduation. Most of these employees also have to speak Norwegian because they interact with Norwegian clients.

Smaller service companies often struggle to attract skilled migrants because of low international brand recognition. In fact, some service companies provide on-the-job-training to employees with general engineering skills. These employees have to display a willingness to learn and adapt. An HR manager in a service company explains what he is looking for in a job candidate with general engineering skills:

Yeah, usually [the skills of applicants] it's not oil. For example, the girl that we have here. She's a . . . civil engineer. . . . She called us and said, "I am an engineer, and I'm working in a pharmacy. I know nothing about oil, but I would like to learn. If you teach me, I will know." So we told her, give us a presentation on [the product that the company makes] in one week. . . . So she Googled [the topic]. And we just felt, why not? Let's train this girl. She arrived two months ago; she's already running projects (interview 49).

Companies can also train employees in the skills that are needed for a job, known as upskilling. ManpowerGroup found that "employers are addressing their talent shortages by upskilling current staff and promoting staff who demonstrate the potential to grow and develop" (ManpowerGroup, 2012: 3; cited in Todd, 2013).

Fierce competition between actors creates a "buyer's market" for foreign-born and Norwegian engineers. They have many job opportunities to choose from, and can negotiate attractive hiring packages. This is also true for IT specialists. Recruitment agencies play an important role in bringing job seekers and employers together, which will be discussed in the next section.

## 2.2 Recruitment agencies

Companies often use recruitment agencies when they need short-term labor for project work. The oil and gas industry often works on a project basis, needing large numbers of workers for a limited time. Even though it is more expensive to hire an employee through a recruitment agency, a company can save money long-term by minimizing redundancy in its workforce. Recruitment agencies select candidates for a job opening, or an agency recommends candidates for an interview with a company's HR managers. Employees who work for recruitment agencies can acquire work experience in well-known companies, which can better position them to find a job after a project is finished. Or the company may hire an employee for a permanent position. A recruiting agent explains the benefits for its employees:

I think you have to choose if you want to be a consultant, or if you want to work with a client. So if you want to be a consultant, it's good to work for [our company], because we have a very huge range of frame agreements with the biggest clients in Norway: oil and gas, bank, finance, in health, and . . . you can participate in very exciting projects. And it is a terminal project; it has a start date and an end date. And if you want to do certain projects, we have them (interview 20).

Recruitment agencies are actively involved in the career decisions of their hires, hoping to employ them for a long time. A recruitment agent in our study follows up regularly to make sure that consultants are satisfied with the work:

We give [our employees] salaries, insurance, pay taxes to the government. They are employed by us, so it's very important for us to follow up, and be sure they are quite happy with us, with the job to the client, because if we can keep them over a long period, we earn more money. And . . . you don't need to replace them all the time, so it's very important for us to follow up in a good way (interview 20).

Large international recruitment agencies have access to an international database of skilled workers, and they can tap into a network of colleagues in other countries. For example, a recruitment agency with an office in Oslo collaborated with sister agencies in Budapest and Madrid to organize recruitment fairs for engineers. A recruiter explains how his agency organizes a fair in another country:

So we could pick up the phone to our colleagues in [Madrid or Budapest] and say, "Hey guys, could you, together with us, make an arrangement happening, can you do the advertising for us? Could you do the set-up for an interview? Could we then see all those men and women registered in such an event?" We could see their CVs. We could do the picking-out of what kind of CV we really want to see. . . . When we returned from that country, these countries, we bring, of course we meet people that are highly skilled, alright, then we of course interview them very properly, then [our colleagues abroad] do the reference check. Because, you know, the references in many cases are a good friend, or, well that's not the best [university] (interview 22).

The local recruitment agents possess valuable local and national knowledge. They know about the national education system and the value of university degrees, they know how to advertise an event locally and nationally, and they can tell if a reference is legitimate. Thus, these local agents are very valuable in the international recruitment process. Norwegian HR managers have to be increasingly competent in these matters, which is difficult to master with job candidates from a multitude of countries and universities, and with different job experiences. EURES assists with these questions, and helps employers recruit internationally. The activities of EURES are discussed in more detail in the next section.

The recruitment agents in Oslo were highly aware of the hesitancy of Norwegian employers to hire job seekers from Hungary and Spain due to a perceived lack of English proficiency and cultural differences. To reduce these negative perceptions, the Norwegian agents made short videos of the job candidates. They were asked to shortly discuss in English why they wanted to work in Norway and what skills they possessed. These videos aimed to provide Norwegian employers a better sense of the candidate's proficiency in English and of his/her personality. The recruitment agency then sold exclusive access to an online database of the job seekers' videos and CVs. The company had only three to four working days to make a hiring decision before access was sold to another company. This quick decision-making deadline is another indicator of the hot labor market for engineers in Norway.

Recruitment agencies carefully follow social trends and incorporate them into their recruitment practices. For example, one agency organizes "speed-dating" events in Norway's largest cities. The recruitment agency invites qualified job candidates and companies who are seeking to hire. Clients quickly present their companies, followed by a speed date between an HR manager and a job candidate, and then reference checks. The recruitment agency has held these local events for the past seven years but it has to extend its global reach:

It's about frame agreements on the very long term. So we have to work very hard and very long to get the frame agreements. And it's about competence, relations, price, . . . globally, because we, we . . . we can see the world is getting smaller. It's about being more and more global (interview 20).

Unfortunately, the increasing competition for engineers has given rise to unscrupulous recruitment agencies. HR managers regularly receive telephone calls from recruitment agents who offer to send CVs of job seekers with an engineering background. Two HR managers in our study received a CV of a "job seeker" who already worked for the company. The employees had not given permission for the use of their CVs, and these incidents placed the employees in an awkward situation. The tactics of these agencies taint the reputation of serious recruitment agencies.

Several foreign-born engineers have used private agents to find employment in the oil and gas industry in Norway. These agents apply for jobs on behalf of job seekers. The agents negotiate the terms of employment when a job is offered, including salary. A job seeker pays an agent an hourly fee until a contract has been signed. The job seeker then becomes an employee of the agent, who withholds a portion of the employee's monthly salary. The agent provides practical assistance when a foreign-born worker arrives in Norway, which can include help with work visa applications, the provision of housing, and information about the company. The agent also assists with the filing of Norwegian tax forms.

Private agents have access to people who can start working on short notice. The agents have international networks to supply the needed talent, and they are knowledgeable about international migration regulations and tax laws. Thus, private agents form a bridge between the global labor market for engineers and the talent needs of local companies.

Three informants used private agents to find a position in an oil and gas company in Stavanger. They found their agents through friends or on LinkedIn. An Indian informant heard about an agent from an Indian colleague in Norway. The informant paid the agent NOK 600 (approximately \$100) an hour for two weeks to search available positions in Stavanger. When he signed a contract with an oil company, the agent's company assisted with his move to Norway. The agent deducts a monthly commission before he pays the informant his salary. Another informant found an agent through his friends in Singapore. He contacted the agent (or 'headhunter') because he wanted to work as a consultant in Stavanger. He appreciates the high consultancy salary, but he feels isolated because he is not allowed to participate in workshops and social events that are only available to permanent employees.

As discussed in chapter one, the international recruitment of IT specialists is less common. One recruitment agency has hired citizens from Romania, Hungary, Poland, Italy, and Spain to work in the IT sector, but these workers already resided in Norway when they were hired. The highest demand for highly skilled workers in IT is for architects, project managers, developers, and experts in data warehousing and infrastructure.

Recruitment agencies and private agents provide access to a flexible workforce that can be activated on short notice. This flexibility is becoming increasingly important as companies try to cut costs and reduce workforce redundancy. Consultants earn good salaries, but they pay a personal price when they are excluded from social activities and workshops in the companies that they work for. We will discuss social isolation issues in more detail in chapter five.

## **2.3 European Employment Services (EURES)**

European Employment Services (EURES) is another intermediary in the international recruitment of skilled workers to Norway. The European Commission created EURES in 1993 to increase international job mobility within the EEA. EURES Norway is part of NAV, and operates as a liaison between employers and international job seekers. In this capacity, EURES advisers play an important role in bridging cultures. They provide information to Norwegian employers about cultural differences, educational systems, and university reputations in other EEA countries. For example, EURES Norway has created fact sheets that contain information about the education system,

language proficiency, and top universities in Portugal and Spain. They also help Norwegian companies recruit workers at international job fairs that are organized by local EURES offices.

EURES advisers are also ambassadors for Norway at home and abroad. The advisers give workshops about working and living in Norway at international job fairs, and they provide weekly sessions on Norwegian culture and employment in major cities in Norway. Thus, EURES advisers play an important bridging role between foreign-born job seekers and Norwegian employers. We will return to this role in the conclusion, where we highlight EURES as an example of successful collaboration between various stakeholders in international skilled migration.

## 2.4 International student migration

Companies are increasingly recruiting students to fill their talent needs. Large companies design projects for graduate students and offer summer internships for advanced undergraduate students. For example, Statoil offers summer internships and trainee programs for Master and Ph.D. students, and FMC Technologies offers a summer program for Master students. These initiatives allow students to work on a project and gain hands-on experience. Students become more familiar with the company and acquire new skills. In return, the company hopes that the most promising students will stay on after graduation. Companies also use career fairs to attract students.

Some trainee programs specifically target foreign-born candidates. For example, ABB offers a global trainee program that lasts between eighteen and twenty-four months. The program promises to provide “the opportunity to work in different countries, and experience diverse work cultures and job assignments” (ABB, 2010). Participants who are stationed in Oslo become familiar with Norwegian work culture, and may request to stay in Norway when the training period is finished, or they may apply their new skills in a branch in another country.

International student internships are also popular among employers and students alike. An interview participant from South Asia found an internship in Soria Moria through AIESEC, the world’s largest student-run organization that promotes youth leadership development. He enjoyed the internship experience and accepted a permanent position in Soria Moria after graduation (interview 5). Soria Moria has hired several AIESEC interns in permanent positions. AIESEC internships and other student training opportunities provide work experience, and allow the intern and the company to explore if they are a good fit.

## 2.5 Global mindset

The Norwegian global mindset is a frequently discussed theme at conferences on the recruitment of skilled migrants. At a conference organized by the Oslo Chamber of Commerce and Abelia, several speakers noted that the Norwegian term *innvandr* (immigrant) has a negative connotation. This term often refers to low-skilled migrants and refugees, focusing on the “problems” of these migrants. Speakers at the 2012 Oslo Global Mobility Forum suggested using the term *global talent* to underline the skills of these migrants, and to garner more support for international skilled migration.

Some companies in Norway are very international and hire a large proportion of foreign-born workers. For example, DNV employs ninety-nine nationalities, Aker Solutions has hired employees from over eighty countries, and FMC Technologies has over fifty nationalities represented. In 2012, 42 percent of Statoil’s new hires in Norway were non-Norwegian. Statoil has implemented guidelines to increase its workforce diversity, stating in its 2012 annual report that

We believe that being a global and sustainable company requires people with a global mindset. One way to build a global company is to ensure that recruitment processes both within and outside Norway contribute to a culturally diverse workforce (Statoil, 2013).

Workforce diversity can contribute new ideas and innovative approaches to problem-solving. A line manager in our study was strongly committed to creating an international project team. He intended to hire foreign-born workers who could bring diversity in terms of cultural background, experiences, and skills. He felt that this was important because, as he put it, Norwegian coworkers had attended the same universities, studied with the same professors, and used the same approach to solve a problem. Another informant expressed the same concern. He stated that Norwegian CEOs tend to have graduated from BI and NTNU, and they tend to hire people who are “the same types as themselves” (interview 33). The company’s management team supported the creation of an international team, and existing Norwegian team members were open to these internationalization efforts.

An international team as described above is only present in a minority of companies in Norway. A survey conducted by Opinion Perduco for ManpowerGroup found that most Norwegian employers believe that ethnically diverse (*flerkulturell*) workers add unique competencies. However, more than seven out of ten of the 2000 surveyed employers do not plan to hire more ethnically diverse workers. Many respondents believe that employers are prejudiced toward foreigners. Language is another reason why companies do not hire from abroad (Reinholdtsen, 2013).

Recruitment agents regularly work with employers who are reluctant to hire foreign-born workers. Some employers refuse to hire foreign candidates even if they possess

skills that fit the job description. A recruitment agent explains this dilemma and the need for Norwegian language proficiency for IT specialists in Norway:

If you talk to [Norwegian] CEOs [in the IT industry], they're really open-minded for a global mindset. But when you come to, come to the end, I think it's quite more difficult to, to do it in . . . concrete. . . . Especially in Stavanger, Trondheim, Bergen. We send CVs to the clients of English speakers, or German, or whatever. But they kind of have to speak Norwegian because all the meetings are in Norwegian, documentation, websites, everything is in Norwegian. So I don't think we're very mature on the [discussion] yet

MvR: You didn't mention Oslo in that list.

No. Because I think we are, in Oslo I think we are quite coming a bit further on this (interview 20).

At first it seemed that employers in Oslo were more open-minded to hiring foreign-born IT specialists than HR managers in other Norwegian cities. Then the recruitment agent explained that the candidates who were hired in Oslo were already living in Norway. Some had studied in Norway, and others had already worked in Norway. As he explained "then they're not as foreign anymore" (interview 20). Thus, the job candidates who already lived in Norway were considered "less foreign," and therefore more acceptable than employees who would be hired directly from abroad.

A recruitment agent in the oil and gas industry noticed a change in mindset among Norwegian employers in the last five years. When employers hesitate to hire foreign-born workers, he argues that it will become a necessity to remain competitive in the future:

I think there is some kind of change in this now because for the recent five years, [Norwegian employers in the oil and gas industry] have, more or less, always insisted on the Norwegian speaker, speaking engineers, they are our first pick. Alright? . . . We have told them for years and said, "Well, well that's ok as a fact, for now, but this is not a fact for the years to come." So, if you are still there, that, "well I don't want to meet English-speaking, German, French, Italian engineers," then you will probably be the loser in this market in the years to come. So, I think the companies like FMC, to a lesser degree also Statoil, but FMC, Aker Solutions, DNV, Siemens, and they are all companies that use English as the company language. FMC, one of the huge companies . . . they have more than 50 nations working on their site, in Kongsberg (interview 22).

The recruitment agent also discussed employers' preference for particular nationalities. Employers' preferences are related to competencies in the oil and gas industry, as well as stereotypical notions of nationalities:

Hungary, the Black Sea, there's a lot of oil and gas industry because of the Russians, yeah, so there you have it. And the UK has a lot of engineers that are experienced in oil and gas. They are very expensive for us. They are, and they are not necessarily the most popular engineers in Norway. Little bit big shot, little bit "show me the money" type of attitude. . . . Eastern Europe engineers . . . lack a little bit of oil and gas. But then, if they have been in some kind of process industry, they, well they can come into consideration (interview 22).

These stereotypical assumptions of a person's worth based on his or her nationality are problematic. These assumptions can contribute to devaluation of a person's educational attainment and professional skills, and often result in a lower salary and lower job responsibilities (van Riemsdijk, 2010b; van Riemsdijk, 2013a). These valuations of skill can also be tied to a person's last name. Research has shown that Norwegian employers are less likely to invite a job candidate with a non-Norwegian sounding last name to an interview (Midtbøen and Rogstad, 2012; Rogstad, 2001). In order to reduce this selection bias, some large companies remove the names of applicants and country of origin, and select candidates based on education and experience. The Confederation of Norwegian Enterprises (NHO) has endorsed these blind reviews.

Several organizations have developed initiatives to address this mindset and its negative outcomes for foreign-born workers. The organization Alarga provides scholarships to foreign students who study in Norway and who speak and write Norwegian. The students write a thesis for a member company (Aker Solutions, Telenor, Statkraft, etc.), and they are paired with a mentor. This initiative is meant to provide students with work experience, and to strengthen their job applications when they graduate. Alarga also provides advice to non-governmental organizations and companies on global talent recruitment. In addition, NHO initiated the Global Future program in 2010 to increase diversity in leadership positions. The program enrolls applicants with multicultural backgrounds and prepares them for executive leadership and boardroom positions. These initiatives help diversify leadership positions and workplaces, and promote a global mindset.



## 3 Professional opportunities for skilled migrants

This chapter addresses the professional opportunities and difficulties that foreign-born skilled workers experience in Norway. The chapter addresses how migrants found employment in Norway, and why they decided to move to Norway. These findings contribute to our understanding of the role of companies, HR managers, and colleagues in attracting foreign-born skilled workers.

### 3.1 Information sources for job openings

Most of our respondents found information about job openings on the Internet or through a colleague or friend. Of our engineering survey respondents, twenty found information on the company's website, fifteen used finn.no, and three used NAV.no. The latter two web sites are Norway-specific, which indicates that these respondents had already decided that they wanted to work in Norway. Seventeen respondents learned about a job opening through an internship, a university presentation, an internal job posting, or from a manager or HR director.

Use of the Internet can also result in a job offer. A software developer from Western Europe posted his programming work on the Internet and was offered a job in Oslo:

I did not apply for [the company]. They contacted me and offered a job. I was a JavaScript developer, with a passion for real-time computer graphics since age five. In summer 2005 I made a real-time animation using web standards that showed some things that had never [been] done or used in such ways before. Three days later, I was contacted by [the company] asking if I wanted to join them (respondent 16).

This example illustrates the specialized skills that some migrants bring to Norway. These migrants have many job opportunities and often select the job that is professionally most rewarding.

Migration studies have shown that social networks are valuable sources of information for immigrants (Grasmuck and Pessar, 1991; Massey et al., 1998). These connections can provide access to jobs and resources, and they can provide emotional,

economic, and social support. Most studies of migrant social networks have investigated low-skilled and unskilled workers, who tend to use networks of family members and friends to find employment. Only recently have scholars started to investigate the social networks of skilled migrants. These migrants are more likely to use professional networks than familial connections to seek employment and to advance their careers (Robinson and Carey, 2000). Fifty-four survey respondents mentioned the role of friends in finding employment. However, it is likely that these friendships developed at the university or in a previous job, thus constituting a professional as well as a friendship connection. One such example of a friendship/professional connection was mentioned by an IT specialist. His job search illustrates the “strength of weak ties” (Granovetter, 1971), or the importance of friends, for finding employment. He found his current job through a friend who worked for Soria Moria in Oslo. After he visited his friend in Oslo in Summer 2001 he lost his job in his home country. He sent his CV to his friend and he was offered a job in Soria Moria eight months later (interview 11). This example indicates the importance of professional and friendship networks in the job search.

### **3.2 Why do skilled migrants decide to move to Norway?**

The reasons to apply for a job are usually a composite of practical and personal considerations. A study of skilled migrants in the United Kingdom uncovered three primary motivations to migrate: career advancement, wider quality-of-life factors, and personal development (Pearson and Morrell, 2002). These motivational factors differ by occupation, country of origin, and stage in the life course (*ibid.*). Florida (2002; 2005) argues that knowledge workers, intellectuals, and artists – the so-called creative class – are attracted by urban amenities, leisure, and entertainment opportunities. They are looking for a good “quality of place” that offers a climate of tolerance and openness. These studies indicate that skilled workers highly value non-monetary aspects of employment in addition to salary. Family considerations are also important decision-making factors (Boyd 1989; Kofman and Raghuram, 2005). Survey respondents and interview participants often mentioned lifestyle factors, including a good work-life balance, a supportive country for families, and easy access to nature. We discuss these factors in more detail in chapter six on personal opportunities and challenges.

The survey respondents decided to apply for a job in Norway for various reasons. The most frequently reported categories were: professional opportunities (42), salary (17), job availability (15), company reputation (12), and location (12). Forty-eight respondents noted that the company (type of company, company growth, type of work, international company and work environment, modern facilities, reputation, good

working conditions) contributed most to their decision to apply for a job. Thirty-five respondents applied because of practical considerations (needing employment, good pay, English-language workplace, ease of immigration within Europe). Thirteen respondents applied because of their interest in the oil and gas industry. Eleven respondents based their decision on personal factors (family reunification, joining friends or a significant other), and nine respondents mentioned the importance of Norway as a “family friendly” country.

An engineer from Eastern Europe explains his reasons to move to Norway as follows:

This position [is related to] my major in my Master’s degree education. The excellent reputation of the company and its large organization may allow me further professional development without changing employer. Its challenging and complex projects allow one to get knowledge in various engineering disciplines. Furthermore, the international background, modern facilities, friendly working environment, and benefits are very attractive (respondent 95).

This respondent places most emphasis on the reputation of the company and the professional opportunities that it has to offer. “Soft factors” such as an international and friendly work environment and modern facilities enhanced this person’s decision to work for the company.

Interviews with foreign-born IT specialists confirmed the importance of company and industry reputation for the employment decision. In particular, the IT specialists in our study wanted to work for companies that create products that they admire. As one HR manager commented: “It is the brand that attracts people” (HR manager 1). A study participant mentioned “I moved to Oslo because [this company] was here” (interview 4). Another participant stated “I worked with the company before, and I found the product interesting. I like that the product is flexible and of good technical quality” (interview 6). And a third mentioned “[Soria Moria] is well-respected in the industry and a good company to work for” (interview 11). Respect for the company and its products were a strong attraction for all IT specialists in this study. In fact, several participants applied for only one job in one company, and they were hired for that particular position.

Several IT specialists chose to work in Oslo because of a sense of adventure. They were looking for an adventurous stay abroad, in a location that was different from their familiar environment. Several participants mentioned that they knew little about Oslo and Norway before they arrived, and they accepted the job offer because of Oslo’s exotic appeal. One HR manager commented that “Norway is exotic. . . . They like to experience the exotic” (HR manager 1). A software engineer describes his desire to explore the unknown as follows: “I sent an application to [Scandia IT] – it sounded exotic. I thought ‘I go to a place with igloos and hunt polar bears for breakfast’” (interview 2). Another participant was mainly looking for a chance to visit Oslo on a job interview:

“I saw the job ad and I thought ‘I can get a free trip.’ I was self-employed and I was not looking for a job” (interview 16). When he visited Scandia IT he was impressed with the company and decided to accept the job offer. Another informant read about Norway before he applied for a job, and he became particularly interested in Norway’s welfare system. Despite his preparation he felt that he knew little before he arrived: “I read about Norway; it is interesting, especially the social way. It is more socialist than [my home country]. It is mysterious. It is a little country, cold; it has a mysterious aura. I did not know much” (interview 8). For another informant, the exoticism of Norway was the decisive factor to accept the job offer. He had received offers from companies in San Francisco, Vienna, and Oslo, and he chose Oslo because he was least familiar with this city:

San Francisco and Vienna have more or less the same challenges, and they are interesting in the same ways. The country of Norway played a final role [in the decision to migrate]. My wife made the decision. Norway is different from [my country of origin] in terms of weather and culture. [Soria Moria] is also a strong attraction factor. The United States is a bit scary, in terms of social system, healthcare [he threw both hands in the air and froze as he said this]. I feel not comfortable (Informant 13).

The excerpts above indicate that Norway is seen to have an exotic and mysterious bent. HR managers in the IT companies in this study capitalize on Norway and Oslo’s relatively unknown status, and they play up the exotic when prospective employees visit for an interview.

The reputation and products of a company, professional challenges, and opportunities to learn new skills largely define the destination choice of IT specialists. Interestingly, the attractiveness of a destination was secondary to professional considerations. The following comments indicate that the location of the company did not matter for several IT specialists when they decided to move to Oslo: “I did not know where Norway was. It could be in the middle of Turkey” (interview 10). Another mentioned: “I had not heard about Oslo. I did not really care where [Scandia IT] is. It is just luck, chance that I ended up here. . . . When I applied for the position here I did not specify where. I just applied for [Scandia IT]” (interview 15). For one non-European citizen, it was important to move to Europe but it did not matter in what country he would find employment. He was primarily interested in experiencing a new culture and traveling within Europe: “I like Europe a lot. I took business trips to Europe, to Germany and Finland for my previous job” (interview 14). Another participant regarded employment in Oslo as a steppingstone for a long-term stay in Europe. Once he has gained permanent residency in Oslo, he will be able to seek employment in another European country. These two participants were interested in Europe, but they had little place-specific appreciation for and understanding of Oslo when they accepted the job offer. An HR manager noted that the foreign-born IT specialists that she hires

do not necessarily have a preferred location in mind, but they know where they do not want to live and work. As long as a prospective job is not in a non-desirable location, prospective migrants may be open to accepting a job offer (HR manager 1). Of course, location becomes very important when migrants decide if they want to stay long-term.

One informant was particularly attracted to the work culture of Scandia IT, which was radically different from his country of origin. He applied for a job in Scandia IT because he knew that the decision-making was more democratic, and the working conditions were more favorable than in his country of origin:

Scandia IT has a good work culture. It has a transparent system and it is not always management-driven. They welcome input from the bottom. The work-life balance is good, employees can estimate the time to finish the job. Most companies [in my home country] are management-driven and deadline-driven. Scandia IT is employee-driven (interview 14).

Most participants mentioned that they decided to work for the company because of the professional challenges that it offers. They like to work with intelligent colleagues who can teach them new skills. One participant even turned down a lucrative offer in another country to participate in an interesting project at Soria Moria: “I received an offer from a bank [in a Central European country]. It was way more money than here [in Oslo]. But it was not fun” (interview 13).

One of the main career considerations of the participants is to learn new skills: “I wanted to leave [my country of origin], have an experience, meet new people. I wanted to work for a company with different people, learn new skills, and speak English” (interview 8). This software developer chose an international career to improve his command of English and programming skills. Another informant also moved to Oslo to improve his skills:

It is a career advantage to work abroad. Oslo is very interesting. I learn a terrible amount every day. The job improves my language skills. My first goal to come here was because of my career. I want to get more advanced skills: Java script skills, software architecture. I want to work on specific products and open source development (interview 6).

Other participants also placed high value on skill acquisition and intellectual challenges: “I took the job because the project at Soria Moria was challenging. I am the lead developer of a small team of five to six people for a web site with millions of users. I could move on to bigger challenges [within the company] and it is a renowned company” (interview 13). However, career advancement opportunities in Norwegian IT companies are limited once one is hired. Both companies have relatively flat organizational structures, and they offer few career trajectories within the company. Norwegian companies place a high value on non-hierarchical management structures and direct

communication between employees (Bråten and Falkum, 2008). IT specialists could become managers to advance their careers, but most informants did not express interest in this career path.

The majority of interviewees and survey respondents had looked up information on the Internet to decide if they wanted to move to Norway. They read about Norway's welfare system, work culture, and natural beauty on the Internet, and some experienced Norwegian culture first-hand during an onsite job interview. Migrants decided to move to Norway for a variety of reasons, weighing professional, cultural, and familial considerations. These migrants can encounter institutional obstacles after they arrive in Norway, which we will discuss in the next chapter.

## 4 Institutional challenges to skilled migration

This chapter discusses institutional opportunities and challenges, in particular Norway's migration regime and migrants' interactions with UDI (the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration), tax authorities, and driver's license offices. This chapter addresses some of the challenges that skilled migrants face when they interact with these agencies.

### 4.1 Institutional regulations

National governments establish migration policies to regulate the admission of foreign citizens into their national territories. The Norwegian government liberalized its migration policy toward third country nationals in January 2010 to make it easier to admit skilled migrants who have an offer of employment. It also allowed university students from third countries to seek employment after graduation if they had sufficient funds, and spouses of skilled third country nationals could obtain a work permit. These initiatives have made it easier for third country nationals to take up employment, but some migration barriers still remain. In this section we use our survey data to examine migration issues by type and region of origin, followed by migration issues by year of entry to identify when certain issues occurred.

The most common complaint was about the long processing time of work permits at the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI). Respondents who reported this issue originated in Asia (three respondents), South America (one), and North America (one). One respondent noted that it was difficult to schedule an appointment with UDI, and another mentioned that UDI's slow processing time and bureaucracy cost his family a lot of money. One migrant's family members were unable to travel for several months while UDI processed his case.

Not surprisingly, third country nationals experienced most institutional problems compared to EEA nationals. It was challenging for one respondent to obtain a personal number, which is required to open a bank account. All three respondents from Australia experienced difficulties with the renewal of their work permits. One man who is married to a Norwegian was uncertain where he should submit his paperwork. Another

respondent observed that people with similar backgrounds, skills, and experience have been issued work permits that are valid for different time periods.

### Experienced migration challenges by year of occurrence

We listed migration issues by year of occurrence to investigate if changes in Norway's migration regulations reduced the number and nature of migration challenges. We hypothesized that migrants who arrived after January 1, 2010 would report fewer challenges because of the liberalization of Norway's migration policies for third country nationals. The reported migration issues are organized by year in Table 1.

Table 1: Experienced migration challenges by year of occurrence

LEGEND: year job started (number of migrants) – number of reported issues and nature of issues
2005 (3) – no reported issues
2006 (5) – 1 reported issue <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time consuming to renew residency every two years</li> </ul>
2007 (4) – 2 reported issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficult system for non-EU citizens who immigrate to Norway</li> <li>• Fighting deportation after divorce</li> </ul>
2008 (19) – 3 reported issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long UDI processing times</li> <li>• Unable to bring a car to Norway</li> <li>• Immigration expense</li> </ul>
2009 (14) – 5 reported issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health care paperwork</li> <li>• Work permit expired without warning</li> <li>• Takes too long to apply for Norwegian citizenship</li> <li>• Opening a bank account</li> <li>• UDI processing time takes too long, family could not travel while the case was processed</li> </ul>
2010 (12) – 1 reported issue <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requirement to learn Norwegian when the language is not used at work or with family</li> </ul>
2011 (32) – 3 reported issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Non-EEA) girlfriend had to apply for a permit in her home country despite having received a job offer in Norway</li> <li>• Immigration office is far away</li> <li>• Work permits issued to people with similar employment for different number of years</li> </ul>
2012 (48) – 8 reported issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children from Nordic countries do not receive language support in schools</li> <li>• Difficult to obtain a personal number</li> <li>• Difficult to schedule an appointment at UDI</li> <li>• 2 complaints about long processing time at UDI</li> <li>• 3 complaints about migration bureaucracy</li> </ul>
2013 (6) – No reported problems



The survey responses indicate that migration-related problems persisted after the implementation of the new Immigration Act and Immigration Regulations on 1 January 2010 (see <http://www.udi.no/newact>). For example, the reported difficulties in 2012 with scheduling appointments, long wait times at UDI, and the migration bureaucracy are similar to issues reported from 2006 to 2009.

UDI has made the permit application process easier with the establishment of service centers for foreign workers in Oslo, Stavanger, and Kirkenes. The first center was established in Oslo in 2007, and the other cities followed soon after. These centers house representatives for UDI, the Tax Directorate, the Police, and the Norwegian Labor Inspection Authority. The centers are designed as a “one stop shop” where foreign-born workers can obtain a residence permit or a registration certificate (for EEA nationals), apply for a tax identification number, and learn about their rights and obligations as workers in Norway. These centers have made it easier for foreign-born workers to obtain the documents and information that they need.

UDI has also become more service-oriented toward employers. Interviews with HR managers in 2011 garnered various complaints about long telephone holds and long wait lines in the service centers. HR managers mentioned that it has become easier to speak with a case manager in UDI by telephone, and the wait times in the service centers are reduced. A direct line of communication between employers and UDI case managers makes it easier for the employers to bring foreign-born workers to Norway. Despite these important improvements, it is clear from our survey and interviews that foreign-born workers still experience difficulties in their interactions with UDI.

Engineers from Europe and Scandinavia mostly reported practical obstacles when they arrived in Norway, rather than issues with migration regulations. This reflects their easier access to the Norwegian labor market as EEA citizens. These practical challenges included the import of a car to Norway, language assistance for children in Norwegian schools, access to health care, opening a bank account, and obtaining a permit for a (non-EEA) girlfriend.

IT respondents reported few problems with their migration to Norway. A Swedish citizen found it a hassle to drive back and forth between Norway and his country of origin. Another respondent experienced problems at the immigration office because UDI did not have the required forms in English:

The immigration office where I had to register when I found a job did not have any English forms available, only Norwegian. I was there alone, and there was no one available to help – even though there were Polish, Arab and other language translators available. That was unwelcoming and a bit intimidating, to be honest. I felt that if I made a mistake, I could lose my contract or my immigration status. [It] turned out alright in the end, but it was a nasty experience (respondent 41).

The example above illustrates a migrant's vulnerability due to lack of Norwegian language proficiency. She was afraid to lose her work contract or immigration status because she did not know how to fill out the required immigration form. Language-related difficulties and other personal obstacles will be discussed in more detail in chapter five.

## 4.2 Tax system and driver's licenses

Several study participants experienced difficulties with the Norwegian tax authorities and with obtaining a driver's license. The most common complaint was about the long wait time for a Norwegian personal number (personnummer). One needs this eleven digit number to open a bank account, order cable TV, register a cell phone – basically, to schedule any services after arrival. An engineer from Australia waited over four months to get his personnummer: "I was paying 50 percent tax, which is not easy in a city like Oslo" (respondent 47). Another engineer from Australia sums up his difficulties upon arrival: "Tax, hard to live as a foreigner (everything is just a little harder – driver's licenses, house loans, credit cards, etc. etc.)" (respondent 143). An engineer from the Middle East found the Norwegian tax system difficult to navigate. He paid his taxes in December 2012 and had not received a refund by July 2013:

In Norway, they have the tax – tax system, which they deduct, uh, they block your income, your status – And you get the tax return after eight, nine months, which is not acceptable. I paid the tax when I came here, up to December. In December, they do the calculations. I don't know when they do the calculations. Probably in 2013. Somewhere in May. Or March. But they will return your tax if you have paid extra. Still, I have not [been] paid. [Norwegians] have the same issues. . . . it will not happen to me next year, because now I understand how to set my income, and all the different things which you have to play with. So then you have to come to balance. You don't have to accumulate so, so much, the tax (interview 51).

The difficulties with the tax system are not unique to third country nationals. In fact, even citizens from other Nordic countries experience difficulties with international tax regulations. A Danish respondent explains:

How to do taxes, what deductions are available, and the interaction between the Danish tax authorities and the Norwegian. They are supposed to exchange information automatically, but they leave all the trouble up to us that have immigrated. It took 3 years until all troubles were solved (respondent 38).

The Danish example underlines the lack of communication between tax authorities in the EEA. The lack of portability of pension rights, social benefits, and healthcare insurance among EEA member states is well-documented and contributes to low inter-European labor mobility (Gill et al., 2013).

Two participants experienced difficulties obtaining a Norwegian driver's license, which seems to be specific to third country nationals. An engineer from the Middle East was allowed to use his foreign license for three months in Stavanger, and then he had to take driving lessons to obtain a new license. He had to take a six-month driving course to qualify for a Norwegian driver's license:

I had the big challenge with the driving license when I came here. . . . So when I came here, they said, "No, your driving license is not accepted in Norway. Either you have to be from Nordic country driving license, or some of the EU countries." Which we are not. And then the process is start over again from the scratch, even though I was, I had a driving license for twenty-five years. . . . I had to take the classes, like the eighteen-year-olds! . . . For six months! Believe it or not, for six months I was going and coming back. . . . Especially in Stavanger . . . You have to forget about the bus, because we have been struggling about that for at least four months. And that was not easy, you know? Especially the area which we have rented the house, it was far away. And, you know, for simple shopping, it's raining and rainy days. It was a mess, of course (interview 51).

His employer paid for the driving course, which cost NOK 40,000 (approximately USD 6,700). The driving lessons were time consuming and he had to take public transportation in Stavanger for three months. His house was located far from a bus stop, and he had to take public transportation to work. This informant was severely affected by Norway's regulation on international driving licenses.

An American engineer also experienced difficulties with Norwegian regulations regarding international driver's licenses. He explains:

The Norwegian government makes it extremely hard for a foreigner to live here. For example, if I want to change my driver's license I will have to take all of the classes which will cost me between NOK 15,000 and 20,000 [approximately USD 2,500-3,400]. I have had a US driver's license for twenty-seven years (respondent 122).

The stringent Norwegian regulations for driver's licenses were featured in the popular television show *Lilyhammer*. Mafia underboss Frank Tagliano – aka Giovanni – is told in a routine traffic control that his American driver's license is not valid in Norway. When Frank visits the driving school to obtain a new permit, the owner tells him "In Norway we take traffic security very seriously – you need a basic driving class, a theoretical test, icy road practice, night driving and long distance practice (*Lilyhammer*, 2012)." The course will take approximately two months to complete. Frank eventually

obtains a Norwegian driver's license through a condominium deal, but our informants had to complete the required driving lessons and pay for them.

Swedish informants also noted that it is very expensive to bring a car to Norway. According to one engineer, the import taxes for his car would equal the purchasing price of the car. Another Swedish survey respondent noted "I can not drive [a] Swedish car (there are hundreds of rules and thousands of exceptions)" (respondent 132). The regulations covering the import of a car and the transfer of international driver's licenses constitute large hurdles for foreign-born workers that may negatively affect their decision to stay long-term in Norway.

## 5 Personal opportunities and challenges

As mentioned in previous chapters, skilled migrants come to Norway for individual and professional reasons, including professional development, job security, and adventure. Foreign-born workers also experience personal obstacles that may become detrimental to their long-term retention. HR managers play a key role in welcoming new employees, training them in company culture, and providing insights into Norwegian culture and society. Some companies offer very little assistance to foreign-born newcomers. This section discusses some of the difficulties that foreign-born IT specialists and engineers encounter.

### 5.1 Quality of life

Many informants mentioned Norway's high quality of life, even when they were not asked specifically about this topic. Some had heard or read about the quality of life before they arrived, and many mentioned it as a reason to stay in Norway. Families with children especially appreciated Norway's family-friendly policies including generous parental leave, leave to care for sick children, and manageable work hours that allow parents to spend time with their children. A Western European IT specialist explains:

I have a family now. Norway is a pretty nice country to raise a family. I got offers from BIG companies in the USA, UK. . . . but these countries pale in comparison to Norway. It's not only about me anymore but about my wife, my child, our health and quality of life (respondent 16).

A Western European IT specialist connected his quality of life to his family and his children's school:

I think the most important factor is my family's well being. My wife is happy about staying, which is of major importance. My kids are in school and kindergarten, so that's another priority for us. They're being followed very well here, the kindergarten and school systems have been working very well so far. We got all the assistance we needed and much more than we hoped for. We know that would have been really hard to get [in our country of origin] (respondent 5).

Others mentioned the good work-life balance, a collaborative work environment, and job security. A female engineer describes the work-life balance as follows: “Great working culture which is highly professional. A very good balance between work and personal life. Extremely flexible working conditions that are accepting of family life and having young children” (respondent 120).

Several informants appreciated the close proximity to nature in their city of residence. Without prompting, many informants listed outdoor activities that they were involved in, including hiking, cross country skiing, downhill skiing, biking, long boarding, and rock climbing. A recruiter in Stavanger mentioned that the outdoor lifestyle is an important attraction for foreign-born skilled workers. She noted that Stavanger offers few recreational opportunities after work, and outdoor activities become an important way of life:

Stavanger is a quiet city. It is. At nighttime, if you walk around, you need to know where you are going. Or else you feel very lonely. . . . There is a lot of free time, and we are very close to nature. So, um, foreigners very quickly . . . learn to be more active outdoors. Because to go skiing is two hours away from here, and to go on daily walks . . . I think there are [pauses] two green areas ten minutes walk away from me, and I live in the center of the city (interview 50).

Norway’s cold winters and rainy summers take more time to get used to. An IT specialist from Western Europe explains: “Long very cold and dark winters can often be isolating” (respondent 7). Another respondent from Western Europe was struggling with icy hills: “It was winter, as I moved in January. It was hard getting used to the cold climate and the few hours of daylight. The language was still quite a barrier, but it was quite fun to try to communicate. I also had some trouble with the hilly terrain and the icy roads” (respondent 41). A respondent from Central America became ill in the transition to the cold winter: “The cold weather. I got influenza after three months of arriving. I have never been that sick in my life” (respondent 78). These weather-related issues can clearly affect migrants, as will be discussed in more detail in the section on social isolation.

Some quality of life factors are place-specific. For example, Kongsberg (population 25,000) offers good amenities for its population size including outdoor tennis courts, a bowling alley, a golf course, downhill skiing, and an annual jazz festival. It also has a small downtown with historic buildings, several shopping streets, and restaurants. Despite these amenities, Kongsberg is a quiet town with few things to do. An engineer from the Middle East describes Kongsberg as a “small city, quiet, easy transportation, not so much shop and social life. High rent for housing” (respondent 177). The lack of social activities in Kongsberg is particularly pressing for young engineers. FMC Technologies, a company that hires a large number of foreign-born workers, has taken several initiatives to improve the social lives of its employees. The company offers dis-

counts for golf memberships, it has built tennis courts, and it added a well-equipped workout room in its main building. Despite these amenities, some informants note that Kongsberg is more fitting for people with families than for young professionals:

Kongsberg is good for older people. It has good schools for kids. For younger, twenty to thirty-year-olds, there is not much to do in Kongsberg. There is a good skiing center. . . . We play fútbol (interview 36).

Kongsberg has a good international school that plans to expand because of high demand. Kongsberg also has active faith communities that cater to foreign-born workers. For example, Muslims use a house in downtown Kongsberg as a mosque, and Norkirken (a mission church closely related to the Lutheran Church) provides translations into English during Sunday sermons. These religious institutions and the international school are important meeting places for foreign-born workers and contribute to their quality of life.

## 5.2 Housing market

The housing market in Norway is tight, and many newcomers to Norwegian cities experience difficulties finding housing. Some companies rent apartments to new hires, which reduces some of the stress of adapting to a new living and working environment. For example, Statoil has purchased apartments in Oslo, Stavanger, and Trondheim, and Opera Software also rents apartments to its new employees.

Apartment rent is very high in Norway. In 2012, the highest average rents were found in Stavanger, where the average monthly rent was NOK 10,290 (Statistics Norway, 2012b). The next three highest average monthly rents were found in Oslo (including Bærum municipality) at NOK 9,470; Bergen at NOK 7,990; and Trondheim at NOK 7,880 (ibid.). The price per square meter was highest in the Oslo/Bærum municipalities. Home purchasing prices have also increased across Norway. The home purchasing price in Stavanger tripled between 2000 and 2012 (Kremer, 2012), which make it difficult to attract people outside the oil sector to Stavanger.

Oslo's housing market is predominantly a buyer's market, and most young immigrants have little capital to put down. An engineer from Central America could only afford to rent an apartment because he did not have enough capital for a down payment. Several informants mentioned that banks require non-Norwegian citizens to put down 25 percent of the purchase price while Norwegian citizens only have to pay a 10 percent down payment. This issue warrants attention from policymakers to ensure equal treatment of migrants in the housing market.

The engineer from Central America found a room through a Facebook page for migrants from his country of origin. He describes the competition for housing in Oslo as follows:

Yeah, it's . . . I think the market here, it's so crazy. Also that they have these restricted systems that you only have one website, like this [web site] finn.no. And, yeah, if you're not really . . . if you don't really know the city then it's kind of difficult to make choices in that short period because if you go and visit the place, there's probably twenty more people that want the place, and it's, yeah . . . I think that part was challenging, getting a place (interview 16).

The housing market is also very tight in Kongsberg, where existing housing is expensive and little new housing is being built. Some foreign-born workers make a forty-kilometer commute between Drammen and Kongsberg. Drammen is a larger city (population 65,000) and has more housing available than Kongsberg. It also offers more leisure activities and is in closer proximity to Oslo. A North American engineer who lives in Drammen likes the city: "Big enough but not too big, close enough to Oslo, all necessary facilities (hospital, cinema, restaurants) and close to nature" (respondent 141).

It is clear that housing and leisure activities are important factors in the retention of skilled workers. An HR manager argued that "Housing and free time activities are political issues" that need to be addressed at a local – or national – political level. He argued that a company alone cannot solve this issue, and it takes collaboration between businesses, community leaders, and politicians to improve the housing situation and leisure activities in Kongsberg.

### 5.3 Establishment costs

A pressing issue for labor migrants is the high establishment cost when they move to Norway. An international move is always costly because one has to pay for international and local transportation, a housing deposit, and living expenses before one receives the first paycheck. Some migrants receive reimbursement for some of these moving costs, but others have to cover these expenses themselves. Especially migrants from low- and middle-income countries can experience severe financial hardship in the first months after arrival. An engineer from Central America describes his financial difficulties when he arrived in Oslo:

A financial obstacle for someone moving in here, like especially for people, for young people as me, like if you're [under thirty-years-old], you don't really have a lot of money, it's kind of difficult too, probably for people with a family, or a higher



position . . . easier to just move all their stuff, and get a place or buy a place. Like in my, in my situation it's really difficult to, to buy a place or so. Then you, you have probably more difficulties because you're forced to rent a place, which is, kind of, in your budget, . . . a real thing. But I think that's, or at least that affects people in the early stage. Like you don't really have a lot of savings, or you don't . . . or if you don't know anyone. Like in my situation, that's also difficult (interview 16).

An IT specialist experienced extreme financial hardship when he moved to Stavanger with his family. He used most of his savings for the international move, and he had to borrow money to pay a security deposit of three months rent:

Moving [to Stavanger] was a challenge. A real challenge because of money. That was interesting. I had a car, of course, so I moved here with a car. I found apartment, but for salary, I got [my first salary] in two months after I started work. And for apartment, I paid three months deposit, so I . . . paid, and I borrowed it from all my friends, and I paid, the first two years, I paid these loans, actually. It was – I didn't expect that. . . . We didn't live with furniture for the first year. We were living in the empty walls, and my children were sleeping on mattresses, and nobody cared about it, actually. I didn't complain, but I, I actually needed some money. . . . And when somebody heard about it in several months from my colleagues, they just, "take my . . . I don't need this table, take it." And we took some chairs, tables, anything, because we only [had] money for the food.

MvR: That's tough.

That's . . . that was incredible. . . . And my wife didn't work, of course, so it was my salary, and it was the lowest starting salary I could get (interview 52).

An engineer from southern Europe also experienced hardship when she arrived in Stavanger in 2012: "The most challenge is that you cannot get paid until you get all your paper up to date, and that took almost two months living with savings" (interview 55).

Some companies have developed initiatives to improve this situation. For example, Statoil offers a low-interest loan to new employees. This loan lowers the establishment cost – and accompanying stress – of skilled migrants, and fosters loyalty to the company. These loans are not feasible for smaller companies, but processing the first paycheck early can reduce some of the establishment-related stress.

## 5.4 Language proficiency

One of the most challenging issues for foreign-born workers is Norwegian language proficiency. Even though all companies in this study use English as their official

working language, it is beneficial for migrants to speak and write Norwegian. Some companies require their foreign-born employees to become proficient in Norwegian to communicate with clients. Offshore operations also require Norwegian language proficiency for safety reasons.

The need for Norwegian language proficiency depends on a person's job responsibilities and the nationality of team members at work. Several informants found it difficult to participate in Norwegian-spoken team meetings. For example, an Asian IT specialist in a Norwegian team replies in English because she does not want to slow down her Norwegian team members:

I think I can understand people much better compared to years back, but I still need to reply in English. Then I feel somehow I destroy the conversation. No matter if I speak English, then people change language, or if I speak Norwegian, then I slow down . . .

MvR: And the only way you get better is by doing it again and again.

Yeah. . . . But at work you will concentrate on, you know, solutions, . . . efficiency. That's why sometimes myself I refuse to use Norwegian because I know I struggle with finding the correct word (interview 21).

This informant feels that her limited language proficiency hinders her interactions with her Norwegian colleagues. She has taken several Norwegian language courses, but she is not comfortable enough to speak Norwegian with her coworkers. This sentiment was shared with other informants who work in Norwegian-speaking teams.

Norwegian language proficiency is also useful outside the workplace. Letters from children's schools, banks, and other institutions are often written in Norwegian, and some forms are only available in Norwegian. Most companies in our study have acknowledged the benefits of Norwegian language proficiency, covering tuition for introductory language courses or offering language courses onsite.

Interestingly, many informants applied to English-speaking companies in Norway to improve their English language skills. The job in Norway enables them to become more proficient in business English. For these applicants, learning Norwegian may be secondary in importance to improving their English language skills. However, even English-speaking companies value the willingness to learn Norwegian, as this recruiter explains:

[Hiring managers] want to make sure that people are actually fluent in English. And for the bigger oil and gas companies, English, is of course, important, but then also, they do focus on whether or not a person is motivated to learn Norwegian. Because that shows that they want to stay – that they want to integrate (interview 50).

According to the Norwegian Society of Engineers and Technologists, NITO, 30 percent of its private member companies use English as their official business language (Ripegutu & Buanes, 2013). However, as discussed in chapter two, many Norwegian employers are reluctant to hire foreign-born workers. This reluctance slows further internationalization of these two industries (Seip, 2007; Reinholdtsen, 2013).

## 5.5 Social isolation

When migrants first arrive, it is important that they are integrated in a social network of colleagues and friends. Some companies have understood this very well, and their HR managers play a key role in the welcoming and integration of newcomers. Other companies provide less support for foreign-born workers, which can be detrimental to their well-being. In this section we discuss some of the social challenges that foreign-born workers experience in the workplace.

An Asian engineer came to Oslo two years ago. She feels lonely at work and in Oslo, and attributes part of that loneliness to her inability to express herself well in Norwegian. She feels like a foreigner, and she feels that she does not belong in Oslo:

Ah, well, but I, since [Norway]'s not my preferred country . . . The society here is, how to say, [. . . it's still different], so . . . One is, one reason is that I don't speak the language . . . to you know. The others they, I think even though I'm able to manage my Norwegian, I still feel I'm foreign. Not that, it's not because they don't treat me nicely . . . well, but you just, you . . . I think I'm still not belonging here . . . maybe never (interview 21).

Her feeling of isolation in Oslo is exacerbated by the dark winter and competition with her colleagues:

Maybe it's unfair to say Norwegian people aren't very social, but I think in this company people question you. They, if you start in such a way, you do not feel very social. . . . The nature here, it's too up north so in the winter, it's too quite torturing not because of the coldness, but because of the darkness. It does bring me some depression, some not, not that bad, but if you feel lonely, you feel even more alone. If you're sad, you will feel . . . This is something you cannot change. I think I'm much better the second winter. But the first one, I remember when I take the metro home I see, because it's quite flat – not flat, but there's not so many buildings so you can see the sky quite far away, so when I saw the sky, the sky started getting dark and dark, which is quite bad (interview 21).

An engineer from Denmark who is geographically (but in his opinion, not culturally) closer to Norwegians also feels a sense of isolation. He attributes this isolation to the emphasis on outdoor activities and the reserved nature of Norwegians:

It has been really tough. The Norwegians are extremely reserved towards inviting foreigners into their homes, and you basically need to be very physically active to survive here. There are huge cultural differences in the way the Norwegians interact compare to the rest of Europe. It almost feels like it is not allowed to just hypernate [sic] and relax in the evenings. You have to go out, ski, byke [sic], run – anything outdoors. I never hear people just dropping for coffee and watching a movie, or eating spontaneous [sic] dinners at each others houses. Very strange for a foreigner, to be honest! (respondent 38).

Difficulty in getting to know Norwegians was often mentioned in interviews. For example, “Norwegians are a little more closed people. It is tougher to befriend someone” (interview 36). This is echoed by an IT specialist from Western Europe: “While I haven’t tried hard, I think is fair to say that it is somehow difficult to fully integrate. On the other side, a mild integration (which is enough for me), is quite easy” (respondent 29). An engineer from the UK offers the following solution: “There should be more pubs in Norway. Most of my friends are not Norwegian” (respondent 167).

This disconnect between foreign-born workers and ethnic Norwegians is also evident in the workplace. An engineer from North America describes his situation as follows:

I have lived and worked in six different countries in my working career. Norway has been the most difficult place to live, with Switzerland is a close second. Norway has many jobs to fill, but they make it very unwelcoming for immigrants, in my opinion. I am tired of hearing the blanket answer of “That’s not the way we do things in Norway” (respondent 122).

Importantly, these feelings of isolation are not universal. In fact, many respondents are satisfied with their life in Norway and intend to stay. A North American IT specialist noted “I was received in Norway with open arms. It has been a lovely experience” (respondent 28). An engineer from Central America is satisfied in Kongsberg:

Norwegians are nice, honest and good people. We enjoy living here. I like my job and I love my children’s school. We are very proud of our achievements as [a] foreign family (respondent 197).

And a Western European IT specialist wrote:

Overall, it’s been a very positive experience. Norway, and the people, are welcoming and loyal if you get over the initial “rough” phase of making contact. Friendship

here has a deeper meaning, and is less casual. Standards of living and quality of life are high, and it's a good experience overall so far (respondent 41).

Overall, proficiency in Norwegian language eases contacts between foreign-born workers and ethnic Norwegians. The level of satisfaction in the workplace also depends on the personality of the migrant and the workplace culture. The next chapter will discuss the initiatives of companies and organizations that aim to help skilled workers adjust to their new environment, and help them create a sense of local belonging and inclusion.



## 6 Initiatives for the local integration of foreign-born skilled workers

This chapter addresses initiatives by companies, state agencies, and non-profit organizations to assist foreign-born skilled workers when they arrive in Norway. These agents provide information about Norwegian culture and society, help migrants adjust to their new environment, and can help them navigate structural and personal challenges. If executed well, these programs can contribute to the long-term retention of foreign-born skilled workers.

### 6.1 Company initiatives

The physical work environment, food, and social interactions influence a person's sense of well-being and belonging in the workplace. Companies try to create attractive working environments to stimulate work satisfaction. For example, companies can offer open office landscapes and break rooms that encourage interaction between coworkers. The IT companies in this study have attractive meeting spaces with warm colors and seating areas that invite communication, such as high tables with high chairs, comfortable couches, and flower arrangements in the common areas.

The migration literature has recognized the importance of food for creating a sense of belonging. However, several of our respondents were dissatisfied with Norwegian food options. They disliked the limited selection of food in Norwegian supermarkets and the high price of restaurant meals. An engineer from East Asia remarked:

You don't know where to buy the things you want even with money, even if you accept a very expensive price. Those products are easy to find in Germany or the UK. In order to import them to Norway, you have to pay a very expensive tax plus handling fee for custom control if the product is worth more than [NOK] 250. Norwegian food [is bad]. Most Norwegians eat international food on a daily basis. Norway does not have good vegetables (respondent 57).

Several companies offer onsite lunches that appeal to international taste buds. Canteens often offer a vegetarian option, and some also have halal dishes. The canteen is a

potential meeting space for ethnic Norwegian and foreign-born colleagues. However, participant observation and interviews indicate that colleagues tend to cluster by nationality, or they eat lunch with their team members. Thus, the canteen does not offer as many opportunities to meet new people as one might expect.

HR managers play a key role in the reception of prospective employees, and they train new hires in the company culture. The IT specialist below describes his first encounter with HR managers when he toured the company during his job interview:

The management tries to build [Soria Moria] culture. I mean when I got in touch with [Soria Moria]. They flew me here for an interview. The people were extremely kind and human. I was totally not used to that. When I moved, I felt they cared about my well-being, that was fantastic. My first impression was that people in the HR department are fantastic. They make a difference (interview 13).

Most HR managers tend to focus on the onboarding of new arrivals, paying less attention to the long-term retention of these workers. Line managers usually take over these responsibilities after an employee starts working in the company. The line managers regularly meet with employees to discuss their professional goals, and try to help them achieve those goals. The long-term retention of an employee depends largely on the relationship with a line manager and that person's ability to align the ambitions of the employee with opportunities in the company. A foreign-born line manager in a large oil and gas company explains:

You got to keep what you got, that is more important than recruiting. You have a lot of work to do [as a line manager]. Talk to them, look after them, be engaged. Find out what motivates them, meet at the water pitcher. You need to have a good team (interview 16).

Some companies try to enhance social interactions between their employees through social programming. For example Opera Software is well-known for its social activities, ranging from get-togethers on Friday afternoon to salsa dancing, board game nights, hikes, skiing trips, and cooking nights. These activities are employee-driven and promote contacts between coworkers. Other companies create programs that specifically target young employees. "Young in Statoil" invites company executives to give lectures about their work, and organizes social events. These meetings provide newcomers an opportunity to meet new colleagues and to learn about the company.



## 6.2 Immigrant organizations

Immigrant organizations in Norway provide information about Norwegian culture and society, and they offer meeting spaces for foreign-born workers. These organizations are arenas for integration and social inclusion (Center for Research on Civil Society and the Voluntary Sector, 2013). These organizations are bridges between foreign-born workers and ethnic Norwegians, fostering a broader understanding of different cultures. Norway has a relatively recent history of organizations that cater to skilled migrants.

Several study participants use social media such as Meetup and Facebook to arrange meetings with other migrants. For example, an informant from Latin America uses Meetup to go to a concert, a party, or to arrange a hike. Immigrant organizations use Facebook to advertise events and to post practical information about living and working in Norway. In this section we shortly discuss three immigrant organizations in Oslo and Stavanger to illustrate the breadth of organizations and their activities.

Oslo houses several pan-ethnic organizations that cater to skilled migrants, including the Association of International Professional and Business Women, the Oslo International Club, and New in Norway (NIN). These associations schedule social events for their members, and they organize workshops that inform about Norwegian life and society. These organizations address the personal and practical obstacles that migrants face in Norway, and thus can attribute to the local integration of skilled migrants. For a more in-depth analysis of the role of immigrant organizations in Oslo in creating a local sense of belonging, see (van Riemsdijk, forthcoming). We now provide three examples how immigrant organizations cater to the personal and practical needs of skilled migrants.

New in Norway (NIN) caters to “educated foreigners and Norwegians” in Oslo (Norway International Network). NIN organizes monthly workshops on Norwegian life and society that help newcomers adjust to life in Norway. Some past workshops addressed how to succeed in Norway, how to file taxes, how to apply for a job, and how to make friends with Norwegians. Recently NIN has offered workshops on home purchasing, investment opportunities, and how to ask for a raise in Norway. These latter workshops cater to more established migrants.

Stavanger’s expatriate community has its roots in the development of the oil industry in the 1970s, and is still active today. Several expat organizations provide information for expatriates on their web sites, and some groups organize regular get-togethers. The first author attended two expat events on a Thursday evening in June 2013. The first event was held in the lobby of the trendy Clarion Hotel in downtown Stavanger. Approximately twenty expatriates met for drinks and discussed, among others, the weather in Stavanger, difficulties with understanding Norwegian, the high price of alcohol, and how to find employment in Stavanger.

Another event was held a few streets away by the international expat organization Internations. This organization has chapters in various cities worldwide, and its “Ambassadors” (i.e. long-term expatriates or locals) post activities and practical advice. Upon entry in the bar, participants wrote their names and country of origin on a sticker and placed it on their shirts. Participants then mingled, often starting a conversation about a person’s country of origin. The event was attended by approximately thirty expats.

The three organizations described above provide meeting spaces for foreign-born skilled workers. They can meet their friends and new people over a drink, and learn about life and work in Norway. These face-to-face activities and the web sites of the immigrant organizations can be important sources of information and social interaction for foreign-born workers. The friendships that these workers forge at the networking events can contribute to their long-term retention.

## 6.3 Private organizations

Several private organizations have developed initiatives to assist skilled migrants, ranging from practical assistance with an international move and providing information about Norwegian culture, to organizing social events. We discuss the programs of a relocation agency, two chambers of commerce, and a labor union. The activities of these organizations can benefit newcomers and more established migrants.

HR managers may hire the services of a relocation agency for high-value international hires. The services that are purchased depend on the needs of the hire (whether he or she arrives alone or with accompanying family members), and the rank of the employee. Relocation agencies can provide assistance with visa applications, provide pick-up service at the airport, assist with housing and the rental or purchasing contract, fill out school applications for children, provide a cell phone, and assist with the opening of a bank account. As discussed in the previous chapter, these practical issues are often time-consuming. In the following section we discuss how the relocation agency International Network of Norway (INN) contributes to cultural learning and the local integration of foreign-born professionals.

The Oslo Chamber of Commerce established INN in 2005 in response to a growing need for expatriate support services. INN is located in eight Norwegian cities, employs five consultants, and has partnered with over thirty companies to provide services to expats. INN organizes social and cultural events for its members, and it emails a weekly newsletter that informs about local events and facts about Norwegian culture and society. The company created a handbook with practical advice for expats, and it offers cultural training. These services help newcomers adjust to their new environment.

The Stavanger Chamber of Commerce has also developed a wide array of services for foreign-born workers. The Chamber invited six HR managers to discuss the most common questions that they received from foreign-born workers. The most pressing issues were housing, taxes, establishing social networks, and the integration of accompanying spouses. Based on this information, the Chamber designed its program for foreign-born workers and created an information guide for Rogaland. Member companies pay an annual fee for these services. The Chamber offered over seventy English-spoken social events in 2012, including hiking, skiing, skating, kayaking, chess, bridge, and workshops on taxes, purchasing a home, and Norwegian labor regulations. The Chamber also distributes an electronic newsletter with activities and information about Norway and Stavanger. A representative for the Stavanger Chamber of Commerce called the Chamber's activities "culture building": "We are the spiders who spin the [social] webs (interview 49b)."

The Stavanger Chamber of Commerce coordinates two immigration-related groups. The first group consists of HR managers and expats, and discusses the biggest challenges of skilled migrants in Stavanger. The second group consists of employees from greater Stavanger, including representatives for NHO, LO, NAV, EURES, and Norwegian Oil and Gas. The group meets four to five times per year, and discusses issues that affect low-skilled and skilled workers. The participants identify key issues and try to find solutions together.

Labor unions can also contribute to the professional and personal integration of foreign-born workers. Tekna, The Norwegian Society of Graduate Technical and Scientific Professionals, started developing initiatives for foreign-born workers in 2012. The union realized the membership potential among foreign-born workers, and their need for information and practical assistance. To attract more foreign-born members, the union took deliberate steps to internationalize its operations. They now post English-language articles on the Tekna web site, use the social networking tools Facebook and Instagram to announce activities in English, and write sections of the membership magazine *Magasinet Tekna* in English. The magazine devoted two issues to international talent recruitment, and Tekna made this a central theme in its 2013 membership conference "Borderless Challenges in a Globalized World." Tekna also offered two English-language workshops on Norwegian work regulations and culture in Trondheim and Stavanger, and a third workshop is planned in Oslo. With these initiatives, Tekna hopes to assist skilled migrants and attract more foreign-born members.

## 6.4 Government initiatives

In previous chapters we have discussed government-funded initiatives for foreign-born workers, including the Service Centers for Foreign Workers and EURES. The Service Centers provide practical assistance with the application for a work permit or employment registration, a personal number, and information about Norwegian employment regulations. EURES provides assistance for job seekers who wish to work in Norway and employers who intend to recruit from abroad. It also offers workshops on Norwegian culture and society. All these services are free of charge but they are only available in larger cities. For example, employees in Kongsberg have to travel to Oslo to register with the police or to obtain a work permit, and to register for a personal number. Other free information sources are the publication *New in Norway* (<http://www.nyinorge.no/en/>), which provides information about immigrants' rights and duties, practical advice, and information about Norwegian culture. These information sources are helpful when a migrant first arrives in Norway, but no government initiatives address the long-term retention of skilled migrants.

In Norway, immigration and integration policies fall under the Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion. The Ministry's integration programs target low-skilled migrants and refugees, who are notably less privileged than skilled migrants. However, the challenges discussed in chapters 4 and 5 warrant more attention to the institutional and personal barriers that skilled migrants encounter. Local governments develop programs to promote diversity and integration, such as the OXLO (Oslo Extra Large) initiative of the City of Oslo. OXLO is a city diversity campaign for tolerance that organizes public awareness campaigns. The OXLO initiative brings attention to the presence of foreign-born workers, and emphasizes that diversity is an asset. If integration initiatives like OXLO are implemented in the workplace, they could foster a larger appreciation for diversity among hiring managers and coworkers. In the conclusion we will provide suggestions for addressing the professional, institutional, and personal challenges that skilled migrants experience in Norway.

## 7 Discussion and conclusion

We are living in a rapidly globalizing world with increasing international mobility. An estimated 3.2 percent of the world's population lives outside their country of origin (OECD, 2013c), and this proportion is likely to increase in the near future. Norway is rapidly transitioning from a resource-based to a knowledge-based economy, and the migration of skilled migrants into Norway is a part of this economic development. Norway is currently an attractive destination and some companies are capitalizing on Norway's comparative advantage in the global labor market. However, these international opportunities are not universally valued and appreciated. As the Manpower-Group survey found (Reinholdtsen, 2013), the majority of Norwegian employers is not ready to recruit internationally. Some employers value diversity but do not know how to go about hiring from abroad. However, Norway's cities are already diverse, topped by Oslo with 29.6 percent of its population of immigrant background (City of Oslo, 2012). Statistics Norway estimates that 47 percent of Oslo's population will be of immigrant origin by 2040 (Texmon, 2012), and Norway's other cities will also become more diverse. By 2040, 70 percent of Oslo's first and second-generation immigrants are projected to be from outside the EEA (*ibid.*). This increase in the immigrant population poses an integration challenge, and warrants more collaboration between stakeholders to plan for the future.

### 7.1 Continued importance of the local scale

Despite a high level of globalization, the national and local scales continue to matter in the retention of skilled workers. Companies have to conform to local and national regulations and customs, and they work with local and national clients. This is clearly evident in the oil and gas industry, where local producer and supplier companies collaborate on large projects. Place matters for the long-term retention of skilled migrants, and these migrants are more likely to stay if they develop a local sense of belonging. Skilled migrants are economically integrated through their employment, but their social integration is often problematic, as illustrated by the interview and survey quotes in chapter five. A multi-scalar approach to the integration of skilled migrants can help us better understand the professional, institutional, and personal challenges of skilled

migrants, and contribute to more effective retention strategies (for a more in-depth discussion of a multi-scalar analysis of skilled migration, see van Riemsdijk, 2013). For example, a joint effort between local, national, and international organizations and companies could contribute to the long-term retention of skilled migrants. We will suggest six local and national integration initiatives in the next section.

## **7.2 Collaborations between stakeholders in international skilled migration**

Chapter six discussed various initiatives for foreign-born workers by immigrant organizations, private companies, and government agencies. The activities of these organizations overlap to a certain extent, and collaboration is fragmented. We found several promising initiatives that bring together stakeholders to improve the recruitment and retention of skilled migrants. We shortly discuss three collaborations that we have encountered in our study, and we make three recommendations for future partnerships.

1) The Oslo Global Mobility Forum is a meeting place for local, national, and international actors in international skilled migration. The conference brings together representatives from government, business, and institutions of higher education to discuss skilled migration issues. This is an example of a multi-scalar initiative that highlights various perspectives on skilled migration and integration, and that tries to foster an integrated approach to skilled migration issues.

2) The establishment of international schools is an example of a partnership between local and national actors. For example, the Kongsberg International School was founded in 2002 by Kongsberg Gruppen, FMC Kongsberg Subsea, Kongsberg Automotive, and the Kongsberg Chamber of Commerce (Kongsberg International School, 2013). The school helps attract highly skilled migrants who place an emphasis on high quality education for their children.

3) The “Stavanger model” that was developed by the Stavanger Chamber of Commerce is a prime example of knowledge exchange between different stakeholders. Representatives for various organizations and companies exchange ideas related to low-skilled and skilled migration, and they take deliberate steps to improve these conditions in the Stavanger region. These stakeholders operate at various scales, ranging from the local to the international, and they can capitalize on these connections to make improvements in the Stavanger region.

We now make three recommendations to enhance partnerships in international skilled migration across scales and institutions.

4) We see a larger role for EURES in international skilled migration and the long-term retention of these migrants. EURES operates locally, nationally, and internationally, and its representatives have regular interactions with colleagues in other European countries and the secretariat in Brussels. Local EURES representatives can draw on these connections at various scales to obtain information about job seekers in Europe, their qualifications, and their migration trends. As discussed in previous chapters, EURES already provides information about European countries to Norwegian employers, and it provides workshops about Norwegian culture. EURES has a good overview of international labor market trends, and they understand the needs of Norwegian employers and foreign-born employees. Stakeholders in international skilled migration could capitalize more on these connections and this knowledge to facilitate skilled migration to Norway and to contribute to the long-term retention of skilled migrants.

5) We also see a political role for immigrant organizations in improving the lives of skilled migrants. As we discussed briefly in chapter 6, immigrant organizations provide practical advice to newcomers about Norwegian life and society, and they offer social networking opportunities. The volunteers in these organizations have a good understanding of the needs of foreign-born workers, and they have developed a system to address these issues. If the immigrant organizations would work more closely with decision-makers at the local and national scale, they could institutionalize and expand some of these services. However, it was evident in interviews with volunteers that they have only limited time and that this “scaling up” is currently not feasible.

The first author discussed these ideas with a representative for the Association of Non Governmental Organizations in Norway (Frivillighet Norge). The Association aims to promote voluntary work in Norway and has close ties with the Norwegian government. The Association provides consultation services to its member organizations, and organizes political campaigns to improve the situation of volunteers in Norway. Its members, the Association for International Professional and Business Women and Norway International Network, could use the expertise of the Association to bring the needs of skilled migrants to the attention of national policymakers. This political action may improve some of the challenges that skilled migrants face in Norway.

The Oslo International Club has realized its political potential. The club has invited politicians to its membership meetings and it collaborated with Abelia to send a letter to former Minister of Labor Hanne Bjurstrøm. They requested changes in the government’s research policy, tax incentives, Norwegian language courses, and a faster turnaround time of work visas (Bjurstrøm, 2011). The Oslo International Club is the most politically active immigrant organization, as illustrated by its agenda for a Cosmopolitan Oslo (<http://www.oslointernationalclub.com/about-us-2/agenda/>).

A collaboration between immigrant organizations could “scale up” this effort to the national level.

6) Last but not least, we recommend a greater inclusion of skilled migrants on advisory boards and decision-making units. Migrants whose children are in school, and those who have found a partner in Norway, are likely to establish roots in Norway. Thus, skilled migrants are likely to become an economic, social, and political force to be reckoned with. If these migrants are given a voice and decision-making power, they can help improve the lives of other skilled migrants.

### 7.3 Family matters

Skilled migration studies have traditionally focused on a male as the primary migrant, and a “trailing spouse,” usually female, was assumed to stay at home and take care of the household (Kofman, 2000). This traditional perspective on skilled migration has changed significantly, as many migrants become members of dual-career households. It is important for these families that both spouses have gainful employment (Raghuram, 2004). HR managers increasingly take these personal circumstances into consideration. One company in our study has arranged several spousal hires for new employees. This increases the loyalty of these employees and makes it more likely that the couple will decide to stay long-term.

Another matter is family reunification, which is restricted in Norway. Three informants mentioned that they might return to their country of origin to care for a family member. For example, an engineer would like to bring his father from India, but he knows that it is difficult to bring family members to Norway:

Actually, that's the only one problem, maybe, in Norway. If you wish to get your parents here, then it's a bit difficult. Because we usually stay with our parents, even if we are married. So then uh, if we move out of India, then there's nobody to take care of them. So then it becomes a difficult situation (interview 58).

This concern about care for elderly parents is also evident among migrants from other regions (Favell et al., 2006). These family considerations are important to address if a company intends to keep an employee long-term.



## 7.4 Contributions to debates on skilled migration

Most debates on skilled migration in Norway have focused on how to make Norway more attractive. These debates discuss how businesses and the Norwegian government can attract more skilled workers, which is an important question about the competitiveness of Norway in the global knowledge economy. This report took a different approach. It investigated how the recruitment process operates, and the roles of various stakeholders (including skilled migrants) in this process. The findings in this report reveal three issues that should be addressed in debates on international skilled migration:

1) It is important to focus on the migrants who already are in Norway. As we have seen, referrals from friends and family are a strong driver for international skilled migration. If migrants in Norway are satisfied in their job and in their private lives, they are more likely to recommend the company that they are working for.

2) Debates on skilled migration should focus more on the professional and personal challenges of foreign-born workers. Public debates on skilled migration acknowledge the existence of institutional obstacles, and have discussed efforts to reduce these. However, professional and personal challenges should be addressed more publicly. These challenges affect many skilled migrants, and an institutional approach to these issues would improve the lives of these migrants.

3) In order to remain competitive in the global knowledge economy, we believe that the debate should shift from the management of migration to the needs of skilled migrants. Norway is currently an attractive destination while most countries are slowly recovering from the global financial crisis. It is not certain that Norway will remain a preferred destination when other economies have recovered. To keep attracting skilled migrants, we suggest focusing on the needs and expectations of skilled migrants. This migrant-centered perspective may attract more skilled workers in the future.

## 7.5 Recommendations for future research

We have two recommendations for future research. First, we recommend more research on the roles of recruitment agencies and private agents in international skilled migration. These agents use global recruitment networks and they are well aware of current trends in the global knowledge economy. A future study would investigate how these agents operate, and how they help shape international skilled migration flows. We also recommend a more in-depth study of the role of flexible labor in the global knowledge economy. What roles do independent contractors play in the need for flexible labor, and what are the lived experiences of these contractors?

Second, we suggest an in-depth investigation of the meanings of place in international skilled migration. For some informants, place was a non-issue when they first moved to Norway. They came for the job and/or the company, and the location of the job was of little importance. Others came to Norway because they knew someone or because they were ready for a new adventure. Of course place becomes more salient when migrants decide if they want to remain in Norway long-term. This sense of place slowly develops over time in the places that we described in this report, ranging from workplaces to the outdoors, sports facilities, and places of worship. The suggested study would investigate the actors and institutions that contribute to this sense of place, and how migrants create a sense of belonging over time.

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## Supplementary materials

### Informed consent form

Governance of International Labor Migration: Politics of Scale and Networks

Principal Investigator: Micheline van Riemsdijk

You are invited to participate in a research study that investigates the governance of migration in engineering and information technology. This study investigates the migration experiences of skilled workers and the strategies of actors and institutions to attract skilled migrants. Attention to these issues provides insights into the governance of international labor migration and international talent recruitment.

#### INFORMATION

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. The interview should take between one and one and a half hours, and will take place at a time and in a location of your choice. If you agree, the interview will be recorded on a digital voice recorder. The Principal Investigator will store the audio recordings at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville in a secure location, accessible only to the Principal Investigator. Please sign the bottom of this document if you agree to be recorded. This study will start in October 2010 and will end in August 2015.

#### RISKS

There are no known risks for your participation in this interview. Your participation is voluntary and you have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason. You can decide at any time that you will no longer wish to participate in the interview.

#### BENEFITS

The findings of this research project provide insights into the migration experiences of skilled workers, the strategies of stakeholders to influence skilled migration policies, and the socio-institutional context in which international skilled migration takes place. Upon request, the Principal Investigator will email research findings upon completion of this project.

#### CONFIDENTIALITY

To protect your privacy, the Principal Investigator will store digital voice recordings, transcripts and other information in separate locations at the University of Tennessee.

Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to the Principal Investigator and a student assistant unless participants specifically give permission in writing.

**CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have questions at any time about this study or the procedures, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Micheline van Riemsdijk at the Department of Geography, University of Tennessee, 304 Burchfiel Geography, Knoxville TN 37996-0925 USA, (telephone (001) 865 974 6033, email vanriems@utk.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer at (001) 865 974-3466.

**PARTICIPATION**

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime.

**CONSENT**

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form and I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**DIGITALVOICE RECORDING**

I allow the Principal Investigator to record our interview on a digital voice recorder.

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Invitation to participate in online survey

Greetings!

You are invited to participate in a study about the recruitment and retention of IT specialists and engineers in Norway. The survey will ask questions about your job search, your work experiences, and your life in Norway. The answers will provide insights into the job search and location decisions of highly skilled workers, and may help inform policy recommendations for the recruitment of highly skilled workers. All answers will be anonymous as the data will be aggregated for the analysis. This is the link to the survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/9HBC75W>

The survey takes approximately 7 to 10 minutes to complete. The last page of the survey contains a link to a web page that you can paste into your browser. This will take you to a new web page where you can enter your email address. If you provide your email address you will receive an electronic report by August 2013, and you will be entered to win a NOK 500 gift certificate. We will detach all email addresses from the survey results. You can also choose not to provide your email address.

If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Micheline van Riemsdijk, Assistant Professor of Geography at the University of Tennessee, at [vanriems@utk.edu](mailto:vanriems@utk.edu) or at (001) 865 974 6033. Thank you in advance for your participation!

# International talent recruitment to Norway

Companies vie to attract the best and brightest workers, and they recruit skilled migrants to meet their talent needs. This report investigates the recruitment of skilled workers in the information technology sector and the oil and gas industry in Norway, and the lived experiences of skilled migrants in these industries. The report presents findings from a survey of foreign-born information technology specialists and engineers in Norway, and interviews with human resource managers, migrants, policymakers, representatives for unions and employer organizations, and other stakeholders who are involved in international skilled migration.



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