



Recruiting Highly Skilled Migrants in the Automotive Industry of Sweden:

Exploring ethnic-based discrimination

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Supervisor: Denis Frank

Examiner: Ylva Wallinder

Abstract

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Key words: Highly skilled migrants, ethnic-based discrimination, labour market inequalities, automotive industry, migrants' integration, recruitment practices.

Purpose: This paper focuses on ethnic-based discrimination and explores the unequal integration of highly skilled migrants in the automotive industry of Sweden. The core of the analysis consists of interorganizational relationships, recruitment practices and motives as mechanisms of discrimination and inequality.

Theory: The theoretical framework of this paper consists of the main intertwining concepts of discrimination and durable inequalities in the labour market.

Method: Qualitative study, semi-structured open-ended interviews.

Results: The study revealed that discrimination and consequently inequalities are embedded in the manufacturing and consultancy companies, operating in the automotive industry of Sweden. Firstly, the power dynamics and client relationships between manufacturing and consultancy companies are able to force inequalities and establish explicit discrimination. Regarding the distribution of ethnic diversity within manufacturing and consultancy companies, highly skilled migrant employees are categorized in subordinate roles compared to natives. Namely, homophily and network recruitment are the main identified factors associated with vertical inequality and limited opportunities for development for high skilled migrants. Additionally, recruitment practices are responsible for the ethnic-based discrimination and unequal integration of highly skilled migrants, allowing hiring professionals to exercise opportunity hoarding and exclusion, according to their preferences. Highly skilled migrants were also praised for their rare and valuable skills as well as their hard-work attitude compared

to native employees. Yet, data revealed the systematic exclusion of highly skilled migrants from the full value of their labour. Finally, bureaucratic hurdles in the work permit process constitute a subtle mechanism of indirect discrimination, due to the limited time resources from the side of organizations.

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1. Introduction

The migration scenery of Sweden has changed multiple times through the past decades (European Commission, 2024). In the more recent years, between 2013 and 2021, Sweden received approximately 1 million migrants from EU and non-EU countries (Eurostat, 2023), while the demographics show that 20% of Sweden's inhabitants in 2023 were foreign-born (SCB, 2023). For the purposes of this thesis, the umbrella term 'migrant' is used to describe "persons who have moved away from the usual residence" (IOM, Key Migration Terms, Migrant), and to describe the foreign origin of employees in Sweden, regardless of their place of birth, migrant status or citizenship.

Migrants' integration is defined as the social, economic, political and cultural incorporation of migrants into a host society (IOM, Key Migration Terms, Integration). Central role in the process of migrants' integration is the successful participation in the labour market (Waters & Pineau, 2015). Sweden has established multiple strategies through the past years for the integration of migrants into its labour market (EUMC, 2003) and the Migration Policy has also been a matter of several reforms, to align the respective needs of the labour market with the migration flows (Piore, 1979; Frank, 2013). Accordingly, in 2023 the Ministry of Justice introduced the current Migration Policy, which highlights the need for "*stricter conditions for low-skilled labour immigration and improved conditions for highly skilled labour*" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2023), stating the need to enhance the competitiveness of the country through highly skilled migrant workers. The Swedish Migration Agency classifies as 'highly qualified workers' employees of managerial occupations and occupations requiring higher education or advanced higher education qualifications (Migrationsverket, What are 'highly qualified workers?').

Over the course of time, Sweden's legal framework has also established multiple efforts to mitigate possibilities of discrimination in the workplace. The Discrimination Act (2008:567, 2023) aims to combat discrimination and promote equal rights and opportunities, regardless of sex, gender identity or expression, religion, disability, sexual orientation, age and ethnicity. More specifically, the Discrimination Act addresses the two concepts of discrimination, direct and indirect. Direct discrimination is defined as the disadvantaged treatment of individuals or groups in similar situations, on the basis of the above-mentioned prohibited grounds. Indirect

discrimination is defined as when the application of a provision, criterion or a procedure, even when is seemingly neutral, can still disadvantage people of a certain prohibited ground. The Discrimination Act prohibits the discrimination of employees, applicants and job seekers from employers, and dictates that employers should undertake preventative and proactive measures to investigate risks and obstacles and to promote equal rights and opportunities. The Discrimination Act covers the fields of working conditions, policies and practices concerning the employment conditions, recruitment and promotion.

In contrast with the national regulatory framework of Sweden (The Discrimination Act, 2008:567, 2023) that prohibits the discrimination of employees, applicants and job seekers, multiple scholars have highlighted that ethnic-based discrimination persistently ranks very high, and migrants have a significantly lower participation in the labour market than natives (Vogiazides & Mondani, 2020; Lappalainen, 2021; Velin et al,2022; Skans & Wasen, 2023). Moreover, despite the Government's wish to attract highly skilled labour in the international competition for talents, valuable for the national economy, scholars have shown that even highly skilled migrants in Sweden are not exempted from discriminatory patterns. They face unequal employment conditions (salaries, education/occupation mismatch and higher unemployment rates) compared to the natives, even when they have the same qualifications and competencies (Irastorza & Bevelander, 2021, Bursell, 2025). Unionen (2024), the largest white-collar trade union in Sweden, raised the matter of skill waste of highly educated migrants in Sweden, the profit loss caused by this mismatch, and the exclusive requirement of speaking fluent Swedish for positions that is not an actual requirement. The documented ethnic-based discrimination and segregated labour market, in defiance of the structured welfare policies, indicates potential culprits that hinder the equal integration of highly skilled migrants into the labour market of Sweden and perpetuate inequalities.

Upon close examination of existing literature (*Previous Research*) on segregated labour market and discrimination, the study draws attention to the following research gaps. The first gap is lack of relevant research focused on the automotive industry of Sweden. As the largest export industry, the automotive sector has a significant financial impact in the country and has ostensibly embraced the positive aspects of ethnic diversity (Pohl & Viktoria, 2017). The motive behind the sector-specific focus of the thesis is dual. Firstly, the thesis background consists of companies operating within the automotive sector in the city of Gothenburg, and all

interview participants were based in Gothenburg at the time of the research. The city of Gothenburg is considered one of the most automotive dominant regions in Sweden, hosting more than one third of the total employment of the sector (Hans & Rise, 2017). And secondly, as interview participants represent both manufacturing and consultancy companies, the thesis explores the role of the interorganizational relationships within the Swedish automotive industry. Liberalization and capitalism lead to the growth of the staffing industry in the Swedish labour market, providing their client manufacturing companies with a numerical flexibility (Coe & Johns, 2007). Manufacturing companies within the automotive industry of Sweden use highly skilled engineer consultants through assignments with consultancy companies, to address digital competence deficits and gain the numerical flexibility to adjust their manpower during critical periods of financial instability (Volvo Cars 2008, 2012, 2023, 2025; Volvo Group, 2020; Eurofound, 2020; Mankevich & Svahn, 2021). As this numerical flexibility is essential for the viability of manufacturing companies, there are arguably economic interests behind this collaboration with consultancy companies, who carry the financial risk and employment responsibilities for the agency workers (Coe & Johns, 2007). A notable example of numerical flexibility among the aforementioned automotive manufacturing companies, is the recent redundancy announcement from Volvo Cars (2025) due to financial challenges, estimating 3 thousand global layoffs, from which, 1 thousand positions are filled by consultants in Sweden.

Interconnected with the first gap, the second significant aspect of the thesis refers to the incorporation of micro and meso levels of analysis. Even though there has been broad research on the segregated labour market of Sweden, it is mainly focused on the micro-individual level of analysis, such as the experiences of migrants or the role of recruiters on ethnic-based discrimination. On the individual level, hiring managers and HR professionals are considered the decision-making operators of recruitment practices, underlying the key role of hiring professionals as the gatekeepers of the labour market (Wells, 2013; Fibbi et al, 2021). A plethora of academic research have found that even when organizations claim meritocracy, the lack of formal fair recruitment practices and unintentional nature of biases of hiring professionals, such as prejudice and homophily, can limit the chances for migrants to get hired and development opportunities in their career (Attström, 2007; Awbrey, 2007; Rooth, 2010; Bursell, 2012 & 2014; Zschirnt & Rueding, 2016; Auer et al, 2018; Frissen et al, 2022). Combining the individual role of hiring professionals with the meso-organizational level, the

paper considers of utmost importance to explore the formal recruitment practices and strategies implemented by manufacturing and consultancy companies in the automotive industry of Sweden. The paper analyses the organizational recruitment practices described by the hiring professionals, that can foster equity and how their absence can lead to disparities and the unequal integration of migrant engineers within the organizations.

On the meso-organizational level, hiring professionals representing consultancy and manufacturing companies provide a more refined approach on the organizational factors that establish and perpetuate inequalities in the automotive industry of Sweden. Through the interviews with hiring professionals, the paper gains insights and examines interorganizational relationships, distribution of diversity within the organizations, recruitment practices and motives, as well as the perceived bureaucratic hurdles in the process of work permits. The organizational perspective provides an in-depth understanding of the meso-factors that shape the inclusion or exclusion of highly skilled migrants. The third and last gap refers to the limited research focusing on the recruitment of highly skilled migrants in Sweden. As suggested by Frank (2018) and Irastorza & Bevelander (2021), there is need for academic attention to the recruitment of highly skilled migrants in Sweden, exploring organizational motives, recruitment strategies and organizational practices that conceal discrimination.

Purpose

As an attempt to explore the misalignment of the anti-discrimination regulatory framework and persistent ethnic-based inequalities in the labour market of Sweden, the thesis argues that it is highly relevant to focus on the ethnic-based discrimination and unequal integration of highly skilled migrants in the Swedish automotive industry. The thesis considers manufacturing and consultancy companies as its core, engaging a micro-individual and meso-organizational level of analysis. More specifically, through interviews with hiring professionals the thesis explores the interorganizational relationships between manufacturing and consultancy companies, organizational recruitment practices, as well as motives behind hiring decisions. Through these aspects, the paper analyses the mechanisms that affect the inclusion of highly skilled migrants in the automotive industry.

Research Questions:

- 1. How can interorganizational relationships between manufacturing and consultancy companies affect the integration of highly skilled migrants into the automotive industry of Sweden?*
- 2. How do recruitment practices contribute to the ethnic-based discrimination and unequal integration of highly skilled migrants in the automotive industry of Sweden?*
- 3. What are the motives behind the recruitment of highly skilled migrants in the automotive industry of Sweden?*

Disposition

The thesis starts by presenting the migration scenery in Sweden and the need to attract highly skilled migrants as a competitive advantage. The main problematization lies on the segregated labour market and the persistent ethnic-based discrimination, highlighting that even highly skilled migrants are confronted with unjustifiable inequalities. The chapter *Previous Research* introduces the academic research previously conducted in the field of labour market segregation in Sweden, categorized under the major themes of *Correspondence Test Experiments*, *Socio-economic Motives*, *The Swedish Labour Market & Precarious Work* and *Diversity & Fair Practices*. The next chapter, *Theoretical Framework*, describes the utilization of the main chosen theories, *Durable Inequalities* and *Discrimination*. The thesis then presents the methodology employed, reasoning on the choices with regards to *Method*, *Participants*, *Data Collection*, *Analysis*, *Trustworthiness* and *Ethical Considerations*. The chapter *Results & Analysis* outlines the results of the research, discussing the mechanisms that affect the integration of highly skilled migrant engineers in the automotive industry of Sweden. Lastly, the chapter *Conclusion* includes a summary of the paper, implications within HRM and suggestions for future research.

2. Previous Research

As labour market segregation and ethnic-based discrimination are complicated phenomena, previous research has examined them through social and economic theoretical prisms. More specifically, the research in the field can be divided into four categories that provide a holistic approach on the thesis's subject: *Correspondence Test Experiments*, *Socio-economic Motives & Migrant Labour*, *the Swedish Labour Market & Precarious Work* and *Diversity & Fairness Practices*. Where applicable, previous conducted research is presented in a chronological order, or according to the context details (regional context, findings and themes).

2.1. Correspondence Test Experiments

Multiple researchers have experimented with correspondence tests in the hiring process, emphasizing the disadvantaged position of migrants in the labour market. In the European context, Zschirnt & Rueding (2016) and Auer et al (2018) used survey experiments and statistical analysis to prove that applicants of foreign origin have more disadvantaged chances to be hired, even when their qualifications and language skills are similar to the ones of native applicants. Also, the scholars proved that the disadvantage was greater for migrant applicants when the desired position was high in the occupational hierarchy. Auer et al (2018) emphasized the duality of migrants' disadvantaged position, as they also face higher risks to be locked in bad jobs, due to the hierarchical positioning of natives and immigrants. Such hierarchies depict the potentials of vertical diversity as a mechanism of organizational discrimination, where highly status in-group employees receive more beneficial treatments in development opportunities, compared to out-group employees (Awbrey, 2007; Eurofound, 2017).

In the Swedish context, Attström (2007) and Rooth (2010) confirmed the implicit biases and discriminatory behaviour in the hiring process of applicants with ethnic background compared to native applicants with similar qualifications in various cities in Sweden. Schröder (2007) emphasised the discriminatory consequences of personal network recruitment for migrant applicants in Sweden, urging for continuous evaluations of policies and proactive measures that can alter employers' behaviour. Bursell (2012; 2014) conducted studies on the ethnic exclusion of Middle Eastern and non-Western applicants and tested the callback rates, realising that applicants with foreign names were systemically disadvantaged compared to Swedish

applicants. The scholar explained how institutionalized hiring practices that are common in Sweden, such as network recruitment, decrease the opportunities of migrant applicants to get hired. Irastorza and Bevelander (2021) highlighted the statistical discrepancies between the native- and foreign-born employees in their employment conditions, suggesting equity-focused policies regarding the evaluation of employees. Bursell and Bygren (2025) also elaborated on the role of xenophobia and homophily in the hiring decisions of employers in Sweden. The study proved that when the representation of migrants is increased, the hiring managers are becoming less reluctant to hire due to familiarity. Nevertheless, specific ethnic groups, such as applicants with Arabic and Slavic-sound names, might still be stereotyped. The authors presented the role of native and immigrant occupation niches in the creation and perpetuation of segregation, where employers prefer employees of similar background to them. For jobs that require high skills and social skills natives are being preferred by natives, while migrants that reach hiring-decision roles might perceive immigrants as more suitable for demanding positions and can provide migrants within their social network with job opportunities (Tilly, 1998; Bursell & Bygren, 2025).

Above mentioned research treated the hiring process as the first step of selection criteria and highlighted the importance of equitable recruitment practices to mitigate discrimination in hiring settings. All experiments proved the disadvantaged positions of migrant applicants, suggesting the need of future qualitative research focusing on the role of recruiters, exploring the hiring setting with a sector-specific approach, and draw attention to the institutional framework and organizational processes that remain rigid.

2.2. Socio-economic Motives & Migrant Labour

Scholars have also paid attention to the motives behind hiring decisions and how the socio-economic context can influence migrant labour. Piore (1979) was one of the first scholars to explore the macroeconomic and social contexts that can affect the demand for migrant labour in the industrial societies. Drawing from Tilly (1998), the capitalist expansion is responsible for the sharpened inequalities in the labour markets. In the more recent literature, MacKenzie and Forde (2009) and Baxter-Reid (2016) employed a qualitative comparative approach to explore the decision making of employers and elaborated on the perpetuating cycles of labour exploitation, through the willingness of migrant employees to work harder. Hence, it is critical

to take into consideration the motives behind the hiring decisions, and achieve a rounded approach to organizational inequalities.

In Sweden, Frank (2013) explored how ethnic inequalities were created and legitimized between migrant and native workers in the construction sector. Companies that are not able to find the required skills within the natives, proceed to hire migrants from a common category within the sector, in which they are perceived as highly skilled, as for example Indians in the IT sector (Frank, 2018). Companies capitalized the peculiarities of the regulatory framework, and deployed workers from abroad, aiming to reduce the cost of labour. The mechanisms of exploitation, opportunity hoarding and emulation were the key drivers of categorical inequalities. The emerged inequalities were legitimized and with time became socially acceptable in Sweden. Krifors (2017) and Hedberg & Olofsson (2021) focused their studies on the interdependent relationship of migration industry and migration policies. Social hierarchies and policies are justified and shaped according to the financial aspects of the neoliberal labour market, perpetuating inequalities among foreign-born and native employees.

2.3 The Swedish Labour Market & Precarious Work

As the participants of the thesis consist of hiring professionals, representing consultancy and manufacturing companies that operate in the automotive industry of Sweden, it is critical to discuss how these interorganizational relationships emerged, and the consequences on the employment conditions. A lot of academic research has focused on temporary employment and precarious working conditions that emerged from the liberalization of the Swedish labour market (MacKenzie et al, 2010; Gauffin, 2020; Berglund et al, 2020). The financial recession of 1990 led to the reform of the labour market, to provide the flexibility to organizations to adjust their workforce and balance employment costs (MacKenzie et al, 2010; Berglund et al, 2020). Hence, employment agencies emerged, usually offering insecure employment contracts and disadvantaged employment conditions to their employees, subcontracted or assigned to deliver projects in other companies (Berglund et al, 2020; Gauffin, 2020). MacKenzie et al (2010) noted the higher regional demands for agency employees in Stockholm and Gothenburg, while Berglund et al (2020) and Gauffin (2020) explained that this form of employment is more common among migrants, contributing to labour market's segregation and racialization of

underclass.

2.4 Diversity & Fairness Practices

An increased number of researchers have raised awareness on the importance of a more anthropocentric approach on HRM practices. In the Swedish context, Rydgren's (2004) main problematization was the institutional discrimination in the recruitment process and how some qualification requirements can have intended or unintended exclusion effects, as for instance knowledge of the Swedish language for jobs that such a requirement is not actually necessary. Frissen et al (2022) noted that organizations that do not implement inclusive recruitment practices, allow human biases of recruiting personnel to interfere with their decision-making. Patterns of discrimination can be concealed under various recruitment practices. Starting from job advertisements, the job description language can discourage qualified applicants of foreign background.

Multiple scholars gave emphasis on HR practices that can embody diversity in organizations and ensure fairness (Krause et al, 2012; Åslund & Nordstrum, 2007; Zschirnt and Rueding, 2016; Auer et al, 2018; Nkomo et al, 2019; Blommaert & Coenders, 2023; Ayoko & Fujimoto, 2024). Alder and Gilbert (2006), Frissen et al (2022) and Chugh (2024) argued that organizations should incorporate features of equity and diversity in their HR practices, not only as a matter of legal compliance or morality, but mainly as an act of strategic advantage. Recruitment in most organizations are not inclusive, and is a subject to human biases and prejudices (Frissen et al (2022)). The scholars advocated regarding practices on the initial stage of recruitment, interview process, employment conditions and preventative measures, as the most impactful in reducing discrimination. More specifically, on the initial stage of recruitment, organizations are advised to use inclusive language in job posting, anonymization of candidates prior shortlisting and usage of e-tools to automatically match CVs with job descriptions. During the interview process, organizations are encouraged to include diverse interview panels and competence-based structured interviews. Regarding the employment conditions, organizations should provide fair payment and inclusive onboarding. Finally, as preventative measures, organizations are advised to adopt unconscious bias trainings for hiring professionals, foster an equity-oriented organizational culture and employer branding, as well as frequent monitoring of practices and assessment of targets and performance.

3. Theoretical Framework

The aim of the thesis is to explore patterns of ethnic-based discrimination and inequalities that emerge from interorganizational relationships, composition of the workforce and job allocation, recruitment practices, the motives behind the recruitment of highly skilled migrants, as well as the bureaucratic hurdles in the process of obtaining a work permit. To achieve this, it is essential to set the theoretical grounds for **Discrimination** and **Durable Inequalities** as intertwining concepts. The thesis suggests that discrimination is the starting point for discussing the ethnic segregation in the labour market. Organizations re-produce forms of discrimination that are already established in a society, and carry them into the labour market (Tilly, 1998; Awbrey, 2007). Firms systemically reproduce discriminatory behaviours through their formal operations, even when they comply to the regulatory framework (Tilly, 1998; James, 2000; Awbrey, 2007).

The concept of durable inequalities, introduced by Tilly (1998), was selected as more appropriate to analyse the organizational ethnic-based segregation. As a phenomenon that persists over time within systems, the theory of durable inequalities does not rely solely on the individual role of employers and their taste-based inclusion decisions. Therefore, interorganizational relationships, composition of the workforce and job allocation, recruitment process, motives of recruitment and bureaucratic hurdles are examined through the lens of social closure, exclusion and control to disclose the mechanisms that install and perpetuate inequalities between native-Swedish and migrant employees. In the concept of durable inequalities, hiring managers and HR professionals portray the power-holding actors that make decisions on the organizational operations, that have a direct or indirect impact on ethnic segregation. Tilly (1998) introduced the four mechanisms that are used in the organizational view of inequalities, *exploitation* and *opportunity hoarding* as causal mechanisms, and *emulation* and *adaptation* as mechanisms of general influence. In this thesis, the analysis of the findings focuses mainly on the aspects of *exploitation*, *opportunity hoarding* and *adaptation* as the underlying drivers of influence. Tilly (1998) explained that exploitation arises when people who hold power, can control the access of others to valuable resources and benefit from their efforts. The mechanism of exploitation is used to identify the power-holding relationships between the two types of organizations, manufacturing and consultancy, and the categorical

pairs of native and migrant employees. The discussion focuses on the ability of certain groups to profit from the labour of migrants, while excluding them from the full value of their labour. The mechanism of opportunity hoarding is used to highlight in what manner dominant members monopolize access to jobs and opportunities for development. Lastly, the concept of adaptation is used to explain how durable inequalities are normalized through the recruitment processes of automotive organizations.

The theory of discrimination has a supplemental role, clarifying the scope of inequality mechanisms, benefiting disproportionately native and migrant employees. Even though discriminatory acts are prohibited in Sweden (The Discrimination Act, 2008:567, 2023), organizational practices harbour discrimination, affecting the inclusion and career development of migrant employees. The thesis suggests that durable inequalities are the outcome of the ethnic-based discrimination, that persists in the Swedish society and thus penetrates its labour market. When discrepancies between the employment conditions of native and migrant employees cannot be justified through variations on individuals' capabilities, are then attributed to discrimination (Tilly, 1998). Organizations and recruiting professionals are the power-holding actors that make decisions on the practices, that produce and reproduce ethnic segregation. The identified practices that act as mechanisms of inequality are categorized under two types of discrimination, direct and indirect. The legal framework of Sweden (The Discrimination Act, 2008:567, 2023) distinguishes the two types of discrimination as per the explicit disadvantaged treatment (direct discrimination), versus the application of a provision, criterion or procedure that even if it appears fair, may disadvantage a group of people (indirect discrimination). In line with the distinction provided by The Discrimination Act (2008:567, 2023), Cossette-Lefebvre (2020) highlighted that the intentionality of discrimination is essential to grasp the embeddedness of inequalities within organizations. Direct discrimination forces social closure and exclusion, while indirect discrimination blurs the boundaries of the regulatory compliance and supports the maintenance of inequality mechanisms. This distinction is used in the analysis of the results, to provide clearer specifications on the aspect of intentionality behind the mechanisms that cause and perpetuate inequalities within the manufacturing and consultancy companies in the automotive industry of Sweden.

Organizations are complex entities that exhibit multiple systems within them, sustaining discrimination (Tilly, 1998). Therefore, the analysis of the findings takes place under five main themes: *Interorganizational Relationships*, *Composition of the Workforce & Job Allocation*, *Recruitment Process*, *Motives of Recruitment* and *Bureaucratic Hurdles*.

The first section, *Interorganizational Relationships*, presents the power dynamics between manufacturing and consultancy companies, that affect the decision-making of recruiters. Client relationships and economic incentives act as the basis of exploitation and opportunity hoarding, explicitly excluding migrants. The concept of direct discrimination is utilized to analyse how inequalities are forced and established due to the dynamic interplay between manufacturing and consultancy companies. The second important concept to explore the instalment and perpetuation of discrimination and inequalities is *Composition of the Workforce & Job Allocation*. The uneven distribution of ethnic diversity across segments and roles reflects the dynamics between native/migrant niches and networks, capable to monopolize resources and exclude out-group members (Tilly, 1998). The concept of glass ceiling is usually deployed by academics to describe the invisible barriers that women face in their career development towards higher managerial positions (Wirth, 2001). In this paper, the term “glass ceiling” is used for the analysis of ethnic division of roles and hierarchies within the manufacturing and consultancy companies, to describe the restricted vertical mobility and limited opportunities for development that highly skilled migrant engineers face in their career compared to their native peers. Moreover, the concept of homophily from the side of hiring professionals is used in the analysis of unintentional and indirect discrimination. The invisibility of the barriers in this section exhibits the indirect discrimination that highly skilled migrants face. Even though organizations appear to have neutral provisions for development, organizational hierarchies are used to discuss the beneficial treatment of natives and the disadvantaged development of highly skilled migrants.

By taking into consideration the pivotal role of fair recruitment in mitigating discrimination (*Previous Research*), the analysis of this paper is focused on the recruitment practices of manufacturing and consultancy companies, and links them to the establishment and perpetuation of inequalities. The main stages of the *Recruitment Process* analysis (*Job Advertising*, *Shortlisting of Candidates*, *Interviews and Selection Criteria*) constitute the tools

utilized by native and migrant niches to achieve selective inclusion and normalise it through the routinised formality of the organizational recruitment processes. Moreover, the role of *network* recruitment in Sweden is analysed to explore the institutionalization of inequalities. The analysis of this section focuses on how formal and seemingly neutral practices can mask discrimination, through arbitrary decision making and gatekeeping from the side of hiring professionals (Wells, 2013; Fibbi et al, 2021).

In the section *Recruitment Motives*, the thesis focuses on the perspectives of hiring professionals, and the rationale behind the selection of highly skilled migrant engineers in the manufacturing and consultancy companies. The attributes that position them as a valuable resource, but also as vulnerable, are employed to elaborate on durable inequalities. For the purposes of the analysis, the “rhetoric of good worker” is deployed to describe the vulnerable position of highly skilled migrants, and their willingness to work harder in fear of employment termination (MacKenzie & Forde, 2009; Baxter-Reid, 2016). As durable inequalities cannot be justified through individuals’ capabilities, the analysis of this section this section strengthens the main argument of ethnic-based discrimination within the automotive industry of Sweden. Lastly, the section *Bureaucratic Hurdles* discusses how the process of obtaining a work permit in Sweden, a regulatory requirement for some applicants of foreign origin, can shape the decision making of the hiring professionals representing manufacturing and consultancy companies. Its discriminatory impact in the inclusion of highly skilled migrants in the automotive industry of Sweden contrasts the wish of the Swedish Government to attract highly skilled migrants.

4. Methodology

The case study is focused on the patterns of ethnic discrimination and inequalities depicted in consultancy and manufacturing companies, operating in the automotive industry of Sweden. With the aim of aggregating the context characteristics and multi-level dynamics that impact ethnic segregation, a qualitative approach was deemed more appropriate to locate people's meanings on experiences, events, processes and structures (Miles et al, 2014). The qualitative approach allows researchers “*to get under the skin of a group or organization to find out what really happens – the informal reality which can only be perceived from inside*” (Gillham, 2000, p.1).

4.1. Participants

The initial research plan considered at least 15 participants, as the minimum sample size required in qualitative research (Bertaux, 1981; Guest et al, 2006). As further discussed in *Limitations*, the country, city, industry and position-specific selection criteria, as well as the sensitive subject of recruiting migrant employees narrowed down significantly the available pool of participants. For the purposes of the study seven participants agreed to be interviewed. The conducted interviews were of great depth and provided sufficient information on the research problem. Identified themes, relevant to discrimination and inequalities, were shared by all the participants as a common experience. As theoretical saturation was achieved, the findings that emerged from the seven interviews were considered adequate to proceed with the analysis.

All the participants were employed by six consultancy companies and one manufacturing company in the automotive industry of Sweden, specifically in the city of Gothenburg, and had hiring-decision responsibilities. The choice of the participants, representing both types of companies operating in the automotive industry, was aiming to gain a more holistic understanding regarding the recruitment of highly skilled migrants and identify potential similarities/differences in the mechanisms that generate and perpetuate inequalities. Additionally, as mentioned in the *Introduction*, the paper combines the micro-individual with the meso-organizational level of analysis. The hiring professionals that agreed to be interviewed provided their personal perspectives regarding the recruitment of highly skilled

migrant engineers, as well as their insights regarding the formal recruitment processes, composition of the workforce and job allocation that have an impact in the unequal integration of highly skilled migrants in the automotive industry of Sweden.

Aiming to collect a variety of different perspectives and experiences on migrant labour, ethnic diversity and recruitment practices, the balanced diversity of the sample was taken into consideration. Selected participants had heterogenous profiles as of origin, professional experience and gender (*Table 1: Interview Participants*), to discuss the interplays in their experiences. Regarding the professional background, the participants were five hiring engineering managers and two HR professionals. They all had a minimum professional experience of three years in their current role, to ensure an established experience in the automotive industry and direct involvement in the recruitment process of employees. The gender ratio, the sample consists of two female and five male participants. Even though the share of women in the sample appears to be small, it reflects the proportion of women in the automotive sector of Sweden, which was approximately 25% in 2015 (Hans & Rise, 2017). And finally, participants' balanced diversity regarding their ethnic origin was considered crucial in the selection of the interviewees, to discuss differences in their views and experiences regarding ethnic diversity and discrimination.

Table 1: Interview Participants

Interviewee	Sex	Origin	Position/Role	Company
1	M	Swedish of foreign origin	Manager	Consultancy- Swedish
2	FM	Native Swedish	Manager	Manufacturing – Swedish Multinational
3	FM	Swedish of foreign origin	Manager	Consultancy – French Multinational Operating in Sweden
4	M	Native Swedish	Human Resources	Consultancy- Swedish
5	M	Native Swedish	Manager	Consultancy- Swedish

6	M	Swedish with mixed background	Human Resources	Consultancy- Swedish
7	M	Swedish of foreign origin	Manager	Consultancy- Swedish

Interviewees were contacted via LinkedIn, telephone and email. The *Participation Request* was sent to all interviewees, that included introduction, purpose of the study and ethical considerations (*Appendix 1*).

4.2 Data Collection

For the optimal selection of data, a great emphasis was placed on the preparation of the interviews. The academic literature discussed in the chapter *Previous Research*, was used for the better understanding of the problem, gaps in the existing literature and suggestion for future studies. The *Interview Guide (Appendix 2)* was created based on *Previous Research*. The interview questions were designed to cover a broad range of multi-level context characteristics that can interfere with the perceptions and decisions of hiring professionals and understand critical organizational practices. The interview guide starts with origin questions, allowing the participants to present themselves and career experiences. The second part was designed to discuss job allocation and teams' composition within manufacturing and consultancy companies. The third part was focused on the recruitment process, practices implemented, selection criteria and diversity initiatives. For this part, the *Diversity & Fairness Practices* introduced in *Previous Research*, were used as the basis for formulating the questions. The last part was directed at the institutional framework and its impact on the recruitment process.

The semi-structured and open-ended interviews allowed the in-depth discussions of the questions and provided an interactive flexibility when better understanding was deemed necessary (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Additionally, the preparation of the *Interview Guide* assisted in the gathering of coherent data from all the participants and permitted the comparability of the content.

All interviews were conducted in English, between February and March 2025. Five interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams, and upon completion of the interviews, the application automatically created the transcriptions. The use of Microsoft Teams is permitted from the University of Gothenburg as a digital tool for the studies. The transcription was checked thoroughly and necessary amendments to text were applied. Two more interviews were conducted in person and were taped. The transcription of these two interviews was conducted manually.

4.3 Data Analysis

The analysis of the findings was conducted with a mixed inductive and deductive approach. Once all interviews were transcribed, the raw data were examined closely to observe the perspectives of recruiting personnel and organizational practices. The findings were sorted manually under open codes, derived from data and patterns as they emerged. During the initial phase of the study, there was no pre-determined theoretical framework. The coding of the findings was relevant to academic literature on segregated labour market and ethnic-based discrimination. More specifically, diversity, exclusion, occupational hierarchies and stages of the recruitment processes were the main codes that emerged from all seven transcribed interviews. Later, the codes were examined and categorized under the key themes of organizational practices, interorganizational relationships, composition of the workforce and job allocation, motives of recruitment and institutional framework. The final themes were cross-checked with the raw data of the interviews, to confirm referential adequacy. The emerged themes were cross-examined with the literature review, to decrease the possibility of biased interpretation and support in the formulation of the theoretical framework. The two-step coding process took place with a mixed inductive and deductive approach, as flexibility was deemed necessary to notice all the important empirical findings with a holistic understanding without personal bias, but also in line with the findings of previous research (Azungah, 2018). Upon reviewing the emerged findings, thematic analysis was considered the appropriate tool to analyse the experiences of the participants, as well as reasonings and motives behind complex phenomena and generate useful results (Nowell et al, 2017). This assisted in the construction of the research question, as I had acquired a fuller picture of the context.

4.4 Trustworthiness

The aspect of trustworthiness was considered for the quality of the data presented in this paper. More specifically, in order to enhance the authenticity of the report, four criteria trustworthiness were applied in the writing process of the thesis (Shenton, 2004; Nowell et al, 2017).

Credibility

Shenton (2004) describes credibility as the internal validity. The main objective of this criterion is the correspondence of the findings with reality. Iterative questioning was applied during the interviews. The main themes of the interview guide were followed closely, and interviews were adapted to the professional experience of the participants, to assure in-depth understanding of the questions and consistency of information. The transcribed texts of each interview were examined separately and observed carefully to extract the most relevant information and meaningful points given by the participants. The data were categorized under codes, and then themes relevant to the theoretical framework. Referential adequacy of themes was re-checked with raw data from transcriptions. As the study is bound to the requirements of anonymity and ethics, all quotes used in the analysis of the findings were labelled as per the assigned number of each interviewee. Thick description of the phenomena under scrutiny was conducted in chapters *Previous Research, Theoretical Framework, Results & Analysis and Conclusion*, to provide readers with useful insights from actual situations (Shenton; 2004).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the external validity of the research, and in which extend the results of the study can be used in different contexts (Shenton, 2004; Nowell et al, 2017). This has been achieved by providing in-detailed descriptions of number and professions of participants, sector and country specific focus and types of organizations. *Methodology* section includes descriptions of method, data collection and analysis of the findings.

As a qualitative case study, the concept of transferability is considered more suitable from generalizability, as it provides insights to a very specific context (country, city, industry), so that readers can make an informed decision regarding the application of the study in other contexts (Polit & Beck, 2010).

Dependability

The criterion of Dependability indicates the reliability of the study results over time, due to the evolving nature of social phenomena and contextual environments (Shenton, 2004). The results of a future research in the same context (country, industry, participants, research method) might deviate due to the constant changings of social settings. In this thesis, Dependability is achieved by Credibility, transparency in data operationalization, and Transferability, clear description of context and time.

Confirmability

Finally, Confirmability demonstrates the objectivity of the results, depicting the reality of the participants without biased interpretations from researchers (Shenton, 2004). The thesis complies to the criterion of Confirmability, by supporting the research findings with raw data, derived from the interviews, and analysing them in accordance with the selected theoretical framework and previous academic literature. The thesis provides adequate reasoning, linking the problem statement and questions, chosen methodology, theoretical framework and analysis in a transparent manner.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

The present study was conducted under the framework of PV2500 V25 Master Thesis course, under the framework of the Master programme in Strategic Human Resource Management and Labour Relations. The research process of the study is bound to the ethical academic principles and is in line with the guidelines of the University of Gothenburg (Rights and responsibilities/ Personal data in student projects). Participants were informed in advance regarding the purposes of this research and the use of data. A *Participation Request (Appendix 1)* was sent to all interviewees, informing them regarding the approximate length of the interview, as well as the aspects of anonymity and confidentiality. The participation request included the participation of the interviewees in a voluntary basis, their right to withdraw, and their right to skip questions that could make them feel uncomfortable or did not wish to answer.

All recordings took place with the consent of the participants. To avoid threatening the anonymity of the participants, all transcriptions were fully anonymised and filed under codes.

Additionally, transcript contextual details that revealed names of professionals and names of companies were amended during the transcription, to avert identity disclosure and prevent potential traceability of the participants.

According to the AI policy PV2203 2024 of the University of Gothenburg, any use of AI tools must be clearly stated in the thesis. In this paper the AI tool ChatGPT was used in two instances. Firstly, it was used during the phase of literature review to look through multiple academic articles in a timely manner. ChatGPT was requested to summarize academic articles, to ensure coherence of relevant articles with the problematization of the thesis. Upon examining the provided summaries, articles that were considered appropriate for the purpose of the study were studied independently, to ensure no inaccuracies in context will be transferred to the paper. Moreover, ChatGPT was requested to suggest authors and titles of academic literature relevant to *Previous Research* and *Theoretical Framework*. Secondly, the AI tool ChatGPT was used for proof-reading the thesis, reviewing the use of academic language and coherent flow of the text. Generated suggestions were not copied directly in the thesis, instead they were used as an example to re-write recommended sentences in a more concise style.

5.Results & Analysis

5.1 Interorganizational Relationships

The power dynamics that emerge from the collaboration of manufacturing and consultancy companies is the first step of the analysis. As discussed in *Previous Research*, the financial incentives behind this collaboration provide the opportunity to manufacturing companies to minimize employment costs and risks, and the flexibility to adjust their workforce according to their needs (MacKenzie et al, 2010; Gauffin, 2020; Berglund et al, 2020). Similarly, the financial viability of the consultancy companies and assignment opportunities for consultant engineers are dependent on the relationship with their ‘client’ manufacturing companies “*A lot of agreements with big clients, a lot of opportunities as a consultant*” (Interviewee 1). As reported by the interviewee, when consultancy companies achieve collaboration agreements with big manufacturing companies, they can provide more opportunities to their consultant engineers.

At the time of the research, the automotive industry in Sweden was reported to go through some hardships. An interviewee reflected on the impact of the financial crisis on the labour market with the following quote:

Here in Sweden, I would say globally as well, we are facing economic problems. Which is of course, affecting the work markets, highest number of people ever being without a job here in Sweden for a very long time. A lot of high qualified profiles. The problem is there isn't enough jobs for them.

(Interviewee 4)

The interviewee reflected on the high unemployment rates in the Swedish labour market at the time of the interview, and the limited opportunities they can provide to highly skilled consultant engineers. This financial dependency to manufacturing companies affects the way consultancy companies handle their workforce, as they highly depend on the labour demands of ‘client’ manufacturing companies: “*But when there are layoffs, the companies usually chose employees of consultancies to go first, as they are not the ones handling their employment contracts.*” (Interviewee 7). Interviewees representing consultancy companies, elaborated on the impact of

the financial crisis on their recruitment approach. When manufacturing companies need to downsize their manpower, engineers who are employed by consultancy companies are terminated first. This consequently affects the recruitment approach of the consultancy companies: *“Right now, we don't hire anybody until they have an assignment with the clients/ We can't take the risk of hiring without the assignment.”* (Interviewee 4). As the interviewee explained, consultancy companies cannot proceed with any recruitment, unless there is a specific request from a client manufacturing company. This is connected to the financial responsibility a consultancy company carries for the agency worker (Coe & Johns, 2007), as consultancy companies are not willing to take such a risk during the financial challenges the automotive industry faces in 2025.

The current financial instability of the market has caused an increase in the demand of manufacturing companies to collaborate with consultancy agencies for the assignment of engineering professionals, instead of hiring directly employees. By taking into consideration the fact that this demand is rooted on the grounds of minimizing employment costs and risks of manufacturing companies (Piore, 1979), employees of consultancy companies are automatically more vulnerable to the consequences of the unstable market. The first theme of analysis suggests that manufacturing companies are the powerholders in this relationship, able to control the resources and distribution of returns to the workforce of the consultancy companies. Data revealed that the consultant engineers are confronted with weaker job security and tenure, due to the temporary nature of their assignments in the manufacturing companies (MacKenzie et al, 2010; Gauffin, 2020; Berglund et al, 2020). I posit that this ability of manufacturing companies to exercise control over the workforce of consultancy companies is an exploitation mechanism, that allows the former to profit from the labour of the latter (Tilly, 1998, pp. 7-8).

In continuation of the control power of manufacturing companies, representatives of consultancy companies reported the greatest challenge they face in the recruitment of highly skilled migrants, due to the interorganizational collaborations:

*The most difficult has been that I have to follow the requests of our clients.
Which I have interpreted to be discriminatory. I have been told, pretty*

straightforward, that some managers, some clients don't want people from certain countries. /Even if they are in Sweden holding the Swedish citizenship. (Interviewee 5)

Interviewees representing consultancy companies explained that managers operating in manufacturing companies have recruitment requests, explicitly excluding persons due to their ethnic/national origin, even when the persons of concern reside in Sweden and hold the Swedish citizenship. It is worth noting that interviewees who shared a similar experience are native Swedish, while the rest of the interviewees who are Swedish of foreign origin or mixed background did not share a similar experience of a discriminatory request. This might be explained by taking into consideration that communicators, in this case representatives of manufacturing companies who do not wish to hire or collaborate with employees of a certain origin, would adjust their communication content according to the characteristics of the audience (Ye et al, 2021). Meaning that representatives of manufacturing companies shared the discriminatory recruitment approach to persons of similar ethnic background, but were more cautious to directly state their discriminatory recruitment approach to persons of foreign origin. Data show that manufacturing companies ignore the regulatory framework of Sweden, that prohibits employers to discriminate on the ground of ethnicity (The Discrimination Act, 2008:567, 2023). Interviewees also explained the dependency of the consultancy companies to the requests of the manufacturing companies, even when these requests are directly discriminatory. The data show that the hiring decisions of recruiting professionals in consultancy companies is directly impacted by the ability of manufacturing companies to exercise control and force social closure and exclusion (Tilly, 1998). The reported data demonstrate direct ethnic discrimination and exclusion of applicants due to their foreign origin, in line with the findings of Attström (2007), Rooth (2010) and Bursell (2012; 2014). I argue that the decision of hiring managers to intentionally exclude applicants with specific country origins, stands as a direct act of discrimination, enacted by the mechanism of opportunity hoarding (Cossette-Lefebvre, 2020). Managers of native origin operating in manufacturing companies are the powerholders in the recruitment decisions and limit the access of out-groups to the valuable resources (job opportunities) (Tilly, 1998).

The reported data are limited due to certain factors. As elaborated in *Limitations*, representatives of companies, who are deliberately engaged in discriminatory practices, will avoid sharing such information. The data are reported from representatives of consultancy companies, and this implies that the rationale behind this decision remains unknown.

5.2 Composition of the Workforce & Job Allocation

A key concept to discuss durable inequalities and organizational discrimination is mobility (Tilly, 1998). To explore further the unequal categorization of migrant employees, a key objective of the *Interview Guide* was to discuss diversity within organizations. Participants representing manufacturing and consultancy companies described diversity within engineering professionals, reporting various countries and regions as employees' country of origin: *"I have people from China, from India, from Canada, from several countries around the globe."* (Interviewee 2). However, India and China were the standard countries that all interviewees mentioned: *"India has a lot of electric engineers, Electro engineers that are working with electrical components and also radio waves. And that is a competence that a lot of companies want it."* (Interviewee 4). The interviewee highlighted the competencies that Indian electric engineers hold, that companies in the automotive industry wish to acquire. In line with the findings of Frank (2013;2018), organizations hire migrants, usually from specific countries commonly found within a sector and widely perceived as highly skilled. Employers thus link specific groups of people, in this case migrant engineers, with their 'fitness' to specific positions. As Tilly (1998) highlighted, manufacturing firms divide roles and positions into clusters and recruit employees within well-marked categories, that are proved more reliable through referrals. Another interviewee also reported: *"So, it's quite natural when a country has over 1 billion of population (India). And you know, maybe they know someone who moved to Sweden."* (Interviewee 1). The interviewee explained this tendency based on the greater personal network of the Indian engineers. As network recruitment is a common practise in Sweden, the high concentration of Indian engineering professionals can be justified through their personal and professional networks.

Moving towards diversity in managerial levels, participants representing consultancy companies reported:

I would say it could be better. There is a lot of native Swedish people working at our company. In the leading positions right now we have... I think we have one left that is not Swedish. Wow, I haven't thought about it before. The majority in leading positions are white. (Interviewee 4)

The management team I would say there isn't much. The CEO is British, but yeah still European. My manager is Swedish, I am also Swedish, but the consultants are very diverse with gender and also where they are from. (Interviewee 6)

Interviewees reported that the vast majority of employees occupying managerial levels are native Swedish and offered very few examples of migrant employees, while they highlighted the diversity within consultant engineers. The data depict very low rates of diversity within managerial levels, compared to diversity among consultant engineers. Similarly, the representative of the manufacturing company reported “*Everyone in the management team is from Sweden.*” (Interviewee 2). Evidence show that even more concerning is the absence of diversity within managerial levels in the manufacturing company, where the interviewee explained that all employees in the management level are from Sweden.

The spread of ethnic diversity was pronounced on the lowest level of engineering professionals, whereas for leading positions it was much more limited, or absent in the case of manufacturing company. There is thus a disproportional representation of migrants across the occupation hierarchy for both types of companies. The data are consistent with the findings of Piore (1979), Awbrey (2007), Zschirnt & Rueding (2016) and Auer et al (2018), depicting the disadvantaged chances of migrants to be hired in positions high in occupational hierarchy and subsequently get locked in jobs of the lower segment. Returning to the role of mobility in the creation and perpetuation of durable inequalities (Tilly, 1998), reported data revealed that organizations allow the horizontal mobility of migrant engineers, but limited to the lowest segment of white-collar employment. On the contrary, vertical mobility seems to be significantly restricted. This systemic vertical barrier was also depicted in the hiring manager's perception, representing the manufacturing company “*Sometimes you would like people to develop. But I also need the knowledge to stay in my team*” (Interviewee 2). Interviewee expressed the importance of keeping highly skilled professionals in the engineering segments, despite the personal

motivation to support employees in their career development. A similar experience was reported by another interviewee:

There was a colleague from Pakistan that he was working for many years in XXXX (manufacturing company). He was trying for years to get a position in management. I think for many years. And he kept getting rejected. So, then he got the position that he wanted. I think it was in UK if I remember correctly. And he left. (Interviewee 7)

The participant shared an example of a migrant engineer who could not break the glass ceiling in the manufacturing organization and thus chose to pursue a career abroad. The findings revealed occupational hierarchies and vertical diversity, where in-group native employees receive more beneficial treatments in development opportunities compared to migrant employees, in line with the findings of Awbrey (2007) and Eurofound (2017). The findings also reflect the contrast with the Discrimination Act (2008:567, 2023), which dictates that employers should undertake preventative and proactive measures to investigate risks and obstacles, and promote equal opportunities in the field of development. I argue that data revealed the mechanism of opportunity hoarding, where access to jobs and opportunities for development are monopolized by dominant groups (Tilly, 1998).

Drawing on occupational hierarchies, an interviewee reflected on the homogenous background of team members and the respective hiring managers:

I look at my group, there are a lot more people in my group with similar background, as me. Maybe more people that come from abroad, or have the same experience as me. Born and raised here, but second-third generation immigrants. You know, who are the managers? So, every group is a bit different. For example, I have a colleague, XXXX. Fantastic manager, but she has a lot more women in our group because she herself is a woman. (Interviewee 1)

The interviewee, who is Swedish of foreign origin, shared an observation regarding the similarities of managers and their teams. The interviewee explained the natural tendency of managers to hire employees with common characteristics, in this case migrant background and gender. Data indicate that recruiting professionals tend to recruit employees with similar backgrounds to themselves. I argue that the phenomenon of homophily, either intentional or unintentional, depicts the mechanism of opportunity hoarding, contributing to the creation and maintenance of categorical inequalities through the exclusion of out-group members (Tilly, 1998). Native and migrant niches establish their social networks within organizations, limiting the hiring of other applicants who lack network resources (Tilly, 1998; Bursell, 2012; Bursell and Bygren, 2025).

Evidence shows that managerial roles, especially in the manufacturing company, are exclusively occupied by natives, indicating the social closure of the upper hierarchical organizational diversity. Data exposed the unequal categorization of migrant employees, who appear to be locked in the lowest segment of the engineering professionals with less opportunities for development. Even though interviewees did not justify the reported vertical segregation, data suggest that exploitation is the underlying driver of this unequal categorization. Organizations profit by distributing returns in an unequal manner, which in this case is the development opportunities between migrants and natives, providing greater returns to dominant niches (Tilly, 1998). Data also suggest that in conjunction with exploitation, the mechanism opportunity hoarding is illustrated in homophily and niches' networks, reinforcing inequalities by excluding out-group members (Tilly, 1998). The restricted vertical mobility of highly skilled migrants displays the disadvantaged application of career development as the glass ceiling that migrant employees cannot break, while native Swedish receive more beneficial treatment. The unintentional nature of homophily and niches, constitute processes of indirect discrimination, supporting the perpetuation of inequalities (Cossette-Lefebvre, 2020).

5.3 Recruitment Practices

The analysis of adopted recruitment process consists of the five main stages: job advertising, shortlisting of candidates, interviews, selection criteria and network recruitment. Starting with **job advertising**, interviewees explained the language parameters that need to be taken into

consideration prior publishing a job posting: *“If it is a requirement for an assignment, then of course I need to take that in consideration. / If there is a specific need for a specific role for Swedish, we will write that in our job ad.”* (Interviewee 4). Representatives of consultancy companies shared that the job postings are bound to the requirements of their client manufacturing companies. Representatives of consultancy companies elaborated also on indirect patterns of discrimination, enforced by manufacturing companies:

A lot of our clients today want the candidates to be able to speak Swedish. And I think that you don't need to speak Swedish in every job that you do, but since we are so controlled by our clients, that's something that we need to take into consideration/ Of course, we can coach our clients, we can tell them well, is it really necessary? For the specific job that you need to speak Swedish and many of them listen, which is why we still have some consultants that are speaking only English. (Interviewee 4)

I have experienced that even though you send candidates who have the correct technical skills, don't get the interviews because of a requirement that is not necessarily a hard requirement, such as being able to speak Swedish and have a driver's license for a software development role. / Depending of course on the client. They are, for instance, stating that the engineers have to speak Swedish and have a Swedish driver's license. That's usually automatically rejects a large pool of the candidates. (Interviewee 5)

Data depict again that the recruitment decisions of consultancy companies are dependent to the requests of the manufacturing companies. More specifically, manufacturing companies include the knowledge of the Swedish language, and Swedish driving license into the vacancies for software engineers. Job description and required qualifications are the first steps of the recruitment process, and hiring professionals can manipulate them to exclude (intentionally or unintentionally) non-elite members, and monopolize access to elite members (Tilly, 1998; Rydgren, 2004; Frissen et al, 2022). Exclusive job requirements are institutionalized through the recruitment practices of an organization, due to the ability of manufacturing companies to exercise control over the consultancy companies. The findings suggest that discrimination is embedded in the organizational processes via opportunity hoarding. As the recruitment process

is considered a common routine within organizations, and exclusive job requirements are institutionalized by this formal process, the mechanism of adaptation acts as a stabilizer of categorical inequalities (Tilly, 1998). Nevertheless, my critique concerns the intentionality of this discriminatory practice. I argue that reported exclusive requirements of Swedish language and driving license for software engineering roles, it not a neutral action. All participants reported that consultancy and manufacturing companies in the automotive industry use English as the official work language. Thus, the requirement of proficiency level of Swedish acts as an intentional barrier for migrant employees who might have been a few years in the country (Rydgren, 2004). Similarly exclusive is the Swedish driving license for a software position. Exclusive requirements are intentionally designed to secure social closure and exclude migrant applicants, and thus are attributed to direct discrimination (Cossette-Lefebvre, 2020).

Moving to the next step of the process, **shortlisting of candidates**, hiring managers reported regarding their role in the process: *“I have decided these are the finalists.”* (Interviewee 2). All participants explained that shortlisting was done manually by hiring managers, leaving up to their criteria which applicants will pass to the next step of the interview. Reported data also show that none of the organizations was using anonymity in the shortlisting process: *“We don't have any anonymization in the process right now.”* (Interviewee 4). Scholars recommend anonymized shortlisting as a tool to mitigate bias of recruiters against applicants with foreign names (Alder & Gilbert, 2006; Åslund & Nordström, 2007; Auer et al, 2018; Frissen et al, 2022; Chugh, 2024). Worth noting, is the observation shared by an HR professional: *“I noticed that a lot of candidates these days, actually, if you aren't from Sweden originally, are changing their names in the in the applications.”* (Interviewee 4). The interviewee highlighted that applicants of foreign origin tend to change their names in their CVs. In line with the findings of Bursell (2012), the discriminatory behaviour of employers in Sweden has been observed by applicants of foreign origin, who adopted this copying mechanism in hope of increasing their chances to receive a call-back. I argue that the stage of shortlisting is of utmost importance for bearing discrimination and granting favourable grounds to durable inequalities. Hiring managers can use the shortlisting process, an adapting mechanism, in a strategic manner to conceal the mechanism of opportunity hoarding (Tilly, 1998). This corresponds to the results of Attström (2007), Rooth (2010) and Frissen et al (2022), who illustrated the impact of individual level bias and discriminatory behaviour of hiring professionals in the recruitment of

applicants of foreign background. The thesis suggests that the apparently neutral organizational practice of shortlisting, can be utilized as a tool of indirect discrimination.

Participants also shared information regarding the structure of the **interviews**:

It is usually a two-stage interview, our recruiter focuses mainly on the personal aspects. If they pass those criteria, which is up to the discretion of the recruiter, the second round of interview is usually with me, because I will, most likely, be their hiring manager. Once I have a pool of candidates, I will talk with the recruiting manager at our client and present the candidates that I believe strongly and that are deemed suitable for the assignment. It's up to the hiring manager to make a decision with whom to proceed with. (Interviewee 5)

Interviewee described the interview process, where HR professionals conduct the first stage of the interview as an introduction meeting, focusing on the personal aspects of the candidate. The hiring manager focuses on the second stage of the interview process, responsible to select suitable profiles to present at the client manufacturing company. All interviewees reported that HR professionals and hiring managers had individual roles, being involved in separate stages of the interviews, contrasting the suggestions of scholars regarding the diverse interview panels (Alder & Gilbert, 2006; Frissen et al, 2022; Chugh, 2024). Data reveal that even when organizations adopt multiple-stage interview processes, it is up to the judgement of one hiring professional to decide whether the applicant can succeed to the next stage of the process.

Additionally, interviewees elaborated on the questions used during the interviews: *“It's very structured way of interviewing because, we have a guideline from XXXX, how to do it, what type of questions to ask. And we should ask questions with a specific method.”* (Interviewee 2). The hiring manager representing the manufacturing company explained that the organization requires a very structured interview process, in line with the company's guidelines and fair recruitment suggestions of (Alder & Gilbert, 2006; Frissen et al, 2022; Chugh, 2024). On the

contrary, representatives of the consultancy companies did not mention any form of structure or guidelines with regards to the interview process: “*No, it is open. I will decide what questions I want to ask.*” (Interviewee 3). Data show that only the manufacturing company has a very structured process of interviewing applicants, based on guidelines. Two more consultancy companies are reported to focus the questions on competencies, but not in the strict form of guidelines. Hiring managers of the other consultancy companies are reported to have the freedom to choose the questions during the interviews.

It is argued that organizations that have not included recruitment panels for the evaluation of applicants and do not have an interview protocol, face a greater risk of discriminatory biases or an arbitrary decision from a hiring manager (Alder and Gilbert, 2006; Frissen et al, 2022; Chugh, 2024). Worth noting is that all interviewed managers reported that they had never received trainings regarding unconscious biases for their hiring decisions, which is highly recommended by scholars as a means to enhance fairness in the recruitment setting (Alder and Gilbert, 2006; Frissen et al, 2022; Chugh, 2024). This finding also aligns with the research of Attström (2007) and Rooth (2010), who confirmed the negative impact of biases in the recruitment process against applicants of foreign origin in Sweden. Considering that the interview process is a legitimate organizational process, it can be used as an adapting and opportunity hoarding mechanism (Tilly, 1998).

The last stage of the recruitment process is the **selection criteria**. In connection with the findings on occupational hierarchies in the *Composition of the Workforce & Job Allocation*, one of the reported recruitment tools utilized to provide natives with privileged access to positions, and excluding out-group members, is the perceived ‘fitness’ to these roles. Interviewees were requested to share their perceptions on job requirements, evaluation of applicants and ‘good fit’. Participants reported the below descriptions of requirements needed for the positions of engineering consultants as “*To be flexible, and able to rotate positions and areas.*” (Interviewee 3) and “*A person that is flexible, not afraid of change and it has to be a person that can adapt in new situations. But also a person that is proactive.*” (Interviewee 6). All interviewees described the desired consultant engineer, as an employee able to deliver, display flexibility and adapt swiftly, due to the short-term nature of their assignments and the frequent need to change roles. The data can be compared to the findings of MacKenzie and

Forde (2009), Frank (2013), Bursell and Bygren (2025), who argued that employers will hire migrants in the less privileged segments, associated with lower job security, lower wages and considered hard. For managerial roles, only one interviewee responded regarding the requirements “*If it’s a project management role, it’s the soft skills*” (Interviewee 1). The only described requirement of a suitable candidate for a managerial position is soft skills. Since most participants did not provide any description of the necessary skills for managerial positions, data are limited to the ambiguous description of ‘soft skills’. The ambiguity of this requirements lies on the possibilities that hiring managers have to interpret it according to their taste, a capacity that cannot be measurable.

Native occupational niches are associated with social and communication skills, and thus the in-group members are preferred for these positions (Bursell and Bygren, 2025). On the individual-level analysis of categorical inequalities, the ambiguous description of the skills required in managerial roles is a notable finding. It allows the subjective interpretation from individual hiring professionals, who act as gatekeepers, and exclude categorically distinct groups of people. The skill requirements for a position constitute the basis for the evaluation, within the formal recruitment process of an organization, allowing it to act as an adaptation mechanism. Even when they appear as neutral routines, they affect the perpetuation of inequalities. It is suggested that the ambiguous skill requirements function as an indirect discrimination practice. The practice is neutral and does not distinguish directly groups of people (Cossette-Lefebvre, 2020), however it authorizes hiring professionals to utilize it as a mechanism of opportunity hoarding and provide systemically unequal access to positions and opportunities (Tilly, 1998; Bursel, 2012).

Aligned with the analysis of the *Composition of the Workforce & Job Allocation* and occupational hierarchies, established native and migrant niches carry their personal **networks**. In addition to the main stages of the recruitment process, interviewees also elaborated on the recruitment of engineers through their personal network in the sector: “*you’re taking in someone from software, maybe they know someone working with hardware from that would like to start working for XXXX.*” (Interviewee 2). Interviewees reported that employees who are working within their teams, refer applicants from their own personal network. Evidence show that employers consider referrals as more reliable, in line with Tilly (1998). Organizations

divide roles and positions into clusters and recruit employees within well-marked categories, that are proved more reliable through referrals. Interviewees reported that referral recruitment is not just a simple practice in the Swedish labour market: *“So, if our consultant refers a candidate, that will later on be hired, that consultant actually will get a small bonus. So, we have that type of system to encourage our employees to refer people.”* (Interviewee 3). Interviewee explained that the company has established a bonus system for the successful network recruitments, where employees receive a certain amount of money as a reward, when they referred candidate gets hired. Six participants confirmed that network recruitment is an encouraged and rewarded practice within the organizations in the automotive industry.

I argue that occupational hierarchies are installed through referral networks, by hoarding opportunities for future employees within the same network of the occupational levels. When the mechanism of opportunity hoarding is so deeply institutionalized as an integral part of the organizational processes, I argue that it is perpetuated through the mechanism of adaptation. While network recruitment can increase the possibilities of getting hired and land in better positions, due to better access to information, vacancies and references, it automatically means that the process is unfair as it creates unequal opportunities for integration in the labour market (Schröder, 2007; Behtoui, 2007; Bursell, 2012; Bursell & Bygren, 2025). The institutionalized hiring practice of network recruitment in Sweden reflects the organizational embeddedness of durable inequalities in the organizational practices. Evidence indicates that recruitment practices of the organizations can act as a Trojan horse. They can be utilized by recruiting professionals to perform social closure and exclusion (Tilly, 1998), even when organizations comply to the national employment regulations. The mechanism of opportunity hoarding is ‘normalized’ through the daily routines of recruitment practices (adaptation), allowing the embeddedness of discrimination. Apart from the exclusive job requirements, recruitment practices appear neutral and are formally institutionalized. The indirect purpose of discrimination endorses the categorical distinctions between migrant and native employees.

5.4 Recruitment Motives

The findings address the peculiarities caused by the categorical distinction of the foreign origin and migrant status of engineers. In an even more vulnerable position appear to be the migrant

employees, residing in Sweden under the provisions of a work permit:

The people that aren't from Sweden, that might not have an assignment, we want to prioritize them right now, to get them out on an assignment, because if they don't, they might lose their employment and then they might have to go back to their country of origin. (Interviewee 4)

The HR professional reported that employees who reside in Sweden, under the terms and conditions of a work permit, should be prioritized in the assignment delegation, to avoid the scenario of having to move out of the country. Tilly (1998) describes citizens/natives and foreigners/ethnic origin as distinctly bounded social categories, that provide clear evidence of durable inequalities. Under these circumstances, migrant employees of consultancy companies, who have pending matters with their residence status, arguably fall under a second categorical distinction, due to their migrant status. Since these migrant employees are formally employed in Sweden, they are bound to the terms and conditions of their permit. In case their assignment at a manufacturing company gets terminated and there are no other available assignments, they will have to move out of Sweden. This potential risk makes them more dependent to their work assignments.

Similarly, De Genova (2002) and Frank (2013) explained how the illegal status of migrant employees is equivalent to vulnerability, influencing their compliant work attitude. Even though in this case the matter of 'illegality' is not applicable, this trajectory was reported by two interviewees. One participant made a comparison between the work culture of natives and migrant employees: *"They (Swedish employees) are used to the easy-going Swedish employment culture. And then you have foreign employees that are exactly the opposite. When they are asked to do something, to deliver something, they do it."* (Interviewee 7). The interviewee shared his perspective on the work attitude of migrant employees, emphasizing their ability to deliver tasks successfully. Another interviewee elaborated on the positive impact of diversity as a competitive advantage: *"that's our strength as a consultancy company is by having diversity, different perspectives on things, different experiences, results in better collaborations and results when it comes to productivity and accomplishing tasks."* (Interviewee 5). The participant explained that company is benefited by employees' diversity,

resulting in stronger collaborations, productivity and achievements. All interviewees reported their positive aspects on diversity, emphasizing the ability of migrant employees to deliver tasks, and act as a competitive advantage for the organizations. This finding also matches the “rhetoric of good worker” from MacKenzie and Forde (2009) and Baxter-Reid (2016). The “rhetoric of good worker” entails the willingness of migrant employees to work harder, to avoid being stereotyped by their employers or in fear of employment termination. This reactive mechanism from the side of employees can impact the perception of employers towards migrant labour and thus their hiring decisions. According to MacKenzie and Forde (2009) and Baxter-Reid (2016), this trajectory plays an important role in the perpetuation of labour exploitation, as employers take advantage of this reactive mechanism. As the thesis is limited to the perspectives of hiring professionals, the data lack of contextual details explaining the hard-work attitude from the side of migrant employees. Nevertheless, data revealed that all hiring professionals seem to embrace the hard work ethics of migrant engineering consultants resulting in productivity.

Shifting in the era of digitalization, a global competition for expertise has emerged. Interviewees highlighted the rare valuable competencies that migrant engineers hold:

The automotive has always been dependent on migrant labour. Now it has turned into very high-skilled knowledge that the industry needs, as in Sweden we lack knowledge in various areas, we have to get people to have that knowledge/ heavy technical roles and engineering roles that are a little bit more demanding it is still hard to find swedes. (Interviewee 6)

The interviewee explained the importance of migrant labour and diversity in the automotive industry, as migrant engineers hold valuable competencies that are not common within Swedish engineers. Participants applaud migrant consultants for their advanced skills in various engineering domains, highlighting the scarcity of these competencies in Sweden (Frank, 2018). In accordance with previous studies (Pohl & Viktoria, 2017; Irastorza & Bevelander, 2021), data revealed the positive perspectives of the interviewees on ethnic diversity, highlighting that the automotive industry in Sweden needs their advanced competencies.

I argue with Tilly (1998) that employers exploit the more vulnerable positions of migrant employees (greater dependency to work and low job security), hard-work attitude and the valuable competencies to extract greater benefits. Concurrently, as discussed in the *Composition of the Workforce & Job Allocation*, migrants are reported to be locked-in the lowest level of the white-collar segment and receive unequal opportunities for development. The vertical segregation suggests their exclusion from the full value of their labour. This paradox consists of clear evidence of discrimination. When discrepancies between natives and migrants cannot be explained through variations of personal capabilities, they are attributed to discrimination (Tilly, 1998).

5.5 Bureaucratic Hurdles

All participants reported that organizations were open to international recruitments. However, when participants were asked about the work permit process, they all shared a similar point of view:

The migration process is a disaster; it is not an automated process. It's a manual process that depends on an individual case officer. One person gets the approval within two months, and the other one has been waiting for seven months. There is no consistency in the migration process.

(Interviewee 1)

Interviewee shared his negative experience with the work permit process when recruiting employees internationally, as the examination of each case is not an automatic process and the length of the process depends on the case worker who is assigned to examine them. All interviewees described the shortcomings of the work permit process, regarding the uncertain timeframe needed to recruit a new employee from abroad. Interviewees justified the time pressure as per below:

Consultancies they usually work with requests from other companies in the field of automotive. So, they need to have someone on a date. A specific date. I don't think they can easily bring someone from abroad if there is a

specific assignment. / The clock is ticking. (Interviewee 7)

The interviewee explained that the work permit process acts as a bureaucratic hurdle when recruiting internationally, as they are not able to affirm to the client manufacturing company the starting date for the employee. In line with the analysis regarding the ability of manufacturing companies to exercise control over the hiring decisions of consultancies, interviewees explained that client manufacturing companies request assignments with a specific timeframe. As discussed in *Interorganizational Relationships*, currently consultancy companies cannot hire anyone without an assignment request from a manufacturing company. Participants reported how they navigate this matter:

The recruiter checked who is in Sweden today just because then it would be quicker to get someone on board/ So if someone in Sweden would fulfil all requirement regardless of which country that person comes from, so to say that would make it quicker. (Interviewee 2)

We tell them that sorry, we can't employ you until you're actually here, or at least in the within the European zone. And that is because of the migration policy and the Swedish bureaucracy of employment and contracts and visa and all of that. (Interviewee 5)

Interviewees explained that it is preferable to employ migrants who already reside in Sweden, or within EU. As reported, recruiting professionals are expected to deal with time related resources, and the waiting time required for international recruitments affects their operations. Data show that organizations include applicants' location in their shortlisting and selection criteria, to avoid the time-consuming work permit process. I thus argue that bureaucratic hurdles interfere with the decision making of recruiting professionals. Even though this manoeuvre can be defended on the grounds of limited resources, it causes recruiting professionals to automatically exclude applicants of foreign origin who reside outside of Sweden. As the motives behind this exclusion do not intend to distinguish applicants, but rather does so consequently, I maintain that it is a subtle form of indirect discrimination. Nevertheless, I argue that migration policy and work permit process should be re-evaluated, to enhance the attractiveness of the country for highly skilled migrants and their possibilities to get hired.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary

In sum, the analysis indicates that interorganizational relationships, recruitment practices and the motives behind the recruitment of highly skilled migrants play a central role in the creation and perpetuation of inequalities in the automotive industry. The revealed patterns of inequality between migrant and native employees in the automotive sector were not explained as a matter of unequal attributes in skills, education or experience. Ethnic based discrimination persists in the society, and is reflected in the organizational logic that lacks diversity incentives and, in some cases, explicitly chooses to exclude migrants.

The results indicate that the financial motivations constitute the basis for the observed inequalities. Manufacturing companies responded to the challenges of the inflation and unstable labour market, by collaborating with consultancy firms for the recruitment of engineering professionals. As the powerholders in this client relationship, manufacturing companies control the employability and employment conditions of highly skilled migrants. Their ability to control justifies their ability to exploit migrant employees, and their unequal categorization within organizations. Data thus show that the interorganizational relationships between manufacturing and consultancy companies in the automotive industry of Sweden can affect negatively the integration of highly skilled migrants.

Migrants possess some characteristics that constitute them more vulnerable as employees compared to natives. The findings suggest that highly skilled migrants tend to be more dependent on their employment and subsequently display a compliant hard work ethics. Participants also displayed positive attitudes towards highly skilled migrants, highlighting the value of their competencies, and rarity of their skills in Sweden. These characteristics constitute the main motives behind the recruitment of highly skilled migrants. However, data show that highly skilled migrants are significantly excluded from the full value of their reported valuable skills and efforts. Drawing on the ability of manufacturing companies to control the employability of highly skilled migrants, data revealed the explicit exclusion of applicants with specific origins, regardless of their competencies. Similarly, manufacturing companies include exclusive requirements for irrelevant job positions, limiting the inclusion of migrants.

In a more implicit manner, organizations also categorize migrant employees in subordinate roles. Occupational hierarchies within the companies revealed that migrants are systemically positioned in the lowest segment of the white-collar sector and have significantly limited vertical mobility, while managerial positions are predominantly occupied by natives. Occupational hierarchy was the most evident pattern of inequalities between migrant and native employees. Participants revealed two factors associated with this ethnic segregation: homophily, as a natural tendency of employers to recruit employees with similar backgrounds, and network recruitment, where recruited employees refer new applicants from their personal networks. This signifies that highly skilled migrants face unequal opportunities for vertical mobility compared to natives, and get locked into less privileged demanding jobs.

The recruitment setting also shares a significant degree of responsibility for the unequal integration of highly skilled migrants. The role of the recruitment practices in the unequal integration of migrants is dual. Firstly, even though organizations comply to the regulatory framework, the recruitment practices are vague and allow hiring managers to circumnavigate and exercise opportunity hoarding and exclusion, according to their preferences. And secondly, discrimination and consequently inequalities are embedded in the organizational processes. Categorical inequalities within organizations are institutionalized and normalized by the formality of the recruitment practices.

Finally, the lengthy process of obtaining a work permit in Sweden for highly skilled migrants who reside outside Sweden or European Union constitutes a bureaucratic hurdle, affecting negatively the decision making of hiring professionals in the automotive industry of Sweden. Even though this pattern of unintentional exclusion was rationalised on the grounds of limited resources, nonetheless acts as a significant barrier in the effort of the Swedish Government to attract highly skilled migrants to support the viability of the Swedish organizations.

6.2 Limitations

Even though the study aims to explore the ethnic-based discrimination of highly skilled migrants through an organizational perspective, the findings are limited due to certain circumstances. Starting from the sample representation, in the initial phase of the research plan the aim was to interview at least 15 recruiting professionals. Notably, only seven agreed to participate. The limited number of participants is related to the limited time available for the thesis research, which was conducted by only one student. The sector specific focus of the thesis, and the profession specific selection of participants, automatically narrows down the number of potential participations.

Equally important factor is that as participation was on a voluntary basis, the aspect of ethnic diversity might be perceived as a sensitive matter and thus a topic to avoid by many employers. The *Participation Request (Appendix 1)* that was sent to potential interviewees included the recruitment of highly skilled professionals of foreign origin as the aim of the project. As the main objective of the interviews was to discuss matters of migrant labour, all interviewees that agreed to participate in the study were actually employed by firms that had employed migrants. As Bursell and Bygren (2025) explained, when employers hire migrants and their representation increases, hiring managers develop familiarity. In addition to this, as all participants in the sample hold at least a university degree, it is possible that this group of people displays more supportive attitudes towards diversity (Frank, 2018). This implies limitations when it comes to gaining access to information on firms and hiring professionals who deliberately chose not to hire workers of foreign origin or are engaged in discriminatory practices, that might signal regulatory breaches or be perceived as socially unacceptable. Employers who acknowledge drivers of discriminatory behaviour, will be reluctant to reveal information that will be generally perceived as reprehensible.

In addition to the above, all participants that agreed to be interviewed for the purposes of this study are employed by organizations based in the City of Gothenburg. Nevertheless, the findings of this study might not reflect the attitudes of hiring professionals and organizations in other areas in Sweden.

6.3 Recommendations

The complexity of discrimination is attributed to societal behaviour that is reflected on individual and organizational levels (Fibbi et al, 2021). The organizational patterns of discrimination is an integral part of a vicious cycle, responsible for perpetuating social long-lasting inequalities (Tilly, 1998). My recommendations are thus not only directed towards the meso-organizational level, but also towards the macro-social dimension.

Capitalism and liberalized labour markets provide a fertile ground for the exploitation of vulnerable groups, such as migrants, to prioritize organizational profit (Piore, 1979; Tilly, 1998; MacKenzie et al, 2010). Hence, I advocate for the development of more pro-active measures within the Discrimination Act (2008:567). There is a need for a stricter national monitoring mechanism to address organizational inertia and shortcomings associated with the exclusion and unequal inclusion of migrants. Remaining at the macro-level, Migration Policy revisions should include provisions for faster processing of the work-permit cases. This reform will act as a twofold: first, recruiting professionals will not avoid hiring applicants with valuable skills due to the time-consuming process; and second, it will enhance the attractiveness objectives of the current Swedish migration policy.

Moving towards the meso-perspective, organizational accountability should not just rest on claiming meritocracy. The findings of the research suggest that the role of HR professionals is limited to the administrative duties of the recruitment process. I hence advocate that organizations should encompass HR professionals in their strategic decisions. HR professionals possess the knowledge needed to raise awareness, by educating and training all counterparts involved in the recruitment settings, so that the latter can take informed decisions on aspects of equity and diversity. Lastly, the establishment of fair recruitment practices should be prioritized by organizations' management, and become an integral duty of HR professionals.

6.4 Future Research

My suggestions for future research involve two types of complementary studies. The first is a comparative study with other industries in Sweden employing highly skilled migrants. An additional suggestion would be an international comparative study with other leading

automotive nations. Both comparative approaches will provide useful contrast to the findings of this thesis. The second is a longitudinal study, to follow up changes and variations in patterns of discrimination and inequalities, through socio-economic and labour market fluctuations.

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8. Appendix

Appendix 1. Participation Request

Dear XXXX,

My name is Evmorfia Syka and I am currently a master's student in Strategic Human Resource Management and Labour Relations at the University of Gothenburg. For the purposes of my thesis research, I am contacting you to kindly request your participation in an interview.

The aim of this project is to explore the perspectives of recruiting highly skilled professionals of foreign origin in the automotive industry of Sweden, recruitment practices, as well as the impact of the regulatory framework (length of the process, employment requirements, etc.) in the recruitment processes.

The study is conducted independently by me, Evmorfia Syka, under the supervision of Denis Frank, Docent/Associate professor at the Department of Sociology and Work Science. The project adheres to the key ethical principles of the Swedish Research Council for research for social science. Further information about ethical considerations is elaborated below.

Data Collection

The data collection consists of qualitative semi-structured and open-ended interviews with hiring managers and HR professionals in the Swedish automotive industry. The preferred positions are directly involved in the recruitment processes. Interviews can be conducted in person or via any audiovisual application of your choice. Interviews will only be recorded with your permission. The interview will last approximately 30 minutes to one hour, but there will be room for further discussion if deemed necessary. Additionally, you have the right to omit any questions you do not wish to answer.

Voluntary participation and non-disclosure

Participation is voluntary and confidential. You have the right to cancel your participation at any time and withdraw from the study.

Unauthorized individuals will not have the access to the material and participants' identities will be protected by professional secrecy and confidentiality standards. Names of participants will not be registered and will be coded under pseudonyms in the transcription and analysis process.

You are free to decide on a suitable meeting time, and your participation will be arranged according to your preferences.

Handling of collected material

Material, such as interview recordings and notes, will be saved on password protected computers and are only available to authorized persons. The transcription of the interviews will be manual. In the final thesis, extracts from transcribed interviews may be cited under a pseudonym assigned to each interviewee. Names of organizations will also not be mentioned, to avoid threatening the anonymity. Contextual details in transcripts will be modified or omitted if necessary, to ensure anonymity and prevent potential traceability of the participants

The collected material will be used for the master thesis under the conditions described herein, and the final thesis will be published electronically by the University of Gothenburg. Interview files, once transcribed, will be erased upon the conclusion of the project.

Results and publication

The results of the study will be published in the form of a Master thesis, that is expected to be completed by 08/06/2025. You will be able to download the essay from GUPEA, and if you wish it can be sent to you via email.

Appendix 2. Interview Guide

Origin Questions- Profile of Interviewee:

- Could you please share with me some information about you, such as education and professional experience?
- Could you share some information about your current role and main responsibilities?
- What types of positions are you assigned to recruit for?
- What led/motivated you to work in your current role in the automotive industry?
- How long have you been working in the automotive industry?
- How would you describe your journey so far in the field of HR/management?
- What have been your biggest challenges in your career?

Company's Background:

- Could you share some information about the organization you are working at? (type national/international, base, years active, size of organization/number of employees)
- With which companies are you assigned to collaborate with/recruit for?

- How would you describe the company's culture?
- How would you describe diversity within the company/team/unit?
- How would you describe diversity within the management level
- Are there any policies in the organization describing aspects of diversity, equity, inclusion?
- Does the company approach diversity through other initiatives?
- How do you think the company/industry is impacted by diversity/ migrant labour?
- Have you noticed any trends in the demands of migrant labour? (Company & Industry-Wise)

Recruitment process:

- Could you describe the recruitment process (job advertising-selection)? (Involvement in all stages?)
- What kind of fair-hiring practices do you have?
- Are there any standard operational procedures and automated recruitment tools (job advertisements and descriptions, shortlisting candidates, evaluating CVs, recruitment panels, structured interview protocols, tests, evaluation and monitoring of procedures)?
- How do you evaluate candidates? (Requirements and language skills)
- How would you define a 'good fit' to the company's culture?
- Is there any protocol regarding biases in hiring decisions (trainings)?
- Are there any policies in the organization describing the attraction, recruitment and retention of employees (generally or specifically for employees of foreign origin)?
- Are there any policies relevant to on-boarding practices and integration (generally or specifically for employees of foreign origin) in the company?
- Is there any established reporting mechanism in case of discrimination? (ex. employee feels discriminating due to limited development opportunities, employment conditions/ or witness a personal taste-based hiring decision of a candidate with lesser qualifications)
- Do you feel the company you should have elaborated further on policies regarding diversity/migrant labour?
- How often are these policies/protocols/procedures getting re-evaluated?
- Further suggestions for implementation initiatives that can translate policies into actions?
- Can you describe any challenges you have experienced within the recruitment process?

Institutional framework:

- Are you aware of Sweden's new migration policy on highly skilled migrant labour?
- How do you feel about the compliance requirements?
- How would you describe its impact on the hiring approach of the company?

-Have you encountered any challenges with the regulatory compliance when recruiting foreign candidates? (Bureaucratic process, length of procedure, minimum employment requirements)