“Everyone wants to integrate immigrant women but not many are willing to put the work into it”

A qualitative study about foreign born women’s integration into the labour market in the Swedish municipality of Jönköping

Course Examensarbete i Globala Studier, 15 hp
Program: Internationellt arbete - inriktning Globala studier
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Term: VT23
Abstract

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The process of integration has been shown to be intricate and particularly detrimental to immigrant women. In examining the Swedish labour market more closely, it is evident that immigrant women are disproportionately affected by unemployment. The aim of this study was to critically assess the various obstacles identified by immigrant women themselves, as well as professionals involved in integration, with a specific focus on the local context of Jönköping municipality through semi-structured interviews. Additionally, the study sought to explore the initiatives undertaken by the municipality and the local region to address these challenges. Prior research has acknowledged the lack of accessibility of assistance sources for immigrant women, the non-recognition of their educational credentials from their home countries, the potential hindrance of domestic gender traditions in job applications, the difficulty of language proficiency, and the prevalence of discrimination as barriers for women in obtaining employment. These findings align with the results obtained from the interviews conducted. Additionally, the interviews mentioned lack of fundings to integrate women, women not receiving important information, gender stereotypes and systematic factors as factors that hinders immigrant women’s labour integration. The study emphasizes how the implementation of intersectionality theory can offer policy makers and municipality workers a deeper understanding of immigrant women.

Key words: Women, immigrant, immigrant women Integration, labour, labour integration, Municipality, Intersectionality

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Tack!

Vi vill ta chansen att framföra vårt yttersta tack till alla som frivilligt valde att delta i dessa intervjuer som möjliggjorde denna uppsats. Till alla integrationsansvariga som deltog i intervjuerna; trots era upptagna scheman tog ni er tid till dessa intervjuer. Ni hjälpte oss i vårt sökande efter fler personer att intervjuas, ni tog er tid att läsa på innan intervjuerna och ni var öppna och ärliga i era svar, tack!
Vi vill rikta ett stort tack till alla kvinnor som med öppna armar valde att dela med sig av sina personliga upplevelser, det var er villighet att dela med er av er upplevelser som gjorde detta arbete möjligt, stort tack!
# Table of contents

1. **Introduction & background** 5
2. **Purpose and research questions** 6
   2.1 Research questions 6
3. **Method** 7
   3.1 Choice of method 7
      3.1.1 Semi-structured interviews 7
      3.1.2 Thematisation 8
   3.2 Presentation of interviewees 9
      3.2.1 First group 9
      3.2.2 Second group 11
   3.3 Interview guide 11
3.4 Collection and processing material 13
   3.4.1 Identified themes 13
   3.4.2 Ethical considerations 13
   3.4.3 Methodological challenges 14
4. **Previous research** 16
   4.1 Language and communication 16
   4.2 Educational disparities 17
   4.3 Discrimination and bias 18
   4.4 Social networks and support systems 19
   4.5 Family responsibilities and gender norms 21
5. **Analytical framework** 22
   5.1 Intersectionality: a background to the concept 22
   5.2 Intersectionality in the labour market 23
      5.2.1 Gender as a hindrance 23
      5.2.2. Discrimination on immigrant status 24
6. **Results and analysis** 24
   6.1 Diversity and inclusion 24
      6.1.1 Language competence 24
      6.1.2 Age-related bias 25
      6.1.3 Cultural disparities 26
   6.2 Workplace equity and empowerment 27
      6.2.1 Womens demands on employers 27
      6.2.2 Employers have high demands 28
      6.2.3 Personal accountability 29
      6.2.4 Systematic factors 31
   6.3 Migrant inclusion strategies 32
      6.3.1 Initiative by municipality and organisations 32
      6.3.2 Insufficient information 33
6.3.3 Sufficient resources are available 33
6.3.4 Insufficient funds 34

7. Final discussion & conclusion 35
8. Further research 37
References 37

Appendix 1: Interview questions 41
Local actors 41
Municipality, regional and county administrative board workers 41
Immigrant women 42

Appendix 2: Consent form 44
1. Introduction & background

Migration involves individuals or groups moving across borders to different geographical locations due to factors like economic opportunities, social or political reasons, seeking asylum, or family reunification (Money et al., 2021, p.340). Integration, on the other hand, is the process where individuals become functioning members of a larger social system, such as community, society, or organization (Money et al., 2021, p.178). This process entails engaging with and adapting to the norms, values, practices, and roles of the larger group. Work in the labour market refers to individuals performing economic activities in exchange for compensation, such as wages or salaries, by providing goods or services within organizations or business (Money et al., 2021, p.115). In Europe, refugees face significant challenges when it comes to integrating into the labour market, making them one of the most vulnerable groups of immigrants in this regard. On average, refugees employment rate stands at 56%, which is considerably lower than that of native individuals. For immigrant women the employment rate is significantly lower than that of immigrant men. According to the European Commission 2016, the employment rate for immigrant women was 45% compared to their male counterparts which was 62%. There was a significant difference for women with no higher education where over 70% are not in employment. Additionally, having previous education will affect a person's ability to acquire a new language (European Commission, 2016). Needless to say, female immigrants have a large disadvantage when integrating into a new society, especially on the labour market.

In the context of Sweden, with a foreign-born population constituting a fifth of its residents, faces challenges in integrating foreign-born individuals into the labour market, particularly foreign-born women. The employment rate for foreign-born individuals is lower than that of native-born individuals, and the disparity is even greater for foreign-born women (Darvishpour & Westin, 2015, p.20 & 23). The government and municipalities recognize the need to increase the employment rate of foreign-born women, as it poses a significant gender equality problem (Regeringskansliet, 2023). Improving employment opportunities for foreign-born women is crucial for promoting integration and reducing exclusion. Factors such as lower education levels, vulnerable economic situations, and limited language skills contribute to their exclusion from the labour market. Language skills, in particular, play a vital role in securing employment, as fluency in Swedish is often required. Limited
knowledge of rights and social networks further restricts their opportunities (Darvishpour & Westin, 2015, p.20 & 23).

The establishment program, initiated by the National Employment Service, aims to provide tailored assistance and support to immigrant individuals seeking employment, with the goal of successful labour market integration within 24 months (Migrationsinfo, 2019). The program recognizes the importance of combining personalised efforts with individual job search activities. Swift labour market integration is essential for individuals who receive residence permits in Sweden (Migrationsinfo, 2019).

In the specific context of Jönköping municipality, similar patterns to the national statistics can be observed. Immigrant women have a significantly lower labour participation rate compared to native women, highlighting the challenges they face in the local labour market (Region Jönköping, 2021, p.8). While observing current political debates, a need for integrating immigrant women into the labour market has been expressed repeatedly. Therefore, this study focuses on the perspectives of foreign-born women in Jönköping and local workers involved in addressing the labour market integration issue.

2. Purpose and research questions

The objective of the study is to critically assess the challenges and obstacles that immigrant women face in the labour market from their personal perspectives. Additionally, the study seeks to critically assess how the people that work with integration view this situation and how they are currently addressing it.

2.1 Research questions

- What are the impediments for immigrant women to obtain a job in the municipality of Jönköping, according to individuals working with integration?
- How do individuals working with integration facilitate the integration of immigrant women into the labour market of Jönköping municipality?
- What are the different reasons that hinder or enable labour market integration in Jönköping municipality according to the immigrant women?
3. Method

In the following method section, the reasoning behind the choice of method is presented; the choice of interviewees and a description of how the interviews were conducted as well as the process for the choice of the questions asked in the interviews. An explanation of the analysis process of collected data and ethical framework is presented. The ethical framework is important as this study focuses on a minority group which requires the researchers to be cautious and mindful of this.

3.1 Choice of method

In this study, the research was conducted via qualitative semi-structured interviews. To critically assess the current situation of immigrant women in the labour market, interviews were conducted with immigrant women and individuals that work with integration. The study sought to identify the progress made in ongoing efforts and initiatives to mitigate challenges and support women's integration in the labour market. Additionally, the study intended to investigate the role and impact of local projects and resources in facilitating the integration process. Further presentation of the respondents can be found in section 4.2 Presentation of Interviewees. With these interviews the study sought to critically assess how the women's integration process had been and their perspectives of challenges they had faced.

3.1.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews intend to gain insight into people's social realities and how they adapt to life circumstances (Dalen, 2004, p.15). They provide a deeper understanding from the interviewees perspective, seeking meaning in their experiences and revealing their true identity. These interviews allowed for spontaneity, depth and reflection (Ryen, 2004, p.15). Questions were based on specific themes, but participants have flexibility to answer from their own perspective. The order and follow-up questions may vary. Through semi-structured interviews, a critical assessment of immigrant women's integration into the labour market was hoped to be gained by gathering opinions and perspectives from municipality workers, and immigrant women.
In total, 17 interviews were conducted. 11 interviews were with various municipality workers and other professionals involved in addressing integration questions at hand. These individuals brought valuable insight and expertise from their experience working within the local community. Additionally, 6 immigrant women were interviewed who had migrated to Sweden a few years ago. These interviews intended to capture their unique perspectives and experiences as recent arrivals to the country.

During interviews with municipal and administrative workers from the County Administrative Board (Länsstyrelsen) and the Regional county (Region Jönköping), their interviews provided insights into specific challenges and strategies in their work. Immigrant women were interviewed with their current job managers present to offer language support if needed. Due to the close relationship between the employed women and their managers, having the managers present created a comfortable environment for open expression. Out of the 17 interviews, 16 were conducted in Swedish, except for one in English due to the interviewees' limited fluency in Swedish. This ensured effective communication and eliminated language barriers.

3.1.2 Thematisation

Thematic coding was used to process and identify key themes in the collected data. Each theme was assigned a specific colour, which was used to highlight relevant text in the interviews. This visual approach facilitated the identification of similarities and contrasts across the texts. In qualitative analysis, this involves weaving together excerpts and segments of the material, treating them as components of a cohesive narrative (Hjerm et al, 2014, p.45-46). Through careful consideration and thoughtful coding, relationships were established between different parts of the data. Similar themes, concepts, or patterns are identified and linked, enabling an exploration of the underlying nuances and connections within the material. Through this approach deeper insights could be uncovered and generate a critical assessment of the subject matter.

After establishing a consistent structure of the set of codes, the next phase was thematisation. This involves identifying thematic connections among the established coded categories
(Hjerm et al, 2014, p.63-64). Thematisation refines the analysis, brings coherence to the data, and helps uncover underlying narratives and concepts, leading to a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

To analyze the interviews systematically, relevant opinions were documented and important aspects in a dedicated document. These comments served as prompts and reminders, during the analysis, ensuring valuable information was not overlooked. 11 themes were identified, which were grouped into diversity and inclusion, workplace equity and empowerment, and migrant inclusion strategies. In section 3.4.1, a detailed explanation of the coding process is provided.

3.2 Presentation of interviewees

This section presents the individuals that were interviewed using pseudonyms to ensure their privacy. The interviews consisted of two groups. The first group consisted of workers from the municipality, county administrative board workers (Länsstyrelsen), Regional worker (Region Jönköping), people involved in Rusta and Matcha, a service from the National Employment Service (Arbetsförmedlingen) assisting individuals in their search for a job or education and finally, people who have been involved in projects focusing on integrating immigrant women. In the search for community workers and integration administrative leaders, the internet was used as the primary tool. The official webpage of Jönköping was visited to gather information about the individuals. To establish contact, the study relied on phone calls and email. Contact was made with the identified individuals, engaging in conversations to ascertain their roles and responsibilities in relation to integration initiatives. Some actors were also found using the snowball method, during interviews recommendations of other actors to possibly interview arose. The second group consisted of immigrant women. The women were all residing in the municipality of Jönköping and locally employed. Contact was made with the women through a local social business focusing on labour integration and some of the women through one of the interviewees of the first group that had managed a project that the women had participated in.

3.2.1 First group

Anders - Municipality worker that focuses on integration.
Kristina - Founder of a local social business that focuses on work integration that offers Rusta and Matcha.

Maria - Operation manager of a business that started as a result of a local project.

Lars - County administrative Board (Länsstyrelsen) member who focuses on Integration.

Karin - Operation manager of a local adult education.

Linnéa - Work coach on a local adult education that offers Rusta and Matcha.

Marie - Regional worker that was involved in a project focusing on inspiring immigrant women to start their own business. Using local businesses that were owned by immigrant women, the project used these women as examples to inspire other women to start their own business. Project was funded by the region (Region Jönköping) as well as the national parliament.

Kerstin - Coordinator at a local organisation created through a project initiated by the municipality, funded by the Swedish parliament. The organisation is located in areas in the municipality with the highest amount of financial aid. The project used local venues in these priority areas where advisors and employment coaches were located to assist individuals, who willingly visited the venue, in how to go from living on financial aid to being financially independent.

Emma - Counselor and project manager for a national organisation that assists people in starting a business. Emma herself was involved in the project that resulted in the organisation that Maria works for. The project was created with support from the municipality and also cooperated with the National Employment Service that provided them with women that could participate in the project, the funds came from Erasmus. The project aimed at inspiring immigrant women in order to strengthen their confidence in searching for work or education.
Birgitta - Municipality worker that focuses on labour integration. Involved in the project that started the organisation that Kerstin and Per works for.

Per - Consultant in the same organisation as Kerstin.

3.2.2 Second group

Aldana - 41 years old from Argentina. Has lived in Sweden for 2 years, came here with a visa.

Fayruz - 47 years old from Syria. Came to Sweden in 2013, with residence permit upon arrival.

Bahar - 30 years old from Iran. Came to Sweden in 2017 seeking asylum.

Nabina - 48 years old from Syria. Came to Sweden in 2017 with residence permit upon arrival.

Maysa - 54 years old from Syria. Came to Sweden in 2017, with residence permit upon arrival.

Lydia - 45 years old from Syria. Came to Sweden in 2017, with residence permit upon arrival.

3.3 Interview guide

Due to the diverse samples, the interview guides varied depending on the occupation of the interviewee, while remaining aligned with the study's research questions (See Appendix 1). To ensure transparency and respect, the authors shared the interview questions in advance, along with a consent form (See appendix 2), allowing participants to review and provide informed consent. This approach involves a critical assessment at creating a comfortable environment for interviewees, allowing them to prepare and share their relevant experiences. The interview guides can be found in the finishing section of the appendix.
Interviews were recorded using cell phone recording applications, both for interviews that occurred in-person and through Zoom. The duration varied depending on the interview group, ranging from one to one and a half hours for the first group and around 30 to 40 minutes for the second group. Printed copies of the questions and an extra consent contract was brought to the interviews to ensure preparedness and ethical conduct. Before each interview, it was confirmed that the interviewee had signed the consent contract, establishing trust between the interviewer and interviewee.

After the first interview, a question was modified to ensure clarity. Originally, the question addressed the integration of migrant women into the Swedish labour market and criticized the adequacy of available resources. The question was revised in the interview guide for municipality workers to address criticism from other EU countries regarding an inadequate integration process in Sweden. The updated version provided clearer context, referencing previous discussions and research, enabling the interviewee to respond to the statement.

Tailoring the interview questions to each individual of group one involved going beyond the interview guide to delve deeper into specific projects or topics the interviewee had worked with. This approach allowed the researchers to gain valuable insights and a critical assessment of each individual’s expertise. Prior to each interview, the interviewees' previous contribution to integration initiatives was looked over to craft more informed and targeted questions. By adapting interview questions based on their prior involvement, a fruitful dialogue could foster and explore their experiences, perspectives, and knowledge in greater depth. While the interview guide was used as a base, additional questions were incorporated for each interview.

When constructing the interview guide for the immigrant women the questions were formulated in a respectful and non-imposing way as the study focused on a marginalised group, this had to be kept in mind. The Ethical Considerations section will further discuss this. However the interview guide was never changed or adapted when interviewing the women, the guide provided in the appendix was used for each interview.
3.4 Collection and processing material

This section outlines the collection and processing of materials, including the identification of themes. It also addresses ethical considerations regarding anonymity and consent in the interview process. Additionally, methodological challenges encountered during the interviews and the writing process are discussed.

3.4.1 Identified themes

After completing the coding of the collected data, the underlying themes were analysed by thoroughly reviewing the material obtained from the interviews. As the authors delved deeper into the responses of the interviewees, the study discovered a gradual evolution in these themes, as they became more apparent through the identification of shared similarities. During the process of creating these themes, the authors were mindful of their relevance to the theory of intersectionality, ensuring that they were aligned with the overarching theoretical framework. This allowed the authors to establish a strong theoretical foundation and link to the findings to existing research in the field. Additionally, the authors considered how these themes could be connected to the objective of the study. By aligning the identified themes with the research aim, the authors aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter and offer valuable insights within the context of the investigation.

3.4.2 Ethical considerations

The ethical considerations of the study adhered to the principles of the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet). A consent form was created, stating the purpose of the study and essay title, emphasising the interviewees' right to withdraw at any point. Participation was voluntary and did not involve financial compensation. Anonymity was ensured, as personal opinions or experiences might discourage interviewees from sharing if their name or organisation was mentioned. Interviews were recorded, and only the authors conducted the transcription and data collection. To ensure understanding, the consent form was translated into the interviewees' mother language using a translation service (See appendix 10.2). Before each interview, the consent form was reviewed together, with the authors verbally explaining each point. The interview conducted in English used the English contract, following the same process.
As stated in the consent form, only the researchers processed the collected material, guaranteeing the anonymity of the interviewees. After completing the thesis, the contracts were disposed of to protect privacy. Personal information, such as names and contact details, was not included in the thesis, and the authors did not publish or share this information, as stated in the consent form.

During interviews with individuals working with integration, subjects that had not been considered prior were raised. Ageism, discrimination based on age, was mentioned, prompting questions about age and experiences of discrimination for immigrant women. Sensitivity surrounding the age question was acknowledged, and interviewees were reminded of their right to choose whether to answer such questions. Proactive measures were taken to ensure interviewees felt comfortable throughout the interviews.

Signing the consent form was standard procedure for all participants, indicating their understanding and agreement to participate. Anonymity was a crucial aspect emphasised in the form, assuring participants that their identities would remain confidential. Only names were requested, and no additional personal information was required. These measures intend to create a safe environment and comply with GDPR standards.

The nationality of the women was also asked, considering previous research highlighting ethnicity as a potential factor affecting employment opportunities. This was discussed with the supervisor, and approval was obtained to ask for nationality information. Participants were informed of their right not to answer and to choose their identity. Questions about experiences of discrimination based on nationality followed. Sensitivity and respect were exercised while approaching this topic, and the interview started by reiterating the participants' right to refuse certain questions.

3.4.3 Methodological challenges
During the investigation, several challenges were encountered. One challenge was related to sampling issues, particularly when interviewing immigrant women. The researchers intent to find immigrant women who have independently secured their current employment without external assistance. However, most of the immigrant women interviewed had obtained their
jobs through integration support projects, leading to different experiences compared to those who navigated the labour market independently. Despite these challenges, the information gathered from all interviewees provided valuable insights, although individual stories may not reflect the overall picture of labour market integration for immigrant women.

The language barrier was another notable challenge when conducting interviews with immigrant women. Fully comprehending their perspectives and thoughts proved difficult due to limited Swedish proficiency. While one interview was conducted entirely in English, language limitations affected the author's ability to gain a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and perspectives of immigrant women. A supportive and inclusive environment was created during the interviews, actively listening and encouraging clarification when necessary.

Time constraints posed another significant challenge. Integrating immigrant women into the labour market is a dynamic topic, and a wealth of information from various sources was gathered, including the interviewees. However, due to limited time, constraints in exploring the situation in-depth and gathering a more diverse range of perspectives were faced.

Thematisation and coding provided a clearer structure for analysing the interview transcriptions. However, it had limitations as the themes were broad and based on the researchers’ own opinions, previous knowledge, and comprehension. This may have impacted the objectivity of the research, but the researchers believed it was the right approach given the circumstances.

Sending the interview questions beforehand had both advantages and limitations. While it allowed interviewees to provide more informed answers, it also limited spontaneity, authenticity, and the chance to build rapport with the interviewee. Familiarity with the questions reduced the potential for unexpected insights and perspectives. Building rapport with the interviewee establishes a more comfortable environment and provides an opportunity to understand their perspective, which might have been lost due to previously sending the questions.
Presenting interviewees poses anonymity challenges. To balance insight and privacy, selected information offers a glimpse into their expertise while protecting personal details. This allowed individuals to maintain anonymity and freely express their opinions. Although it was challenging to provide sufficient insight into some individuals' expertise due to the need for anonymity, preserving the interviewees' anonymity was deemed essential.

4. Previous research

In this section, the extensive body of previous research is presented, providing valuable insights into the challenges faced by immigrant women in their pursuit of employment, as well as the underlying causes behind these difficulties. Through the examination of numerous peer-reviewed articles, a critical assessment emerges of the multi-faced obstacles that immigrant women encounter while navigating the labour markets of Sweden, Europe and globally. To facilitate a critical assessment, these obstacles have been categorized into distinct themes: Language and communication, educational disparities, discrimination and bias, social networks and support systems, family responsibilities and gender norms and lack of information and guidance.

4.1 Language and communication

It is crucial to recognize that the success of migrant women in the labour market is heavily influenced by the prevailing local labour market conditions and the preferences of employers (Kanas & Müller, 2021, p.1239). Factors such as language proficiency, references, and cultural values, including religion and education, all come into play and are closely considered by employers when making a decision to hire someone. Language skills, in particular, play a significant role in determining employment outcomes. Employers tend to place substantial emphasis on a woman's ability to communicate effectively in a professional manner in the language of the country she resides in. This emphasis stems from the desire to avoid potential communication problems and difficulties in the workplace. Being able to speak the language of the job is often seen as an essential skill to ensure effective collaboration, understanding, and productivity (Kanas & Müller, 2021, p.1239). Migrant women who possess strong language skills and can communicate fluently in the language of the host country tend to have an advantage in the labour market (Schieckoff & Sprengholz,
2021, p.2). Language proficiency enables them to interact with colleagues, clients, and supervisors more easily, thereby increasing their chances of securing employment and advancing in their careers.

Additionally, speaking the language of the host country plays a crucial role in immigrants' mental health (Im et al, 2012, p.498, 499). Research has indicated that bilingualism can act as a protective factor, reducing the risk of depression. This findings underscores the importance of language proficiency as a requirement in the labour market, as it not only facilitates effective communication but also assists in alleviating the stress associated with acculturation, cultural shock, and interpersonal challenges. By having bilingual abilities, immigrants can navigate their new environment more confidently, engage with others, and access a broader range of employment opportunities. Language skills enable immigrants to overcome communication barriers, from social connections, and effectively integrate into the labour market. Furthermore, acquiring language skills can enhance immigrants' self-esteem and provide a sense of belonging, which has a positive impact on their mental well-being (Im et al, 2012, p.498, 499).

4.2 Educational disparities

One of the key challenges faced by immigrant women is the lack of recognition for their educational qualifications (Yang, 2017 p.104). Multiple prior studies provide evidence that immigrant women face significant disadvantages compared to native women, even when their training and experience levels are similar (Yang, 2017 p.104). It is highly probable that immigrant women experience a reduced likelihood of employment due to factors such as their educational credentials not being fully recognized, their training experience being less easily transferable, or not being afforded equal employment opportunities that align with their level of productivity (Yang, 2017 p.105). Discrepancies in education systems, language barriers, or lack of understanding by employers regarding the value of foreign acquired qualifications often hinder their employment prospects. Consequently, many immigrant women find themselves at a disadvantage when seeking employment, despite having a solid educational background and relevant experience (Yang, 2017 p.105). The transferability of immigrant women's training and experience can also be limited by cultural differences or structural barriers within the labour market. Practices and knowledge acquired in their
countries of origin may not be entirely applicable or recognized in the new work environment, thereby hindering their access to positions that match their skill level and training (Yang, 2017 p.105).

Several studies have consistently highlighted the significance of education as a key determinant of the skill level exhibited by immigrants (Mélangez & Visser, 2011, p.44-45). It is widely recognized that newly arrived immigrants tend to earn lower incomes compared to native-born individuals who possess similar educational qualifications. Foreign-born workers commonly face labour market disadvantages, which include a reduced recognition of their work experience and educational credentials acquired outside the host country, along with limited knowledge about the local labour market (Mélangez & Visser, 2011, p.44-45). The findings of various investigations have consistently emphasized the crucial role of education in shaping the capabilities of immigrant populations. These studies have revealed a concerning pattern wherein recently arrived immigrants experience a notable income disparity compared to their native-born counterparts who possess similar levels of education. This income gap signifies the existence of barriers that hinder the economic integration of immigrant workers (Mélangez & Visser, 2011, p.44-45). Additionally, references and cultural values are factors that employers consider in the hiring process. References provide insights into an applicant's qualifications and work ethic, while cultural values shape employers perceptions and expectations (Schieckoff & Sprengholz, 2021, p.11-12).

4.3 Discrimination and bias

Different authors agree that discrimination of immigrants has a profound impact on how they are received and treated in society, which in turn affects participation in the labour market (Schieckoff & Sprengholz, 2021, p.10). Immigrant women, in particular, face a higher degree of discrimination compared to men, leading to lower levels of willingness to seek employment. Factors such as an employer's perception of gender, religious beliefs, and cultural background further contribute to the challenges immigrant women face in obtaining employment. When immigrant women contemplate whether or not to enter the labour force, multiple factors come into play (Schieckoff & Sprengholz, 2021, p.10). One of the most significant factors is their personal experiences and beliefs regarding discrimination based on both their gender and ethnicity, potentially restricting their opportunities for finding suitable
employment. The experiences of discrimination and the fear of encountering further bias in the labour market can significantly impact an immigrant woman's confidence, motivation, and drive to secure employment. They may feel discouraged by the unequal treatment that they have faced and develop reservations about their ability to succeed in the labour market (Schieckoff & Sprengholz, 2021, p.10). Discrimination plays a crucial role in understanding the outcomes of immigrant women. It is closely intertwined with both birth and gender dimensions. While immigrant men also face discrimination in the labour market, it is particularly pervasive among immigrant women, especially those who are married and have young children.

Numerous studies have highlighted the challenges faced by migrant women in accessing employment opportunities in Sweden (Spehar, 2020, p.3914). Practical experiences may go unrecognised due to lengthy validation processes, lack of educational qualifications, or devaluation of perceived competences resulting from stereotypes and prejudice. The discrimination experienced by immigrant women is further compounded by the intersection of gender, race, or ethnicity (Schieckoff & Sprengholz, 2021, p.11-12). Immigrant women of colour, for instance, may encounter additional barriers to employment and face discrimination based on both their gender and their racial or ethnic background. This intersectional discrimination can lead to feelings of inferiority and exclusion among migrant women (Spehar, 2020, p.3914). Furthermore, immigrant women frequently encounter inequalities in employment opportunities based on perceived productivity. They may face biases and stereotypes that restrict their chances of securing employment in well-paid sectors or those with opportunities for professional growth. This discrimination based on perceived productivity can lead to undervaluation of immigrant women's abilities and restrict their job options (Yang, 2017 p.104).

4.4 Social networks and support systems

Power is not a static concept but rather a dynamic force that is intricately woven within social networks. Different research suggests that power is a diverse amalgamation of strategies and techniques, encompassing properties associated with specific groups (Yang, 2017, p.7-8). In the context of migrant women, their social behaviour tends to be more closely monitored by family members compared to their male counterparts, particularly among migrant groups that
adhere to more “traditional” gender role attitudes. Migrant women often face different opportunity structures for socializing and meeting people compared to migrant men partly due to lower labour market participation rates (Yang, 2017, p.7-8).

For migrant women, the workplace serves as a significant social arena for connecting with others and establishing new personal relationships that can offer valuable resources, such as native individuals or those who have successfully integrated into the labour market (Bilecen & Seibel, 2021, p.543-545). It is crucial to recognize that the relationship between social networks and employment status works in both directions. On one hand, a positive association between the two can indicate that knowing more people, whether online or in person, increases the likelihood of finding employment. On the other hand, it can also suggest that because individuals are employed, their social networks expand (Bilecen & Seibel, 2021, p.543-545). Migrant women, in particular, often face limited opportunities to build advantageous networks due to their restricted participation in the labour market. The workplace plays a pivotal role for migrants in establishing ties with the native population. Additionally, being employed increases migrants chances of forming relationships with other employed individuals. Therefore, the lower labour market participation of migrant women may explain why they have less access, compared to their male peers, to “open” networks that induce a larger proportion of native individuals and employed people (Bilecen & Seibel, 2021, p.543-545).

Additionally, references and cultural values also play a significant role in the hiring process. Employers may consider references from previous employers, educational institutions or community organizations to gauge an applicant's qualifications, work ethic, and compatibility with the organization's values (Schieckoff & Sprengholz, 2021, p.2). Different authors agree that, while a social network and support system are not prerequisites for entering the labour market, they can act as valuable assets in overcoming barriers, accessing opportunities, and navigating the intricacies of a new work environment. By leveraging the resources, knowledge, and emotional support provided by these networks, migrant women can increase their chances of finding meaningful employment and achieving long-term career success (Yang, 2017, p.7-8).
4.5 Family responsibilities and gender norms

Cultural factors such as gender norms and gender stereotypes of an individual’s native country and the receiving country affect immigrant women’s integration into the labour market of the receiving country (Kanas & Müller, 2021, p.1234). If a woman’s nativity culture emphasises gender structures that favours domestic responsibilities for women the woman will consequently be less likely to apply for jobs. Fodor and Glass have in their research, which focuses on immigrant women’s employment in Central and Eastern Europe, found that immigrant women of more gender traditional nativity cultures will be more likely to search for jobs if the receiving country has a more egalitarian culture that favours gender equality (Fodor & Glass, 2018, p.1282).

The view of female education in a woman’s native country will heavily impact her ability to obtain a job when immigrating. Language skills play an important role in the European labour market as a whole. To minimise misunderstanding and other communication issues employers stress the ability to write, read and speak the language of the receiving country when applying for a job (Kanas & Müller, 2021, p.1239). However, the quality of a woman’s language skills and her ability to learn a language heavily depends on her academic background. Schieckoff and Sprengholz mean that this disadvantage of education results in a spiral of unemployment, being dependent on her partner’s income or possibly financial aid and social segregation as she will not learn the language nor the culture of the country she resides in (Schieckoff & Sprengholz, 2021, p.7).

In almost all of the EU members, except for Ireland and the UK, third country nationals are overrepresented in low paid jobs such as manual labour and unskilled labour. These jobs usually involve insecure employment, unusual working hours, heavy labour, informal jobs and may or may not include insurance. In the case of women; nursing jobs and cleaning jobs are common for immigrant women to have (Belgiojoso & Ortensi 2014, p.1122). Research has found that nursing and cleaning jobs often prefer female employees and are jobs that are not favoured by the native population. Such jobs are therefore overrepresented by immigrant women. Dimitria Groutsis observes that these types of jobs make it difficult if not impossible
for a woman to work herself up to a higher paid job, consequently creating a high income difference between immigrant and native women (Groutsis, 2009, p.50).

5. Analytical framework

This section provides background information on intersectionality. The authors have chosen intersectionality theory as it offers the potential to understand how different aspects affecting immigrant women may influence their job prospects. Specifically, it examines how identifying factors, such as women and immigrants, may impact the chances of obtaining employment in the municipality of Jönköping. Intersectionality theory also influenced the decision to inquire about the women's age and nationality during the interviews, as these factors may further complicate their ability to secure a job in the municipality of Jönköping.

5.1 Intersectionality: a background to the concept

Intersectionality was coined in Chicago in the United States by law professor Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics published in 1989. Crenshaw recognised how black women were discriminated against in the United States judicial system as the American court often failed to acknowledge how, in legal cases of discrimination, women were discriminated on the basis of skin colour and gender intersectionality. Crenshaw also criticised the Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics for excluding how the black women’s gender and skin colour intersectionally affect women. Feminist theory explained the discrimination of the black women as being based on their gender not taking into account that white women have, due to the colour of their skin, a privilege in court cases that black women do not have. Crenshaw observed that Antiracist politics did not recognise the hardships black women experience seeing as how black women and black men often were generalised in politics and often claimed that their discrimination was similar, excluding the aspect of gender. Anti-Discrimination doctrine signified discrimination as being based on either a person's skin colour or their gender, not recognising how these might intersect. Consequently, African American women faced marginalization within analytical frameworks and doctrines.
Intersectionality recognizes how factors in conjunction play integral parts in creating either a privilege or a disadvantage for an individual. Nowadays, the theory takes other social factors into consideration such as sexuality, religion, ethnicity, class, disability, weight, caste and physical appearance. The theory is a commitment to ensuring that no one is left behind and striving for change that positively impacts the lives of all individuals (Atrey, 2018, p.870). Intersectionality provides an understanding of how different forms of discrimination and privilege intersect and interact, resulting in unique barriers and advantages for each individual (Atrey, 2018, p.871).

5.2 Intersectionality in the labour market

For the immigrant women there are two recognised factors that potentially create barriers for the women to integrate into the local labour market: their gender and immigrant status. This section provides further information about discrimination based on previously mentioned factors.

5.2.1 Gender as a hindrance

When considering the intersectionality of power and inequality, it becomes apparent that certain concepts, such as whiteness, masculinity, heterosexuality, class, and gender, play crucial roles (Yang, 2017, p.7-8). In the context of immigrant women, previous studies have consistently shown that they face marginalization and discrimination due to their gender and race. The absence of an institutional perspective carries the risk of perpetuating the stigmatization experienced by marginalized groups within society (de los Reyes & Mulinari, 2007, p.125). A notable example of this is the categorization of immigrant women in the labour market, which is often used to explain segregation and unequal conditions. While gender stereotypes may sometimes assist women obtaining certain jobs, they can also serve as barriers when women seek employment in fields such as healthcare or elderly care that are traditionally associated with femininity. Conversely, when women aim to pursue
predominantly male-dominated professions, the stereotyping of gender roles can pose significant obstacles (de los Reyes & Mulini, 2007, p.30).

5.2.2. Discrimination on immigrant status

Discrimination against immigrants in the labour market may result from racism, where stereotypes and biased treatment stem from both their immigrant status and racial/ethnic background (de los Reyes & Mulini, 2007, p.65). Intersectionality highlights how stereotypes and prejudices on the basis of race stems from a positivist outlook that encourages individuals and institutions to categorise individuals, differentiating “us” from “them” when describing their society (de los Reyes & Mulini, 2007, p.128). The theory further explains how systematic discrimination in society such as in the labour market on the basis of ethnicity and immigration status is an institutionalised issue in Sweden that limits individuals abilities to obtain a job as well as integrating into the society (de los Reyes & Mulini, 2007, p.115).

6. Results and analysis

In this section, the empirical material gathered from this study is presented of the women and people who work with integration. The results is presented in three themes from the thematisation: diversity and inclusion, workplace equity and empowerment, and migrant inclusion strategies. Subcategories found in each theme are also included. The section analyses and explores the perspectives of the interviewed individuals, while also considering previous research.

6.1 Diversity and inclusion

The theme of Diversity and inclusion presents and analyses how factors of language proficiency, age discrimination and cultural differences make it difficult for immigrant women to find employment or to take the step in searching for employment.

6.1.1 Language competence

Anders, Per and Birgitta expressed concern over the limited communication abilities of immigrant women, hindering their job prospects. They stated that language proficiency is
essential for fulfilling job responsibilities, but that many of the women lack formal education in their home countries, making it challenging to learn Swedish. This lack of educational foundation poses a significant obstacle when they arrive in Sweden, where proficiency in the local language is crucial for most jobs. Anders and Per highlighted the need for immediate language support upon arrival to facilitate integration into the society and labour market.

One immigrant woman, Aldana, shared her experience of struggling to find employment due to the language barrier. While proficient in English, her limited knowledge of Swedish limits job opportunities, particularly in smaller cities like Jönköping, where fluency in Swedish is often required. She emphasised the importance of language proficiency for integration and acknowledged the difficulty of learning Swedish, especially for those with limited access to language resources based on their legal status in Sweden.

Bahar discussed the challenges of accessing language learning opportunities as an asylum seeker. Without the right to participate in programs like Swedish for Immigrants (SFI), she sought recommendations from teachers and engaged in free activities organised by churches and organisations to learn Swedish independently. She emphasised the need for language education to be available to all individuals in Sweden, regardless of legal status, as it plays a crucial role in successful integration.

6.1.2 Age-related bias

Linnéa brought up the issue of age discrimination being a significant barrier faced by immigrant women in the labour market, particularly for those over the age of 55. She mentioned how these women often arrive with limited education, language skills, and face other challenges. Employers may prefer younger candidates, perceiving them as more suitable, leading to discrimination against older immigrants. Additionally, Maria mentioned how women from the Middle East face higher levels of discrimination due to social racism in Swedish society.

Some immigrant women interviewed did not experience age discrimination, thanks to support from Arbetsförmedlingen, which facilitated their entry into specific projects aimed at helping them secure employment. Practical experience gained through these projects allowed them to
overcome age-related challenges. However, other women shared stories of facing age discrimination. Maysa arrived in Sweden at age 50, completed language programs and internships but faced rejection in her desired industry sector. She expanded her job search and eventually secured a stable position at 55 years old. She candidly acknowledged the presence of age discrimination and the challenging journey she faced.

6.1.3 Cultural disparities

Birgitta and Kerstin mentioned how immigrant women often face the perception that they should continue their traditional roles as homemakers even in Sweden. With large families to care for, they must navigate language learning, cultural adaptation, education, employment, and childcare simultaneously. Kristina and Linnéa mentioned how lack of prior work experience further complicates their integration into the labour market. Per asserted that these challenges stem from cultural backgrounds and traditional gender roles rather than religion. He mentioned how an unsupportive husband becomes a significant obstacle to the woman’s integration progress. He continued to mention how social and cultural issues confine women to their homes, hindering their entry into the labour market. Overcoming these obstacles requires a departure from traditional gender roles and support from husbands.

Nabina, Lydia and Fayruz also highlighted the challenges of balancing motherhood with work in Sweden. Adapting to internship schedules and jobs proved difficult, as the standard eight-hour workday left limited time for childcare, meal preparation, and household chores. They valued their families and cultural values, recognizing the impact of their family roles on adapting to Swedish norms and schedules. While understanding the practicality of both parents working in Sweden, they faced personal challenges in juggling their responsibilities.

Research consistently emphasises the importance of effective Swedish language communication for immigrant women's success in the labour market. Kanas and Müller found that language proficiency is expected by employers to fulfil job responsibilities efficiently, with those possessing language skills being more likely to be hired (2021, p.487). Their interviews with immigrant women revealed that their name and age often act as barriers to employment. Schickoff and Sprengholz's study further highlighted discrimination based on age and devaluation of skills due to stereotypes and prejudices (2021, p.1166-1184).
Another shared experience among immigrant women is the significant household responsibility they bear. Fodor and Grass emphasised the contrast in labour integration processes between immigrant men and women, with women shouldering the burden of household chores, childcare, and their own labour market integration (2018, p.2346-2367). Interviews with the immigrant women consistently mentioned the challenge of managing household responsibilities while adapting to their integration journey. Employers often prefer women with fewer or no children to avoid potential professional complexities.

6.2 Workplace equity and empowerment

The theme of workplace equity and empowerment presents subthemes of Women demands on employers, Employers demands on the women, Personal accountability, and Systematic factors. Personal accountability presents how labour integration is a process initiated by a woman herself while the remaining subcategories are factors that make it difficult for women to obtain employment.

6.2.1 Women's demands on employers

Linnéa, who guides long-term unemployed individuals to find employment, observed that many women have unrealistic demands on employers. Immigrant women expect assistance in their personal situations, such as adjusting work hours or workload for children with special needs or illnesses. According to Linnéa, this private situation can hinder women entering the local labour market or make them less attractive to employers if they expect work accommodations.

The interviewed women didn't have young children or require family assistance to work. Fayruz, currently working part-time, searched for additional part-time work to increase her hours while staying in her current job. Finding such opportunities was challenging as employers considered her desire for part-time work either impossible or unattractive. Aldana emphasized the importance of feeling respected in the workplace when expressing her demands to an employer. Lydia simply expressed the need and willingness to secure employment without any additional demands.
Birgitta described how women’s willingness to take any work or having no demands is also a limitation when searching for work. While being understanding of the women’s situation and their need to financially provide for their families, the municipal workers described how solely wanting a job is not enough. Although having an income is important, a few of the municipal workers described how taking “any job” may not be sustainable in the long term and might also result in the women who have no demands ending up getting exploited by employers.

Kristina noted that many women they encountered were willing to adapt to employer and societal demands without any specific requirements. One client even removed her khimar to conform to societal standards and increase job prospects. Emma mentioned that some women have unrealistic salary and workload expectations. Both Linnéa and Kristina shared instances where women turned down job offers due to salary discrepancies, despite lacking education, work experience, and Swedish proficiency. Linnéa explained that these expectations stemmed from a lack of information about the Swedish labour market and system, and often changed once explained to them.

Yang’s study highlights that immigrant women frequently place significant demands on employers (2017, p.63). One prevalent request is for employers to accommodate their schedules, aligning them with their roles as mothers and wives. Spehar (2021, p.3914) suggests that a lack of information contributes to these expectations. However, demanding scheduled accommodation without education or language proficiency may not be realistic. Interestingly, interviews reveal that immigrant women do not make appearance-related demands. Their primary concerns are obtaining fair wages and sufficient working hours to facilitate their integration and development of society.

6.2.2 Employers have high demands

In Sweden, employers have various demands for job acquisition. Lydia, Maysa and Fayruz highlight the repeated demands of language proficiency in Swedish, university education, driver's licence, and sometimes even owning a car. They found the demands for language skills and education realistic, as they served as motivators for them to improve their language abilities and pursue further studies. However, Fayruz felt discouraged from applying due to
these demands, while Aldana couldn't apply because she didn't speak Swedish, leading to a loss of motivation to learn the language. Fayruz faced challenges as her foreign education was not recognized, despite having experience and education, employers require a Swedish degree or local references. Both Fayruz and Aldana found the employers' demands unrealistic.

Municipality worker Birgitta finds employers' demands unrealistic. She believes the demands are implausible, and employers seem unaware of their expectations. Kerstin notes that employer demands are constantly rising, even for traditionally low-skill jobs like cleaners and caretaker, now requiring a driver's licence or a car ownership. Caretakers also face education requirements. Recalled how this was not the case a few years previously.. Lars explains the challenges of keeping up with increasing demands while assisting women job seekers, as the municipality lacks the authority to change employer requirements.

Kristina highlights how Swedish labour market demands focus solely on paid work, ignoring the valuable skills gained from unpaid domestic work. Employers require physical evidence of previous experience through references or contracts, which is challenging for women with solely domestic experience. Kristina emphasizes that disregarding domestic work not only hinders financial independence and work experience but also undermines the time and effort invested in family and home.

A similarity can be found between the interviewed immigrant women and previous studies regarding the lack of recognition of education qualifications obtained in their home countries. Immigrant women in Sweden, despite having extensive preparation and qualifications, are often required to start their professional journey from scratch, resulting in a significant loss of motivation (Schieckoff, 2021, p.276)

6.2.3 Personal accountability

Per emphasized the need for immigrant women to actively access support systems like the Employment Service’s programs and courses. It is crucial for individuals to take the initiative and pursue these opportunities. Karin highlighted the importance of enrolling in courses to enhance skills and qualifications, choosing career paths with better job security and pay. The message conveyed is that jobs are available for those motivated to invest in themselves. As
Per mentioned, by seeking relevant resources and demonstrating commitment, immigrant women can improve their chances of meaningful employment and career fulfilment.

There was a significant discussion about the individual-centric nature of the system. As Maria said, immigrant women must seek help and support themselves. Many arrive with expectations of assistance, but as Per emphasized, they need to take the initiative. According to Lars, communicating this upon arrival and throughout the integration process is crucial. Additionally, integration processes may vary by municipality, providing information promptly can facilitate their journey.

Birgitta mentioned that it was recommended that immigrant women apply for loans from CSN to study and receive financial support. However, some perceive it as contradictory to their traditions and religious beliefs. Despite this, accessing the CSN loan becomes necessary to pursue education and financial independence within the system.

According to Kerstin, efforts to organise meetings and information sessions for immigrant women in Swedish society have been made. However, motivating them to attend can be challenging as they prioritize family responsibilities. To facilitate integration it is crucial for women to take initiative and overcome barriers by actively engaging in socialisation, networking, and learning opportunities. Encouraging them to explore available resources, attend gatherings, and seek information and support can aid their integration process.

Aldana highlighted the lack of information as a significant concern. She expressed dissatisfaction with the treatment received from Arbetsförmedligen, where they were often told to learn the language and seek assistance on their own. The limited and basic information provided did not help their establishment process. Maysa and Lydia had positive experiences with accurate information and community projects, facilitating their integration. However, for Fayruz, finding necessary information was challenging. The varying efficiencies of available resources and domestic situations further complicated her integration process.
6.2.4 Systematic factors

Anders, Maria and Linnéa criticised the Swedish establishment system for its limited provisions of only two years of support for immigrants to integrate, learn the language, and enter the labour market, particularly impacting immigrant women with limited education and literacy skills. Anders scrutinised the Swedish for immigrants (SFI) program for emphasising reading and writing over conversational skills, neglecting the specific needs of individuals requiring continuous guidance in speaking and pronunciation. Additionally, Anders mentioned how the division of SFI studies into home-based learning further hinders effective language acquisition by isolating individuals from necessary support and interaction. To address these issues, Linnéa, Kerstin and Per mentioned how it is crucial to provide individualised support tailored to the unique circumstances and needs of each immigrant woman. However, Anders highlighted how the current system in Sweden tends to generalise and overlook the diverse backgrounds and experiences of immigrant women, hindering the effectiveness of the support provided.

Linnéa criticised the short-term focus of the municipality, prioritising quick solutions such as fast jobs for immigrant women without considering their long-term prospects. While temporary employment may offer immediate satisfaction, it risks trapping women in insecure jobs and limiting their opportunities for skill development and access to higher-skilled careers. She mentioned how in order to promote sustainable integration, the municipality needs to invest in education, professional development, and higher-skilled employment opportunities.

All the women interviewed expressed dissatisfaction with the Swedish establishment, feeling pressured to learn the language quickly without adequate support. Nabina, Maysa and Lydia found the SFI program ineffective in developing their speaking skills and providing relevant information about Swedish society. The establishment programme lacked flexibility and overwhelmed them with excessive focus on internships, hindering their ability to pursue further education or work.

Previous research by Bilecen and Seibe emphasised the importance of immigrant women entering the labour market to establish contacts and integrate successfully (2021, p.781-798).
However, this requires fulfilling prerequisites such as providing language foundations and individualised support. These findings align with the discussions from the interviews presented above. The preparation provided to immigrant women in Sweden before entering the labour market is often inadequate, lacking optimal language instruction and necessary information for employment readiness. The system should recognize the diversity among immigrant women and offer tailored support to address their individual needs (Yang, 2017, p.61-88).

6.3 Migrant inclusion strategies

The final theme presents initiatives taken by the municipality of Jönköping and local organisations to integrate immigrant women into the labour market. Sufficient resources that are available locally are demonstrated. Additionally, the theme presents difficulties for the inclusive strategies such as Insufficient information and Insufficient fundings.

6.3.1 Initiative by municipality and organisations

Kristina, Linnéa and Emma identified a need for additional support in assisting female immigrants outside the labour market in finding employment. While the National Employment Service plays a role in providing guidance, Linnéa felt that longer and more individual based support was necessary. Kristina mentioned that by having more local organisations, tailored guidance and assistance can be provided to individuals based on their specific needs. Kristina stated that more individuals have to start more businesses focusing on labour market integration. The local organisations that were interviewed, collaborated with the employment service, which referred individuals in need of job search assistance to them. This approach allows the employment service to focus on other national government demands.

Maria described how the organisation she manages is different from others as they have no demands for employees to have previous work experiences or education nor good Swedish skills, instead the organisation provides courses in cleaning and Swedish speaking services. Maria mentioned how there is a further need for this kind of organisation as there was a clear need for women who did not have good Swedish abilities to still obtain a job which she
claimed is impossible in other cleaning firms. Additional projects that have been executed are further explained in the presentation of the interviewees.

6.3.2 Insufficient information

Fayruz, Aldana and Bahar expressed a need for clearer and more comprehensive information when they arrived in Sweden. They mentioned a lack of guidance on job searching, available services, and language learning. Linnéa acknowledged that while information exists online, some women lacked computer skills and found it challenging to access the specific information they needed. Fayruz mentioned the need for information about Swedish laws, as she had no prior knowledge of the country. The Migration Agency, National Employment Service, and municipalities have roles in providing information, but everyone in the first interview group observed gaps in information about Swedish culture, the labour market, and the education system. Kristina, Maria, Per and Kerstin felt the need to fill these gaps themselves by providing information. Continuity of support beyond the first few years in Sweden was also highlighted as important by Linnéa and Maria.

The women who arrived with residence permits generally found the information provided and support received from the Migration Agency and Employment Service to be sufficient. However, Bahar shared that she received no information from local services or the municipality. Instead, she relied on information from friends and family already in Sweden. Maysa mentioned the support she received from her family members in obtaining information and Aldana mentioned how her Swedish partner was her only source for information. Aldana and Bahar expressed frustration at the lack of information despite actively seeking it.

6.3.3 Sufficient resources are available

Per, Emma and Anders highlighted the issue of resources during our interviews, noting that while there are available resources for immigrant women to integrate into the labour market, the responsibility to seek them out lies with the individuals themselves. Per mentioned how self-confidence, determination, and an active search for opportunities are essential qualities for accessing these resources. The municipality of Jönköping has allocated specific resources to support immigrant women, including projects, internships, and short courses. However,
Linnéa mentioned how she often finds a lack of interest and initiative among immigrant women in actively pursuing these resources.

Per mentioned how the receptiveness of immigrant women to integrate themselves depends on the support from local services and social circles. He continued by saying that those with some knowledge of Swedish culture, Swedish friends, and opportunities for socialising fare better in the integration process. Per, Kristina and Kerstin acknowledged the need to actively reach out to this specific group of immigrant women to provide accurate information and motivation. The municipality has implemented interventions tailored to this group to ensure their awareness of rights and available resources.

Aldana, Bahar and Fayruz expressed that the issue lies in their lack of awareness about available resources rather than a lack of interest, leaving them confused and unaware of their options. They highlighted a communication gap as the problem, the other women praised Arbetsförmedlingen for effectively assisting them in accessing community projects with job prospects. However, Bahar and Aldana stated how they felt lost and uncertain about what they are entitled to participate in. Having sufficient support from local services is crucial not only for the women's integration process but also for their mental health as having functional resources decreases the chances of segregation (Im, Lee & Lee, 2014, p.502). According to Schieckoff & Sprengholz immigrant women are the group that utilises available resources the least as a result of lack of knowledge of the existence of these resources (2021, p.276).

6.3.4 Insufficient funds

The people that had been involved in projects, the insufficient funds provided by Erasmus and the national government were frequently mentioned. Emma mentioned how the project was not possible without voluntary support from the local church and housing companies as the budget did not cover all activities. Per mentioned a lack of additional funding and clear directives for integrating immigrant women, despite the focus on this target group as directed by the Swedish parliament. Lack of resources for immigrant women's integration is an ongoing issue, with limited research addressing the topic. Spehar's research highlights the recurring problem of inadequate knowledge and assistance from local services for newly arrived women in Sweden. Insufficient funding is one of several factors contributing to this
complex issue, and although there is political discourse and a recognized need for integration, there is a lack of funding and interest in projects targeting immigrant women (Spehar, 2020, p.3921).

7. Final discussion & conclusion

The study aimed to critically assess the challenges in labour market integration faced by immigrant women according to the women themselves and individuals working with integration. Additionally the study sought to identify initiatives taken locally to integrate immigrant women. Previous research highlights several key findings. First, the success of immigrant women in the labour market is influenced by local labour market conditions and employer preferences, with language proficiency playing a significant role in employment outcomes (Yang, 2017, p.105). Second, immigrant women often face challenges in having their education qualifications recognized, leading to reduced employment opportunities (Schieckoff & Spengholz, 2021, p.276). Third, personal experiences of discrimination based on gender and ethnicity can impact immigrant women's confidence and motivation to secure employment. Finally, cultural factors such as gender norms and stereotypes, affect immigrant women's integration into the labour market, potentially influencing their willingness to apply for jobs (Schieckoff and Spengholz, 2021, p.283).

The first research question regarding challenges faced in the local labour market; The findings reveal that immigrant women in Jönköping face multiple employment obstacles. Language proficiency emerges as a significant barrier, impeding communication, networking, and task understanding (Schiekoff & Spengholz, 2021, p.276). Additionally, a lack of recognition for qualifications and experiences from their home countries contributes to unemployment or challenges in regulated professions (Yang, 2017, p.105). Gender discrimination further complicates navigating the labour market, as available resources often fail to address women's specific needs (Schiekoff & Spengholz, 2021, p.276).

The second research question focuses on the facilitated work implemented locally to ease immigrant women’s integration process: Language support programs, including classes and language exchange initiatives, help improve Swedish language skills, enabling better job
opportunities. Job training, skill development workshops, and tailored services enhance employability. As the author Kanas and Müller explained, job placement and referral services connect immigrant women with employers valuing diversity, while networking events, mentorship programs, and career guidance sessions foster professional networks and insights (2021, p.1234). Collaborating with local businesses promotes diversity and inclusion, empowering immigrant women and enhancing Jönköping's labour market.

For the third research question focusing on what the women themselves experience in integrating the labour market, the women identified several critical factors that influence their integration process. Language proficiency, knowledge of available resources, and the responsibilities of motherhood were highlighted as crucial influences on their integration journey. Strict language requirements set by employers were perceived as major barriers. The woman expresses dissatisfaction with the short timeframe and lack of support in the Swedish settlement program, as well as inadequate information about integration programs. As the author Yang mentioned, balancing personal integration with family integration added to the challenges, resulting in slower progress (2017, p.93).

The authors identify a discrepancy between the perspective of immigrant women and municipality workers. While the workers believe that providing sufficient information would enable immigrant women to independently access the labour market, the women themselves disagree. The authors emphasized the need to address this issue in order to make improvements and better support immigrant women in their employment endeavors.

Intersectionality theory recognizes that immigrant women face unique challenges due to the intersecting factors of gender, ethnicity, and immigration status. The strategies implemented by municipality workers in Jönköping, such as language support programs, job training, and tailored workshops, address language barriers and enhance employability. However, integration requires a comprehensive approach that acknowledges the complexity of immigrant women's experiences shaped by various identities and social structures. Individual actions, institutional regulations, and power dynamics influenced by factors like class, gender, and ethnicity play a role in maintaining inequalities. Viewing Swedish and immigrant women as distinct categories neglects their intersecting identities and shared needs.
Immigrant women's integration requires personalised support that recognizes their diverse identities. An intersectional perspective enables policymakers, employers, and service providers to understand barriers faced by immigrant women and develop inclusive approaches. This involves addressing discrimination, providing comprehensive information, and offering support services tailored to their circumstances. By adopting an intersectional lens, a more equitable and inclusive labour market can be fostered, benefiting immigrant women and society as a whole.

8. Further research

A prospective further research could focus on comparing the approaches of various municipalities in prioritizing the integration of women into the labour market. Since each municipality adopts different strategies, examining their effectiveness would therefore be valuable. Additionally, exploring the specific needs of different age groups among immigrant women in entering the labour market could provide valuable insights for tailored support. Furthermore, investigating the impact of the interaction process and labour market challenges on the mental health of immigrant women is another important area for future research. Understanding the influence of these factors on mental well-being can contribute to the development of appropriate interventions and support systems.

References


Appendix 1: Interview questions

Local actors

- Tell us about yourself and what you work with.
- What challenges have you encountered in your work as integration specialist?
- What difficulties are there when it comes to integrating immigrant women in Jönköping?
- Why do you think it is more difficult for immigrant women to enter the local labour market compared to their male counterparts?
- What factors affect women's labour integration process the most in Jönköping?
- How would you describe the present situation for women on the labour market in Jönköping?
- According to the EU members’ locally governing bodies often have a focus on integration of immigrants but often overlook the differences between men and women. How do you focus on women in your projects/work?
- What implementations have your organisation done to mitigate the labour integration of immigrant women in Jönköping?
- Have you encountered any obstacles or difficulties when it comes to integration of immigrant women? What are they?
- Are there any future or ongoing projects regarding women's labour integration?
- Do you experience a need for more resources and fundings for integration of immigrant women?
- Is there anything you want to mention that we have not talked about?

Municipality, regional and county administrative board workers

- Tell us about your job position and job duties
- Tell us about the organisation you work with and what you do
- Any reasons why you chose to do this type of work?
- How would you explain the current situation with women's integration in the labour market in Jönköping?
  - Have you seen any (positive) change since you started with this organisation in terms of women's integration in the labour market?
  - How has this organisation affected women's accessibility to the labour market in Jönköping?
- What do you think are the challenges when it comes to the integration of immigrant women in Jönköping?
- How long have these women been away from the labour market and what do you think is the reason?
- What efforts does this organisation make to help these women?
- Do you think there is enough support/help with resources for these immigrant women?
• What factors do you think make it difficult for immigrant women to enter the labour market in Jönköping? (language, ethnicity, etc)
• The issue of integrating foreign-born women into the Swedish labour market is a highly debated topic. Although there are many resources to help these women, their integration into the labour market is - as considered by politicians, integration specialists and municipalities - a failure.
  - What is your stand on this?
  - What do you think it is due to?
• What kind of expectations do you think women have for work and the employer?
• What expectations do employers have of women?
• What is needed for these women to enter the labour market more quickly from the day they arrive in Jönköping?
• Is there something you feel you want to let us know?

Immigrant women

• Tell us a little about yourself and your work.
  ○ Nationality
  ○ Age
  ○ How did you get your current job?
• What is something that you enjoy most in your work?
• Do you feel satisfied with your current work and workplace?
• How would you describe your experience with finding a job in Jönköping?
• What did you find most difficult when finding work?
  ○ Language requirement?
  ○ Other requirements such as a driver's licence.
• Why do you think immigrant women have it more difficult to obtain a job in Jönköping compared to men?
• In what way do you think that the individual can do to mitigate the work seeking process easier?
• In what way do you think the municipality can make the work seeking process easier for immigrant women?
• Are you informed of the different support and help resources in Jönköping that can assist you in your job searching process?
• Have you received support or assistance in the different help resources, for example arbetsförmedlingen, rusta och matcha etc?
  ○ What did you think about that support?
  ○ Was that support sufficient enough or do you feel that you needed longer or more support?
● Is there anything you feel that those working with integration should know? Something you have experienced?

● What demands do you have of a job and the employer?
  ○ What demands have you experienced that employers have - are these demands reasonable?

● Is there something in your private life that has made it difficult for you to have a job?
  ○ How has it affected you?
  ○ For example; care of children, care of other family members, other responsibilities in the house.

● Was the specific work time something that made it difficult for you to find a job?

● A lot of employers have requirements that one should be able to speak and write in Swedish either fluently or without any problems. Do you see the language requirements as an obstacle or a motivation in your process to obtain a job?

● Is there something we haven’t asked you that you want to bring up?
Appendix 2: Consent form
Intervju avtal

Denna intervju är en del av vårt kandidatexamensarbete i internationellt arbete på Jönköping University. Syftet med arbetet är att få en inblick i hur situationen är för utrikesfödda kvinnor när de söker arbete samt vad lokala aktörer och kommunansvariga gör för att underlätta situationen för kvinnorna i Jönköping kommun.

Titeln på arbetet är Utrikesfödda kvinnors integration på arbetsmarknaden i Jönköping. Det slutgiltiga arbetet kommer sedan att publiceras på Diva Portal.

Genom att skriva på godkänner jag till nedanstående punkter:

- Jag bekräftar att mitt deltagande i detta forskningsprojektet är frivilligt.
- Jag förstår att jag inte kommer att få ekonomisk ersättning för att delta i denna forskningsintervju.
- Jag förstår att jag har rätten att dra tillbaka mitt medverkande i studien närmast, i så fall kommer materialet att raderas.
- Jag förstår att jag har rätt att vägra svara på alla frågor eller så kan jag avbryta intervjun när som helst.
- Jag förstår att all information jag tillhandahåller för denna studie kommer att behandlas konfidentiellt.
- Jag förstår att forskaren inte kommer att identifiera mig med namn i några rapporter med hjälp av information som erhållits från denna intervju och att min konfidentialitet som deltagare i denna studie kommer att förbli säker.
- Jag förstår att insamlad material kommer att hanteras av enbart forskarna själva.
- Jag har läst och förstått förklaringsarna angivna i texten till mig
- Jag godkänner att intervjun spelas in.
- Jag kan begära en kopia av utskriften eller annan data som samlats in under forskningsintervjun och kan göra ändringar som jag anser vara nödvändiga för att säkerställa effektiviteten av eventuella avtal om konfidentialitet.
- Jag samtycker till att forskarna får publicera dokument som innehåller citat av mig.

Intervjupersonens namn

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Datum för intervju

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Intervjupersonens underskrift

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Datum för signering

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تُعد هذه المقابلة جزءًا من درجة الدكتوراه لدينا في الدراسات الدولية لمجتمع النسائيات في Jönköping. وهدف هذه الدراسة إلى اكتساب رؤية متعددة للناشئة من خلال توسيع ووصف النشاطات، وكذلك ما تقوم به الجهات الفاعلة المحلية ووسائل الاتصالات التحسين.
تُهمي هذه الدراسة بناء إجماع المرأة المولودة في الخارج في سوق العمل في Jönköping. ستُنشر النسخة النهائية على بوابة الطلاب Diva.

قما بكشف هذا الاكتشاف، فإليك أوفق على ما يلي:

أولاً، أنك مشتركت في هذا المشروع الجدلي. طوعي.

أعلمني أن أتمكن من الوصول إلى معلومات ملية للمشاركة في هذا البحث.

أعلمني أن لديك الحق في ضبط مشاركتك في الدراسة في أي وقت، وفي هذه الحالة سيتم حذف إجاباتك.

أعلمني أن لدي الحق في رفض الإجابة على أي أسئلة أو إلغاء المقابلة في أي وقت.

أعلمني أن أي معلومات أقدمها خلال هذه الدراسة سيتم التعامل معها على أنها سرية.

أعلمني أن البحث لن يحدد هوائيًا في أي تقارير، باستخدام المعلومات المستمدة من هذه المقابلة، وأن خصوصيتي كمشاركت في هذه الدراسة ستظل مضمونة.

أعلمني أنه لا يمكنني أن يعطى أي المعلومات التي يتم جمعها إلا الباحثين الذين سيقومون.

تقرر قوانين التفويضية والولادة في النص، فيما يتعلق بي.

أوافق على تسجيل المقابلة.

أوافق على أن أُطلِق نجومًا من النص أو الإجابات الأخرى التي تم جمعها أثناء المقابلة، وأن أي تغييرات أراها ضرورية، لضمان فاعلية أي تغييرات متعلقة بسرية:

أوافق على أن يجبر الباحثين نشر وثائق تحتوي على الإجابات من إجاباتي.
Interview contract agreement

This interview is a part of our bachelor degree in Global Studies at Jönköping University. The purpose of this study is to obtain an insight into the situation for immigrant women when they are seeking jobs as well as what local actors and municipal employees do to mitigate the situation for women in the municipality of Jönköping.

The title of this study is *Foreign born women’s integration on the labour market in Jönköping.*

The final paper will be published on the student portal Diva as per obligation by the university.

By signing this agreement I agree to the points given below:

- I confirm that my participation in this research project is voluntary.
- I understand that I will not be financially compensated for participating in this research.
- I understand that I have the right to withdraw my participation in the study at any time, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I understand that I have the right to refuse to answer any questions or to cancel the interview at any time.
- I understand that any information I provide for this study will be treated as confidential.
- I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure.
- I understand that collected material will be handled solely by the researchers themselves.
- I have read and understood the explanations given in the text to me.
- I agree to the interview being recorded.
- I may request a copy of the transcript or other data collected during the research interview and may make any changes I deem necessary to ensure the effectiveness of any confidentiality agreements.
- I agree that the researchers may publish documents that contain quotes from me.

Name of the Interviewee __________________________ Date of interview __________________________

______________________________
Signature of interviewee __________________________ Date of signature __________________________