

# PROJECT SPEECHLESS



AHO - DIPLOMA AUTUMN 2019 - RAOUL KOREMAN



Project Speechless

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This diploma project is an exploration of the landscape within Norwegian language education for immigrants. It takes a critical look at the ongoing political developments in Norway and suggests a way to address these changes within existing education services.

This report takes up some of the background and research for this project and will talk you through the final design delivery. It is intended less as a showcasing of the final delivery, and more as an argumentation for a new approach to service development in language education.

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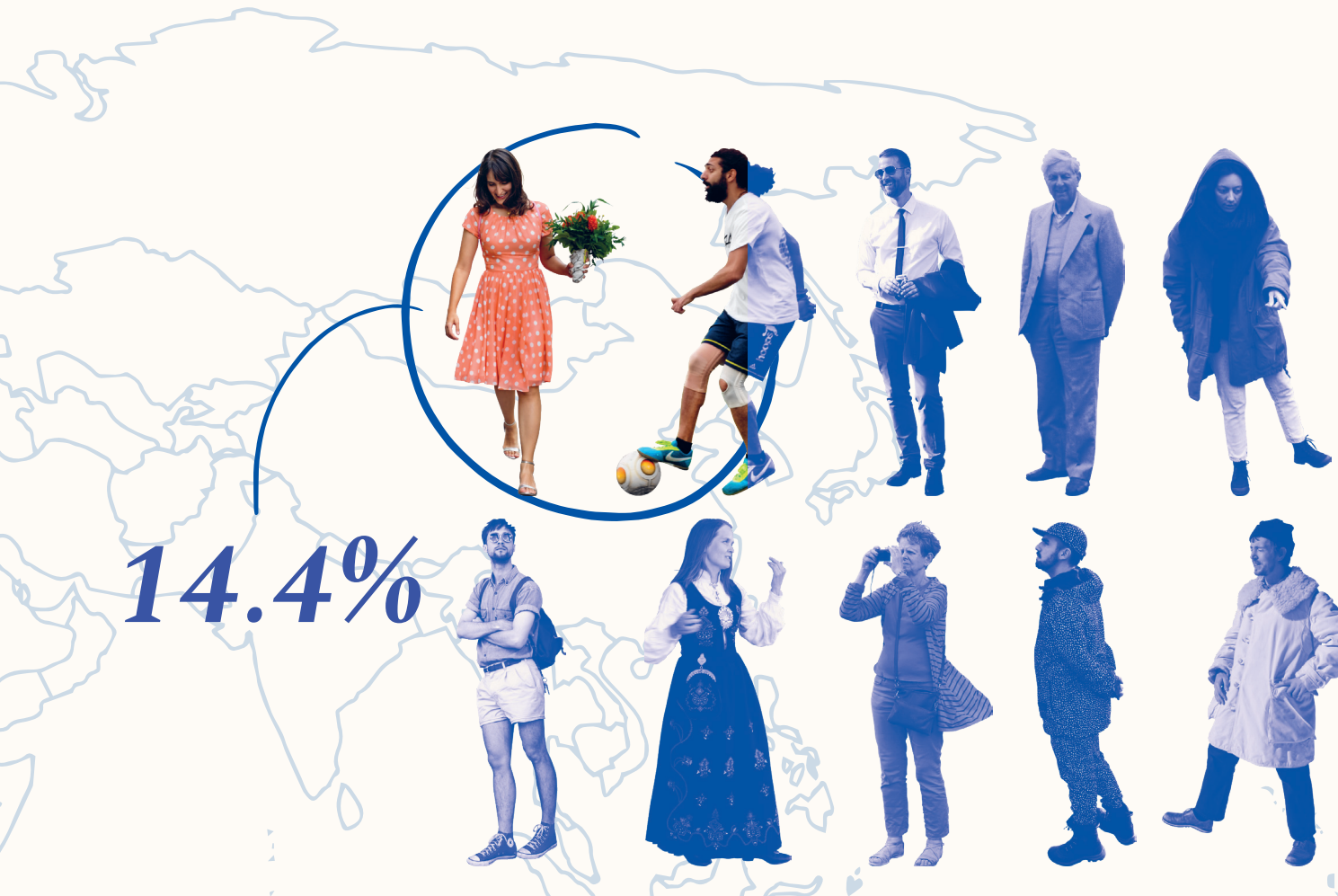
*QUO*

# ***A WORLD IN MOTION***



*STATUS QUO*

*10*



Images by skalqubarse

a. The UN has divided the world in to 8 regions according to the Sustainable Development Goals. The regions are: Sub-Saharan Africa, Oceania, Northern Africa & Western Asia, Northern America, Latin America & the Carribean, Europe, Eastern & South-Eastern Asia and Central & Southern Asia

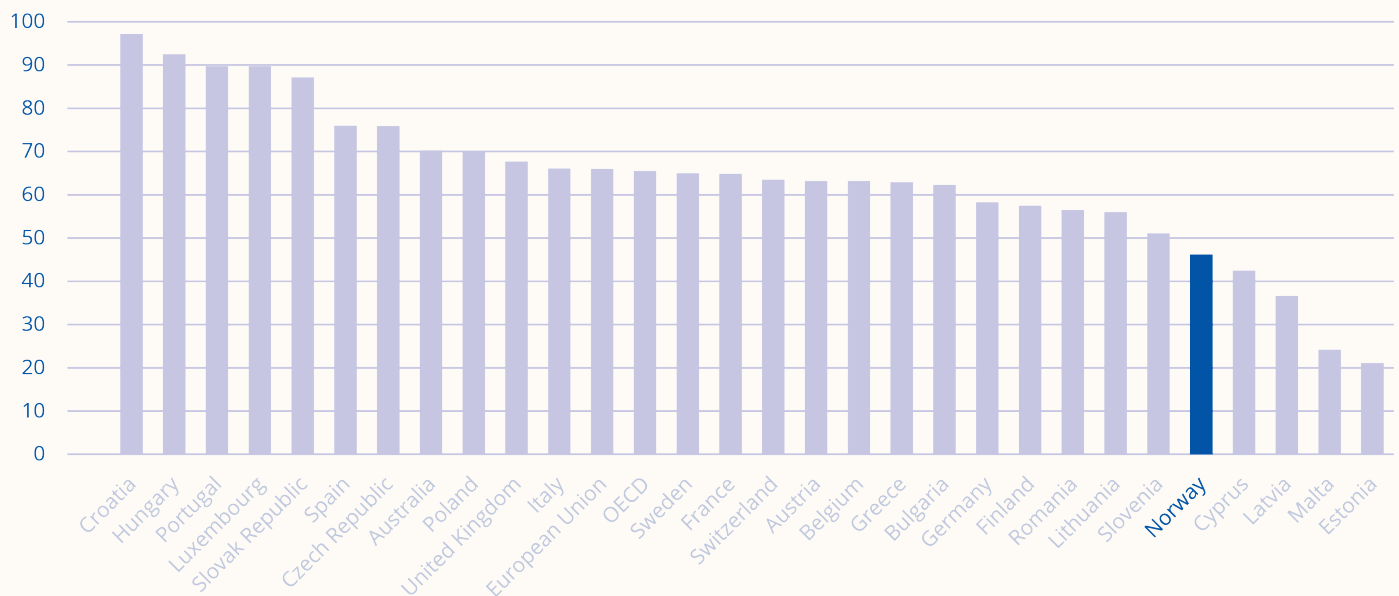
This year, the United Nations estimated the total number of international migrants worldwide to be over 272 million people<sup>1</sup>. 82 million of them live in Europe. That is the largest share of any of the UN's 8 international regions<sup>a</sup>. The reason this number is so high is largely due to the Schengen Agreement, which allows free flow of people across borders, making it easy and appealing to migrate for many<sup>2</sup>. Another more recent and far less uplifting cause is the still ongoing Syrian civil war, which towards its peak in 2015 caused millions of people to flee their homes and seek refuge<sup>3</sup>. All in all, international migrants, regardless of their background, make up roughly 11% of Europe's total population as of 2019.

In Norway that percentage is even higher, at 14.4%. The majority of immigrants in Norway are what we call "voluntary migrants" - for instance, people who have chosen to migrate for for better work opportunities or for family reasons.

In Europe, almost half of all migrants come from other European countries. Poland, Lithuania and Sweden top the charts in Norway<sup>4</sup>.



# LOST IN TRANSLATION



Overall, Norway performs quite well when it comes to the integration of immigrants. According to the OECD, Norway scores above average in most categories, from employment to housing to health. However, there is one category in which Norway scores far below average: language proficiency. Less than half of immigrants report advanced language skills in Norwegian. This ranks Norway bottom fifth (out of 28), only followed by Cyprus, Latvia, Malta and Estonia<sup>5</sup>. In fact, about 1 in every 4 immigrants report that their Norwegian skills are on a novice level or lower<sup>6</sup>.

There are many reasons why immigrants do not learn Norwegian. It can be difficult to find time or it may be too expensive. Some spend as much as 40 000 NOK (~4000€) on professionally taught courses<sup>7</sup>. This is an investment not everyone can afford. Often there is no strict need for people to learn Norwegian. Most Norwegians speak English, and in many workplaces English is the operating language. Immigrants who try to initiate conversations in Norwegian will often experience that Norwegians quickly switch to English in an effort to ease the flow of the conversation<sup>b</sup>.

b.  
"If you try to say something in Norwegian to them, and they see that you struggle, they so quickly change to English that you don't even have a chance to practice."  
- Masha

"Everyone in Norway speaks English quite well, and that has been a problem. Even when I do speak Norwegian, I try, people will switch to English because my pronunciation is not good, so it's much faster to have a conversation in English, or in order to connect."  
- Morgan

c.  
 "I don't expect to get a job before I know Norwegian. Because when you look for positions here, and big companies, they all need Norwegian and that's obvious for me. So, I don't plan on looking, maybe if I find something with English, but there is a 1% chance." -Masha

«After 2 years when I was going to look for work - then I saw it as a big obstacle that I didn't know Norwegian. I got a lot more rejections writing in English than when I started writing in Norwegian" - Renata

" You get them right back with the courses when they lose their job. They need to know more Norwegian." - Ellen Rost, Senior Advisor, IMDi (Directorate for integration & diversity)

It may seem like learning Norwegian is not all that important, and certainly does not warrant the price tag that is attached to a serious language education. However, not knowing Norwegian has a profound effect on people's everyday lives. Despite Norwegian society being characterised as a progressive and inclusive society, not knowing the language can be a huge obstacle.

In the labour market people who send out applications in English are far less likely to be invited for an interview than if they write in Norwegian, even if the position itself does not require Norwegian language skills. Employers also state that communicative skills in Norwegian are an important criterion when downsizing their staff<sup>b</sup>. Not knowing Norwegian makes it more difficult to find work, keep work, and negotiate working conditions<sup>c</sup>.

Although work is one of the primary concerns for most people, lack of language affects people in many more ways, first and foremost their sense of belonging. Language is one of the key markers of integration, and not knowing the local language can make you feel like a stranger in a country you consider your home. Through my conversations with immigrants I heard many different thoughts on this experience of "not feeling at home". Some described it as a sort of limbo, disconnected from to their country of origin, while at the same time not a part of Norwegian society. Others described their sense of belonging and identity as a growing mass, picking up bits and pieces along the way, resulting in a heterogeneous blend of the cultures and places they have lived in throughout their life. Others again said they were in constant flux, their sense of belonging changing from day to day. One day they might feel entirely Norwegian, other days not at all.

Clearly, language plays an important role in the life of migrants both practically and emotionally.



Actually, I feel Norwegian. What I say to people who say that: “Yeah, but you’re not completely Norwegian.” I say: “Yes, maybe. But you aren’t either, because you didn’t choose to be Norwegian.” But I am choosing to become Norwegian, the citizenship is a choice for me. In a way, I am more Norwegian, or more of a Norwegian in other ways. And that’s completely okay. That’s my story.

- Ahmad



I feel like when you come to a different country you’re sort of always in between. Always. Like here, I don’t feel Norwegian, maybe in some degree, but not comparing myself to people originally from here, I think. Although I feel like I belong here, but I’m not a 100% I guess, but I’m not 100% Polish either, or American at all. It’s like you’re always an outsider, wherever you go now. You’re stuck.

- Agata



I have no idea. Maybe it's a good thing. Maybe everyone should have no idea where they belong. Because I think there would be less fighting if everyone realized that we're all from everywhere and we're all parts of everywhere. So, I don't know, it's tricky. I mean that's the whole conflation of the global within the local or the local within the global; it's wherever you make your strong bonds with other people your friends and your family, whoever that is, and that's okay. And everyone is going to be consistent parts of everywhere else.

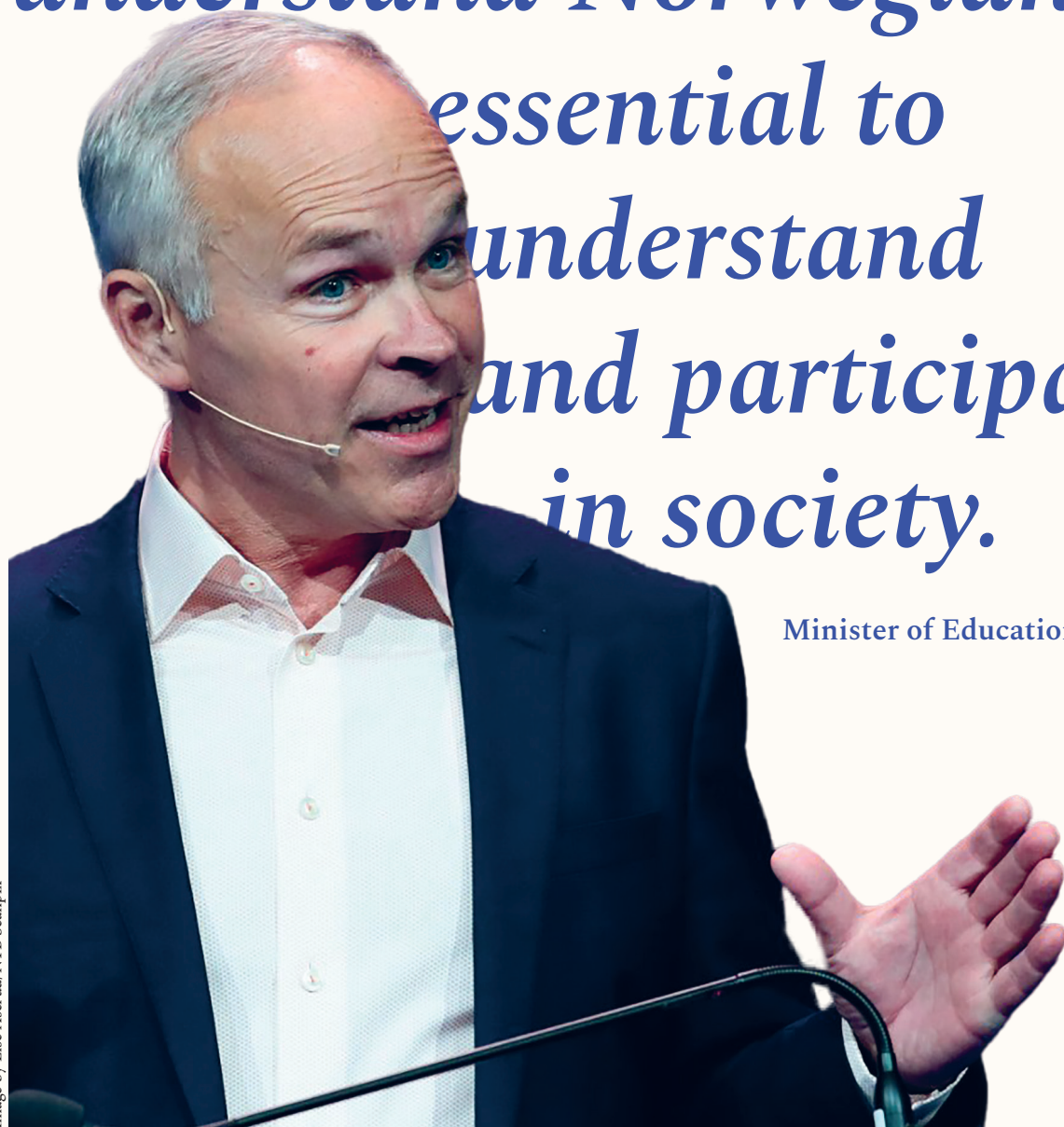
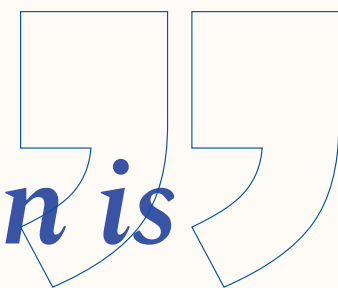
- Morgan



I never felt particularly English before I lived outside of the UK. There are things about me now that I realize now are quite English characteristics or quite British characteristics, but then if you'd ask me before I lived outside of the UK and then still now, then I'd say I don't know, I kind of regard myself in terms of being a European.

- Tom

*The key to integration is language. To speak and understand Norwegian is essential to understand and participate in society.*



Jan Tore Sanner  
Minister of Education and Integration



# POLITICS & POLICY



During this project a new integration law was proposed and the national budget for 2020 was released.

d. CEFR, the Common European Framework for Reference of Languages. The levels range from A1 (lowest) to C2 (highest). The proposed level, B2, is explained as: "[...] independent speaker, who can maintain a conversation about most general subjects and handle unexpected situations or questions."

It comes as no surprise then, that language is a hotly debated topic in the political discourse. At the national integration conference September this year, Norway's Minister of Education and Integration, Jan Tore Sanner, said in his opening speech: "The key to integration is language. To speak and understand Norwegian is essential to understand and participate in society."<sup>9</sup>

For a long time, the political agenda on integration has had an overwhelming focus on getting immigrants into work. In the national budget for 2020, the government has allocated nearly 310 million NOK to support initiatives for better integration. The key goals they state are education so that more immigrants can find work, and improved Norwegian language education<sup>10</sup>.

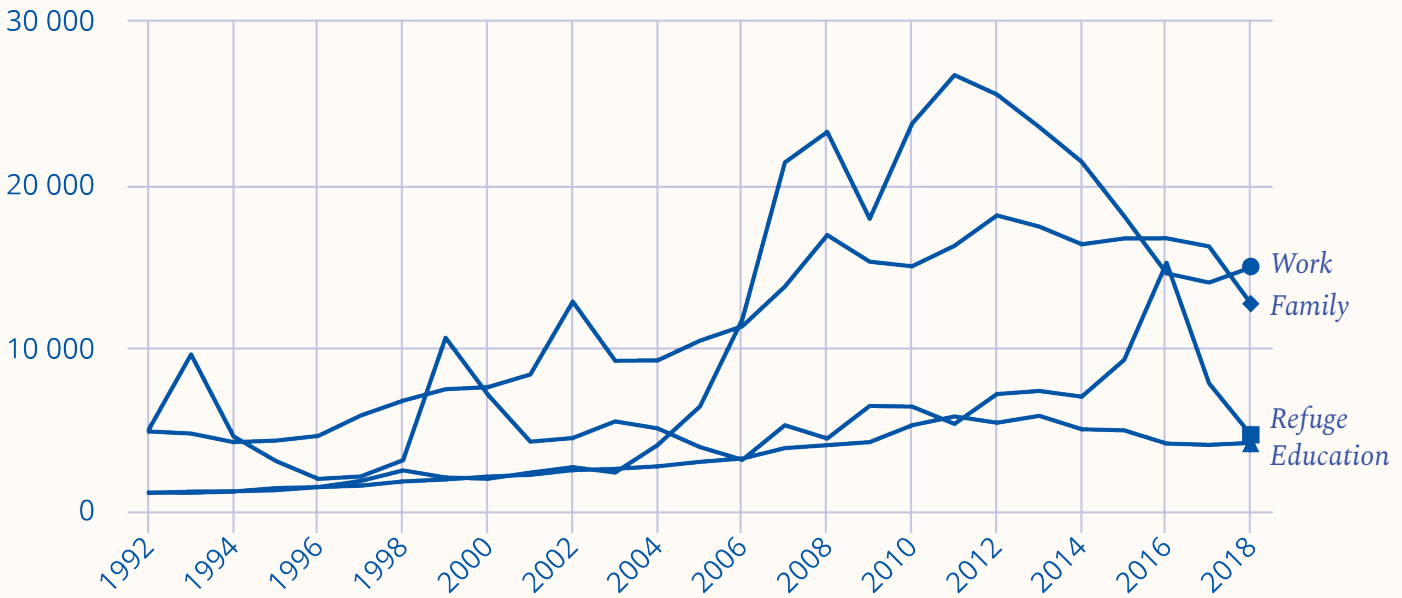
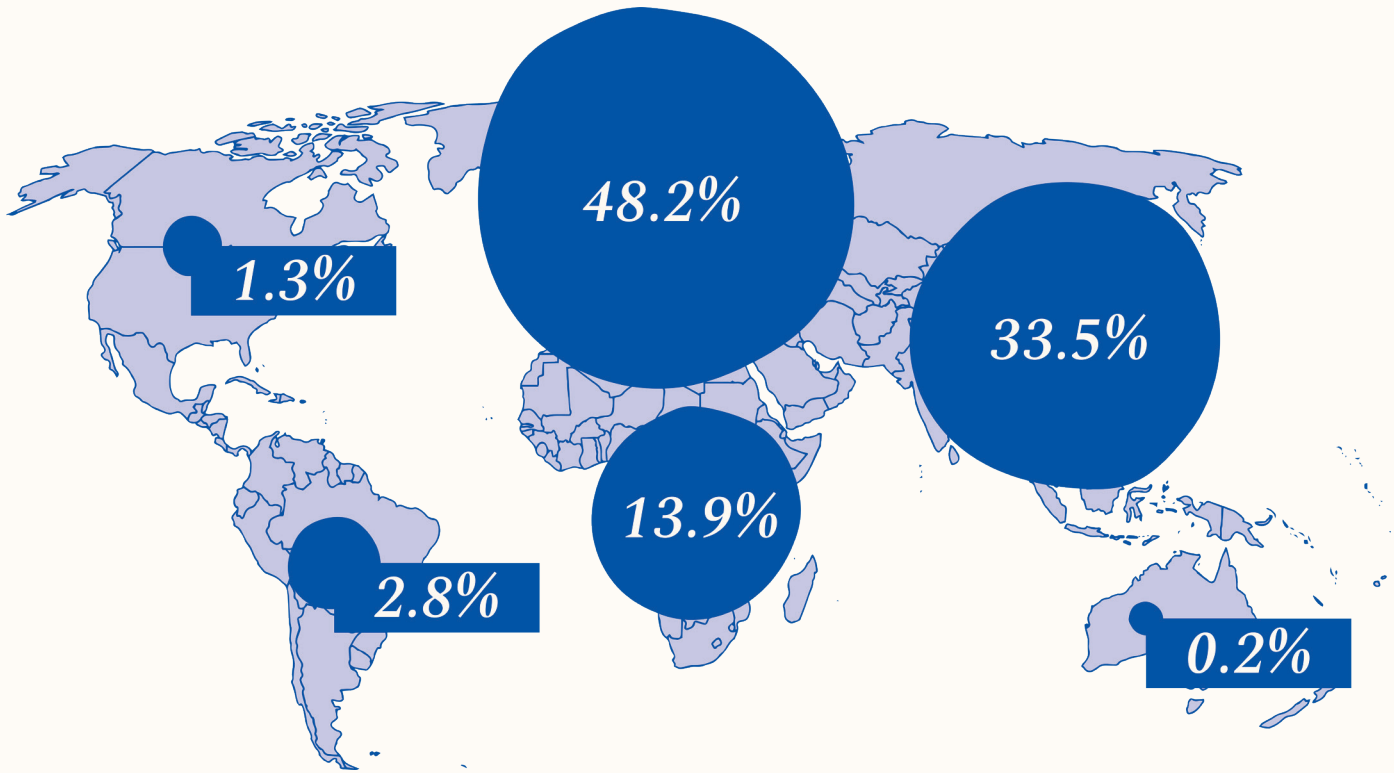
In addition, a new integration law is currently on hearing<sup>11</sup>. Among other points, this law proposes a contract between refugees (notably not other groups of immigrants) and the municipality they live in, to create a mutual accountability. The law also imposes stricter language requirements for immigrants. The requirement would move from a set amount of hours spent in a language course to a minimum level immigrants need to achieve. In order to acquire the Norwegian nationality, the level would also be raised from A2 to B1 of the CEFR<sup>d</sup>.

There are a number of tests that are used to measure people's language proficiency such as "Norskprøven", a test with 3 levels ranging from A1 to B1<sup>12</sup>. Another popular test is "Bergenstesten", which is aimed at levels B2 and C1<sup>13</sup>. Both of these were originally developed to test general language proficiency. In many ways you could compare them to the TOEFL or IELTS tests for English. In recent years however, these test have been given far more importance, as employers may require applicants to pass a certain level for certain positions; also, the language test have been incorporated into the citizenship test. This means that a lot of benefits that come with work and citizenship are dependent on language skills.

At this point it is worth mentioning the division of “Right & Obligation”. In language education for immigrants, people may have the *right* to an education, meaning that they are offered language courses that are funded by the government. They might also have the *obligation* to learn the language. Refugees and asylum seekers have both the right and obligation to participate in an educational program. Labour migrants from countries outside the EEA or EFTA have the obligation but no right, meaning they are not entitled to financial support for their language education. People from the EU/EEA have neither the right, nor the obligation to learn Norwegian<sup>14</sup>.

This is related to the Schengen agreement mentioned earlier. Unlike Sweden and Denmark, the Norwegian government has decided not to offer financial support to these immigrants for their language education as there is a consensus that the open border policy should not ultimately affect the Norwegian tax payer.

The result of this split in policy between different groups of migrants means that there is a robust system in place for those who have the right and the obligation to learn. They are covered by “introduksjonsloven” (the introduction law), which gives access to an introduction program covering Norwegian language, culture, and society<sup>15</sup>. People from the remaining two categories do not have access to this introduction. As you might recall from earlier, most immigrants in Norway fall within those last two categories. Because Norwegian policy is largely based on universal rights, the system is set up to create an even playing field. It supports those with the weakest premises, as the others have greater means to support themselves.



Almost half of all immigrants in Norway come from other European countries and the majority come for work or for family reasons.<sup>4</sup>

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ND

## LANGOGO AI

A handheld translator with over 100 languages that will recognize speech, translate it and read the target phrase in the other language. It uses an artificial neural network to improve.



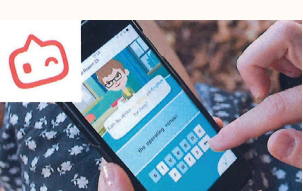
## LANGUAGE CAFÉS

Informal events where people can meet other immigrant and native speakers to practice language in informal conversations.



## FOLK MØTER FOLK

This is a project from Avunddal, Norway. 10 refugees meet 10 people from local public, private and voluntary sectors and engage in a dialogue to create understanding and forge new networks.



## CAPEESH

A vocabulary training app that uses AI to find words that are relevant to the learner's field of work. The app uses gamification to provide exercises. The product is exclusively sold B2B.



## MEMRISE

Around language learning app with language and vocabulary

## MIGRAPOLIS

A TV-series by NRK from 197-2016 focusing on the different problems immigrants face in the Norwegian everyday and cultural differences. Included "Migranytt", news for, by and about immigrants.



## FOLKEUNIVERSITETET

Folkeuniversitetet is an ideal organization. They offer a range of paid courses for adults. These include Norwegian courses from beginner to advanced level.



## NTNU CALST

CALST is an NTNU project focusing on pronunciation. The platform takes people's first language into account and gives them listening and speaking exercises to improve pronunciation.



## RØDE KORS NORSKTRENING

The Red Cross offers "Norsktraining" all over Norway. In sessions facilitated by volunteers, people can practice speaking Norwegian in open conversations with the volunteers and other immigrants.



## SPRÅK-/ARBEIDSPRAKSIS

Norwegian governmental initiative that places immigrants in practice

## MODIG

Children's show that follows our child per episode and showcases their obstacles and road to overcome them in daily life. Flyktningebarn i Norge.



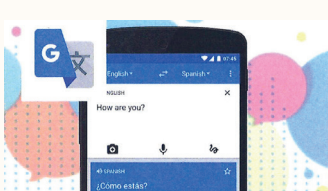
## KUNNEFORENINGEN STELLA

Stella is the Red Cross' center for women. They offer a variety of courses, such as Norwegian, computer-assistance, job hunting and more.



## LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS

Classic textbooks for language learning, teaching vocabulary and grammar as well as basic info about Norwegian culture and society.



## GOOGLE TRANSLATE

Google Translate is the world's most popular translation service and offers function such as live translation, image recognition and speech recognition in a wide variety of languages.



## THE NEWS

The news is an important information channel

## TOGETHER PROJECT

The Canadian "Together Project" connects refugees and volunteers for friendship and social support to build stronger, more integrated communities.



## DUOLINGO

The most popular free app to learn vocabulary. Available for many languages. Offers specialized courses for immigrants in some languages. Uses a lot of gamification.



## REFUGEE-GUIDE

Voluntary guides are paired with new refugees and meet some hours every week. In this way the refugee can get to know language, culture and the local community.



## KOMMUNAL VOKSENOPPLÆRING

Language education and social studies (as well as other offers for other groups) are offered by each individual municipality.



## THE HUMAN LIBRARY

A global initiative that originated in Copenhagen. The human library is

## SNARK MED MEG BUTTON

Button made as part of a project between Designit Oslo & Vestre Toten kommune. The button encourages native speakers to speak to immigrant employees in norwegian. Adopted by KWI, individuals and many more.



## NORWEGIAN ON THE WEB

Now is developed by NTNU as a course available online, aimed at students coming to Norway. Contains material up to the A2 level. Includes videos, podcasts, word lists, grammar, exercises and pronunciation.



## DROPS

App with gamified vocabulary training. Daily sessions limited to 5 minutes. No grammar, only vocabulary. Uses simple illustration. Flash card like approach.



## TANDEM

Free mobile application that pairs native speakers and lets them chat to learn from each other. Offers tools to help in conversation.



## ITALKI

Website that connects language learners

# TAKE YOUR PICK

To the left are some of the tools and services that exist to help people learn Norwegian. Everything from translators to vocabulary apps, to volunteer organisations, courses, municipal initiatives, pronunciation training, etc.

This means that the majority of immigrants have to puzzle together their own education and navigate the vast amount of services and products that exist out there. From apps such as Duolingo, to volunteer programs like the Red Cross' language training or paid courses. The choices are many.

Each approach has its own unique strengths and weaknesses. And it is crucial that there is this variety. No two people learn in the same way, and so catering to these differences warrants the existence of so many alternatives<sup>e</sup>.

For people who have restricted time or money, or just want to supplement their leaning, apps that are free to use and accessible at any time, anywhere are an incredible resource. Take Duolingo for example. Using elements of gamification, attractive visuals and the largest catalog of languages out of any service, Duolingo has become a popular tool for many migrants, including those in Norway. In Sweden the app is so popular among Arab immigrants, that the company has created a specialized Swedish course for native Arabic speakers.

People who are looking for more guidance and opportunities to practise can turn to volunteer programs like language cafés or

the Red Cross' "norsktrening" (Norwegian training). Their weekly sessions are hosted by volunteers who have some training and can facilitate activities where learners can engage in conversations and learn through

talking. The low threshold, conversational nature of the program and of course the fact that it is free, has made these alternatives immensely popular. In Oslo, people will queue for up to an hour before Red Cross sessions begin in order to secure a seat, as there are only a limited number of open spots.

For those wanting even more structure to their learning and with the financial means, either through their own income or sponsoring from their employer, there are plenty of professional courses available. Educational institutions like Folkeuniversitetet provide courses with a stricter theoretical approach and offer anything from short intensive courses that run for a few weeks with daily lessons, to more longer courses that take place over a semester with lessons a few hours a week.

These are just a few examples of the existing range of possibilities available to people who are learning Norwegian, many of which people combine to tailor their learning process.



e. "Everybody learns differently. You have to try different ways to find out what works for who and not just settle with the first thing that comes to mind." - Toril Kristin Sjø, Associate Professor, UiO, Institute of linguistics & nordic studies

# A GOAL WITH NO PLAN

Common throughout all of this is a strong emphasis on the goal: knowing the Norwegian language.

On a policy level, this is clearly visible in the goals stated in the new integration law and the 2020 national budget. Norwegian language education is a means to an end. It is a stepping stone in order to achieve immigrant participation in the labour market, and to better integrate and include immigrants in the culture and norms of Norwegian society.

The same sentiment is echoed by the immigrants themselves. Norwegian language is mostly a skill they need to acquire to access better job opportunities or navigate the intricacies of local culture. The road to get there is often frustrating and painful, but “something you just have to push through”.

This goal oriented approach makes complete sense, after all the goal is not the language itself, but what it can enable. However, only looking towards knowing the language as the goal takes away a very important part of the process: *not* knowing the language. The time it takes to learn a new language varies greatly from person to person. Some only need a few months, while others struggle for years. Universally though, with language as with any other skill, everyone must go through a challenging process which starts with of not knowing to master language skills which sufficient to function successfully in daily life. This road can be a goal in and of itself, but both in policy and in the learner’s experience it rarely is.

The tests mentioned earlier are a telling example. The formal proof of Norwegian proficiency you can get through “Norskprøven” and “Bergenstesten” is an important goal for many immigrants because it is widely seen as a door opener when applying for

full time work or more demanding positions. And with the proposed move from a mandatory number of hours to a required skill level, the tests also hold considerable sway outside of work. The issue with these tests and the importance they have been given, is that this was never their intended purpose. They were created as general tests, to assess a person’s overall language proficiency. They are not tailored to see whether a person masters the language they need to function in their line of work or everyday life<sup>f</sup>. Yet, because they were what was available at the time, they were adopted for the purpose they serve today. Using the test in this way has been deemed discriminatory by many. Especially the proposal to raise the required language level to acquire the Norwegian citizenship, has received significant criticism from language teachers and policymakers. The concern is that legislative changes like these target immigrants with a weaker background and create an invisible division between desirable and non-desirable immigrants. As Cristina Ros i Sole said: “The language requirement, then, has become a convenient way to obscure immigration policies.”<sup>16</sup>

Regardless of whether this is the case or not, the tests and their use directly affect the learning process, despite the fact that they do not reflect the language a learner needs in everyday life. One person said in an interview that he would regularly split his study into two sessions, one to prepare for the test, one to *really* learn Norwegian. If there were more emphasis on the road instead of the end goal, learners could benefit from a learning process that much more closely follows their actual needs, and more closely corresponds to their individual reason to learn Norwegian.



In the national budget for 2020, it is stated under the main priorities that "We must be better at integration and that immigrants get into work faster. [...] The [newly] proposed law will contribute to more immigrants acquiring formal competence and participation in working life."

In the integration strategy's preface it is stated that "the most important goal for the integration strategy is that more immigrants find work."

f.  
"The tests show a level. The government's decision to connection them citizenship etc. came later. Neither the permanent residence or the citizenship is what they were made for originally. Regarding work, it is a very general language skill test. [...] It is not able to meet the requirements of working life." - Anonymous, Kompetanse Norge

målt som andel av verdiskapingen i fastlandsøkonomien. Ved å holde igjen når det går godt i økonomien, unngår vi unødvendig press på rente og kronekurs, og støtter opp under konkurransekraft, omstilling og videre vekst i næringslivet. I regjeringens forslag til budsjett for 2020 er bruken av oljeinntekter på 243,6 mrd. kroner, som tilsvarer 2,6 pst. av kapitalen i Statens pensjonsfond utland.

## 1.2 Hovedprioriteringer i 2020

Regjeringen har i budsjettet for 2020 prioritert tiltak som følger opp Granavolden-plattformen hvor

gen har sammen med organisasjonene i arbeidslivet startet arbeidet med å tilpasse systemet med særaldersgrenser til det nye pensjonssystemet.

Vi må lykkes bedre med integreringen og sørge for at innvandrere kommer raskere i jobb. Dette krever et inkluderende arbeidsliv. Forslag til ny integreringslov er på offentlig høring. Lovforslaget skal bidra til at flere innvandrere oppnår formell kompetanse og deltar i arbeidslivet. Regjeringen foreslår å vri deler av innsatsen gjennom integreringstilskuddet mot tiltak som gir flere utdanning og kvalifisering. Innvandrere fra land utenfor EØS-området er blant gruppene som er særlig prioritert for arbeidsmarkedstiltak.

Høy sysselsetting og lav arbeidsledighet er

# Forord

Et av regjeringens hovedprosjekter er å gjennomføre et integreringsløft. Målet er at innvandrere i større grad skal delta i arbeids- og samfunnsliv. De som skal leve og bo i Norge, må være en del av store og små fellesskap i samfunnet vårt.

Det viktigste målet for integreringsstrategien er at flere innvandrere kommer i jobb, slik at de kan forsørge seg selv og sine. Arbeid er også fellesskap, frihet og selvstendighet

Vi skal verken skjønne eller svartmale situasjonen på integreringsområdet. Vi har klare utfordringer med integrering, men vi ser også at mye går i riktig retning. Hovedutfordringen er for lav sysselsetting, som også fører til utenforskap og at barn lever i fattigdom. En sentral forklaring på dette, er at mange, særlig flyktninger, mangler den kompetansen som det norske arbeidslivet etterspør.

“The reason, or the main goal of course is to get a job.”

- Masha

“You always have that thought: “Okay, this is what I’m learning to pass the test, not to learn Norwegian.” When I started learning for my own sake, to talk to people and to read the paper, I learned far more than when I was just reading the course curriculum and crammed vocabulary.”

- Ahmad

# MAKING IT PERSONAL

This is not a new thought. Individualisation has long been heralded as the key to successful education. Involving the learners in constructing their own process creates a more motivating learning situation<sup>17</sup>. However, individualisation has not been implemented very widely, because adapting to each individual is extremely costly compared to a more general approach. But it does not have to be.

There are attempts to create a more individualised learning process. Municipal language courses use an “individual plan”. They attempt to map the learners background, needs and future plans in order to create a more relevant educational plan<sup>18</sup>. This is a very important step in the right direction for language education, but it relies on continuous adjustment and is challenging to maintain over a longer period. Other courses might be offered in a B2B model, so that the courses can be adjusted to the learners work, which is a good baseline but does not offer any support for the language which participants need in their personal lives. Apps often give learners the option to choose the vocabulary they would like to train. These are all examples that prove that language education is striving to achieve more personal learning. Unfortunately, true individualized education is still far off. Having each system, each tool, and each teacher adapt to each learner is an impossible task. It would require unprecedented time, money and human resources.

A possible solution to the problem might lie in Norway’s new integration strategy for 2019-2022 published in late 2018<sup>19</sup>. One of the key points in the strategy is “Hverdagsintegrering” - everyday integration. The goal is that “immigrants should experience an increased sense of belonging and participation in society”. This new strategy stresses the importance of interaction between immigrants and their local community, and that this is something that can not be achieved by the public sector on its own.

Meeting places such as volunteer organisations, sports activities, schools and kindergartens are listed as important arenas for people to interact. The strategy goes on to highlight the need to involve civil society and help immigrants get a better understanding of Norwegian society by creating more and better spaces for Norwegians and immigrants to interact.

The insights that are laid out in this part of the strategy are vital. Integration is a team effort that requires the public sector, immigrants, local communities and the private sector to all cooperate. Language education is not actually mentioned directly, but the foundational thoughts surrounding “everyday integration”, to leverage people’s everyday interactions, may be the answer to a more individualised, more relevant language education.





*THE*

*DESIGN*

*PROPOSAL*

Project Speechless is a concept on how to apply some of the intentions of “Hverdagsintegrering” in language education. It not only targets immigrants, but also the system that surrounds them. The foundation for this is the potential of everyday interactions as a means to create awareness and support language learning.

FN

OSAL



Image by Andreas W. Fredriksen/E24.no

Lack of language can make situations as mundane as ordering at a café or navigating public transport challenging. But, they might just be the best opportunities for learning.



Image by Sveinung Berg Bentzød/Attenposten

# THE POWER OF THE MUNDANE

Individualising education in the classroom or in the tools learners use is an expensive endeavour, but there is an untapped potential in using learners' everyday lives to fulfill the need for individualised learning. Learners' everyday lives is after all where they encounter the situations in which they must be able to use the Norwegian language.

but encouraged. As adults however, we are expected to be capable language users. And so communicating in a language we do not master is scary. Many people say it makes you feel childish or incompetent, and so they just avoid it. Mundane tasks, like asking for an item at the grocery store or ordering a cup of coffee in a café can turn into incredibly stressful situations.

Most people who attend classes or volunteer events only practise in these sessions for a few hours a week in total. If this is all the practice they get, it is no wonder that progress is slow<sup>g</sup>. Practicing outside the comfort of a classroom, with an app at home, or at the Red Cross' events is challenging. When we are children we learn through trial and error. Making mistakes is not only expected

Accepting and overcoming this barrier is one of the most important steps in the learning process<sup>h</sup>. In order to do so, society must be aware of the learner's situation to accommodate them, and the learner must be given the support and tools to speak in everyday life. Showing ways to create awareness and providing these tools are the goals of this project.

<sup>g</sup>.  
"They come [to my class] maybe two or three times a week. Then the learning is very isolated and there is little development." - Janne Scheie, Teacher at Folkeuniversitetet

<sup>h</sup>.  
"It's very individual. Some people are more open than others and get over the sense of being inferior. Making that decision takes a lot of courage, but it's the most important step they take." - Solveig Berre, Volunteer, Red Cross

# *TAKING THE FIRST STEP*



The outcome of this project is not intended as a solution in and of itself. It pulls on the research and ideas that have been outlined so far and gives an example of how to apply them. The aspiration is that elements of the design can be experienced by people, from immigrants to teachers to policymakers, and spark further development and adaptation of the underlying intentions which are also described in this report.



# A STORY TO TELL

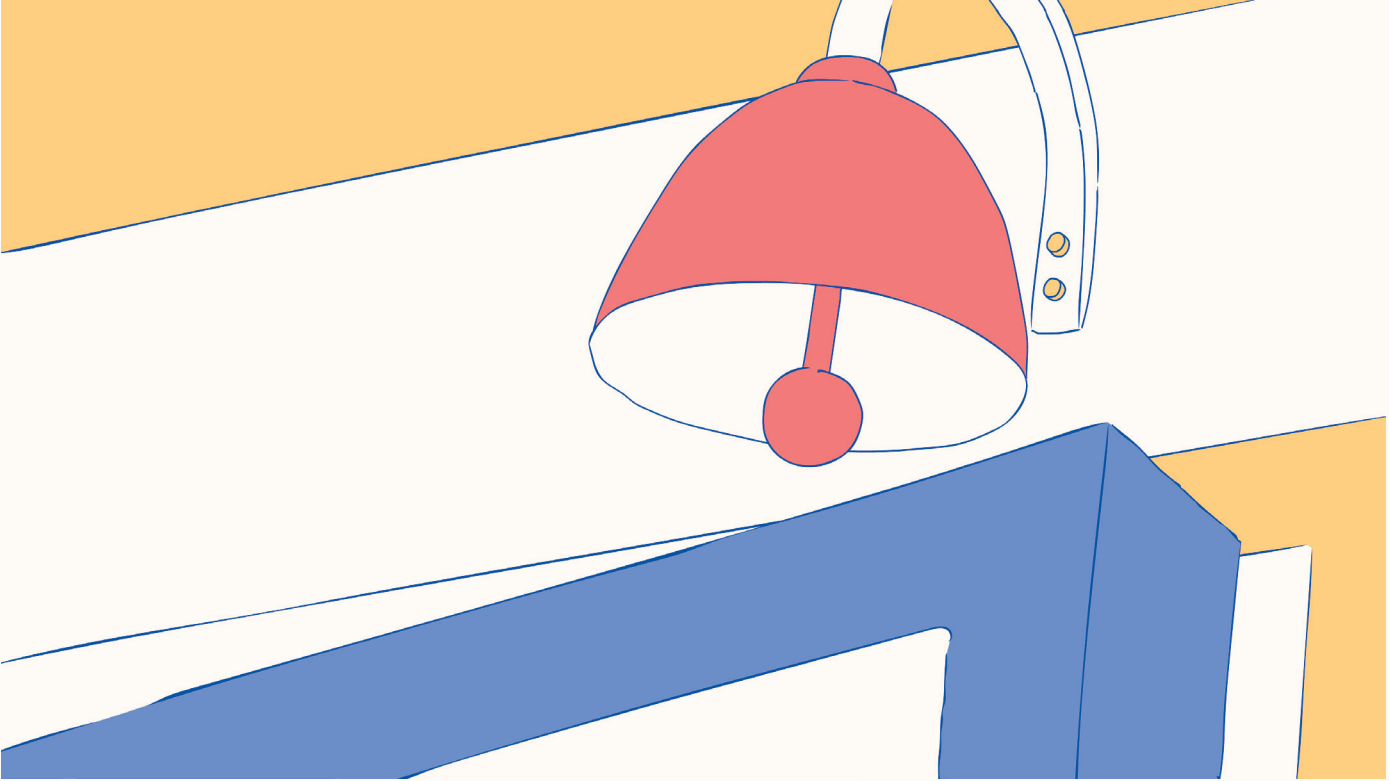
Throughout this project, stories have been an essential driver. Talking to immigrants about their experiences surrounding language coming to Norway as well as interviews with teachers, volunteers and policymakers give insight at a more personal and nuanced level. The stories and concrete examples that people share from their own experience paint a much richer picture than reports and statistics can do on their own.

When presenting the project to people, I often found myself reaching for these stories. They rendered the issues we were discussing more tangible and helped to understand them more clearly. Retelling stories was such a powerful tool in the process of the project that they became the core of the delivery. Immigrant stories are incorporated in the final delivery in two ways.

The first of these is a short animated film. In the film we meet a young immigrant woman entering a café. We see her holding her phone, practising the phrase “I would like a coffee” in Norwegian, getting ready to order. When it is her turn, the barista asks her what she would like to have. She responds in Norwegian. The barista answers: “What are you saying?”, as he did not understand her. She stumbles over her words in uncertainty trying to repeat herself. The barista first friendly, shifts his demeanor and berates her: “Have you gone to school? Learn to talk properly!” We look back at the woman. She is flustered by the sudden outburst. Behind her another woman stands waiting. “Can you be quick? I’m in a hurry,” she says impatiently. Another man stands up at his table in the background. He shouts: “Go back where you came from! We don’t need people like you here.” The increasingly crass comments from three of them, the barista, the waiting woman and the man at the table, overlap, becoming more and more chaotic. The main character looks stunned, paralyzed by the situation unfolding around her. At the height of the chaos, the sound fades. The barista asks: “What would like to have?”, and smiles at her. The hurtful comments, the sudden outbursts never really happened. “A coffee, please,” she now answers in English.

The intention of this short film is to highlight some of the barriers of using an unfamiliar language out in the real world. As over the top as this situation and the characters’ comments might seem, these are all comments that the people I spoke to have experienced. What we see in the film is that despite the fact that comments like these are very rare, the fear of being mocked, being in the way or unwelcome is something that can have an enormous impact on our confidence. In this case the fear got the better of our main character and she chose to speak English, to avoid having to face these fears.

Through this story, we can feel the discomfort which especially beginning language learners may experience. It gives a peek into how language can make even the smallest tasks stressful and challenging. The reason it is presented in the form of a short film, is that it is a very quick and effortless way to convey a lot of thoughts and emotions. I was looking for a way in which, in no more than a minute, anyone could have this visceral experience and which would ignite some reflection. The film is mostly aimed at those who do not have any experience of their own of being “language-less” in another country so that they can get an understanding beyond the facts and figures.





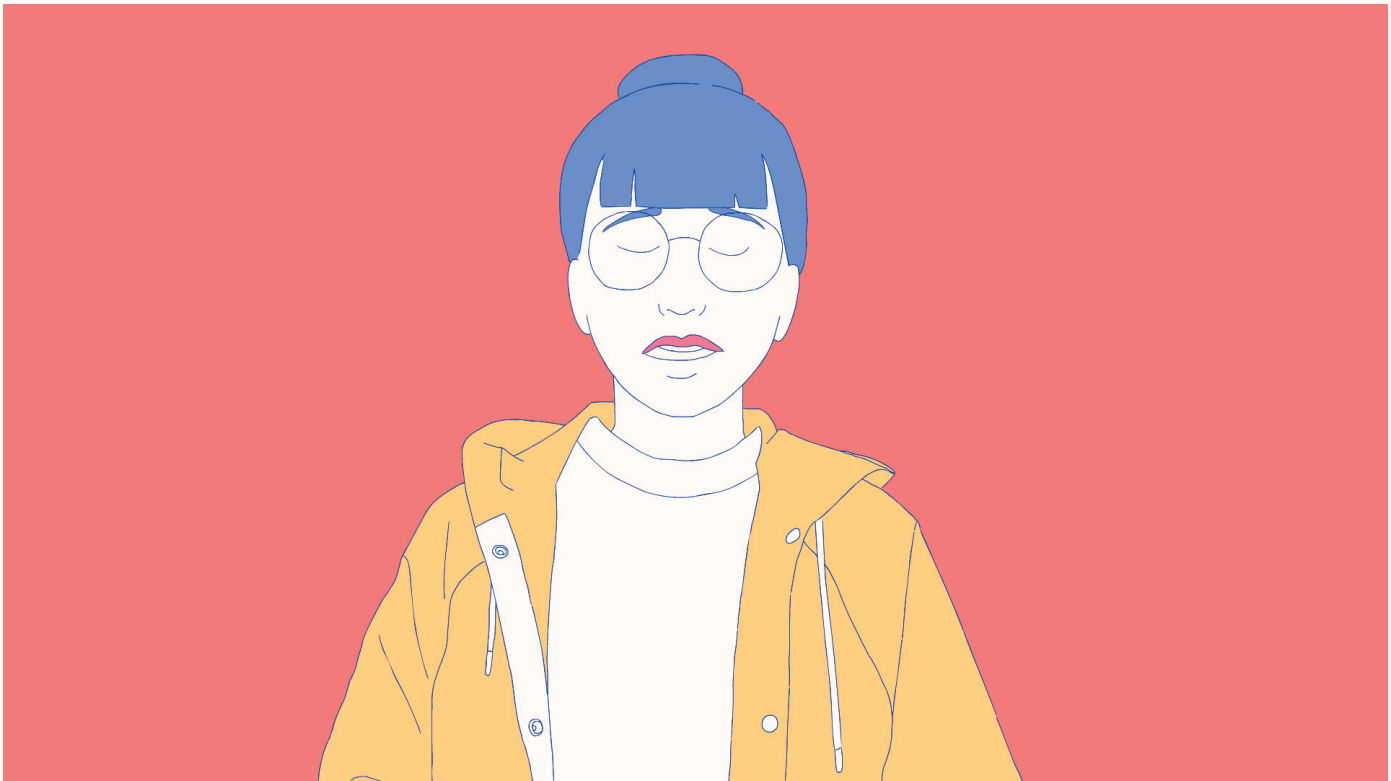
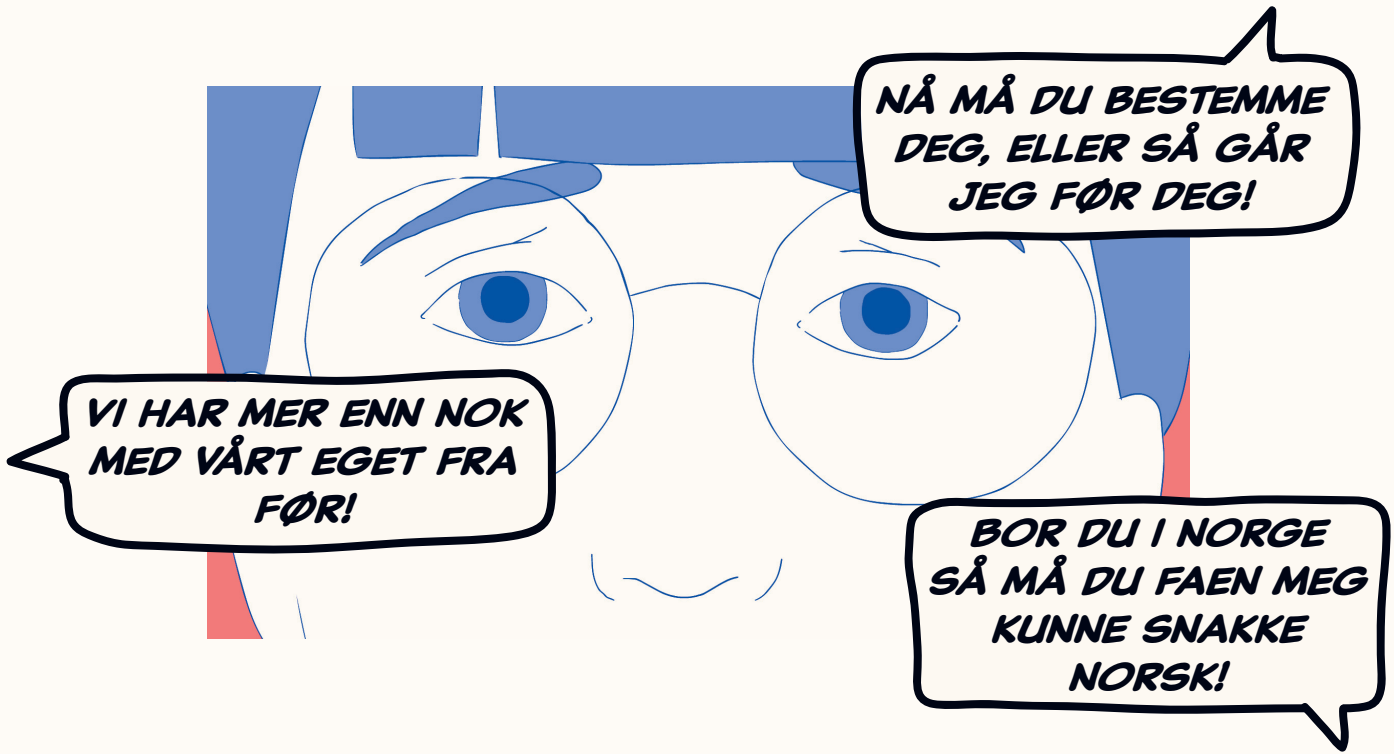












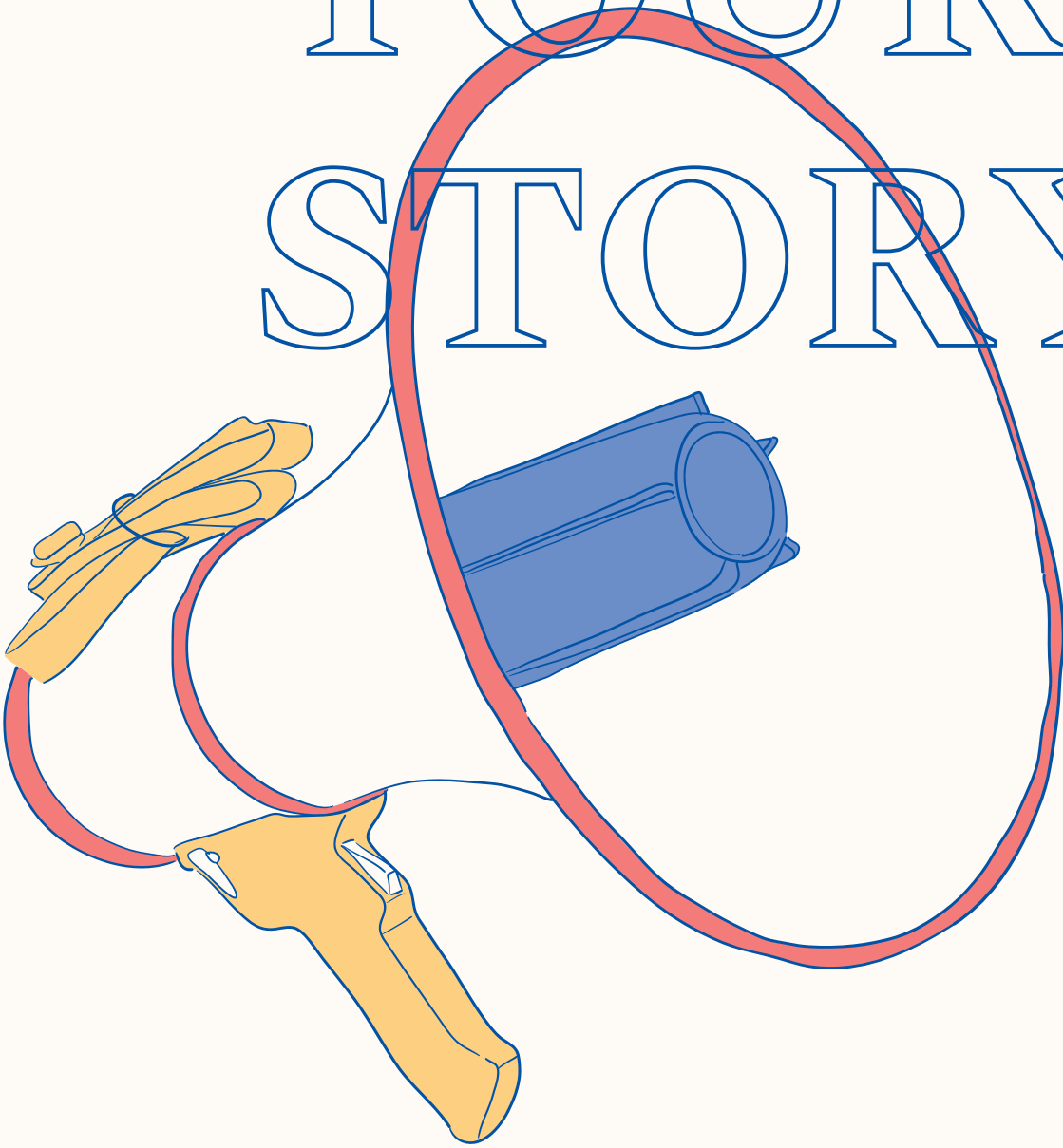




SHARE

YOUR

STORY



i.  
 “It’s really awkward for me, when people speak really, like people really try to be nice and speak some really simple Norwegian to me and I still don’t understand. That’s my fault, but I want to show my respect and the effort I want to make.” - Xifan Cui

j.  
 “It’s super scary to go out and just talk. But it’s good to know that I’m not alone in that.” - Alice

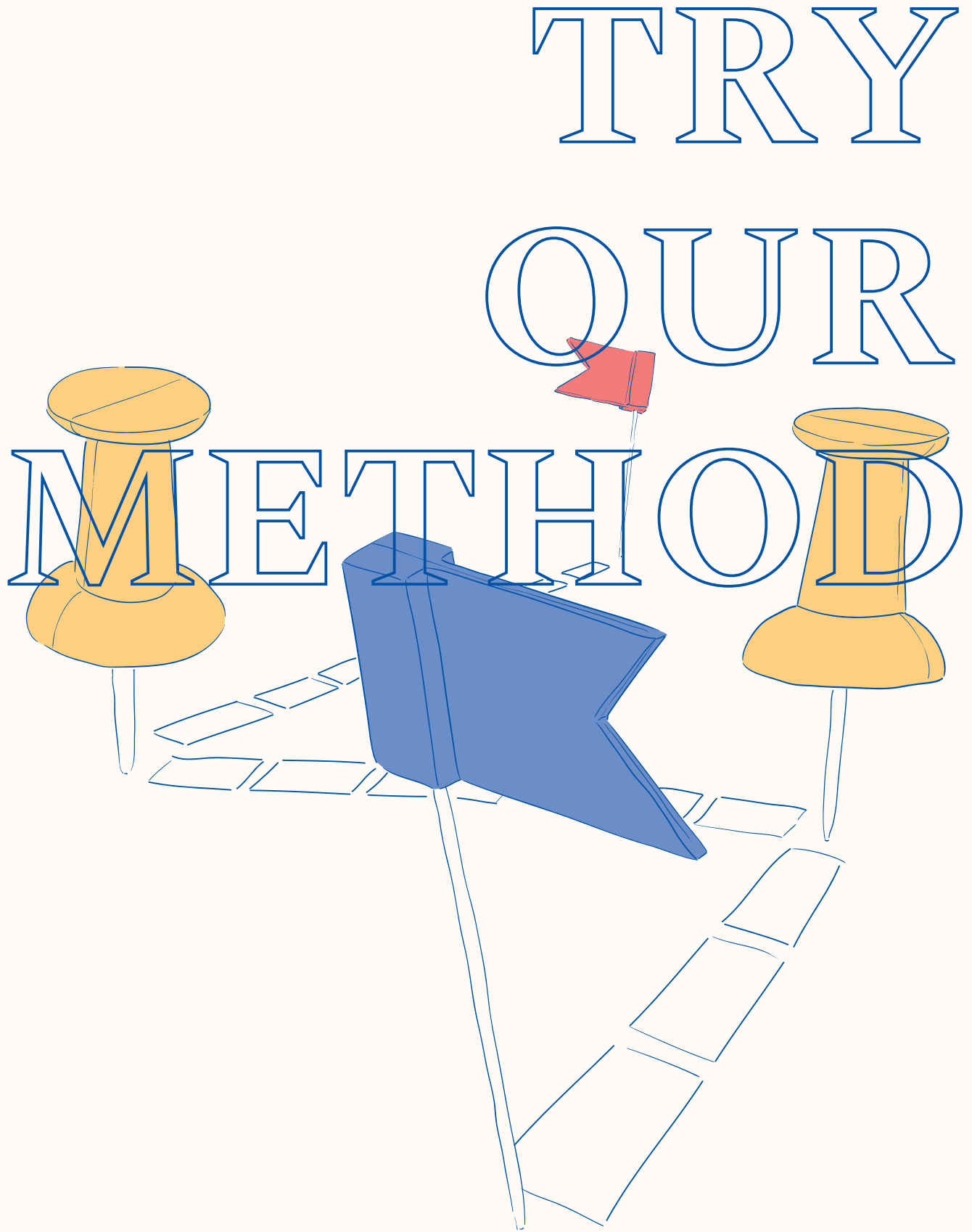
In addition to the “curated” story as seen in the film, Project Speechless uses twitter to gather stories directly from migrants. The experience of learning a language and settling in a new home can be very different from person to person. It is important to represent as many as possible, because the intention is to paint a richer picture of what part language plays in migration, not just to push a single point of view. This is not only valuable to people from the outside looking in, but also to the migrants themselves.

People often believe that when trying to learn a language, the obstacles they face are unique to them, and that the problems they have are their fault<sup>i</sup>. This train of thought can be very demotivating. However, most of the issues people encounter are in fact quite common. Collecting stories that talk about some of them, in which people can recognize themselves, helps them realise that these challenges are a natural part of the learning process.

The brief format of Twitter lends itself well to collecting a large amount of experiences and opening them up for discussion. The frame for what can be shared is intentionally left open. Whether people want to share problems they face, their personal achievements or their methods and tips, the Twitter component of Project Speechless is intended to be a space to share, vent and celebrate the honest and unfiltered experiences of people.

The stories are a starting point for reflection. As mentioned in the government’s integration strategy, a mutual understanding between migrants and the society around them is essential to achieve successful integration. By sharing stories, to broaden understanding and engage people in reflection, we can take the next step towards creating awareness.

People’s stories also bring attention to the fact that using a language in everyday life is very difficult<sup>i</sup>. In order for immigrants to start using a language in these situations, they need the tools and support to do so. This is where the second part of the delivery comes in.





# *METHODICAL APPROACH*

Most tools and courses provide learners with the vocabulary and grammar they need. It is easy to believe that this is sufficient for the learner to then go out and use this knowledge. For instance, when taught the typical phrases needed to book, order and pay in a restaurant, that should be enough for someone to then go to a restaurant and communicate in Norwegian. This is not the case. Because of the barriers mentioned earlier, many migrants who can understand and know the vocabulary they need still choose not to speak in Norwegian.

To encourage learners to speak and practise in everyday situations, we have to actively aim for it. Project Speechless proposes a method to prepare for using language in everyday life.



### *Be specific*

Pick a specific event or a situation that occurred recently to talk about. Language learning often tends to be very abstract. Try to be as specific as you can be in your conversations.

### *Act the part*

Use movement and place yourself in a context by roleplaying to prepare for the unexpectedness of real conversations and train your full range of conversational skills.

### *Embrace difficulty*

Conversations can bring up bigger questions and new topics. Your first reaction may be to avoid these because they might seem difficult to handle, but they provide a great opportunity to learn more.

### *Be specific*

Take the time to reflect on your language use in everyday life. Look for more opportunities to practise and identify what you need to do to make use of your new skills in other situations.

The method consists of a number of guidelines and exercises. The four guidelines are 1. be specific, 2. act the part, 3. embrace difficulty and 4. take a step back. We will walk through them and take a look at the reasoning behind each of them.

“Be specific” calls for more attention to the way in which one talks about the topics when learning. The focus on laying out the vocabulary and grammar when discussing a topic can be very abstract and does little in the way of creating a relation between the material and the learner. By picking specific events or situations that occurred recently in the learners life we ensure that the topics become relevant to them and create more points of reference to contextualize and remember the learning.

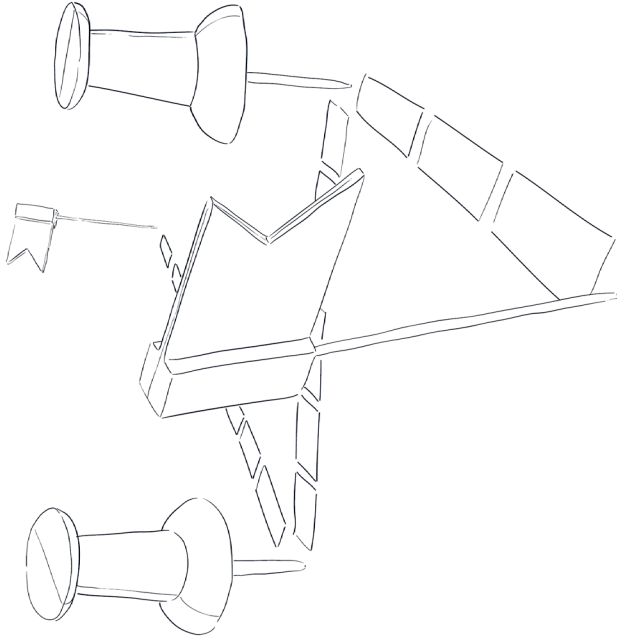
“Act the part” promotes the potential of role playing in language learning. Role playing is already a part of many learning services through reciting scripted conversations, but the intention here is to bring in the spontaneity of taking a situation and acting it out with limited preparation. This can help people place their acquired knowledge in a realistic context. Stepping into a role also allows people to distance themselves from what they are saying and their mis-

takes and help them practise more freely. They are forced to speak and interact in a realistic context, but within the safety of a training environment.

“Embrace difficulty” relates to language and culture being deeply intertwined. Therefore, learning a language frequently brings up much bigger topics such as religion, politics and world views. Questions about these topics often go unanswered, because people feel unequipped to deal with them and would rather turn the attention back onto the language itself. This is unfortunate, because these discussions can not only provide valuable cultural understanding, but also engage people and push them to speak beyond their level.

“Take a step back” is all about reflection. In order to embrace everyday interactions as opportunities for practice, people need to both be aware of their use of the language in everyday life and of the barriers that are preventing them from making the most of these opportunities. To do so it is important to take a step back and reflect critically on their own learning process and the steps they themselves take to increase their learning.

# Speechless Method



The road to language proficiency can be challenging and there may be many obstacles along the way. Identify and work with them. Make the most of what you have learned rather than limiting yourself by what you don't know yet. We have collected a set of principles and exercises you can apply in your practice.

Whether you are a teacher or learner in a course or practising with family or friends, we believe these resources can help you speak with confidence in a large variety of everyday situations.

Remember that these are only guidelines and suggestions. Adjust any of these principles and exercises to yourself and your group. Do you have suggestions for exercises we should add or want to share your experience trying our method? Write to us at [projectspeechless@gmail.com](mailto:projectspeechless@gmail.com)!



# BECOME SPECIFIC

Pick a specific event or a situation that occurred recently to talk about. Language learning often tends to be very abstract. Try to be as specific as you can be in your conversations.

Are you learning how to order food at a restaurant? Use the last time you were at a restaurant as an example. Talk about what happened, what was said, how the experience was. Are you learning new grammar? Try to place the rules in a context and apply them in a conversation.

When learning a new language the most important task is to speak as much as you can. Practice makes perfect!

## EXAMPLE EXERCISES

These are examples of exercises you can use, remember to adjust them to yourself and your group.

### Since Last Time

If you have regular learning sessions, such as in a course, set a specific task to complete between sessions. For example buy a drink at a café using only your target language. In the next session, recount what you did and how it went.

### Gallery

Split into pairs. One person picks an image from their phone and tells the story behind it. The other person asks supporting questions. The difficulty of the questions can be varied to suit your level.

### Scene Synopses

When working on a topic, look up a scene from a show or movie online that relates to the subject. Retell what happened in the scene afterwards.

# ACT THE PART

Use movement and place yourself in a context by roleplaying to prepare for the unexpectedness of real conversations and train your full range of conversational skills.

Many people struggle with “passive knowledge”: Knowledge that we have but don’t know how to apply. This is extremely common in language learning. To activate passive knowledge, you have to practise using the language. It can be quite intimidating to go out and use a new language in the real world. Using roleplay you can take some of the knowledge, place it into a realistic situation and practise spontaneous interaction in a safe environment.

Roleplaying can seem difficult and awkward, but there are many different ways to act out a situation that suit any level. Find a way you are comfortable with and elevate your conversations.

## EXAMPLE EXERCISES

These are examples of exercises you can use, remember to adjust them to yourself and your group.

### Cue Lines

After choosing a situation to enact, assign roles to all participants. Participants get a short time to look for and write down key words and phrases. Act out a conversation using some of them and adjust them to fit one another’s lines.

### Hollywood Director

One person takes the role of the director. The rest of the participants are “actors” and are given different roles. The actors get up and act out a situation using their voice, movement and any objects as makeshift props. The director can at any time say “cut” and change the scene by for example giving a different line for the actor to say, giving instructions for the mood or tone in which they should speak, replace a prop etc.

### Tabletop Roleplay

Draw out the location of the situation you are acting out on a piece of paper. Draw the different characters on paper slips and place them in the location. Each person picks a character. Act out the scenario by moving the characters around the location. Narrate what it is they are doing and what they say as you go through the scenario.

# EMBRACE DIFFICULTY

Conversations can bring up bigger questions and new topics. Your first reaction may be to avoid these because they might seem difficult to handle, but they provide a great opportunity to learn more.

Engaging in deeper conversations encourages you to push the limits of your language skills and can give important cultural insight. One of the core reasons to learn a new language is to feel at home and create a sense of belonging. A greater cultural understanding is important to achieve this and your conversations are a gateway to these topics.

Never be afraid to ask. Our assumptions can create barriers we try not to overstep. For good conversation, communicate openly what you wish to talk about and if there are things you are uncomfortable with.

## EXAMPLE EXERCISES

*These are examples of exercises you can use, remember to adjust them to yourself and your group.*

### **Comparison**

When talking about a cultural difference, go around the table and describe how this situation would play out in each person's home country. Avoid critiquing each other, but feel free to give deeper explanations to why things are the way they are in your own culture.

### **Open Debate**

One person takes the moderator's role. Have an open discussion about the topic. Raise your hand to speak. The moderator controls who speaks and can decide to stop people if they go on too long or trail off.

### **Opinion Piece**

Split into pairs. One person is the interviewer, the other is the interviewee. The interviewee explains their opinion on the topic. The interviewer takes notes and asks questions to assist the interviewee. Afterwards, the interviewer presents their notes to the group.

# TAKE A STEP BACK

Take the time to reflect on your language use in everyday life. Look for more opportunities to practise and identify what you need to do to make use of these situations.

Many people attend courses or have practice sessions only a few times a week in short periods. If you don't develop your language skills outside of this, progress can seem very slow. Take your conversations as an opportunity to look for other possibilities for practice. Talk about the experience of using the language in other situations.

Reflecting on your language use can give you the insight you need to further develop and create good habits that allow you to identify and overcome our barriers.

## EXAMPLE EXERCISES

These are examples of exercises you can use, remember to adjust them to yourself and your group.

### Recall

Each participant describes the last time they used the target language. This can be conversations, watching TV, listening to the radio, etc. Describe what was said and note what you understood and what you struggled with.

### Barriers

If people have the opportunity to practise in everyday life but do not, set up a list of barriers as a group. What is stopping you from practising in these situations? Exchange tips on how to overcome these barriers and use other exercises to practise these scenarios together.

### Mapping

If it is difficult to find opportunities to practise outside the scheduled sessions, create a map. Divide into pairs and note typical things you do in a week. Mark events that can be potential opportunities to practise. Prepare by doing some of the other exercises.



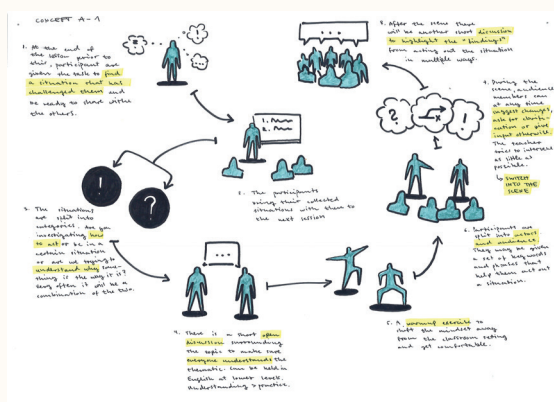


# FORM & FUNCTION

The group at Folkeuniversitetet went through two rounds of testing that they themselves took control over and orchestrated themselves. The participants were asked to go out and practice Norwegian in one situation which they agreed upon in class over the weekend. In the next session they retold what had happened in Norwegian. Collectively, they chose one of the scenarios the reenact. They assigned roles and wrote down key words and phrases they wanted to use for 15 minutes. They then enacted spontaneous conversations between the characters around the table. Afterwards, they discussed what they had learned and how it had felt to go out and practice.

An early draft for the activities prototyped by the group at Folkeuniversitetet.

These principles were developed following prototyping with a small group at Folkeuniversitetet. I discussed a rough draft with the course's teacher, and we made some changes based on her pedagogic knowledge and her knowledge of the student group. They ran two test rounds on their own making changes along the way. I joined their second session to observe and talk to the learners. From their collective feedback we extracted the four guiding principles that make up the method described above.



The reason the delivery for this project is the four principles with example exercises and not a further developed service for the course at Folkeuniversitetet is the diversity mentioned several times earlier. The people who take courses at Fokeuniversitetet are only a small fraction of the migrants trying to learn Norwegian. The rest use a variety of different tools and services. And even the group that helped test the initial concept differs in background, attitude and personality from other groups. In other words, it would be pointless to tailor a service to this group, because it would not be possible to transfer it to any other people or other situations. This gave the idea to create a set of guidelines that should be possible to adapt for anyone, regardless of the teacher, the learner(s) and the service provider. In this way anyone, from someone using an app and practicing with friends to teachers and volunteers, can implement it in some way. When developing services, we tend to focus on the service provider - their circumstances and resources - and make something for that specific situation. This proposal however, aims to provide a core that can be applied under a wide range of circumstances and gives the end user the option and the responsibility to make changes to suit their needs.

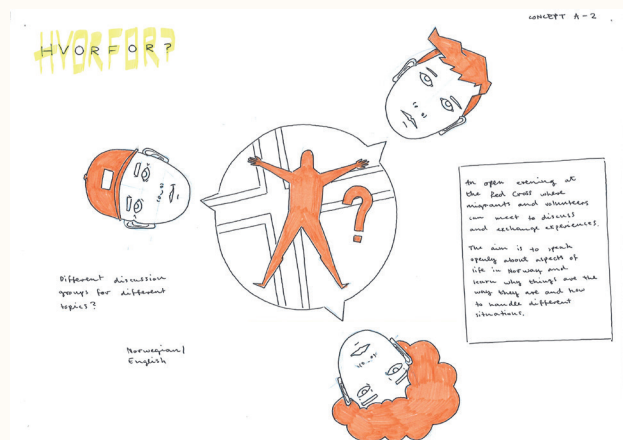
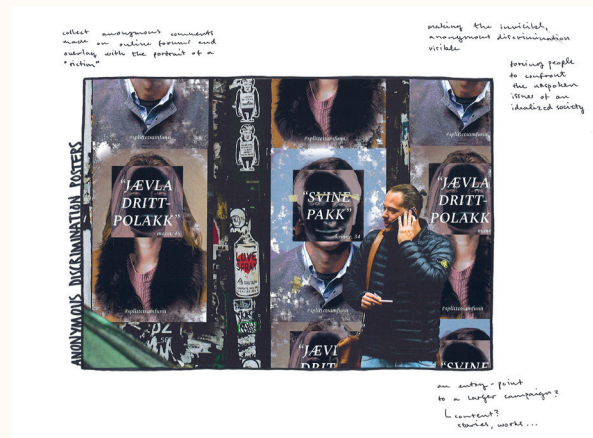
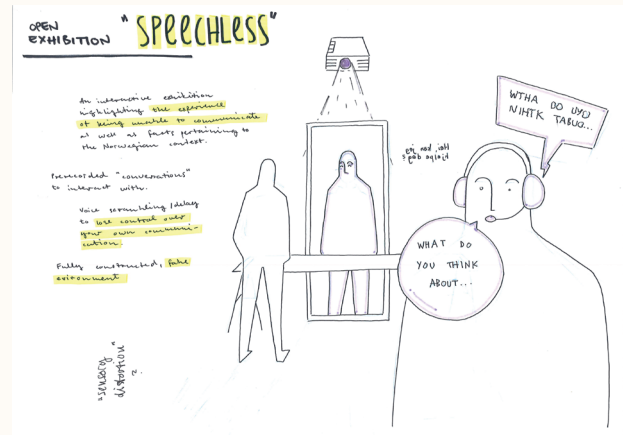


The website and all content is available at [projectspeechless.com](http://projectspeechless.com)

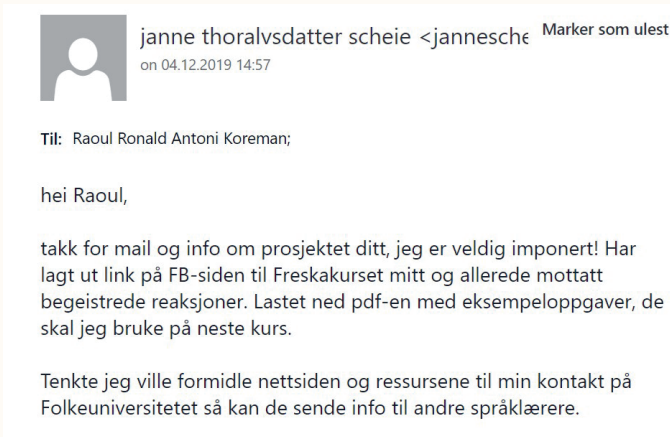


All of these elements, the animation, the collected Twitter stories and the method, are made available on the website *projectspeechless.com*. It gives a short introduction to the project and the intention behind sharing stories and the method. The full method with more in-depth descriptions and example exercises is available as a PDF download. The reason the material has been gathered on this platform is that it makes it easy to distribute. Earlier on during concept development I thought about different ways of distributing the outcome of this project such as an exhibition and public events. But I eventually decided on a website and a PDF printout as an adequate medium because this form makes it accessible to anyone, and is not bound to any particular time or space.

Together, these elements give an example of how to use learners' everyday interactions for the purpose of creating a more individualized learning process. As it is impossible to adjust every educational service or program to every learner, we have to rely on activating the migrant's own motivations to create a learning process that suits their particular needs. In order to do so, they need to become aware of the situations in which they can apply their knowledge and practise in a safe environment to prepare for using the language out in the real world. This can be achieved by applying the guidelines and exercises. Both the migrants and the people in their support system must have an understanding of the challenges learning a language in order to facilitate for practice and conversation in real-life situations. This can be done through storytelling and open discussion.

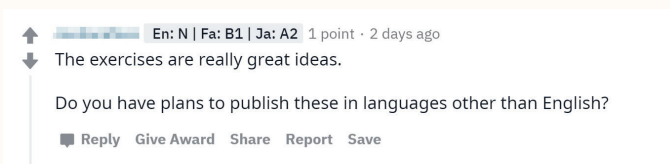


Some other ideas for the final concepts included an interactive exhibition, placing people in the shoes of the immigrants, a campaign bringing invisible discrimination into daylight through posters displaying comments and slurs posted by anonymous users online and a Q&A offer for the Red Cross where immigrants could meet Norwegians and discuss cultural differences and related questions.



Can you share this with me? I'd like to follow it. [...] If this can help motivation and make people believe that "yes, I can" in the middle of all the noise, I think that's very good.

- Ellen Røst  
Senior Advisor  
IMDi

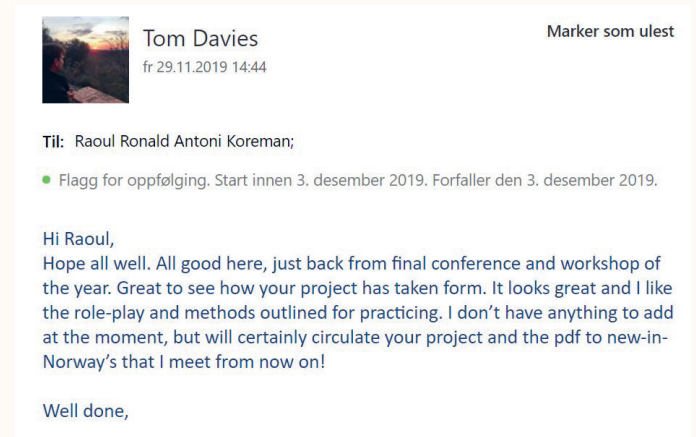


A lot of people are not aware how difficult it is [to learn a language]. I think this is very important.

- Fayette Egede Nissen  
Norsktrening Coordinator  
Red Cross

"Thank you for the email and info about your project, I am very impressed! I've published the link on the Facebook page of my course and have already received enthusiastic replies. I've downloaded the PDF with example tasks, I will use them in the next course.

I'll pass the website and the resources on to my countacts at Folkeuniversitetet so they can send info to the other teachers."



There are many attempts to create something homogenous for a very heterogenous group of people. I think a different perspective is very exciting.

- Anonymous  
Kompetanse Norge

# FEEDBACK

The feedback so far on the questions raised in this project have been positive. The reflections from an outside perspective on the current educational system and the politics that dictate it were appreciated by the people who have helped me during my research.

The animated film does a good job placing people in the situation that this project discussing, but it does need the support of the remaining elements to function. It is more of an introduction that can give a brief glimpse, which then needs to be expanded on further. It does achieve its goal to engage people and spark their reflection, but is missing a call to action.

Twitter stories, although they have a lot of potential to raise discussion, need clear follow-up. This has not been possible within the scope of this project.

In order to create a more autonomous community, there needs to be a strong appeal to sharing stories. This can be done in a number of ways, for instance by setting up a more coordinated campaign, through partnerships with some of the institutions that have been involved in this project or by iterating on other, more engaging ways of presenting the stories.

As for the design elements, the method holds value. Both the people I have worked with from Folkeuniversitetet and the Red Cross have said that they intend to apply and adjust them moving forward. Immigrants who have learned Norwegian, or who are learning at the moment also expressed interest in the methods, saying that they are interesting and useful, looking back at their own learning process.

*WRAP*

*UP*

*OPPING*

# BUILDING A BASIS

Project Speechless takes a bottom-up approach. It gathers observations from the current political development and connects these to the ground level. By addressing the actual implementation of these overarching ideas and setting them into the world, we can see their effect. Rather than trying to attack an already turbulent political debate, trying to enforce top-down change, the project provides a basis. This basis is intended to adapt, to fill the needs of a system that is too complex to prescribe a one-size-fits-all solution. It is up to the individual people to reflect on the notions this project puts forth, experience it for themselves and take ownership of it.

This then, is not another tool on the market. It does not compete with existing offers, but supplements them. Project Speechless acknowledges the need for many different forms of education, because everyone learns differently. It proposes an approach that can be adapted to any learning process or curriculum to draw upon the unused potential of everyday interactions.



# *MOVING FORWARD*

The approach and methods outlined in this proposal can not stand on their own. They are reliant on being adapted by the people who use and provide existing language education in order to provide added value.

Both the actual design proposal that is put forth in this project and the greater goal to demonstrate the possibility to engage everyday interactions as a way to enhance individualised learning need to grow and be experienced. As part of a bottom-up approach, the project needs a greater width so that the ideas behind it can affect the system on a higher level.

There is no formal plan in place for the further distribution of the material created during the project. For now, it relies on spreading informally through the people and institutions that have been involved so far. Judging by the feedback, I have no doubt that the ideas of this project will live on, but for them to reach their full potential it is essential that these ideas spread. This report as well as the website will be sent to more people as more key actors are identified. Mainly however, the path forward is undetermined. How people across the system adopt the ideas and take ownership of them will determine their eventual impact.



# *IN CONCLUSION*

Project Speechless is not a “finalised, ready-to-ship” solution. More than anything else, it is a concept set out into the world to explore the potential of everyday interactions as a basis for future development in language education. People can experience it and adapt it. Through this, the need for political change is made visible. We need to think differently about Norwegian language education for migrants.

Project Speechless also addresses the way the services in the field are being developed. There is a stunning variety of tools and services. Instead of competing with them, further developments in language education can benefit from standing on the shoulders of these established offers. Project Speechless is an example of how to shape an approach in such a way that it can integrate into the existing service ecosystem. Naturally, this approach carries a substantial amount of uncertainty, as the implementation is left to the end user. But this uncertainty is also its strength, since the approach enables its users. It moves away from the prescriptive nature of service design and suggests an alternative. All in all, Project Speechless intends to spark reflection among the people who have the final say, learners, teachers and policymakers, so that they can make a change.

# *PERSONAL REFLECTIONS*

Looking back at this project now, the thing that has stuck with me the most are people's different views on their identity and their sense of belonging (you can read some of them on page 14). I myself came to Norway with my family about 13 years ago. Despite feeling as much Norwegian as anything else, if not more, I've held on to my Dutch citizenship. As with many of the people I talked to, I don't have a clear, definite answer to where I consider myself to belong. It is a peculiar feeling that can be difficult to express and I have greatly appreciated hearing others share their understanding of it in their words.

# THANK YOU...

To Josina, for your impeccable supervision and relentless positivity and eye for detail.

To my fellow diploma students for the companionship, the discussions, and the good laughs.

To Agata, Ahmad, Masha, Morgan, Renata, Tom and Tracy for sharing your stories with me. Without them this wouldn't have existed.

To Janne T. Scheie and her students at Folkeuniversitetet for taking what I came up with and running with it.

To Fayette Egede Nissen, Ellen Røst, Solveig Berre, Per Olav Strande and the people of Kompetanse Norge for your expertise and enthusiasm.

To Emilie Stømmen Olsen from Designit, for helping me get in touch with the people I needed.

To Hoa, Julie & Irene for lending me your voices. You brought the film to life.

To my family for checking in to make sure I stayed more or less healthy.

To you, for taking the time to read this report. I hope it has given you something to reflect upon.

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