



DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN STUDIES (CES)

LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION OF FEMALE REFUGEES

A comparative study of the Swedish and Norwegian labour markets

Zainab Fakh

Thesis:	Master thesis 30 hec
Program and/or course:	MAES - Master in European Studies
Semester/year:	Autumn 2017
Supervisor:	Andrea Spehar

Abstract

Despite the considerable attention the labour market integration of female refugees receives from policy-makers and researchers, their employment rates are still the lowest among other population groups across Europe. Many studies have addressed the barriers that female refugees confront to access the labour market, which have largely presented the perspective of policy-makers and academics. By contrast, the perception of female refugees has been marginalised in the academic field. Therefore, this study pays attention to female refugees' experiences in accessing the labour market. The aim is to analyse and compare the obstacles that female refugees can face in entering the labour market in Sweden and Norway. Another aim is to suggest some mechanisms to overcome these obstacles. The study uses empirical materials that are collected by conducting qualitative interviews with female refugees and some stakeholders in both countries. In addition, the study analyses and compares the laws on the introduction programmes in Sweden and Norway. The findings suggest that female refugees in Norway are more satisfied with the quality of the introduction programme and the Public Employment Service (PES) than their counterparts in Sweden. Moreover, the findings show that discrimination is more pronounced in Sweden than in Norway. Nevertheless, there are no considerable differences between female refugees' experiences when it comes to the individual barriers or other institutional and structural barriers. The study concludes that a less-multicultural model with improving the quality of the introduction programme and the PES may lead to better labour market integration of female refugees.

Key words: female refugees, labour market integration, introduction programme, Sweden, Norway

Abbreviations

EU	European Union
EU LFS	The European Union Labour Force Survey
IMDi	Directorate of Integration and Diversity in Norway
NAV	Norwegian Labour and Welfare Organisation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NSSB	Statistics Norway
SPES	Swedish Public Employment Service
SSCB	Statistics Sweden

Table of Contents

- Abbreviations..... 4
- 1. Introduction 1
 - 1.1. Outline of the thesis 4
- 2. Objectives and research questions..... 5
- 3. Previous research..... 7
 - 3.1. Institutional and structural barriers 8
 - 3.1.1. Lack of recognition of previous qualifications 8
 - 3.1.2. Integration policy 9
 - 3.1.3. Migration policies and housing instability 9
 - 3.1.4. Labour market structure 10
 - 3.1.5. Discrimination 11
 - 3.2. Individual barriers 12
 - 3.2.1. Language proficiency 12
 - 3.2.2. Education level..... 12
 - 3.2.3. Cultural values 13
 - 3.2.4. Lack of professional and social networks 14
 - 3.3. Research gaps and the study’s contribution to the field..... 14
- 4. Theoretical framework 16
 - 4.1. Assimilation and multiculturalism 16
 - 4.2. Intersectionality 19
- 5. Research design and methodology 21
 - 5.1. Case selection 22
 - 5.2. Qualitative methods 24
 - 5.2.1. Comparative textual analysis 24
 - 5.2.2. Semi-structured interview method 26
 - 5.2.2.1. Selection of interviewees 27
 - 5.2.2.2. Interview guide for female refugees’ interviews..... 28
 - 5.2.2.3. Analysis techniques for female refugees’ interviews 29
 - 5.2.3. Informant interview method 30

5.2.3.1. Selection of the informants	31
5.2.3.2. Interview guide for informant interviews	32
5.2.3.3. Analysis techniques for informant interviews.....	32
5.3. The quality of the research methods	32
5.3.1. Credibility	32
5.3.2. Reliability	33
5.3.3. Transferability	33
5.3.4. Confirmability	34
5.4. The study's delimitations	34
6. Results.....	36
6.1. The comparative textual analysis.....	36
6.2. Interview results with female refugees	39
6.2.1. Institutional and structural barriers	39
6.2.1.1. The quality of the introduction programmes.....	39
6.2.1.2. Discrimination	43
6.2.1.3. Validation of foreign credentials	46
6.2.1.4. Housing instability and the settlement programme.....	47
6.2.1.5. Generous access to the welfare system	47
6.2.2. Individual barriers	47
6.2.2.1. Language skills.....	48
6.2.2.2. Professional and Social networks	48
6.2.2.3. Cultural values	48
6.2.2.4. Education level.....	49
6.2.3. Assessment of how barriers to access the labour market can be removed.....	51
6.2.3.1. Enhancing the effectiveness of the introduction programme.....	51
6.2.3.2. Validation of foreign credentials	51
6.2.3.3. Settlement programme	52
6.2.3.4. Establish footholds into the labour market	52
6.3. Informant interviews.....	54
6.3.1. The obstacles that hinder the access of female refugees into the labour market ..	54
6.3.2. Mechanisms to bring more female refugees to the labour market	55
7. Analysis and discussion	57
8. Conclusion	63

References	65
Appendices	1
Appendix 1: Obstacles to getting a suitable job by first generation immigrants in Sweden and Norway in 2014	1
Appendix 2: Interview guide for interviews with female refugees.....	2
Appendix 4: Table of demographic data for respondents in Norway.....	4
Appendix 5: Table of demographic data for respondents in Sweden.....	5

1. Introduction

The thesis addresses an old but still current social problem in Europe, which is the low participation of female refugees¹ in the labour market. According to the European Union (EU) Labour Market Force survey ([LFS](#)) in 2014, the employment rate of female refugees² was on average 45% in the EU. This percentage is 17% lower than that of male refugees and it is 6% lower than that of other non-EU born immigrant women ([EC & OECD, 2016:19](#)). The low employment rate of female refugees makes them more vulnerable to poverty than any other immigrant groups, which also imposes an extra burden on the welfare system of the host country ([FEMM Committee, 2016: 33](#)). For that reason, both policy-makers and researchers in Europe are mired in emergency response to ensure the socio-economic inclusion of refugees into the host country. Furthermore, special attention is paid to female refugees who can find it more difficult to access the labour market.

Over the last 30 years, the academic research on the labour market integration of female refugees has focused on the obstacles that hinder the access of refugees to the labour market (Nordplus programme, 2010-2011). Research has pointed out that these obstacles are often divided into institutional, structural and individual barriers. Under this division, there are different factors such as language proficiency, education level, qualifications recognition, discrimination and other factors related to laws, policies and procedures in the host country. Alongside these obstacles, researchers acknowledge that female refugees confront extra challenges to enter the labour market. These challenges are based on the gender roles and

¹ Before turning to the substance of this study, it would be useful to differentiate between the concept of *female immigrant* and the concept of *female refugee* in this paper. The generic term *female refugees* describes all women that have gained the residence permit on humanitarian grounds or as family members of someone who has granted the residence permit on humanitarian grounds. On the other hand, the term *female immigrants* refers to all women who have immigrated and resided in the host countries regardless of the reason for immigration.

² The data that was extracted from EU LFS (2014) on the employment rates of refugees and immigrants refer to all first generation refugees and immigrants who are between 15 to 64 years old. There is, unfortunately, no specific available data on the situation of the newly arrivals who have not been living in the host country for more than 5 years. Rather, the data covers people who have been in the host country for a year or over. Nevertheless, it was considered that the longer a person lives in the host country, the better his/her employment outcomes are. In other words, the employment rate among the newly arrived female refugees might be even lower than the total employment rates that the LFS presents. Therefore, the focus of this study was on the newly arrived female refugees who have not been living in the host country for over 5 years as they are the most vulnerable ones compared to other female refugees who have been living in the host country for a longer period.

traditional values that refugees carry with them to the host society (Westin & Dingu-Kyrklund 2000; Kofman 2003:7).

Researchers tend to use quantitative data to compare the situation of female refugees to other immigrant groups in different countries. The quantitative research shows that the employment rate of female refugees is always the lowest among other population groups due to the above-mentioned obstacles. However, using quantitative methods to look at the female refugees' labour market integration is limited to the availability of the comparable data. Moreover, the quantitative data does not provide an in-depth understanding of the actual situation and the different obstacles that female refugees confront in accessing the labour market in each country.

Another research approach on the labour market integration of refugees is to use experimental methods to estimate the discriminatory attitudes towards refugees in general. This kind of experimental research provides some assumptions about the discrimination that female refugees can face, but it does not reflect the individual experiences of female refugees in this regard. In other words, what is known so far is that the employment rates of female refugees are the lowest among other immigrant groups because of the structural, institutional and individual barriers. However, these barriers have largely been identified from the perspective of policy-makers and academics, but little is known about the perceptions of female refugees on the labour market integration process. How do female refugees experience the factors that hinder their access to the labour market? Are they similar to the explained factors in the previous research or do they have other obstacles that should be taken into account when talking about integration? What can motivate female refugees to work and how? These questions cannot be appropriately answered without hearing the experiences of female refugees, but unfortunately, they have not yet been sufficiently addressed in the previous research. Marginalising the significance of the female refugees' experiences in the labour market is not only a research gap, but it is also a drawback in any political initiative to improve their participation in the labour market without involving them. These experiences should be linked to the institutional efforts to integrate female refugees in order to improve their labour market integration. As a result, a better performance on the integration's indicators, such as personal well-being and social cohesion can be achieved.

The aim of this thesis is to analyse and compare the obstacles that female refugees can face in entering the labour market in Sweden and Norway. It also aims to suggest some mechanisms to overcome these obstacles. Focusing on Sweden and Norway is based on the similarities and differences between these two countries. On the one hand, they both belong to the Nordic region with very generous welfare systems and stable labour markets with relatively high employment rates (Brochmann, Hagelund, 2011: 13; Pettersen and Østby, 2013:76). On the other hand, these countries have different employment rates of female refugees. In Sweden, female refugees have the lowest employment rate among other immigrant groups, namely (53.5%), which is approximately (8%) lower than that of male refugees. In contrast, female refugees in Norway have a higher employment rate compared to that of their counterparts in Sweden, namely (57.9), which is even higher than that of male refugees in Norway, whose employment rate is only (55.4%) ([EC & OECD, 2016:19](#)).

Moreover, according to the EU LFS in 2014, Norway was the only European country, with credible data³, where female refugees have a higher employment rate compared to that of male refugees. Therefore, the differences in the employment rates have led to the assumption that female refugees in Norway enjoy a better access to the labour market, not only compared to female refugees in Sweden but also compared to male refugees in Norway. Accordingly, it will be interesting to compare the individual experiences of female refugees in the Swedish and Norwegian labour markets.

This study uses empirical materials that are collected by conducting qualitative interviews with newly arrived female refugees, civil servants and civil society organisations in both countries. In addition, the study analyses and compares the laws that regulate the introduction programmes⁴ in Sweden and Norway. Analysing these laws is essential to understand how the differences in the introduction programmes in each country can affect the experiences of female refugees in the labour market.

³ In both Spain and Slovenia, female refugees have higher employment rates compared to male refugees. However, these data have low reliability according to the LFS. Therefore, they were not selected as good examples to compare Sweden to them.

⁴ The introduction programme is an integration programme that targets newly arrival refugees to bring them closer to the labour market and prepare them for work.

The study contributes to the research on labour market integration of female refugees, which currently lacks the combination of addressing the introduction programmes, the female refugees' individual experiences, and the stakeholders' opinions in one research paper. Furthermore, the study outlines a set of recommendations that will be based on the female refugees' experiences to improve their participation in the labour market. This implies that the outcomes are of great political and social importance for Europe today and it is highly relevant to the field of European Studies. Focusing only on two European countries, which have relatively long experiences in integrating refugees will provide empirical findings on the best/worst practices in integration. These findings can be useful to other European countries to learn from and ensure the long-term socioeconomic inclusion of female refugees across Europe.

1.1. Outline of the thesis

The study is divided into eight chapters. The first chapter sheds light on the importance and relevance of the performed study to the field of European Studies and to the socio-economic academic research. This is followed by a presentation on the research objectives and research questions in the second chapter. The third chapter reviews insights from the theoretical and empirical literature on the labour market integration of female refugees and it identifies the research gaps. The fourth chapter describes the theoretical framework, whereas the fifth chapter describes the research design and methodology. It also includes a presentation of how the empirical data were collected and analysed. Thereafter, the results will be presented in chapter six, which is followed by a discussion of the results in chapter seven. Finally, the conclusion consists of final remarks and the empirical implications of the findings.

2. Objectives and research questions

There are two objectives that drive this study. The first objective is to analyse and compare the laws that regulate the introduction programmes in Sweden and Norway. Doing that will facilitate a better understanding of whether the introduction programme in Norway is more effective in facilitating the access of newly arrived female refugees to the labour market than the programme in Sweden. In other words, by analysing and comparing these laws it will be possible to estimate how the differences in these laws can affect the experiences of female refugees in the labour market. The second objective is to hear the voice of newly arrived female refugees in the target countries and let them express their stories about accessing the labour market. Understanding their individual experiences will be essential to identify the main causes of their low employment rate. At the same time, it will help in evaluating the introduction programmes which these women attend in each country. Also, civil servants and civil society organisations might have their opinions regarding the low employment rates of female refugees. Therefore, it would be useful to hear their perspectives on this issue in both countries as they are experts in the labour market integration.

To achieve these objectives, the main research question is: *Are the barriers that newly arrived female refugees face in accessing the labour market in Sweden similar to those their counterparts confront in Norway? How could these barriers be removed according to these women?*

Answering the two parts of this question will be based on presenting different narratives of newly arrived female refugees that share their experiences about accessing the labour market. By using an intersectional approach to analyse and compare these experiences, it will be possible to identify whether female refugees in these countries face similar or different barriers to access the labour market. In other words, if women interviewees in both countries talk about similar obstacles, then it can be concluded that their experiences cannot be an explanation for the differences in their employment rates. In contrast, if these experiences are similar in some aspects, but different in others. For example, if female refugees in both countries address the language proficiency as an obstacle but on the other hand, they talk differently about the validation of their previous education. Then, the answer to this question would be affirmative to

the extent their experiences differ. Thus, it can be concluded that these few differences can be among the explanations for the differences in their employment rates. Regarding the second part of the question, this will be answered by presenting the solutions that female refugee interviewees suggest to improve their participation in the labour market.

However, to build a more coherent picture and better understand the differences in the female refugees' experiences in the labour market two additional questions will be answered. The first question is: *Is the integration programme in Norway more effective in facilitating the access of female refugees to the labour market than that in Sweden?* Answering this question will be done by looking at the introduction programmes and two other documents, which are issued by the OECD, on the labour market integration of immigrants in Sweden and Norway. This technique will be the point of departure to identify differences in the integration programmes and approaches to bring female refugees closer to the labour market in each country. However, solely doing that will not predict which integration approach and programme are more effective. Rather, the evaluation should be done by hearing the experiences of female refugees. In other words, if women interviewees in Norway are more satisfied with the integration approach and programme than their counterparts in Sweden, then it can be concluded that the integration approach and programme in Norway are more effective in facilitating their access to the labour market in Norway than in Sweden. Contrary to that, it will not be possible to bless the integration approach and programme in Norway if female refugees in Sweden show their appreciation for the integration programme and approach or they express similar opinions to their counterparts in Norway.

The second additional question to be answered is: *What are the main obstacles to integrate female refugees according to stakeholders? Do these stakeholders mention similar obstacles as female refugees address?* The answer to this question will be found by conducting informant interviews at the final stage of the research. The aim of these interviews is to identify to what extent the obstacles that female refugees address are considered by different stakeholders in both countries. In other words, the more the stakeholders are aware of female refugees' needs, the better the outcomes of the labour market integration should be.

3. Previous research

In 2014, the EU LFS presented data on the main obstacles that first generation immigrants confront in accessing the labour market. The suggested barriers according to this data are: the lack of language skills, lack of recognition of qualifications, country of origin and religion and other barriers (see table 1 in appendix 1) The data indicates that language proficiency of the host country is more significant to access the labour market in Norway than in Sweden, whereas the country of origin and religion are more significant in Sweden than in Norway. However, there is, unfortunately, no specific available data on the obstacles that female refugees can face in accessing the labour market. Rather, the EU LFS presents common barriers that all immigrants confront regardless of their gender or reason for immigration. Therefore and in order to build a sustainable basis for this study, it is necessary to address some of the previous research contributions on the main obstacles that female refugees can face in accessing the labour market.

The literature on these obstacles divides them into institutional, structural and individual barriers. The institutional barriers are the legal obstacles that can hinder the access of female refugees to the labour market because of legislations, laws and policies. These obstacles are mainly the lack of qualifications recognition, integration policy, migration policy and settlement programmes. Structural barriers, on the other hand, are the social obstacles that female refugees can face because of the labour market structure and discrimination. Third, the individual barriers are the human capital obstacles, such as poor education level, poor language skills, lack of social networks and a person's cultural values. However, all these barriers interact together and their interaction aggregates their impacts on the female refugees' opportunities to access the labour market. For example, if a female refugee lacks the language skills (individual barrier), but she cannot start learning the language until she receives the residence permit and other official papers (institutional barrier), then she will not get a job because the employer will consider that she does not speak the language and her previous skills are not up to standard (structural barrier). Therefore, all these barriers together will make it even more complicated to find a job for a female refugee. While the individual barriers can be overcome over time by personal efforts, the institutional

and structural obstacles are more difficult to overcome without the institutional efforts to tackle them. In the following three sections, these barriers are explained in more detail.

3.1. Institutional and structural barriers

This section first presents some of the main institutional barriers, which are lack of recognition of previous qualifications, integration and migration policies and procedures. Thereafter, it sheds light on two of the main structural barriers that female refugees can face in accessing the labour market, which are labour market structure and discrimination.

3.1.1. Lack of recognition of previous qualifications

Studies by [Lemaitre \(2007:26-27\)](#) and Schuster et al. (2013) show that the previous education of immigrants does not secure them jobs relevant to their qualifications. In Norway, only around 50% of immigrants who succeeded in validating their qualifications were able to access the labour market or be admitted to further studies in 2014 (Skjerven and Malgina, 2015). Both Lemaitre (2007) and Schuster et al. (2013) studies argue that the failure in recognising immigrants education force many immigrants to work in jobs that they are over-qualified for. In this regard, the report by the Swedish Council for Higher Education ([2015:13](#)) states that only around 40% of foreign educational credentials were recognised in 2015. That means only 40% of immigrants can benefit from their previous education in Sweden.

Nevertheless, validation of previous education is one side of the coin and the second side is the validation of the previous work experiences. A study by [Sumption \(2013\)](#) shows that relevant work experiences can be more important than formal education for immigrants in many cases. Recognising these experiences is, however, more difficult because of the differences in the cultural and economic structures between the host country and pre-immigration country (Sumption, 2013:6). Moreover, Andersson and Guo (2009) state that work experience in the Swedish labour market is a requirement for immigrants in order to get a job. The authors explain that the differences in education systems between the country of origin and host country are the main reasons for not recognising immigrants' previous qualifications.

However, according to Wadensjö (1992), an immigrant who obtains qualifications from Sweden will not have the same opportunities in the labour market as a native-born with

Swedish qualifications. Contrary to this, Bratsberg, et al. (2017) state that obtaining an education in Norway can make the immigrants' employment rates similar to those of natives. ([Bratsberg, et al.](#), 2017:19, 51)

3.1.2. Integration policy

Some scholars argue that the soft integration policies lead to lower participation of female refugees in the labour market (E.g., [Hagelund, 2005](#); Wikan 2001). From the literature in Norway, Hagelund (2005) puts the matter of the integration crisis at refugees' feet and the soft integration policies. She explains that not only religion and refugees' cultural values are the reasons for integration failure. Rather, the government also is responsible for that because it does not make demands on refugees to integrate. The author argues that integration policy only focuses on securing the refugees' rights without addressing their duties. According to Hagelund the lack of refugees' participation in the labour market could be explained by the state's '*snillisme*', Norwegian for kindism. The kind attitudes of Norwegian politicians and policy-makers towards refugees have led to failure in their integration⁵ (Hagelund, 2005:7).

Another study, by Koopmans (2010), shows that the integration policies and the generous access to the welfare benefits affect the socio-economic integration of immigrants. The study's findings suggest that the generous countries that grant easy access to equal rights for immigrants (without putting demands on them) have low employment rates of immigrants and high levels of segregation. Moreover, these countries have a higher percentage of committing crimes among immigrants (Koopmans, 2010:20).

3.1.3. Migration policies and housing instability

The migration policies and their implications, namely, the length of asylum procedure and the delays in the settlement of refugees postpone the integration activities ([OECD, 2009:54](#)). In addition, the kind of residence permit that female refugees obtain can limit their access to the labour market. More precisely, when a female refugee obtains a residence permit based on the residence permit of her male family member, she will not enjoy the freedom to work or study without the permission of this man (ibid).

⁵ Kindism is a concept that has been used by right-wing liberalists and social democratic reformers.

Furthermore, the difficulties in finding housing in Sweden affect the labour market integration of female refugee since they will not be settled until they find a permanent flat. The housing problem could either be a structural or an institutional barrier as the housing sector in Sweden is in crisis and the government does not put much effort to solve it. On the other hand, the resettlement programme in Norway can distribute female refugees to small villages wherein the opportunities to find a job, to learn the language and build social networks are very limited (ibid).

3.1.4. Labour market structure

In the context of Sweden, some studies explain that the employment gap between female refugees and native Swedish women is based on two facts. These facts are the high rate of native women's employment in Sweden and the highly competitive labour market ([SCB, 2016](#)). Almost all jobs in Sweden require upper-secondary education, which makes it impossible for illiterate or low-educated female refugees to access the labour market. Similar explanations can be found in Norway, which has also a high employment rate of native women and a competitive labour market (Bratsberg, et al. 2017).

However, not only does the structure of the labour market hinder the access of female refugees, but also the labour market regulations. Examples of these regulations are the relatively high minimum wages and stringent employment protection for permanent jobs. The high costs of hiring and firing will limit the opportunity of female refugees to access the labour market because employers might be reluctant to hire a person, whose skills are yet untested. Therefore, the chances to access the labour market through the low-skilled jobs are much bigger for female refugees since these jobs are often temporary and low-paid (OECD, 2016:36-39). Nevertheless, these jobs are like poisonous flowers, which female refugees can enjoy their smells by getting the first experience in the labour market of the host country. But at the same time, they will kill/limit their opportunities to acquire skills and they may get stuck there for a long time without having a chance for a permanent well-paid contract. Similarly, Bratsberg, et al. (2017) argue that the first job for an immigrant in Norway is often short-lived and not sufficient for long-term labour market participation. Therefore, the authors

emphasise that investments in immigrants' human capital such as education and language skills are essential for a solid foothold in the labour market (Bratsberg, et al. 2017:51).

3.1.5. Discrimination

Discrimination based on ethnicity, race or religion is prohibited in many nation-states, which can limit the discriminatory behaviours in the labour market. However, discrimination is often difficult to identify and quantify ([Arai, Bursell and Nekby, 2015:386](#)). Many experimental studies attempt to examine the discrimination in the labour market by applying for jobs with equal quality CVs that only have a gesture of race or ethnicity. Such studies have continuously found that there is unequal treatment of racial or ethnic minorities (Bursell, 2014). However, the unequal treatment towards the groups can be experienced differently by women and men. In this regard, a study by Arai, et al. (2015) on the '*Employer Stereotypes of Men and Women with Arabic Names*' suggests that Arabic men face stronger discrimination in the labour market than Arabic women. The study shows that there is a callback gap between applicants with Arabic and Swedish names for both men and women (Arai, et al. 2015: 386). Nevertheless, by adding extra merits to the CVs with Arabic names the callback gap disappears for women, but it remains large and significant for men (ibid, 392). The authors conclude, however, with stating that it might be that male refugees face stronger discrimination compared to female. Still, female refugees confront the largest earning inequalities because of the occupational segregation in the labour market (ibid, 400).

In Norway, an experimental study by Midtbøen, et al. (2012) shows that job applicants with Norwegian-Pakistani (and Muslim) sounding names are 25% less likely to be invited for an interview by Norwegian employers than Norwegian sounding names with similar qualifications. The authors conducted some interviews with employers to explain the gap in the callback. Their findings indicate that the unfamiliarity with ethnic minorities and their past experiences, the ethnic stereotypes and the uncertainty are the main causes for the callback gap (Midtbøen, et al., 2012:185). Similar to Sweden, discrimination targets male immigrants more than female immigrants in all age categories as can be observed in the discrimination reporting to the Norwegian Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud (LDO)

([Bangstad, 2016:408](#)). Yet, there are anecdotal reports which show that many Muslim females are denied to work because of their headscarves (*ibid*, 409).

3.2. Individual barriers

The individual barriers mainly include language proficiency, education level, cultural values and lack of professional and social networks. These barriers are addressed in the following four sections.

3.2.1. Language proficiency

A number of studies have shown that immigrants who have a high proficiency in the host country language are more likely to find a job and to get a higher salary. ([Chiswick and Miller 2002](#); [Shields and Price 2002](#)) However, two studies explain that the language proficiency of female refugees is worse than in other immigrant groups (Sales, 2002:467; [Cary-Wood et al., 1995](#)). The authors state that isolation and the lack of access to the labour market are the main reasons for poor language skills. Nevertheless, the literature on the determinants of refugees' language acquisition is less developed, compared to the literature on economic and family immigrants (Tubergen, 2010:516-517). Tubergen's analysis (2010) on the determinants of second language proficiency among refugees in the Netherlands shows that different pre/post-immigration factors can affect the skills in the host country's language. The study shows that people who completed an integration course or received a post-migration education have better language proficiency than others (*ibid*). Therefore, it can be urged that these findings should be taken into account when forming the language courses to consider the different needs of female refugees in learning the language. Moreover, it is important to mention that homesickness, cultural shock, nostalgia, and trauma alongside family obligations can delay the learning of the host country's language and culture ([Landos & Olofsson, 2015](#); Lemaître, 2007).

3.2.2. Education level

Many quantitative studies show that highly educated female refugees have a higher employment rate than that of their low-educated counterparts. For example, the EU LFS (2014) shows that the employment rate of high-educated female refugee in the EU is close to

69%, whereas the employment rate of low-educated female refugees is only 30% and it is the lowest among all immigrant groups (EC & OECD, 2016:21). Moreover, the employment rate of high-educated female refugees is 3% higher than that of equivalent male refugees and 5% higher than that of other highly educated women from non-EU countries (ibid, 20).

Nevertheless, many newly arrived female refugees have low levels of qualifications ([Martín et al., 2016](#)). In 2015, around 52.5% of refugees in Norway have very low educational levels compared to 26% of the whole population. By contrast, only 22.3% of refugees have higher education and almost half of them are women ([NSSB, 2016](#)). In Sweden, data from the OECD Survey of Adult Skills shows that the literacy gap between Swedish native-born and refugees is the largest among OECD countries (OECD, 2016:14, 99). Almost one-third of the refugees have very low educational levels, which is the double of the percentage of the low educated native-born (ibid).

3.2.3. Cultural values

Refugees tend to take the traditional values of their country of origin with them to the host country. These values alongside their religious beliefs shape their gender attitudes in the host society, which can negatively affect women's employability (Rubin et al. 2008). In this regard, Koopmans (2016) argues that the low employment rate of Muslim immigrant women compared to that of other immigrants can be explained as a result of the unequal gender attitudes of this ethnic group (Koopmans, 2016:199).

Nevertheless, a study by Norris & Inglehart (2012) shows that Muslim migrants gradually absorb the values of the host country. The authors compare the Muslim immigrants' attitudes towards gender equality and sexual liberalisation to native people in the host country and to people from their origin country. Their findings suggest that Muslim immigrants have less conservative attitudes towards gender equality and sex liberalisation compared to their counterparts in their country of origin. However, they are still more conservative if their attitudes are compared to natives' attitudes in the host country. Therefore, the authors conclude that living within an Islamic or Western society affects the people's attitudes towards gender equality and sex liberalisation more than the people's religious beliefs, education level, age, gender and income ([Norris, Inglehart, 2012:231](#)).

3.2.4. Lack of professional and social networks

A growing research shows that professional and social networks play a significant role in facilitating the access of immigrants to the labour market (Åslund, Forslund and Liljeberg, 2017:149). A report by Hensvik and Skans (2013) shows that 60% to 70% of employers hire employees through informal recruitment avenues in Sweden. Similar findings in Norway were presented in a study by Hagtvet (2005), which demonstrates that only 40% of all available jobs (in both public and private sectors) were formally published before hiring a person (OECD, 2009:63).

3.3. Research gaps and the study's contribution to the field

The taken notes on the previous research can be summarised as follows: First, the research on labour market integration of female refugees often uses quantitative data and experimental methods to examine the effects of different barriers on the female refugees' employability. Second, there is the tendency to focus on structural, institutional and individual barriers that hinder the access of female refugees into the labour market. The qualitative research that explains these barriers has largely been based on the policy-makers' and academics' point of view. By contrast, the empirical research on the individual experiences of these women in accessing the labour market is very limited in spite of its significance. Female refugees are the ones who do not work and improving their employment rate first starts with hearing about their experiences in the labour market. When addressing the low participation of female refugees in the labour market, it is essential to understand their individual experiences in searching for jobs and working in the host country. These experiences give hints to what is effective and ineffective in the integration policies and programmes. Hence, it can be argued that these experiences will help in identifying the main causes of the problem and where the dysfunction lies.

Third, prior comparative studies have a general approach in comparing the outcomes of refugees to other groups of the population across a wide range of countries. This comparison does not provide a deep understanding of the situation in a specific country. More specifically, if two countries are similar in many economic, political and social characteristics, why is it that they have different labour market outcomes of female refugees? Exploring the

‘why’ here would help with identifying the barriers that female refugees face and pinpointing best practices that could be good patterns to learn from. In this regard, the literature in both Sweden and Norway address to a large extent similar obstacles that female refugees can face in accessing the labour market. Thus, it is not possible to predict, based on this literature, any differences in female refugees’ experiences in the Swedish and Norwegian labour markets. That implies that the literature, which presents mainly the academics’ and policy-makers’ perspective does not provide an explanation for why female refugees in Norway have a better labour market outcomes. Therefore, it will be interesting to look at the problem from a different angle by hearing the voices of female refugees to explore whether these obstacles are experienced differently by them in Sweden and Norway.

Based on the above, the contribution of this study can be seen through providing a comprehensive overview of the female refugees’ situation in the Swedish and Norwegian labour markets. It also provides different narratives of newly arrived female refugees in Sweden and Norway. Besides that, it presents some institutional perspectives from some civil servants and civil society organisations. Simply stated, the gap that the study wishes to fill is to combine the individual experiences of female refugees with the insights of some stakeholders alongside analysing the introduction programmes in Sweden and Norway. The outcome of this combination can portray the differences in the obstacles that female refugees confront in both countries, which could be an explanation for the differences in their employment rates. Furthermore, the study will highlight some of the best practices to increase the labour market participation of female refugees.

4. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework is based, on the one hand, on theories that explain the integration model in each country, which are assimilation and multiculturalism. On the other hand, it is based on the intersectionality theory, which explains the multiple-discrimination that a person can experience. The selected three theories are essential to explore the experiences of female refugees in the labour market and they are explained below.

4.1. Assimilation and multiculturalism

The socio-economic inclusion of female refugees is shaped by the integration model that is adopted by the host country. Scholars distinguish between multiculturalism and assimilation as the main models of immigrant integration. Assimilation, on the one hand, means that the process through which a migrant absorb completely the host country's culture and identity (Joppke, 2007). Assimilation can occur spontaneously or forcibly when a country forces a migrant to erase their original culture, language and religion in order to replace them with the host country's culture and identity. This definition was narrowed down by Brubaker (2001) to include only the introduction programmes that make non-EU immigrants become more similar to the native population. In other words, if a refugee speaks the host country's language and has similar qualifications to that of natives, s/he will have equal opportunities to those of natives.

According to this theory, the longer an immigrant lives in the host country the more similar s/he becomes to native. Therefore, investing in the language skills and social inclusion of refugees could be the most effective approach to integrate them and make them active economically. That is to say, by overcoming the individual barriers such as lack of language skills, education level, social networks and cultural values, refugees will have similar employment outcomes to those of natives. Here, it can be argued that learning a language or a culture will not give the immigrant the same opportunities as a native person has. Rather, assimilation leads to alleged similarity, which covers underneath more obligations on the immigrants without tackling the discrimination that immigrants can face. Moreover, the theory does not take into account all institutional and structural barriers that refugees can face

in the labour market. Its main focus is to make immigrants on the surface look similar to natives without giving them de facto similar opportunities.

The concept of *multiculturalism*, on the other hand, became popular in Europe in the 1980s but was only adopted half-heartedly. Multiculturalism is based on the recognition of the ethnic and cultural diversity of refugees and that requires tackling all direct and indirect discrimination in the labour market. Multicultural theorists argue that migrants should have the same rights and obligations of citizens in their host country and maintain at the same time their cultural identities and beliefs ([Inglehart & Norris, 2009:3](#)). The main focus of this theory is to tackle the institutional and structural barriers to ensure equal access to the labour market to all population regardless their beliefs and ethics. The theory magnifies the rights of immigrants to remain their identities, but it underestimates how this will affect their integration. The individual barriers, such as cultural values, social networks, language skills and education level will become even worse if the multicultural approach was implemented full-heartedly. Multiculturalism will create a society within a society, and women will be even more distance from the labour market and society if they have a stronger identity. These negative aspects of multicultural theory made many European countries such as the Netherlands, Austria, France and the United Kingdom, shift their immigrant integration approaches from multiculturalism to assimilation based (Joppke, 2007; Koopmans 2003).

In this context, Koopmans (2010) blames the welfare state and multicultural policies for the poor socio-economic integration of immigrants. (Koopmans, 2010:20) The author argues that the Netherlands, Sweden and Belgium are facing disappointing integration outcomes because of multicultural policies. In all these three countries, immigrants have low employment rates, cause high levels of crimes and they are strongly segregated. In contrast, Germany, Austria and the United Kingdom have achieved better outcomes of integration policies since these countries do not grant access to equal rights for immigrants and the welfare system is not generous as much as a country like Sweden (ibid, 21-20).

Nevertheless, in spite of the claims that countries are shifting their policies toward assimilation, the [Multiculturalism Policy Index](#)⁶ shows that multiculturalism has, in fact,

⁶ Multiculturalism Policy Index monitors the policies evolution in 21 Western countries to estimate the development of multiculturalism.

strengthened rather than weakened in almost all countries during the last thirty years. The index shows that Sweden has a 'strong' multiculturalism model and it scores 7.0 points on the Multiculturalism Policy Index ([Tolley, E., 2016:99-103](#)). On the other hand, Norway scores 3.5, which is relatively low, but it has increased from 0 point in the 1980s to reach this score in 2010 (*ibid*, 83-86).

When it comes to the literature on the integration model, it can be observed that the Swedish integration approach has characterised as multiculturalism model (Joppke, 2007; Brochmann, Hagelund, 2011:13). Sweden does not put a lot of demands on refugees in order to obtain the citizenship and at the same time, it assures them generous access to the welfare benefits. Norway, on the other hand, has been positioned somewhere between the multicultural Sweden and the restrictive Denmark. Norway poses some requirements on refugees in order to obtain the permanent residence permit and citizenship as well as to have access to the welfare benefits (Brochmann, Hagelund, 2011:13). However, Norway is probably less presented in the international literature on the integration approach among other Nordic countries because of its position outside of the EU (*ibid*).

Nonetheless, it is important to state that multiculturalism and assimilation in this thesis mean the policy approach to manage the socio-economic integration of refugees. The concepts do not mean the spontaneous heterogeneity as a consequence of immigration. Therefore, operationalising these two theories will be mainly done by analysing the introduction programmes in Sweden and Norway, which explains the mechanism through which each country aims to integrate its refugees. The introduction programme in Sweden is regulated by the Establishment Reform ([SFS nr. 2010:197](#)), whereas it is regulated by the Introductory Act ([2005 No. 228](#)) in Norway. In addition, two other documents, issued by the OECD, will serve as supplementary materials. These documents are rich sources to describe the integration models and the situation of refugees in each country in detail. By analysing these documents, it will be possible to compare the rights and obligations that refugees have according to each law. Hence, it would be possible to explore whether assimilation is more visible in the introduction programme in Norway than in Sweden. Thereafter, it can be assumed that assimilation can lead to a higher employment rate of female refugees and it affects their individual experiences. Nevertheless, it seems that it is well established in the

previous research that Sweden has a more multicultural approach compared to Norway and identifying that in this study will not be a discovery. Still, the aim of using these theories and analysing the selected documents is to better understand the regulations and identify how these multicultural and assimilation models are perceived by female refugees.

4.2. Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a sociological theory to promote social justice. It is one of the most important contributions of feminist theorists (Shields, 2008:301). The term intersectionality came to light in the early of the 1970s, when the feminist scholars addressed the special experiences of women. Subsequently, the question of “Which women’s experience?” was raised by feminists of colour. They argued that the experience of a black woman cannot be solely understood in terms of being black or of being a woman. Rather, both categories interact and can aggregate their impacts on the black woman’s experience (ibid, 303). From that time onwards, the theory has evolved to explain all the oppressions and opportunities that a person experiences as a result of overlapping two or more of social categories ([Verloo, 2006](#)). That is to say, each social category puts a person in either an oppressed or a privileged position and when different categories interact together, they will create multiple oppressions or opportunities for this person (Zinn and Dill, 1996). Put differently, the interaction between gender, class, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity and health will have multiple effects on a person. S/he may, however, be disadvantaged relative to be categorised in one group, but at the same time, s/he may be advantaged relative to another group. For example, a Christian female refugee may be disadvantaged because of being a woman and being a refugee, but she enjoys religion privilege if we compare her to a Muslim female refugee. However, these categories have different effects over time and according to the changing social and political discourse ([Vervliet et al. 2013:3](#)).

The intersectional theory is used in this study as the interpretive framework to understand the challenges that are faced by female refugees in Sweden and Norway. Female refugees can be defined by two main social categories: woman and refugee. Adding to that, they might be also defined as coloured, Muslim, mother, lesbian, low/high educated, disabled or old. By looking through the lens of intersectionality, we can better acknowledge the

differences among the interviewed women to understand the oppression and empowerment that they have experienced or that they are concerned about.

Nevertheless, some previous studies show that male refugees can experience discrimination more than female refugees (Bangstad, 2016; Arai, et al. 2015). Such findings might be seen as a contradiction to the intersectionality, which considers being a woman and being a refugee will cause multiple discrimination. Therefore, it would be interesting to hear about the individual experiences of female refugees to estimate whether their gender and nationality together make them even more disadvantageous.

In addition, it is important to state that the intersectional theory aims to achieve social justice and tackles all kinds of discrimination. Thus, using all the three mentioned theories as a theoretical framework is essential to better understand the experiences of female refugees since each of these theories provides explanations to certain obstacles in the labour market.

5. Research design and methodology

Simply stated, the study examines whether the barriers that female refugees face in accessing the labour market in Sweden are similar to those their counterparts confront in Norway. Accordingly, a comparative multiple-case study approach is used to better understand the differences and similarities between female refugees' experiences in the Swedish and Norwegian labour markets. (Bryman, 2012:72-74)

The study has an abductive approach, which is described by many researchers as 'the systematised creativity' to achieve a new knowledge (Spens, 2005; Taylor et al., 2002). The abductive approach is suitable to use when there are many possible explanations for a phenomenon since this approach helps to decide which possible explanations to consider most. In the context of the study, the low employment rates of female refugees might be caused by one (or more) of the barriers that the previous research addresses, such as language proficiency, lack of qualifications, discrimination, etc. All these explanations will be tested throughout the interviews with female refugees and the most likely explanation (s) will be identified.

The methodological approach consists of multiple qualitative methods, which are comparative textual analysis, semi-structured interviews with female refugees, and informant interviews. The methods were utilised sequentially to provide useful data at each stage of the research and to avoid complex and contradictory data during the collection and analysis. In other words, after collecting data through the comparative textual analysis, the interviews with refugee women were carried out. Thereafter, the informant interviews were conducted. However, in case any contradiction in the collected data appears through the process of collecting and analysing, the information was revised again to check where the defect lies and to discard the suspect data.

This chapter motivates the study's cases and methods. Thereafter, it turns to the presentation of the data collection and the analysis techniques. The last two sections are devoted to discussing the quality of the research methodology and the study's delimitations.

5.1. Case selection

The employment rates of female refugees vary sharply across the EU Member States. According to the EU LFS (2014), their employment rate is only 48.1% in Germany, whereas it reaches 53.5% in Sweden. Still, Sweden has a considerable gender employment gap between female and male refugees, which is approximately 8%. Moreover, female refugees' employment rate lags significantly behind the native-born and non-refugee migrant women. In other words, Sweden has not yet succeeded in decreasing the employment gap between female refugees and other immigrant groups. In contrast, Norway, Sweden's neighbouring country, has the second highest employment rate of female refugees in Europe, which is 57.9%. This percentage is still relatively low, but it is higher than any percentage in other EU's countries. It is moreover the second highest percentage in Europe after Switzerland, where their employment reaches (73.1%) (EC & OECD, 2016:20). There is, however, a gender employment gap between female and male refugees in Switzerland, where the employment rate of male refugees reaches (84.5%). Contrary to that, the employment rate of female refugees in Norway is slightly higher than that of male refugees, which is only (55.4%) (See table 2).

Table 2: Employment rate of first generation immigrants by reason for migration and sex in Sweden and Norway in 2014

GEO/REASON	Native-born	Family reasons	Education reasons	International protection or asylum	Total
Sweden (male)	78.50	67.5	86.1	61.4	68.9
Sweden (female)	74.80	61.6	66.5	53.5	61.9
Norway (male)	77.40	72.6	62.7	55.4	72.1
Norway (female)	76.80	60.8	77.7	57.9	65.7

Source: Eurostat and OECD, Own calculations based on EU LFS 2014 AHM.
(See: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/lfs/data/database>)

Focusing on Sweden, on the one hand, is based on two factors. First, as the thesis is to obtain a degree in European Studies, it would be too big to analyse in-depth the participation of female refugees in the labour markets in all EU Member States in just one paper. Therefore, it is fair and interesting to focus on Sweden as the country that has accepted more asylum seekers per capita than any other Member States in 2015. (OECD, 2016) Secondly, Sweden is classified as one of the best countries in both integration policies and gender equality ([MIPEX, 2015](#)). Therefore, it would be interesting to look at this well-organised system, which deals with a large number of female refugees compared it to other Member States.

On the other hand, in Norway, the refugee integration is a recent issue compared to many other Western European countries. Still, Norway has achieved comparable and even better results on refugee integration than those better-known immigration countries. Norway is similar to Sweden in many political, economic and social aspects. Both countries are democratic countries with high GDP per capita and they have high and almost the same employment rate for men (68.1% in Sweden and 68.4% in Norway) and women (60.8% in Sweden and 61.1% in Norway). The labour markets of both countries are relatively stable and the labour force of women to the total population is also very close (in Sweden 57.1%, whereas it is 56.1% in Norway). The share of the working-age population to the total population is approximately the same (62.8% in Sweden and 65.7% in Norway) and the share of immigrants to the population in those countries is relatively high ([World Bank data set, 2017](#)). However, the number of refugees in Sweden is higher than in Norway. While 4.1% of the Norwegian population has a refugee background ([SSB, 2017](#)), the refugees made up 7% of the Swedish population (ECDO, 2016:34). Nonetheless, accepting a higher number of refugees in Sweden does not justify the gender employment gap among refugees in Sweden compared to the situation of their counterparts in Norway.

Finally and most importantly, both countries belong to the Nordic region, which is characterised by a universal access to generous welfare benefits and a high degree of public involvement. Simply put, the countries combine economic success and high levels of social justice as well as a high number of refugees, which has drawn considerable interest to identify the differences in the female refugees' experiences in those countries. Adding to that, both

countries have transparent and open data on female refugees, which is not always the case in other European countries.

Nevertheless, what on the surface seems to be similar integration programmes and approaches may, however, be implemented differently. These differences can be assumed because of the differences in the employment rates of refugees in these two countries. In other words, do female refugees in Norway have more positive experiences than their counterparts in Sweden? By exploring that, it can be established a basis for evaluating the effects of differing introduction programmes and integration approaches in those countries and how that has led to different labour market outcomes of female refugees. Particularly, if we consider that the biggest groups of refugees in Sweden and Norway share to a large extent similar backgrounds. According to the [SSCB \(2015\)](#) in Sweden, the three biggest groups of refugees are people from Iraq, Syria and Iran, whereas these groups are Somalians, Iraqis and Iranians in Norway. ([NSSB, 2016](#)) Therefore, it can be argued that the country of origin and cultural values is not a sufficient explanation for the differences in the employment rates. Rather, the differences could be based on either providing better service for those women to access the labour market or on forcing them to work in order to be eligible to certain rights, such as the eligibility to obtain a permanent residence permit and citizenship.

5.2. Qualitative methods

The following sections explain the study's methods and how the collected data were analysed. They also provide information regarding the selection of interviewees and the interview guides.

5.2.1. Comparative textual analysis

The comparative textual analysis was conducted as a first step of the analysis to identify any differences and similarities between the introduction programmes in Sweden and Norway. Doing that helped in framing some assumptions about the women's experiences, which were the bases in phrasing the interview questions.

The comparative textual analysis aims to analyse, interpret and compare the content of text data by classifying these data into categories, which are possible to compare. The selected materials to compare were mainly the introduction programmes in Sweden and

Norway. In Sweden, the integration programme is regulated by the [Establishment Reform \(2010:197\)](#), whereas in Norway it is regulated by the [Introductory Act \(2005:228\)](#). Although the laws were issued in different countries and in a different period of time, they are comparable to a large extent for two reasons. First, they have the same purposes, which are to increase the possibility of newly arrived refugees to participate in working and social life and to increase their financial independence. Second, these laws include the same components to integrate refugees, which are language and social trainings and other activities to prepare participants to access the labour market. These laws were used as the main sources to evaluate the integration approaches in Sweden and Norway because they are the legal framework to integrate refugees and any violation of these laws might impose sanctions on the offender. Moreover, as the aim of these programmes is to facilitate the access of newly arrived refugees to the labour market, then it is important to evaluate to what extent this aim is fulfilled by hearing the opinions of female refugee on the quality of these programmes.

Nevertheless, to ensure a better understanding of the integration approaches in each country, two documents are used as supplementary sources. These documents are: *Jobs for immigrants: the integration of immigrants in Norway (2009)* & *Working Together: Skills and Labour Market Integration of Immigrants and their Children in Sweden (2016)*. The documents are issued in a different period of time but they are comparable to some extent since they are both issued by the OECD.

To analyse and compare the laws on the introduction programme, the following steps were used. The first step was to do initial coding, which includes all main components of each introduction programme, such as the objectives, the responsible authorities for the implementation, the target group, the obligations and rights, the sanctions in case of violation and the introduction benefit. Other formulations that were less important to compare or they were too general were excluded such as defining the term refugee, when the law enters into force, any amendments, professional secrecy, etc. Having created a scheme of initial codes, it was possible to identify any similarities and differences between the laws. Thereafter, the codes were categorised into different themes in line with the assimilation and multiculturalism theories by identifying which law imposes more obligations on the programme participants. However, since the introduction programmes are not considered as sufficient materials to

characterise the country's integration model, other data were extracted in the same process from the other supplementary documents. For example, information about obtaining a permanent residence permit and the citizenship (The table of coding scheme is presented in the results' chapter).

5.2.2. Semi-structured interview method

After conducting the comparative textual analysis, the interviews with female refugees took place. The first objective of the interviews was to identify existing and potential barriers to labour market integration of female refugees from interviewees' perspectives. The second objective was to find solutions to overcome these barriers based on their opinions. The interviews were semi-structured and the questions were simple, direct and open-ended to encourage interviewees to share their experiences (Tracy, 2012: 139). The advantage of this technique was to hear the experiences of female refugees since they are the ones who struggle in accessing the labour market. In addition, many scholars consider interviewing as a valuable method to gather information and evaluate opinions from minority groups, particularly women. This method gives women more space to express themselves and tell their stories ([McCall, 2005](#); Anderson & Jack, 1991).

Listening is central to qualitative interviewing, but motivating interviewee to speak when they are reluctant is much more important. Not all women were on the same level of openness to share their stories. To solve that, telling the interviewer own story helped in making them more comfortable to talk. Nonetheless, the talk of the interviewer was as much as necessary and non-verbal encouragements (such as head nods, pauses, and additional open-ended questions) were used to stimulate interviewee to provide more narrative (Muylaert et al., 2014:184).

Throughout the interview sessions, information given by interviewees was tape-recorded and was then transcribed into English. However, the interviews were not videotaped because that might distract the interviewees from providing detailed information. Before conducting the interviews, an interview guide was prepared, alongside that additional questions were also asked during the interviews. The questions of the interview guide were asked to friends before posing them to interviewees to improve their clarity and refinement

(Peabody et al., 1990). The target number of interviews was as much as possible. Still, as it is time-consuming to perform a lot of interviews, the number of interviews was 15 interviews per country/30 interviews in total. The interviews took place over a four-month period beginning in February 2017 and their length ranged from 20 to 50 minutes.

5.2.2.1. Selection of interviewees

The study targets female refugees who have not been living in the host country for longer than 5 years and regardless their education level or backgrounds. Focusing on newly arrived female refugees is based on the significant increase in the number of female refugees over the last five years. Furthermore, their experiences can be current material to assess the introduction programmes as well as estimating the opportunities and challenges they can face from their perspective. Especially, if we consider the growing support for anti-migrant political parties, the rise of Islamophobia and terrorism in Europe, and the tightening of the migration policies. Therefore, it can be argued that these current circumstances in Europe make the previous observations about the labour market integration of female refugees no longer be relevant.

The interviewees were chosen by snowball sampling. A few respondents refer to other potential respondents and that has led to interviewing different women from different backgrounds and age groups. Using a snowball sampling might be considered as a bias of selection of respondents. Still, it was used as a method to reach respondents because it was difficult to obtain a sample without asking a few respondents for others. Moreover, using random sampling could have led to unrepresentative sample since it is down to chance. Therefore, it was more efficient to use the snowball sampling and in order to limit its bias, a reasonable number of interviews were carried out to produce a sample with representatives for age, nationality, education level, etc. (Atkinson and Flint, 2001). However, the selection of interviewees was based on fulfilling the following criteria: to be over 18 years of age and not above 46; to be a refugee or married to a person who has been granted the residence permit on humanitarian grounds; to not have been living in the host country for more than five years.

The majority of the interviews were conducted in person at language schools where it was possible to meet women from different backgrounds and age groups. Nevertheless,

some interviews were conducted on Skype, particularly with interviewees in Norway. Geographically, most of the interviews were conducted with women who are settled in Gothenburg and Oslo as those cities have a substantial number of newly arrived refugees. Other interviews were conducted in smaller cities to examine the differences in female refugees' experiences not only among the countries but also within each country.

5.2.2.2. Interview guide for female refugees' interviews

The interview guide was designed based on the previous research, which explains the main obstacles that female refugees face in accessing the labour market. The first part of the interview focuses on the interviewee's background, such as country of origin, pre-immigration qualifications, age, family structure and year of arrival in the host country. The second part focuses on the challenges and opportunities in finding a job or pursuing further education in the host country as well as on evaluating the efficiency of the introduction programmes for interviewees' future career. Other questions were raised about sharing household chores to examine the impact of the cultural values on their labour market integration. In addition, interviewees were asked about their experiences with different integration actors such as the Public Employment Service (PES), language schools, and municipalities.

The first draft of the interview guide was formed in English. However, since English is a second language for all interviewees, the English version was translated into Arabic and Swedish (see Appendix 2: the interview guide). Using the Arabic language helped in providing data that are well-observed by the interviewer since knowing how words are used and the meanings of specific terms in the local vernacular are crucial for qualitative research. Yet, some researchers argue that when the respondents and the interviewer speak the same non-English native language during the interview and this non-English data will be used in an English publication, meaning may get lost in the translation process. To avoid such potential limitations in the analysis, the interviewer stuck to English as much as possible, particularly, when taking notes during the interviews. However, with some interviewees who could not express their thoughts neither in English nor in Arabic, Swedish was used. This strategy has

increased response rate and involved different women from different countries of origin, which provided good empirical material for the intersectional approach.

5.2.2.3. Analysis techniques for female refugees' interviews

After transcription, the first step in the analysis was to separate the indexed from the non-indexed data. All demographic data (Nationality, age, civil status, the number of children, education level, work experience, year of arrival, type of residence permit) were organised in a table to estimate how these elements affect the individual experiences of the interviewed women in the labour market. The second step was a primarily coding in terms of question-reply. The third step was to extract three themes that are essential to answer the research questions. The first theme was the institutional and structural barriers that women face in accessing the labour market, whereas the second theme was the individual barriers. The third theme was the solutions that women addressed in order to speed up their access to the labour market.

Thereafter, these themes were broken down into sub-themes. The institutional and structural barriers were divided into five sub-themes, which are: the quality of the introduction programmes, discrimination, validation of foreign credentials, housing instability and settlement programme and generous welfare system. The individual barriers, on the other hand, were divided into four sub-themes. These sub-themes are: language skills, social networks, cultural values and education level. This division was based on the literature review, intersectional theory, the research questions, and the interviewees' responses. The third theme 'solutions' was divided regarding the most frequently mentioned topics by female refugees. The sub-themes are: enhancing the effectiveness of introduction programme, validation of foreign credentials, settlement programme and establishing footholds into the labour market.

The fifth step was to use a clustering technique to gather the responses in categories according to their similarities. For example, for the first theme, where interviewees talked about the institutional and structural barriers, the responses were organised according to the frequency of mentioning each barrier. The final step of the analysis was to compare the results from Norway to the results from Sweden to identify the similarities and differences in the

female refugees' experiences in those two countries. The analysis was conducted by the assistance of NVivo, which is a software package to assist in analysing qualitative data.

5.2.3. Informant interview method

Interviews with civil servants and civil society organisations were conducted in Sweden and Norway. The aim of interviewing these actors was to hear from experts what the main obstacles are that they face in integrating female refugees into the labour market. The informant interviews are rich sources of information. Nevertheless, conducting effective informant interviews poses set of challenges. For example, the informants are experts in selecting the appropriate narratives to tell and they would not reveal any issues that could harm their organisations. Therefore, the interviewer had to assess the credibility of the provided information. In this regard, it was considered that interviewees would not give false or misleading information. Rather, if they did not wish to answer a question, they could express that directly (Berry, J. M., 2002).

The informant interviews were conducted after carrying out the narrative interviews with female refugees. This technique provided the interviewer with as much information as possible about the topic and different actor's roles. The aim of that was to give the interviewer credibility and to not waste the interviewees' time (Hochschild JL. 2009:125). The interviews were semi-structured to allow respondents to elaborate on their answers and provide rich detailed information. At the same time, it provides some structure to make the interviews' data more comparable (Bryman, 2012).

Data from the interviews with informants were recorded using hand-written notes because some of the respondents felt uncomfortable with tape-recording. The handwritten notes led to losing some data regardless of the speed in writing the responses. Nevertheless, to avoid missing data as much as possible, processing the data took place straight away after each interview while the received information was still fresh. Also, it was considered that it is time-consuming to transcribe all the tape-recorded interviews which were held for an average 40 minutes. A 40-minute interview took on average four hours to transcribe. Furthermore, the interviews could have been weaker if they have been recorded because of the interviewee's discretion and uncomfortableness.

5.2.3.1. Selection of the informants

In Norway, interviews with the Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi) and the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service (NAV) were conducted. Besides that, Norsk Folkehjelp (NGO) contributed to the study by providing valuable information via email. In Sweden, an interview with the Kvinnocenter (civil society organisation) was conducted. Another interview was carried out with the Swedish Public Employment Service (SPES)⁷. The selection of the respondents was based on the central role that they play in integrating refugees. Particularly, the PESs as they are the backbones in implementing the introduction programmes in both countries. On the other hand, IMDI is the driving force of refugee integration, it implements the government policy and works together with migration authority, municipalities, government agencies and private sector to integrate refugees.

Additionally, interviewing civil society organisations was based on the fact that they are engaged in different programmes and projects to target female refugees. Their long experience on female refugees' integration makes them experts to identify the best mechanisms to bring more female refugees to the labour market. However, the study excludes employers as potential interviews because of two main reasons. First, the assumption that not all employees will agree that there are discriminatory behaviours in the labour market. Rather, they will associate the low employment rates of female refugees to the unfamiliarity with their qualifications or the poor language skills. Secondly, as it is stated in the previous research chapter, many experimental and qualitative studies have targeted employers, therefore, interviewing employers will not be an addition to the previous research. (See: Midtbøen, et al. (2012), [Lundborg, P. & Skedinger, P. \(2014\)](#)) Furthermore, the number of informant interviews was limited to the time scope of the study. In other words, interviewing larger numbers of stakeholders would have revealed further relevant information to the study. However, the interviewed organisations provided the needed data to produce answers to the research questions.

⁷ The abbreviation PES is used to refer to both the SPES and NAV.

5.2.3.2. Interview guide for informant interviews

The interview guide consists of five questions, which focus on the following themes. First, the challenges that female refugees can face in entering the labour market. The second theme was about the introduction programmes and projects that target female refugees to evaluate to what extent the integration policy is a gender-sensitive policy. Thereafter, a question was raised about the cooperation between different stakeholders to integrate refugees. Lastly, a question was asked about the mechanisms that can improve the female refugees' participation in the labour market according to the interviewee's experience. The languages used in the interviews were Swedish in Sweden and English in Norway. The first draft of the interview guide was formed in English and then translated to Swedish (See Appendix 3).

5.2.3.3. Analysis techniques for informant interviews

The informant interviews were used to provide a broader understanding of the problem and to assess the applicability of the suggested solutions by female refugees. The initial coding of the data was done according to the interview questions and based on the type of the organisation. Thereafter, two themes were identified based on the aim of this study. These themes are the barriers that hinder the access of female refugees into the labour market and the best mechanisms to bring more female refugees to the labour market.

5.3. The quality of the research methods

Using any research method has its strengths and weaknesses, which may raise concerns about the quality of the research. Therefore, and in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the study, four criteria were considered throughout performing this study. These criteria are: credibility; reliability; transferability and confirmability (Shenton, A. 2004:63).

5.3.1. Credibility

Credibility in the qualitative research is to evaluate how appropriate the used measuring techniques are to measure what is actually intended to be measured in the study (Golafshani, 2003:599). To ensure the credibility of the study, two techniques were employed, which are: the ethical considerations and the iterative questions (Shenton, A. 2004:64). Regarding the ethical considerations, all respondents were informed about the criteria that they were selected

for and why their inputs are significant to the research. They were also informed about the purpose of the study and the interview process before conducted the interviews. Their participation was on a voluntary basis and they were told that the researcher has an objective position and there are no right or wrong answers to the questions. Most importantly, the interviewees were given an appropriate degree of confidentiality and it was clear to them that any information obtained from them will be protected and used only for academic purposes. Assuring confidentiality makes the respondents more comfortable to reveal information that would otherwise not have been revealed (Bryman 2008:113). The second technique to ensure validity was to use iterative questions by rephrasing some of the interviews questions to uncover any misleading or false information and reveal further clarifications (Shenton, A. 2004:64).

5.3.2. Reliability

Reliability is the probability of getting the same results if the same study were to be repeated, in the same context, by using the same measuring techniques and interviewing the same respondents (Tracy, 2013:228). However, this is difficult to achieve in the qualitative research because of the nature of the phenomena scrutinised qualitatively (Marshall and Rossman, 2011). Yeung (1995:318) argues that to improve the validity and reliability of the research, it would be useful to use triangulation technique, which involves using multi-methods strategy to collect the data. Using different methods in one study reduces the limitations of each method and maximises their benefits (ibid, 319). Therefore, this study used a wide range of interviewees and a range of documents to collect the data. In addition, reporting in detail the processes within which the study was performed allows a future researcher to repeat the same study and achieve similar findings.

5.3.3. Transferability

Transferability means to provide a detailed description of the fieldwork to give a room for the reader to decide whether the prevailed settings are similar to another work and the findings can justifiably be applied to this work. (Shenton, A. 2004:69) In this regard, sufficient information was provided regarding the respondents and their backgrounds to allow the reader

to decide whether the provided information and findings can be applied to other settings and other groups of female refugees.

5.3.4. Confirmability

Confirmability means that the findings emerge from the data and not from the researcher's preferences. Confirmability is, however, difficult to be assured as long as the research design and data selection are the researcher's work (Shenton, 2004:72). Again, using triangulation can improve the research objectivity and reduce the researcher's bias (ibid). In this vein, the study's findings were drawn in line with the laws that regulate the introduction programmes in each country. That means the researcher's bias is limited to these official documents. Another way to ensure the objectivity was to motivate the selection of research design, methods and techniques to answer the research questions (ibid). In this regard, the motivations for selecting an approach where other approaches could have been possible were explained. In other words, interviewing female refugees is the only appropriate method to report their experiences in the labour market. Alongside female refugees interviews, the textual analysis and informant interviews serve as complementary methods to gain a full picture, which covers the different angles of the problem. In addition, explaining the methodological approach in-depth gives the reader the room to evaluate how far the results are emerging from the collected data.

5.4. The study's delimitations

As it is stated before, the driving force of this work is the differences in the employment rates of female refugees in Sweden and Norway. The study relies on data that was presented by the EU LFS in 2014. This data shows the differences in the employment rates of female refugees in both countries. Nevertheless, the countries' national data present different portrayals of refugees' employment. These differences between the national data and the EU LFS data can be explained by many factors. Such as, many refugees work in non-registered jobs (e.g., black market, informal employment) compared to natives. However, it is difficult to identify the reasons for the difference in the national and international data (OECD, 2009:15). It is therefore noteworthy to mention the numbers according to the national data even though they

were not used as a ground for this research. The Norwegian data from 2015, shows that the employment rate of female refugees is only 44.2%, which is 5.7% lower than that of male refugees (49.9%) (Olsen, 2017:21). Still, the gender gap for refugees is smaller than the gap between all female and male immigrants (ibid). Moreover, for refugees who have been living in Norway for 15 years or more, the employment rate of female refugees is similar to that of male refugees (55%) (ibid). By contrast, there is a 5% gender employment gap among refugees after living in Sweden for 20 years or more. However, the employment rate, according to the Swedish national statistics, was 50.3% for female refugees 56.3% for male refugees in 2015 (SCB, 2017). These differences in employment rates were the main concerns when conducting the research. Nonetheless, since the data do not cover the same period, it was, therefore, more convenient to rely on the EU LFS data, which was collected in the same period and on the same basis in both countries.

6. Results

This chapter provides a concise summary of the introduction programmes in Sweden and Norway in the first section. This is followed by a presentation of the female refugee interviews' results in section two. The third section explains the results of the informant interviews.

6.1. The comparative textual analysis

The introduction programmes in both countries have the same aim, which is to prepare the refugees to access the labour market by providing them with language courses and other activities that are important for the labour market (§1).

In Sweden, the Establishment Reform (2010:197) states that all newly arrived refugees and their families who are between 20-64 years of age have *the right* to participate in a two-year introduction programme. In addition, newly arrived refugees who are above 18 can be enrolled in this programme if they came to Sweden without their parents (2010:197, §2). The PES enrolls a refugee in the introduction programme within a year since s/he is settled in the municipality (§6). Following the registrations, a PES caseworker with the programme participant build an individual plan according to the participant's qualifications and needs to access the labour market. The individual plan must be for full-time activities and it may be extended beyond the two-year period, but not for more than eight months (§8).

The introduction programme includes language and social training alongside other activities to prepare participants for work. The programme is organised by the PES with the coordination with municipalities, which are responsible for providing the language and social training (§7). Participants in the introduction programme are entitled to the introduction benefit and other benefits as long as they attend all full-time activities (§15). However, not participating in the programme activities will not lead to revocation of the residence permit (Riksrevisionen, 2015:36).

Similarly, in Norway, refugees and their families who hold a residence permit and are between 18 and 55 years of age have *the right and obligation* to participate in a two-year introduction programme (Introductory Act, 2005:228, §2,5). Unlike in Sweden, completing the introduction activities or demonstrating equivalent language skills is a requirement for

obtaining a permanent residence permit and the Norwegian citizenship. The municipalities have the obligation to enrol refugees in the introduction programmes *as soon as possible and within three months of settling a refugee in a municipality or after the refugee requests a participation in the programme*. Moreover, the municipalities are obliged to provide the language and social training not only for resident refugees in the municipality, but also for asylum seekers who are temporarily living at reception centres in that municipality (§17,§18).

Likewise in Sweden, each participant has an individual plan based on her/his qualifications and needs to access the labour market. Also, the introduction programme includes language and social training for a total of 300 hours alongside other activities to prepare the participant for work (§4,6). Participants in the introduction programme are entitled to the introduction benefit as long as s/he attends all full-time activities. Any absence without permission causes a reduction in the benefit (§10). Alongside that, the Introductory Act includes other rules on the procedures of payment the benefit and the implications of providing incorrect information (§13, §14, §15, §16). Moreover, the law states that in principal teachers who provide the training to refugees should have professional and educational qualifications (§19).

Nevertheless, the differences in the outcomes of the introduction programmes can be clearly seen in the following year of the programme. In 2015, only 5% of female refugees were in unsubsidised regular employment and a further 10% of those women were employed in subsidised employment after the programme in Sweden (OECD, 2016: 21). Contrary to that in Norway, half of the female refugees who participated in the introduction programme are working or studying one year after the programme ([NSSB:2016](#)). However, after the introduction programmes, in both countries, many women are becoming increasingly distant from the labour force, which raises the needs to reach out to these women.

Table 2: Results of comparing the laws on introduction programme in Sweden and Norway

	Sweden	Norway	
Purpose	To increase the social-economic inclusion of newly arrivals and to ensure their financial independence.	To increase the social-economic inclusion of newly arrivals and to ensure their financial independence.	Similar
Compulsory participation	Obligatory to get the benefit. Not obligatory to obtain a permanent residence permit and the citizenship.	Obligatory to get the benefit, to obtain a permanent residence permit and to obtain the citizenship.	Not similar
Target group	Refugees and their families between 20-64 years and refugees who are 18 – 19 years old without parents in Sweden.	Refugees and their families who are between 18 and 55 years of age.	Not similar
Responsible authorities	The PES enrolls refugees in the introduction programme, whereas municipalities provide the language and social training.	Municipalities are responsible to provide the introduction programme.	Not similar
Starting the introduction programme	Within one year after a person is settled in a municipality.	Within 3 months after a person is settled in a municipality or after s/he requested participation.	Not similar
Components of the programme	Swedish language training, social studies and other activities to prepare the participant for work.	Norwegian language training, social studies and other activities to prepare the participant for work.	Similar
Duration	Two years on a full-time basis and can be extended in case of approved leaves of absence.	Two years on a full-time basis and can be extended in case of approved leaves of absence.	Similar
Individual plan	Individual plan for each participant according to her/his needs and qualifications.	Individual plan for each participant according to her/his needs and qualifications.	Similar
Introduction benefit	Yes	Yes	Similar
Absence	Not mentioned	Reduction of the programme benefit.	–
Teachers' qualifications	Not mentioned	The main rule is that teachers should have professional and educational qualifications.	–
Appeal	The Administrative Court	County Governor	–
Settlement of refugees	Refugees have the freedom to select where to settle.	Negotiated between the state and municipalities.	Not similar
Access to labour market	Unrestricted	Unrestricted	Similar

6.2. Interview results with female refugees

In total, there were thirty respondents. Nineteen of them were in the age group from 26 to 35, while eleven of them were aged between 36 to 45 years. The majority of interviewees in Norway had a temporary residence permit, whereas the majority of them in Sweden had a permanent residence permit. Most of the interviewees have been living in the host country for 3 to 5 years, which implies that they are not very recent arrivals who lack the basic needs of the labour market. Moreover, the data on female refugees' employment rates, which was used as a premise for the comparison, covers to a large extent the sample of interviewees since the majority of them arrived in the host country before performing the EU LFS in 2014. Furthermore, most of the interviewees were still not active economically when conducting the interviews and a few of them were working in temporary jobs. They all could relatively speak the host country's language and the majority of them are from Syria and Iraq.

All interviewees were motivated to answer the questions because they felt that it is an important step to make themselves heard. Interviewees have different backgrounds and demographic tables present that in the appendices 4 & 5.

This section is divided into three subsections. The first subsection presents the institutional and structural barriers, whereas the second subsection explains the individual barriers. The barriers are presented from the most significant one to the least significant one according to interviewees' responses (see figure 3). The third subsection presents the solutions that were addressed to achieve a higher employment rate of female refugees (see figure 4).

6.2.1. Institutional and structural barriers

The structural barriers are the quality of the introduction programmes and discrimination, whereas the institutional barriers are the validation of foreign credentials, housing problems and the generous access to the welfare system.

6.2.1.1. The quality of the introduction programmes

When asking respondents to evaluate the introduction programmes and the service they receive from the PES, many respondents in Sweden said that the introduction programme is

essential for their integration and the PES provides good services. A respondent explained her experiences with the PES as a good experience by saying that:

“I was lucky because I had a good caseworker. She helped me to get an internship and she is my reference in everything I do. I think all people who work at the PES should be like her, but unfortunately, many are not.”

The above quotation demonstrates how respondent did not place high expectations on the PES. Even though she receives a good service from the PES, but she saw that as an exception as many of the PES caseworkers do not provide good services. By the same token, other respondents said that the PES only registers them in the language and social training. They further explained that the PES caseworkers only help with low-skilled jobs or internships, but they cannot help with finding a job that matches everyone’s qualifications. However, all respondents agreed that the service that they receive depends on the caseworker they have. One respondent expressed her experience with the PES when she asked for help for validating her education as follow:

“The support we get from the PES is good, but I think some of the caseworkers do not have a good knowledge about how they can help us. I sometimes feel that I have better knowledge of some of them after having been through different situations in Sweden.”

According to this respondent, many of the PES caseworkers lack the qualifications to provide good services. The respondent considered herself as a more knowledgeable person in the process of foreign education recognition than the PES caseworkers since she has experienced many situations during her life in Sweden. Similarly, another respondent said that the PES does not have any information about how different University degrees can be validated. She said also that there is no coordination between the PES and the validation authorities.

Contrary to that, the majority of respondents in Norway were satisfied with the service that the PES provides. However, all respondents agreed that the PES can only help with finding jobs or internships in the most in-demand jobs. In one respondent’s own words:

“When we start language courses, a caseworker from the PES meets each student to hear from us about our backgrounds and what plans we have for the future in

Norway. They do their best to help us, but they cannot help us if we cannot speak the language or we do not have good qualifications. So, you see some people receive help while others do not.”

This respondent provided a detailed description of the role that the PES plays in assisting refugees to access the labour market. However, she referred to the limited role that the PES can play if the refugees lack the essential qualifications of the labour market.

Another point that refugees reflected upon was the lengthy administrative procedures. Most respondents in both countries consider waiting for too long to get the residence permit or any decision of any authority create a gap in their CVs. One respondent in Sweden said that:

“... We have to wait too long for everything. We waited a year to receive the residence permit and then we waited a few months to get the social security number, the ID-card, the bank account, etc. Finally, when we were registered at the PES, we had to wait three months to start the language courses. We waste a lot of time and that makes us feel useless and excluded. During this period of time, we cannot make any social networks, we cannot find a job, we do not even know whether we will be allowed to stay or not.”

The above quotation illustrates how the lengthy procedures keep refugees not only out of the labour market, but also out of the society with an uncertain future and very limited chances to build new skills. Nonetheless, respondents from both countries expressed a great trust of the integration authorities and people who provide the services. They said that they have a great deal of trust in authorities and people who work there. A respondent in Sweden explained why she trusts the authorities as follows:

“I trust authorities and people who work there because they basically have to follow the law otherwise they will not be able to work there anymore.”

Trust, according to this respondent, comes from the power of law, but not from the trust in individuals. Her words did not, however, differ a lot from that of interviewees who expressed their lack of trust in the authorities and people who provide the services in both countries.

These women said that they trust the laws, but not the individuals because individuals can easily favour a person and help her/him more than another person without violating the laws.

Furthermore, respondents were also asked to evaluate the quality of the language and social training they receive. In this regard, all respondents from Norway said that the social training was good. In Sweden, some respondents thought that the social training was too basic. One respondent explained that:

“They should start with the social orientation course at an earlier stage because we waste a lot of time when we arrive in Sweden until we receive our papers. So people could do something useful and learn about Sweden, while they are waiting for the residence permit.”

The above quotation illustrates the need to start the integration process at an earlier stage since that will speed their socioeconomic inclusion. When it comes to the language courses, respondents in Sweden were not very satisfied with the quality of language courses. They said that the language courses are good but not at high quality. Students with different backgrounds, from different age groups and on different levels of language skills attend the same class. The majority explained that they only learn how to write at school, but there are no speaking classes. Moreover, the courses do not teach students anything about their professions. However, all respondents agreed that it is a personal effort to learn the language and one respondent commented on that:

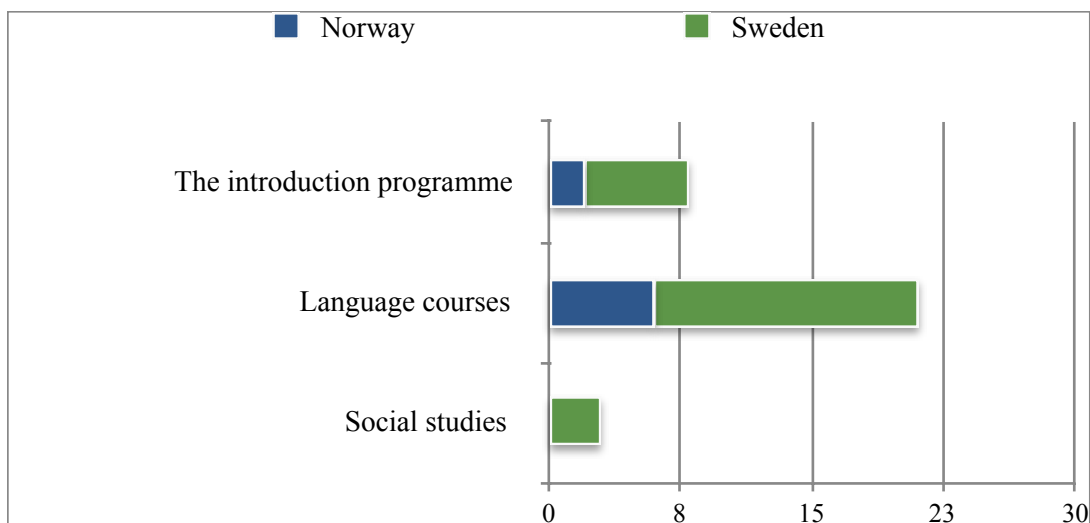
“The courses are not very high quality, but that is the same wherever you go. Some teachers are more qualified than others and it is our responsibility to learn the language because we are adults and we do not need someone to tell us to write our homework.”

This respondent acknowledged that the responsibility lies on students themselves who should work hard whether they have good language courses and teachers or not. In Norway, few respondents said that the language classes are not very good, whereas many others expressed very positive opinions regarding the quality of the courses. As stated by one respondent in Norway, who thought the courses are very good, but the students are not putting much effort to learn:

“Language courses are very good. They divide students into groups according to their levels. We were not too many people in the class and the teacher had time for each student. However, the problem is that many students are not motivated to learn. So teachers are doing well, but not all students are willing to learn and they disturb the ones who want to learn.”

Nonetheless, respondents from both countries agreed that the quality of the language courses differs from city to another, from school to another and from teacher to another, but each respondent was telling her individual experience.

Figure 1: The number of female refugee interviewees who thought that the quality of the introduction programme, language training and social training are not good enough.



6.2.1.2. Discrimination

In Norway, most of the respondents said that they do not think there is discrimination in Norway, but the problem lies in the lack of social networks, language skills, and qualifications. Employers want to hire the best applicants and they will not hire someone who just arrived in the country with still untested skills. Other respondents explained that they will never become equal to native Norwegian people. They thought that discrimination is indirect and exists in the

private sector, but not in the public one. Their opinion was that many employers will look at the person's name, appearance and religion more than her/his qualifications. One respondent explained that it is not discrimination which refugees face, it is rather the passive position that the citizens hold towards refugees. As that was stated by her words:

“Norwegian people are not racist, but they do not have any responsibilities towards us. The government, which accepted us should carry the burden alone and find jobs for all of us. So they do not hate us, but they do not care about us.”

Contrary to this, respondents in Sweden said that there is indirect discrimination, which could be based on different factors and it is hard to say which one affects these women most. It could be religion, particularly when wearing a headscarf, language skills, nationality or being a refugee or a woman. However, they also agreed with the respondents in Norway that employers will hire the best person, but if a refugee has similar qualifications to a native person, employers will select the native applicant. Nevertheless, based on the intersectional theory, respondents were asked about how different social categories can affect their integration. The social categories, which were brought up are refugee status, religion, nationality, gender, and age.

Refugee status

Respondents in Norway expressed that it is difficult to be a refugee because refugees do not have any other home and they have to integrate into the host country. It is their responsibility to integrate, but it is difficult to achieve that if native people do not accept them. Some respondents said that many natives have the perception that refugees are not productive and they only want to get the social benefits. They explained that people are very much affected by the media and any bad attitude of a refugee is generalised on all refugees, which has a negative impact on the integration of refugees into the host country. Contrary to this, few respondents said that being a refugee has a positive effect on their integration because they get support from the government, while other immigrants do not enjoy the same rights.

In Sweden, respondents said that being a refugee affects them negatively because of the rise of Islamophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment. Other few respondents do not think that being a refugee affects their integration. One of the respondents in Sweden considered her gender has no influence on her experiences in the labour market, but being identified as a refugee is the worst part of her story. As how this respondent phrased her opinion:

“I do not think being a woman does really matter as much as being a refugee. Being someone who is forced to leave her/his country and come to a country where not everyone wants you to come is the worst part of our experience. I can understand people who do not want refugees in their country because of what is going on these days, but that is not our fault.”

Wearing a headscarf

Respondents in Norway and Sweden who wear a headscarf said that wearing a headscarf affects their opportunities in the labour market. However, they acknowledge that it might not be a hinder in all careers. One of the respondents in Norway explained how her headscarf can limit her chances in the labour market as follows:

“I mean, if a woman wears a headscarf, they will consider her a conservative Muslim and they might be reluctant to offer her a job. I would not have felt like this if I had not worn a headscarf.”

Nationality

Some respondents in Sweden said that their nationality affects the type of the residence permit they obtain and how native people perceive them in the society. They said that nationality can have either a positive or a negative impact when it comes to the migration and integration policies as well as when it comes to communicating with people and looking for jobs. In Norway, none of the respondents thought that nationality affects their integration.

Gender

In Norway, few respondents said that it is more difficult for women to get a job compared to men since employers will always consider that women have can get pregnant and have to take care of their children more often compared to men. This discrimination targets all women, including natives.

However, few respondents in both countries thought that being a woman is better than being a man in Norway since people have a common perception that Muslim women are oppressed and hold a subservient position in society. Therefore, they will pay more attention to women from the Middle East to empower them.

Age

Some respondents in both countries thought that their age affects their opportunities in the labour market. They explained that they need to learn the language and validate their education. By the time they will be ready to work, they might be a bit too old to find a job. Employers will always prefer to hire a young person who has experience in the host country more than an older person without any experiences.

6.2.1.3. Validation of foreign credentials

Respondents in both countries who have a bachelor's degree or higher indicated that validation of their education is very time-consuming and that not all degrees can be recognised. Some respondents considered that as the main obstacle, which makes them less motivated to work. Some explained that spending some years on learning the language and validating the education will create a gap in their CVs, which makes it more difficult to find a job that matches their education. One respondent in Sweden said that:

“I personally, do not think they want to recognise our previous education and they destroy our skills during the waiting time. By the time we finish the language courses and get our qualifications recognised (if we were lucky to get admitted to a validation programme), we will not have any experiences left. It is really sad, just wasting time and money on all sides.”

6.2.1.4. Housing instability and the settlement programme

In Norway, some respondents said that sending refugees to small cities limit their opportunities to find a proper job due to the lack of available jobs there. Also, the language courses are not of the same quality as in big cities and the chances to meet natives to practice Norwegian are very limited. As that was formulated by a respondent:

“They send us to villages without people and we cannot leave these villages because we will lose the right for the introduction programme if we decide to move to another city.”

In Sweden, many respondents said that they still do not have a permanent flat and that they move every few months to a new place. They thought moving to smaller cities will limit their chances in finding a job or obtaining qualifications to study at a University. They do not feel settled and they are always worried about where they will live next.

6.2.1.5. Generous access to the welfare system

Few respondents in both countries said that granting a full access for refugees to the welfare system might not be the best idea. They explained that people will be less motivated to apply for jobs since staying home and receiving benefits is as if one partner works and the second stays home. In one respondent's own words:

“I also think supporting people too much is not a good thing and that will make people lazy to search for a job.”

6.2.2. Individual barriers

The individual barriers are language skills, professional and social networks, cultural values and education level.

6.2.2.1. Language skills

Respondents in Norway considered language as a major hinder, they explained that if they do not know the language, they will not be able to study or apply for jobs. They will not be able to communicate with employers or learn about the labour market regulations, their rights and obligations. One of the respondents summarised the importance of host country's language skills as follow:

“I think language is the main obstacle we face because if we cannot speak the language, we will not be able to search for jobs, to communicate with people and prove our qualifications.”

In Sweden, some respondents said that language is the main obstacle to access the labour market, whereas others considered other factors such as social networks or education level are much more important.

6.2.2.2. Professional and Social networks

Respondents in both countries said that it is very important to have professional and social networks to find a job, but the majority lack that. One respondent in Norway explained that as follow:

“Employers always ask for references and how we can get them if we do not have any work experience here and the last job we had, was for many years ago.”

6.2.2.3. Cultural values

The majority of respondents in Norway said that work is more important for men than for women. Similar opinions were expressed by respondents in Sweden. Respondents in both countries justified their opinions by saying that men can work with any kind of jobs and they do not mind changing their professions. In addition, they stated that men cannot manage to take care of their children as much as women can. Working women have to work inside and outside the home, because men will not do anything at home, according to the respondents.

Some said that working 8 hours per day is too much and they would prefer to work part-time in order to have more time for their children. As one respondent in Norway explained:

“Of course, my husband comes first and there is no power on earth can make me share the parental leave with him. I love taking care of my children and I do not think he will manage to take care of them as much as I can.”

By contrast, some respondents in both countries said that work is equally important for both women and men, as the type of life here differs from their countries.

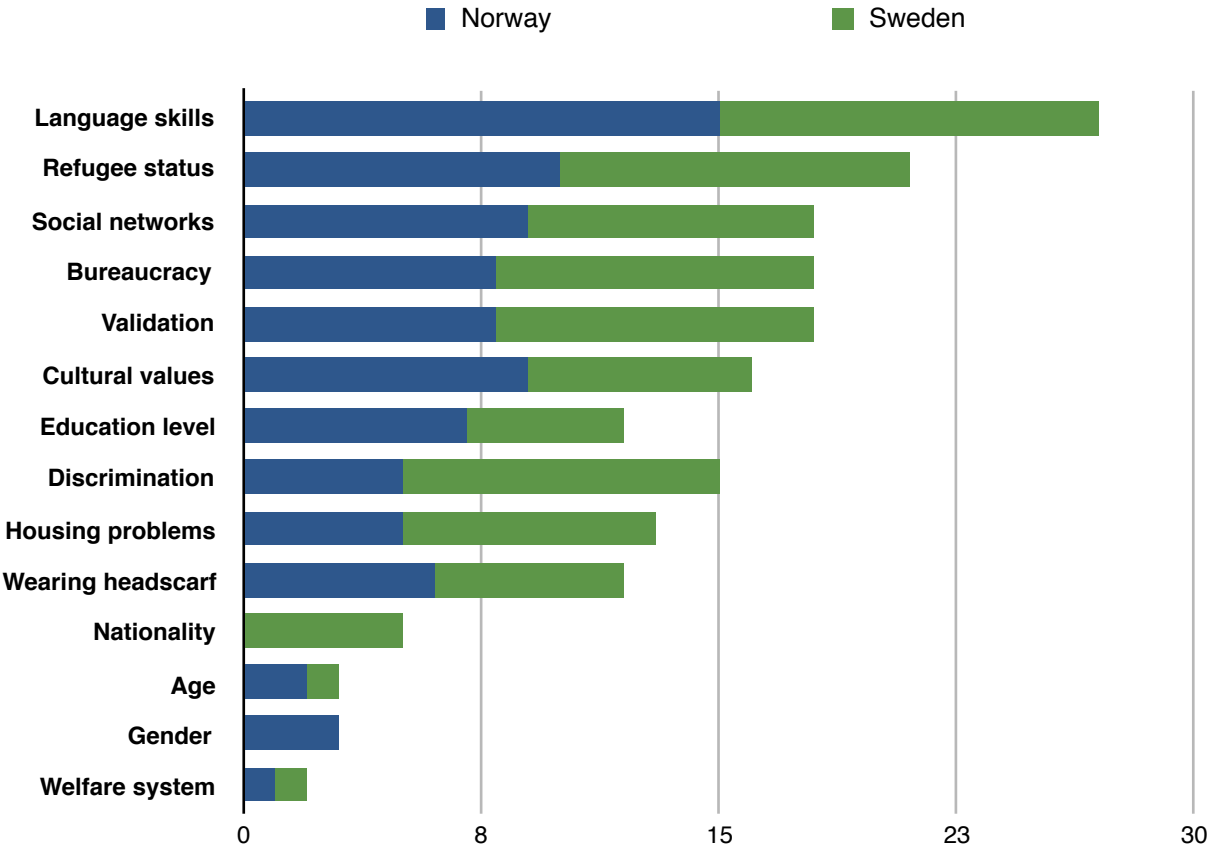
6.2.2.4. Education level

Respondents who had a high school education or less stated that having an education from Norway is very important to have a good job and income. One respondent said that:

“Almost all jobs require minimum years of experiences and a University degree, but I do not have that.”

According to this respondent, it is relatively impossible for her to find a job if she does not pursue any education in Norway. Some women have worked before, but they do not have any relevant education and it is impossible to use their experiences if they do not get an education in Norway. Similar results in Sweden, respondents who do not have a University degree said that most jobs require education obtained in Sweden.

Figure 3: The barriers to access the Swedish and Norwegian labour markets from interviewees' point of view.



6.2.3. Assessment of how barriers to access the labour market can be removed

Respondents in both countries addressed four focal points that can be taken into account to improve the participation of female refugees in the labour market. These points are explained below. (Figure 3 presents the results of interviews in this regard)

6.2.3.1. Enhancing the effectiveness of the introduction programme

Most of the respondents in Norway said that it is important to enhance the effectiveness of the introduction programme and language courses. They suggested that the language courses should be more relevant to their educational background and work experiences. They also acknowledge that not all refugees can study and learn by going to school. Therefore, people who do not progress well at school, they should have the possibility to do training and gain some work experience. On the other hand, respondents in Sweden were more critical of the quality of the language courses. Most of the respondents thought that language courses should be improved and include more speaking sections since focusing only on writing will not be enough for any job. Respondents suggested that students should be divided according to their educational backgrounds and language skills. In addition, the contents of the courses should be based on the background of each group of students. One respondent explained that:

“If I am a pharmacist, why I have to study the Swedish literature and not learn the terms that I need for my future career!”

According to this respondent, learning the professional language should be alongside learning the grammar. This will accelerate the access into the labour market and facilitate studying any validation programme.

6.2.3.2. Validation of foreign credentials

Respondents in both countries with a minimum of a bachelor’s degree education expressed their concerns about the validation of their previous qualifications. They thought that they should all have the opportunity to validate their degrees. The increased number of refugees has led to a high competition among students to get a place on the validation programmes and not all refugees can

validate their degrees. Some respondents suggested that the validation of foreign credentials should be an integrated part of the introduction programme. Respondent in Norway said that:

“Make it easier to use our previous education and work in our fields, I do not know how they can do that, but that is really important. I will not be happy if I work with something new and I will not be productive as much as if I work in my field.”

The above quotation illustrates the desperation of the respondent in using her previous education and how that will affect her motivation to work.

6.2.3.3. Settlement programme

Some respondents in Norway suggested that it is important to consider the size of the labour market prior to sending refugees to a particular city. According to a respondent, the authorities should match the labour market needs and people’s skills before settling them in any city or village.

“Well, maybe when settling people in different cities, they should take into account the size of the labour market and the chances to find jobs for those people in these areas. They should match the labour market needs and people’s skills.”

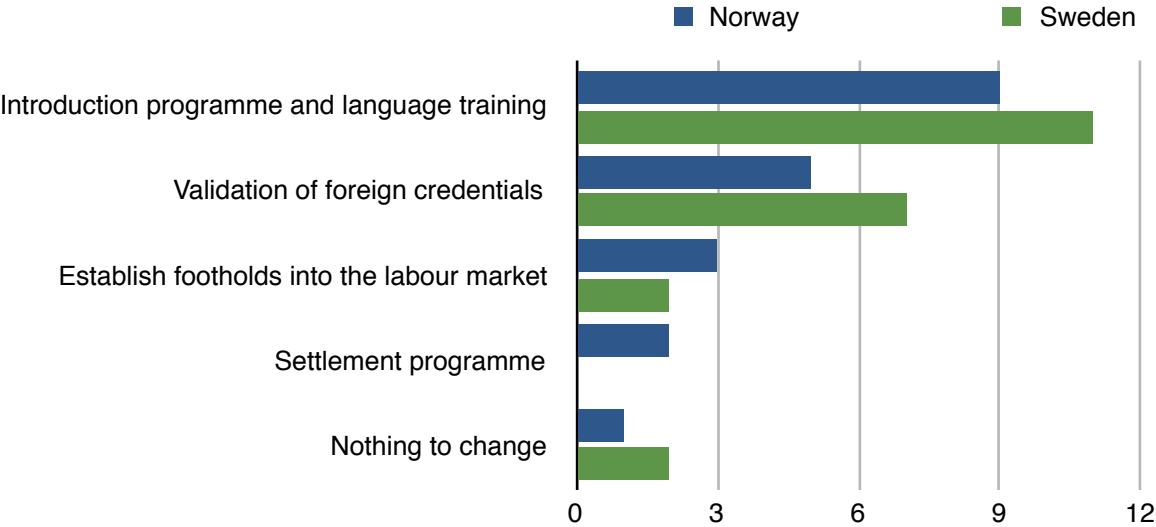
6.2.3.4. Establish footholds into the labour market

Building bridges between refugees and employers was an essential issue, which respondents from both countries addressed. Employers do not know anything about the refugees' skills and they will be reluctant to hire someone if they do not know their qualifications. Therefore, respondents believed that the PES should introduce refugees to potential employers by organising mentorship and internship programmes or by holding seminars where employers and job seekers can meet.

Respondents acknowledged that the PES has very limited capacity and they cannot force employers to give a refugee an internship or a job. The majority of the internships that refugees can do are in small companies where it is difficult to get a job afterward. Moreover,

respondents were aware that their host country has a large number of refugees which makes it more difficult to meet everyone's needs and can slow down the process.

Figure 3: Solutions to overcome the barriers to access the labour market from female refugee's perspective



6.3. Informant interviews

Five interviews were conducted with different stakeholders who showed a great interest and engagement to provide substantial information about their work in general and their particular efforts to integrate female refugees. There are many projects that target different groups of refugees to integrate them faster into the labour market in both countries. These projects are done by different NGOs and authorities. Nevertheless, all informants agreed that the quality of language courses and the support that refugees receive during the introduction programmes differ across municipalities. For example, the informant from MIDI stated that:

“The quality of language courses and the support that provided by the municipalities differ per municipality. Therefore, women who do not receive good support from their municipality, they will have worse outcomes compared to women who receive good services.”

This informant also brought to attention the problems that the settlement programme can cause. She agreed that the programme can solve the segregation problem, but it causes other problems regarding the size of the labour market where many refugees are settled.

6.3.1. The obstacles that hinder the access of female refugees into the labour market

Informants in Norway addressed four main obstacles to integrating female refugees into the Norwegian labour market, which are education level, the highly competitive labour market, lack of financial resources and the cultural values of refugees. An informant from the PES in Norway said that all jobs in Norway require at least a high school education and the employment rate of native women is very high. There is an educational gap between refugees and natives and it is difficult to fill this gap. Furthermore, another informant in Norway explained that some women need more help than others, but there are not enough sufficient financial resources to support each woman individually. In addition, cultural values and gender roles are among the main obstacles in integrating female refugees since these women have more responsibilities towards their families. In the informant's own words:

“Female refugees have generally lower education level compared to male refugees. Also, they have more responsibilities towards family and taking care of their kids so they progress slower than men in learning the language. However, there are not enough financial sources to support each woman. Some women need more help than others, but we do not have enough resources to help each one.”

In contrast, informants in Sweden found qualifications to be the main obstacle. They said that many female refugees are very willing to work, but they do not have previous qualifications. They do not know what they are good at and they are afraid to try. On the other hand, men usually have work experiences and are used to work, which makes it easier for them to enter the labour market faster. An informant from the PES said that low-educated female refugees should have the possibility to do training and experience their qualities, which will motivate them even more and help them to access the labour market.

6.3.2. Mechanisms to bring more female refugees to the labour market

According to an informant in Norway, changing the gender roles and motivating women to work is a problematic issue. The informant explained that it costs a lot of money to prepare a low-educated woman to access the labour market and that will be a waste of money to invest in her skills if she does not want to work. Therefore, it is important to motivate women and make them work. On the other hand, another informant in Norway saw that female refugees, particularly low educated need extra help to prepare them for the labour market. The informant said that:

“Many studies show that temporary jobs lead to permanent jobs. Therefore, it is a good step to help women with signing their first employment contract. Also, I think having an introduction programme that matches female refugees’ needs and educational backgrounds, would improve their employment rate. Formal education is the most important factor in integration and the programme should be more linked to their backgrounds as well as providing longer programmes for women who need special attention.”

This informant referred to different studies to support her opinion and she emphasised that female refugees have different experiences compared to male refugees because of the gender roles and traditional values. Therefore, the informant saw that having a natural integration programme would leave these women behind as long as their husbands would not share household chores.

In Sweden, the responses were more focused on improving the language skills of female refugees and to have labour market education that targeted at female refugees. An informant from the Kvinnocenter said that most of the courses that the PES provides are targeted at male-dominated jobs and it is difficult for female refugees who have never worked before to start working in men-dominated jobs. Therefore, there should be more education and training that target women's needs, particularly the low-educated ones.

7. Analysis and discussion

The results reveal that the introduction programmes in Sweden and Norway are similar to a large extent when it comes to the purpose, the components and duration. However, the Introductory Act in Norway is more detailed and put demands on refugees by explicitly stating that refugees have the right and obligation to participate in the introduction programme. It also puts more demands on municipalities to provide the introduction programme for refugees within three months of settling them in a specific municipality. On the other hand, the Establishment Reform in Sweden is softer and leaves a larger room for interpretation. The law does not state that refugees are obliged to attend the introduction programme rather it is their right to attend this programme. At the same time, the PES has up to one year from settling a refugee in a municipality to register her/him in the introduction programme.

Nevertheless, the main differences between Sweden and Norway regarding the integration of female refugees appear to be clearer pronounced in the implementation of the introduction programmes not in the legislations. Female refugees in Norway expressed their satisfaction with the introduction programme and the PES as well as the quality of the language and social training. By contrast, their counterparts in Sweden were more critical of the quality of the integration programme, the services that the PES provides and the language and social training. However, all respondents from all interviewed groups agreed that the quality of the introduction programmes differs per municipality, which puts some people less advantaged compared to others. These findings as such have not been addressed by previous studies, which mainly use quantitative data to compare the outcomes of refugees without paying attention to the voices of female refugees.

Furthermore, the results show that female refugees in Sweden are more concerned about discrimination than their counterparts in Norway. However, the intersectional analysis shows that different social categories such as age, nationality, gender, refugee status and wearing a headscarf affect the majority of respondents within a country and slightly between the countries. Respondents in both countries said that they could be advantaged or disadvantaged according to their identity. The responses of female refugees on how refugee

status can negatively affect their labour market integration provide similar results as found by Landos & Olofsson (2014) and Lemaître (2007). These studies indicate that among others homesickness, cultural shock and pressure can decrease the motivation of refugees to learn the host country's language and culture.

Contrary to the intersectional theory, which considers being a woman and a refugee will cause multiple-discrimination, some women thought that being a woman will give them a better opportunity in the labour market compared to that of their male peer. They explained that both Sweden and Norway seek to empower women and that may affect positively their experiences in the labour market. Their thoughts are similar to results by Arai, et al. (2015) & Bangstad (2016). These studies show that male refugees may experience a higher level of discrimination in the labour market compared to female refugees. Nonetheless, some other women expressed thoughts in line with the intersectional theory. They believed that employers will prefer to hire men more than women since women have much more responsibilities towards family.

However, not all women interviewees thought that their gender will affect their experiences in the labour market. Rather, they had many concerns about how their headscarves can affect their employability. These results are in line with the discrimination reporting to the Norwegian Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud (LDO) in Norway. These reports show that many Muslim females are denied to work because of their headscarves (Bangstad, 2016:408).

By looking at other institutional barriers, such as validation of foreign credentials, housing problems and generous access to the welfare system, it seems that there are no big differences between female refugees' experiences in both countries. Both groups of educated respondents considered that a lack of recognition of their previous qualifications is the main obstacle to access the labour market. They are not motivated to change their careers or to study for a few years before they can work in their fields. These findings are similar to results by Lemaître (2007) and Schuster et al. (2013). These studies show that the previous education cannot secure refugees jobs in their fields. In addition, addressing the generous access to the

welfare system as a hinder to access the labour market by a few number of respondents in each country corresponds with the findings by Hagelund (2005) and Koopmans (2010).

Furthermore, the lengthy administrative procedure is a nightmare for respondents in both countries. They thought that waiting for too long before starting the introduction programme is a waste of their time and skills. This recalls what the OECD states about how the delay in the asylum procedure can slow the refugee integration (OECD, 2009). Furthermore, and similar to what the OECD finds, female refugee interviewees expressed that the housing instability affect their progress in learning the language and accessing the labour market.

When it comes to the individual barriers, it can be seen that learning the language is the main obstacle for female refugees in both countries. Respondents addressed that they have very limited opportunities to use the language and the majority lack the social networks. Their responses are in line with the findings of Sales (2002) and Cary-Wood et al. (1995). In the same light, informant interviewees in both countries addressed language proficiency as one of the main obstacles to access the labour market.

Regarding the cultural values, when asking whether work is more important for interviewed women or for their partners, the majority of respondents put themselves behind their partners. While respondents did not address that as a barrier, it is actually seen one of the main barriers to socio-economic integration because it affects their motivation to learn the language and search for a job. This was addressed as a core problem in integrating female refugees into the labour market during the informant interviews in Norway. By contrast, informants in Sweden considered the low-educational level and the lack of work experiences as main problems. According to them, female refugees need more support to qualify for the labour market. Similar to that, respondents who have a high school education or less stated that they will not be able to find a job if they do not pursue an education in the host country. The low-educated respondents are aware of their problem and their opinion is similar to findings by Bratsberg, et al. (2017). Informants in both countries showed many concerns about the educational level, which requires a lot of investments to prepare these women for work life.

Another problem raised by women respondents in both countries was the lack of professional and social networks, which limits their chances to access the labour market. These concerns are in line with findings by Åslund, Forslund & Liljeberg (2017) and Hensvik & Skans (2013). These studies indicate that informal recruitment through social and professional networks is very common in both countries and refugees generally lack these networks. By contrast, informant interviewees did not mention that among the barriers, even though they could play an important role in building these professional networks for refugees.

Going back to the barriers to access the labour market that was presented by the EU (LFS) in 2014, it can be noticed that the findings provide a similar picture of that results. Discrimination in Sweden is more pronounced, whereas language proficiency is more significant in Norway than in Sweden. Moreover, respondents in Sweden found that their nationality impacts their integration, whereas none of the respondents in Norway mentioned that. However, wearing a headscarf is considered as a huge barrier in both countries (see Appendix 1).

Additionally, none of the respondents in Norway complained about the integration model. Their experiences were not affected by the obligatory aspect of the language and social training to obtain the permanent residence permit and citizenship. That implies that a less multicultural approach will not negatively affect the refugees' perceptions. Rather, it might be a good way to integrate them further into the host society. On the other hand, female refugees in the multicultural Sweden were not as satisfied. Therefore, it can be argued that adopting a less multicultural approach in Sweden alongside improving the quality of the language training would be beneficial. Moreover, it could be argued that demands should also be increased on the relevant authorities such as the PES and municipalities. Both multiculturalism and assimilation have negative and positive sides and none of them can replace the other. A balance between these and tackling discriminatory attitudes in the labour market could lead to better socio-economic integration.

Based on that, it can be said that the collected data provide an affirmative answer to the first additional question. This question tries to explore whether the *introduction programme in Norway is more effective in facilitating the access of female refugees to the*

labour market than in Sweden. The affirmative answer is based on two premises. First, the fact that a larger number of female refugees access the labour market after finishing the introduction programme in Norway compared to Sweden. Second, the differences in female refugee interviewees' opinions about the quality of the introduction programme in both countries. In Norway, interviewed women expressed their satisfaction with the introduction programme, the quality of the language and social training, and the services of PES. In contrast, their counterparts in Sweden were more critical of the quality of the introduction programme, the service that the PES provides and the language and social training.

When it comes to the second additional question: *What are the main obstacles to integrate female refugees according to stakeholders? Do these stakeholders mention similar obstacles as female refugees address?* The answer is affirmative but to limited extent. Informants considered language proficiency, low educational level, cultural values, and limited financial resources as the main reasons for the low employment rates of female refugees. These opinions are similar to those addressed by low-educated respondents. Contrary to this, educated respondents saw the problem mainly in the validation programmes. Informants did not refer to the complexity of validating the foreign qualifications and how that will influence the motivation of women to work. This barrier does not seem to be as important for informant interviewees since the number of low-educated female refugees is much larger. Furthermore, informants did not mention the need to assist these women and build social and professional networks for them.

In this sense, the answer to the first part of the main research question, *whether the barriers that female refugees face in accessing the labour market in Sweden are similar to those their counterparts confront in Norway,* is affirmative but to a limited extent. There are differences when it comes to the implementation of the introduction programmes and the quality of the services. There are also differences when it comes to discrimination, which was more pronounced in Sweden. By contrast, there are no considerable differences when it comes to the individual and other institutional barriers, such as validation of foreign credentials, housing problems and generous access to the welfare system.

Regarding the second part of the question about solutions to bring more female refugees to the labour market, women interviewees in both countries addressed relatively similar points to facilities their access into the labour market. These solutions were mainly to enhance the efficiency of the introduction programme and language courses, to facilitate the process of validation of foreign education, to build social networks for refugees and to match the needs of the labour market to refugees' skills. Therefore, it can be argued that these solutions should be taken into account in both countries in order to bring more women to work life.

8. Conclusion

In sum, there are no differences in the individual barriers that female refugees can face in accessing the labour market. These similarities could be based to a large extent on the similarity of the composition of refugees in both countries. Regarding the institutional and structural barriers, it can be noticed that the quality of the integration programme and the services that the PES provides as well as the language and social training are of a higher quality in Norway according to female refugee interviewees' evaluation. In addition, the concern about discrimination was more observed among women interviewees in Sweden than in Norway. Regarding other institutional and structural barriers, there were no significant differences in the female refugees' experiences.

Therefore, and in light of these empirical findings, it is difficult to say what exactly can explain the differences between the employment rates of female refugees in Sweden and Norway. However, some explanatory factors could be the differences in the number of female refugees in both countries, the obligatory aspect of the introduction programme in Norway, and the differences in the implementations of the integration programmes. Put differently, the individual barriers are more or less the same, but the institutional efforts are the reason behind these differences.

Based on the above, it is essential to acknowledge that it is not only due to female refugees and their cultural values that they have a low employment rate. Rather, it is also due to the authorities that have failed to meet their needs to access the labour market. It is due to the regulations and lengthy administrative procedures that leave female refugees for a long time out of the labour market. It is due to employers who are reluctant to offer a female refugee a job opportunity. It is due to the EU, whose solidarity has destabilised in confronting the huge number of refugees. It is due to a combination of all these actors and they all need to collaborate to improve the integration of female refugees into the labour market.

Authorities should recognise the different needs of female refugees. Each group of women has different needs and possess a different educational level and a wise integration policy should meet these different needs. Another effort should be done by refugees themselves, for instance, their gender role attitudes can be altered based on sharing

responsibilities and encouraging women to be economically active. Finally, employers who have not been included in this study, but they are essential actors in the labour market integration of female refugees. Employers should be more open to test the skills of female refugees and show their interests in supporting the socio-economic cohesion. Most importantly, Sweden can learn from Norway in that the multicultural approach is not necessarily the correct model for integration, rather, imposing extra demands on refugees and improving the quality of the integration programme can lead to better integration outcomes.

These findings could serve as a guide for newly arrived female refugees to better understand the challenges and opportunities that they will face in entering the Swedish and Norwegian labour markets. Furthermore, the findings could help different stakeholders to see the problem from female refugees' perspectives, which should be taken into account to improve their employment rates.

Finally, it can be said that observing the lack of motivation to work among many female refugee interviewees, raises many concerns about their labour market integration. This issue opens a door for a further research area, which could focus on tackling the stereotype images and gender role attitudes of refugees. It is important to distinguish here between tradition and religion because the former could be changed by raising awareness and encouragement, while the latter is much complicated and sensitive to touch upon.

References

- Andersson, P. and Guo, S., (2009) *Governing through non/recognition: the missing 'R' in the PLAR for immigrant professionals in Canada and Sweden*, International Journal of Lifelong Learning
- Anderson, K. and Jack, D. C. (1991) *Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses*, in S. Berger Gluck and D. Patai (eds) *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, pp. 11 – 26 . New York : Routledge
- Arai, M., Bursell, M. and Nekby, L. (2015) *The Reverse Gender Gap in Ethnic Discrimination: Employer Stereotypes of Men and Women with Arabic Names*, Int Migr Rev, 50
- Atkinson, R. and Flint, J. (2001) *Accessing Hidden and Hard-to-reach Populations: Snowball Research Strategies*. Social Research Update, 33
- Bangstad S. (2016) *Islamophobia in Norway: National Report 2015*, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2015*, Istanbul, SETA
- Berry, J. M. (2002) *'Validity and Reliability in Elite Interviewing'*, PS: Political Science and Politics
- Bratsberg, B., Raaum O., and Røed, K. (2017) *Immigrant labour market integration across admission classes*, Nordic Economy Policy Review, TemaNord
- Brochmann, Hagelund (2011), *Migrants in the Scandinavian welfare state: The emergence of a social policy problem*, Nordic Journal of Migration research
- Brubaker, R. (2001) *The return of assimilation? Changing perspectives on immigration and its sequels in France, Germany, and the United States*, Ethnic and Racial Studies
- Bryman, A. (2012) *Social research methods*, Oxford University Press, 2012. 4th edition
- Bursell, M., (2014) *The Multiple Burdens of Foreign-Named Men: Evidence From a Field Experiment on Gendered Ethnic Discrimination in Sweden*, European Sociological Review 30:399–409
- Carey-Wood, J., Duke, K., Karn, V. and Marshall, T. (1995) *The Settlement of Refugees in Britain*, London: HMSO

- Centralbyrån (2016) *utrikes föddas etablering i arbets- och samhällslivet*, Statistiska, Integration: Report 9
- Chiswick, B. & Miller, (2002) *Immigrant earnings: Language skills, linguistic concentrations and the business cycle*
- European Commission & OECD (2016), *How are refugees faring on the labour market in Europe?*, Working Paper 1
- FEMM Committee, EP (2016) *Female refugees and asylum seekers: the issue of integration*
- Golafshani, N. (2003) *Understanding reliability and validity in qualitative research*, The Qualitative Report, vol.8
- Gyöngyi Kovács Karen M. Spens, (2005), *Abductive reasoning in logistics research*, International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management, Vol. 35
- Hagelund, A. (2005) *Why it is bad to be kind. Educating refugees to life in the welfare state: A case study from Norway*, Social Policy and Administration, Vol.39, No 6
- Hagtvet, H. (2005). *Undersøkelse om rekruttering av arbeidskraft*. Aetat Report No.1 1/2005. Oslo, Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration
- Hensvikb L. and Skansc O. N. (2013) *Social networks, employee selection and labor market outcomes*, IFAU, Working Paper
- Hochschild J. L. (2009) *Conducting Intensive Interviews and Elite Interviews*, Workshop on Interdisciplinary Standards for Systematic Qualitative Research
- Inglehart, Ronald, and Norris, Pippa (2009) *Muslim Integration into Western Cultures: Between Origins and Destinations*, HKS Faculty Research Working Paper Series RWP09-007, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University
- Inglehart, Ronald F. and Norris, Pippa, (2012) *Muslim Integration into Western Cultures: Between Origins and Destinations*, Political Studies, 60
- Joppke, C. (2007) *Beyond National Models: Civic Integration Policies for Immigrants in Western Europe*, Western European Politics
- Kofman, E (2003) *Women immigrants and refugees in the European Union*, Department of International Studies, Nottingham Trent University Clifton Lane, Nottingham

- Koopmans, Ruud. (2003) *Good Intentions Sometimes Make Bad Policy: A Comparison of Dutch and German Integration Policies*, In *The Challenge of Diversity*, Edited by: Cuperus, René, Innsbruck: Studien-Verlag
- Koopmans, R. (2016) *Does Assimilation Work? Cultural Determinants of Labour Market Participation of European Muslims*, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*
- Koopmans, R. 2010, *Trade-offs between equality and difference: immigrant integration, multiculturalism and the welfare state in cross-national perspective*, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 36, no. 1
- Landos, I. and Olofsson, D. (2015) *Brain waste in Gävle? - Culture crash in an industrial region*, Master study in Business Administration, Gävle
- Lemaître, G. (2007) *The Integration of Immigrants into the Labour Market*, OECD Social, Employment and Migration, Working Paper
- Lundborg, P., Skedinger, P. (2014) *Employer Attitudes towards Refugee Immigrants*, IFN Working Paper No. 1025
- Marshall, C & Rossman, B. (2011) *Designing Qualitative Research*, (5th ed.), Sage, Los Angeles
- Martín, I., Arcarons, A., Aumüller, J., Bevelander, P., Emilsson, H., Kalantaryan, S., MacIver, A., Mara, I., Scalettaris, G., Venturini, A., Vidovic, H., Welle, I., Windisch, M., Wolffberg, R., Zorlu, A, (2016) *From Refugees to Workers Mapping Labour-Market Integration Support Measures for Asylum Seekers and Refugees in EU Member States*, Volume I: Comparative Analysis and Policy Findings
- Midtbøen, Arnfinn og Rogstad, Jon (2012): *Diskrimineringens omfang og årsaker: Etniske minoriteters tilgang til norsk arbeidsliv*. Report no. 1: 2012. Oslo: Institutt For Samfunnsforskning
- McCall, Leslie (2005) *The complexity of intersectionality Signs*, *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 30(3), 1771-1800
- Muylaert, C., Sarubbi, V., Gallo, P, Neto, M., Reis, A., (2014) *Narrative interviews: an important resource in qualitative research*, *Rev Esc Enferm USP*; 48

- Mühlau, Röder (2014) *Are They Acculturating? Europe's Immigrants and Gender Egalitarianism*, Europe's immigrants and gender egalitarianism, IIS Discussion Paper No. 414
- Nordplus programme (2011) *Nordic Network for empowerment of immigrant women with low educational background / working experience*.
- OECD (2009) *Jobs for immigrants: labour market integration in Norway*, International Migration Division.
- OECD (2016) *Working Together: Skills and Labour Market Integration of Immigrants and their Children in Sweden*, OECD Publishing, Paris
- Olsen, B., (2017) Flyktninger i og utenfor arbeidsmarkedet ([2017](#)).
- Peabody, R, Hammond, S., Torcom, J., Brown, L., Thompson, C. and Kolodny, R (1990) *Interviewing Political Elites*, PS: Political Science and Politics 23, no. 3: 451-455
- Pettersen, S. & Østby, L., ([2013](#)) *Scandinavian comparative statistics on integration*, Statistics Norway
- Riksrevisionen, ([2015](#)) *Nyanländas etablering – är statens insatser effektiva?*, RiR 2015:17
- Rubin, J., M.S. Rendall, L. Rabinovich, F. Tsang, C. van Oranje-Nassau and B. Janta (2008), *Migrant women in the European labour force. Current situation and future prospects*, Rand EUROPE Technical Report, Cambridge, UK
- Sales, R. (2002), *The deserving and the undeserving? Refugees, asylum seekers and welfare in Britain*, SAGE, Vol 22, Issue 3, pp. 456 - 478
- Schuster, A., Desiderio, M. V., & Urso, G. (2013), *Recognition of Qualifications and Competencies of Migrants*, Brussels: International Organization for Migration
- Shenton, A. (2004), *Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects*, Northumbria University, UK
- Shields M and Price S, 2002, *Racial harassment, job satisfaction and intentions to quit: Evidence from British Nursing profession*, *Economica*, 69
- Shields, S.A. (2008) *Gender: An intersectionality perspective*, *Sex Roles*, 59
- Skjerven S. A. and Malgina, M., ([2015](#)) *Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT)*, Norway

- Statistics Norway, (2017) *Women and men – Please, mind the gap!*
- Statistics Sweden, (2017) ([SCB](#))
- Sumption, M. (2013) *Tackling Brain Waste: Strategies to Improve the Recognition of Immigrants*, Foreign Qualifications. 1st ed
- Swedish Council for Higher Education, (2015) *One step on the road to the labour market*. 1st ed., Stockholm
- Tolley, E. (2016) *Multiculturalism Policy Index: Immigrant Minority Policies*, Revised edition, Queen's University
- Tracy, S (2013) *Qualitative Research Methods: collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*
- Tubergen, V. (2010) *Determinants of Second Language Proficiency among Refugees in the Netherlands*, Utrecht University, The University of North Carolina Social Forces
- Taylor, S.S., Fisher, D. and Dufresne, R.L. (2002), *The aesthetics of management storytelling: a key to organizational learning*, *Management Learning*, Vol. 33 No. 3, pp. 313-30
- Verloo, M. (2006) *Multiple Inequalities, Intersectionality and the European Union*, In: *European Journal of Women's Studies*
- Vervliet, M., De Mol, J., Broekaert, E., Derluyn I. (2013) *That I Live, that's Because of Her: Intersectionality as Framework for Unaccompanied Refugee Mothers*, *The British Journal of Social Work*, Volume 44
- Wadensjö, Eskil (1992) *"Earnings of Immigrants with Higher Education in Sweden"* mimeo, Swedish Institute of Social Research, Stockholm University
- Wikan, U. (2001) *Generous Betrayal: Politics of Culture in the New Europe*, Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press
- Westin, C. and Dingu-Kyrklund (2000) *Integration analysis in Sweden*, EFFNA-TIS Working
- Zinn, B., Dill, M. B., (1996) *Theorizing Difference from Multiracial Feminisms*, *Feminist Studies* 22, no. 2
- Åslund O., Forslund A. and Liljeberg L., (2017) *Labour market entry of non-labour migrants–Swedish evidence*, *Nordic Economy Policy Review*, TemaNord

Laws

Establishment Reform ([2010:197](#))

Introductory Act ([2005:228](#))

Interviews

1. Interviews with female refugees in Sweden, March 2017
2. Interviews with female refugees in Norway, April 2017
3. Interview with Norska Folkhjelp, April 2017 (Via mail)
4. Interview with Kvinnocenter, April 2017
5. Interview with Directorate of Integration and Diversity, May 2017
6. Interview with the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service, May 2017
7. Interview with Swedish Public Employment Service, May 2017

Appendices

Appendix 1: Obstacles to getting a suitable job by first generation immigrants in Sweden and Norway in 2014

Country /Barrier	Lack of language skills	Lack of recognition of qualifications	Origin, religion, social background	No barrier	Other barriers
Sweden First generation	14.4	10.4	8	30.1	33.9
Norway	20.7	11.1	3.2	17.9	38.4
Sweden First & second generation	10.9	7.8	6.1	34.1	37.7
Norway	17.9	9.6	2.8	17.9	43.5

Source: Eurostat based on EU LFS 2014 AHM.
(See: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/lfs/data/database>)

Appendix 2: Interview guide for interviews with female refugees

1. Tell me about your background (country of origin, age, marital status, children, year of arrival, education level, work experience in your country, type of residence permit you have). To identify, in order, the three most important topics for integration. (Work/education, Language, Social interaction)
2. Can you tell your experience in the labour market? What factors most help/hinder your integration process? Why? How? Here is the list of potential factors that may help you... (Language proficiency, Education level and recognition qualifications, Discrimination, Cultural values, Integration policy, The labour market regulations)
3. Can you describe some details of what you have gained from the integration programme for your future career? How can you evaluate this programme? What are its pros and cons? Did you receive the support that you needed from the Public Employment Service?
4. What do you think about language courses and societal orientation course?
5. What could have been done better to achieve a faster path to the labour market?
6. Do you think that finding a job is more important to your partner than you? What do you think about sharing parental leave with your partner?
7. Have you experienced any discriminatory behaviour in the labour market? If yes, can you tell more about your experience?
8. Is there anything about your experiences in Sweden/Norway specifically as a Syrian woman that has had an impact on your integration experience, either positively or negatively?
9. If you have worked before, what about the possibility of retraining for a new career? If you haven't worked outside the home before, what do you think about training for a career?
10. What do you think about the overall organisation of the integration process in Sweden? That is, the way in which you are treated by authorities, the way different services are spread out or concentrated, etc?
11. When you think about your own relationship to the integration process in Sweden, would you say that you have a great deal of trust in the authorities and those who provide the services? Why or why not?

Appendix 3: Interview guide for informants

- What are the main obstacles that different authorities can face in integrating female refugees into the labour market?
- Is there any integration programme/project that only targets female refugees? In other words, can you describe the integration policy as a gender-sensitive policy?
- How different stakeholders (PES, municipalities, NGOs, etc.) work together to integrate refugees? What are the main challenges in this cooperation?
- I'd love to hear your perspective on the current situation of female refugees in the Norwegian/Swedish labour market?
- According to your experiences, which mechanisms can bring more female refugees to the labour market?

Appendix 4: Table of demographic data for respondents in Norway

Respondents	Country of Origin	Age group	Marital Status	Number of Children	Years in NOR	Educational level	Type of Residence Permit
Respondent 1	Iraq	26-35	No	0	3	Grade School	Temporary
Respondent 2	Syria	26-35	No	0	3	High School	Permanent
Respondent 3	Syria	26-35	Yes	2	3	High School	Permanent
Respondent 4	Syria	36-45	Yes	3	2	High School	Temporary
Respondent 5	Iraq	36-45	Yes	2	3	Bachelor	Temporary
Respondent 6	Iraq	26-35	Yes	2	4	High School	Permanent
Respondent 7	Syria	26-35	No	0	3	Bachelor	Permanent
Respondent 8	Iraq	36-45	Yes	3	4	Bachelor	Permanent
Respondent 9	Iraq	26-35	Yes	2	4	Bachelor	Permanent
Respondent 10	Iraq	26-35	No	0	4	Bachelor	Permanent
Respondent 11	Syria	26-35	Yes	2	2	Bachelor	Temporary
Respondent 12	Syria	26-35	Yes	1	4	High School	Permanent
Respondent 13	Syria	26-35	Yes	0	4	High School	Temporary
Respondent 14	Syria	36-45	Yes	3	2	Bachelor	Temporary
Respondent 15	Syria	36-45	Yes	2	4	Master	Permanent

Appendix 5: Table of demographic data for respondents in Sweden

Respondents	Country of Origin	Age group	Marital Status	Number of Children	Years in SWE	Educational level	Type of Residence Permit
Respondent 1	Yemen	26-35	Yes	3	4	Bachelor	Permanent
Respondent 2	Syria	26-35	Yes	1	3	Bachelor	Permanent
Respondent 3	Syria	26-35	Yes	0	3	High School	Permanent
Respondent 4	Iraq	36-45	Yes	2	5	Bachelor	Permanent
Respondent 5	Iran	36-45	Yes	0	3	Bachelor	Permanent
Respondent 6	Syria	26-35	No	0	2	Bachelor	Permanent
Respondent 7	Iraq	36-45	Yes	1	2	Bachelor	Permanent
Respondent 8	Syria	36-45	Yes	4	4	Grade School	Permanent
Respondent 9	Syria	26-35	No	0	3	Bachelor	Permanent
Respondent 10	Syria	36-45	No	2	4	Bachelor	Permanent
Respondent 11	Syria	26-35	Yes	1	4	High School	Permanent
Respondent 12	Eritrea	26-35	Yes	0	2	High School	Temporary
Respondent 13	Syria	36-45	Yes	3	3	Bachelor	Permanent
Respondent 14	Syria	26-35	No	1	3	High School	Permanent
Respondent 15	Syria	26-35	Yes	2	3	Bachelor	Permanent