The global refugee crisis has led to a significant influx of displaced individuals seeking refuge in foreign countries. Over the past decade, the number of refugees has dramatically increased, reaching its peak during the so-called 'refugee crisis' of 2015-16 when more than a million refugees fleeing from war entered the European Union (Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017). In Europe, the number of refugees tripled from 1.8 million to 6.1 million between 2013 and 2017 (Donato & Ferris, 2020). Refugees arrive in host societies after experiencing violence, war, perilous journeys, and long waits in various asylum camps (Bansak et al., 2018). While, these shifts and experiences of the refugees have triggered a polarized public and academic debate between the restriction of immigration (Gray and Frank, 2018) it has also impulsed policies towards integration of refugees (Chouliaraki and Stolic, 2017). Integration, defined by Bansak and colleagues (2018, p.328) as "the degree to which refugees have the knowledge and capacity to build a successful and fulfilling life in the host society," primarily entails socioeconomic inclusion and participation.

In an increasingly digital world, the role of digital skills in facilitating the integration of refugees is paramount. Access to and proficiency in using digital technologies, including social media sites, computers, mobile apps, and website navigation, are essential for the successful integration of refugees into host societies (Culbertson et al., 2019). The existing literature primarily adopts a techno-optimistic perspective, viewing digital technology as a solution to the challenges refugees encounter throughout their journey. These include improved access to services and information (Bouffet, 2020), bridging the gap between refugees and host societies (Damian and Van Ingen, 2014), and maintaining contact with families and friends in their countries of origin (Gifford and Wilding, 2013). While the use of digital technologies has been associated with the successful integration of refugees (AbuJarour et al., 2019), concerns have been raised that this perspective overlooks the differences among refugees and the existing structural inequalities that influence access to and capability in using digital technologies (Kaurin, 2020; Potocky, 2021). The digital divide can perpetuate existing social inequalities, pushing refugee groups with limited digital skills to the margins of society (Correa-Velez et al., 2013). The digital divide is broadly defined by Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as "the gap between individuals, households, businesses, and geographic areas at different socio-economic levels with regard to both their opportunities to access information and communication technologies (ICTs) and to their use of the Internet for a wide variety of activities" (p.5). Therefore, understanding the influence of the digital skills on the overall integration of refugees becomes crucial.

Previous studies have focused on investigating the role of digital technologies on refugee integration, encompassing their applications in humanitarian settings and initiatives related to the integration of refugees. However, an important issue that has been overlooked is the disparities in access and digital skills among different groups of refugees and how it affects the integration process. This

research gap also means that we do not know much about what refugees themselves say they have achieved with their digital skills and the challenges they have faced. Moreover, integration studies in the Dutch context have predominantly focused on Moroccans, Turks, and Surinamese (Te Lindert et al., 2008). More recently, attention has shifted towards refugee groups from Syria and Afghanistan. Notably, Eritreans constitute the second-largest group of asylum seekers in the Netherlands, following Syrians. Between 2014 and 2017, approximately 15% of asylum applications were submitted by Eritreans (Sterckx & Fessehazion, 2018). Despite their significant presence, there is a scarcity of literature on the situation of Eritrean refugees in general. This literature gap can also have implications for the design and implementation of policies, particularly considering the criticism faced by the Dutch integration policy for not adequately considering the diverse backgrounds of various refugee groups (Bonjour and Duyvendak, 2018).

To address these gaps, the current study took a qualitative approach to explore the impact of digital skills on the integration of Eritrean refugees in the Netherlands. This study contributes to a better understanding of digital skills and refugee integration, positioning itself within the discussions on the digital divide and refugee integration (Alam and Imran, 2015; Potocky, 2021). On the practical side, the findings can inform the development of tailored policies and interventions by municipalities and other stakeholders to meet the specific needs of Eritrean refugees.

1.2. Research questions

Building upon the provided introduction, this study explores the following research questions:

How do digital skills impact the integration of Eritrean refugees in the Netherlands, and what are the key digital accessibility challenges they face during their integration process?