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IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN THE SWEDISH WORKFORCE

Analysing Labour Market Integration Through an Intersectional Lens

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Abstract

Immigrants facing various forms of inequality in the Swedish labour market is a well-documented issue, but research often lack precision in identifying exactly who experiences these inequalities, why and in which segments of the labour market. This study focuses on five key factors—gender, culture, religion, migrant and nationality—across three areas of the Swedish labour market: deskilling, labour market participation, and the informal economy. The aim of the study is to get a clearer picture on how country of origin influences challenges and intertwine with culture and religion within labour market integration for migrant women. The research is based on five qualitative interviews with experts working towards migration, integration, and the Swedish labour market to gain their insights into different patterns in the labour market. This study integrated an intersectional analysis and ultimately showed how different nationalities, mainly women from Ukraine, Somalia, Afghanistan, Romania and Turkey are affected by culture and religion and how this, in turn, influenced their labour market integration.

The significance of the study is to gain a better understanding of how and why migrant women experience difficulties in the labour market, which is a necessary step to understand how to work to reduce these difficulties.

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Contents

1. Introduction

Migration to Sweden has evolved significantly over time. In the 1930s, migrants came mostly from other Nordic countries. However, by the 1970s, refugee immigration increased, and by the 1980s, more migrants from outside the EU began arriving. In response, Sweden introduced anti-discrimination laws aimed at preventing labour-related ethnic harassment. Despite these efforts, notable disparities remain between native Swedes and migrants in the labour market. Migrants tend to earn lower wages, are more likely to occupy low-skill positions, and have lower overall labour market participation rates. Research indicates that migrants from Africa and Asia are especially affected by discrimination and unemployment.[1]

As a European Union (EU) member state, Sweden provides valuable insights into how integration policies are implemented at a national level. The EU's free movement framework highlights the importance of labour market integration for migrants, particularly when comparing the inclusion of third-country nationals to EU nationals. In 2019, the Migrant Integration Policy Index gave Sweden a perfect score for anti-discrimination— which makes it important to study why migrants may still face mistreatment.[2] Sweden is also a relevant case study in European studies as the country's high proportion of foreign-born[3] and long-standing generous asylum policy, compared to the rest of the EU[4], offers unique insights into migrant women's structural obstacles and opportunities in the labour market. This highlights broader challenges and approaches to migration within the EU and Europe.

Sweden is also known for its strong gender equality and comprehensive welfare system, making it an interesting case to explore in terms of how inclusive it is for migrants and how their experiences might differ. Despite progress in gender equality, previous research shows that there are major differences in how female migrants are affected in the Swedish labour market compared to male migrants, mainly in five different areas, making it relevant to analyse how these differences arise. Previous research also reveals that these effects have a particularly negative impact on non-EU migrants and examines the ways in which they are affected.[5]

The theory used to analyse the material is intersectionality, which is good for combining different factors that can affect vulnerable groups simultaneously. In this study, these factors are nationality, religion, migration, gender and culture. Nationality can be understood as an individual's formal affiliation with a particular nation, usually based on origin or citizenship. Globalization has contributed to individuals often developing multiple identities and loyalties beyond national affiliation.[6] In this essay however, nationality will be defined as an individual's country of origin, regardless of citizenship or identification. Religious migrant

[1] Rydgren, J. (2004) 'Mechanisms of exclusion: ethnic discrimination in the Swedish labour market', *Journal of ethnic and migration studies*, 30(4), pp. 697–716. P. 698, 699, 700
[2] Migrant integration policy index. (2020). "Anti- discrimination" Retrieved 2024-12-30, from: Anti-discrimination | MIPEX 2020
[3] OECD. (2019) "Foreign- born population" Retrieved 2024-12-27, from: Foreign-born population | OECD
[4] Berg, L. and Spehar, A. (2011) "EU och välfärdens Europa - familj, arbetsmarknad, migration". Malmö: Liber. P. 222
[5] Anchevska, E. *et al.* (2020) 'Sectoral Brief: Gender and Migration', *European Institute for Gender Equality* pp. 1– 24. p.10
[6] Kruma, K. (2013) *EU citizenship, nationality and migrant status an ongoing challenge*. Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff. P. 3

woman in Sweden will be characterized as individuals who define themselves as religious women and have been born outside of Sweden as first-generation migrants. Mironenko and Sorokin argues that "culture is a multidimensional phenomenon that encompasses processes, products and results of human activity, material and spiritual, transmitted from generation to generation in a non-biological way." [7] This research will mainly focus on the culture of a country and its people where abstract elements, like language, and external factors, such as collective behaviour patterns, are emphasized.

The material collected for the study is qualitative interviews with experts in migration, integration and the Swedish labour market. They were selected because of their insight into what different patterns exist for female migrants in the Swedish labour market and what they might be due to.

1.1. Aim

Migrant women in the Swedish labour market are often portrayed and studied as a homogeneous group. Previous research typically focuses on either gender, culture or religion, migrant but rarely integrates all perspectives. Even when all are addressed, studies often overlook how a woman's country of origin affects her position in the labour market. The aim of this study is to contribute to previous research by exploring whether the nationality, culture and religion of migrant women influences their integration into the Swedish labour market, and if so, in what ways. This will be examined through three research questions:

1. According to experts, how does nationality, gender, religion, migrant and culture influence migrant women's participation in the Swedish labour market?

1 A. How do experts perceive nationality, gender, religion, migrant and culture influencing deskilling of migrant women in the Swedish labour market?

1 B. What are experts' reflections on nationality, gender, religion, migrant and culture influence migrant women's employment in the Swedish informal economy?

1.1.1. Disposition

The following section will present previous research and introduce the theory applied in this study. Next, the materials and methodology will be outlined, along with arguments for their selection. This will be followed by the results chapter, which will describe and reflect on the collected data. The results will then be discussed and analysed in relation to the study's aim and theoretical framework. Finally, a brief conclusion will summarize the findings and answer the research questions.

[7] Mironenko, I.A. and Sorokin, P.S. (2018) 'Seeking for the Definition of "Culture": Current Concerns and their Implications. A Comment on Gustav Jahoda's Article "Critical Reflections on some Recent Definitions of "Culture""', *Integrative psychological & behavioral science*, 52(2), pp. 331–340. p. 338

2. Previous research and theoretical framework

2. 1. Previous research

This chapter explores migrant women's labour market experiences in the EU before shifting focus to the Swedish labour market. This structure aims to offer a comparative perspective, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how the experiences of migrant women in Sweden align with or diverge from broader EU trends.

2.1.1. Labour Market Integration of Migrant Women in the EU

Anchevska et al. discusses how female migrants born outside the EU face different problems. Approximately seven percent of the EU population consists of individuals born outside the EU, with women making up half of this group. Female migrants face distinct challenges throughout the migration and integration process, often differing significantly from those encountered by male migrants.[8] Barslund, Bartolomeo and Ludolph describes similar problems as Anchevska et al. For instance, women born outside the EU experience notably lower levels of integration into the labour market compared to other migrant groups.[9] Anchevska et al. address the impact that migrant women born outside the EU has on the labour market. Non-EU-born women have limited employment opportunities, are overrepresented in low-wage jobs and frequently work in sectors where human rights violations are prevalent. Within the EU, three key areas of labour market inequality particularly affect women, especially those born outside the EU: deskilling (migrants often work in roles that don't match their skills or education level), labour market participation and employment in the informal economy (work outside the regulated labour market system).[10]

Barslund et al. and Anchevska et al. discusses how labour market participation rates are generally lower for migrants from non-EU countries, with this gap widening further when considering gender.[11] One contributing factor is that women from countries with traditionally low labour market participation often encounter elevated unemployment rates within the EU as well.[12] Barslund et al. explains that the significant gender gap in labour market participation among migrants can be partly attributed to the low-skilled women in the migrant population.[13] However Anchevska et al. notes that highly educated women also encounter challenges within the EU labour market, as high-skill jobs for migrants are often concentrated in male-dominated fields such as technology and finance, limiting opportunities for women.[14] Dorn and Zweimüller also state that a lack of labour market participation is partly because of discrimination, where ethnical minorities are often the ones who meets the most discrimination.[15]

[8] Anchevska et al. 2020 p.10
[9] Barslund, M., Di Bartolomeo, A. and Ludolph, L (2017) 'GENDER INEQUALITY AND INTEGRATION OF NON-EU MIGRANTS IN THE EU', *EuroMesco Policy brief*, no.69, pp. 1–8. p. 1
[10] Anchevska et al. 2020 p. 3
[11] Barslund et al. 2017 p. 2
[12] Anchevska et al. 2020 p. 4
[13] Barslund et al. 2017 p. 1,4
[14] Anchevska et al. 2020 p. 4
[15] Dorn, D. and Zweimüller, J. (2021) 'Migration and Labor Market Integration in Europe', *The Journal of economic perspectives*, 35(2), pp. 49–76. p. 69

Furthermore, Barslund et al. as well as Anchevska et al. agrees that labour market participation is closely linked to social integration.[16] Low participation can result in social isolation, which in turn restricts access to networks essential for finding employment and integrating into society.[17] Employment fosters a sense of community and purpose, and the absence of such connections can perpetuate isolation.[18]

FRA and Anchevska et al. work aligns when considering deskilling amongst migrant women. Fewer migrant women in the EU participate in paid labour compared to migrant men which is often linked to deskilling among women born outside the EU. These women's qualifications are frequently unrecognized, limiting their access to higher-paying jobs that align with their skills and education. [19] Also Dorn and Zweimüller mentions that residents of poorer countries face difficulties to keep equivalent jobs when they move to richer countries.[20] Anchevska et al. argues that deskilling often results in migrant women working in roles below their skill level or in fields unrelated to their original training.[21] Dorn and Zweimüller adds to this discussion by describing how it is also difficult to transfer and correctly assess education levels and grades to a new country.[22]

Anchevska et al. also states that a key factor contributing to deskilling is the limited availability of professional language courses.[23] The authors on the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) describes the importance of proficiency in the host country's language as an essential knowledge for labour market integration.[24] Dorn and Zweimüller adds to this by mentioning that without good knowledge in the language, both the ability to find work and the productivity level at work will be decreased.[25] Anchevska et al. states that language is also connected to gender norms. Due to social expectations, migrant women often assume primary responsibility for household duties, leaving them with less time to attend language classes.[26] FRA does the same connection explaining that women who arrive as spouses commonly face delayed entry into the workforce, rendering them economically dependent on their partners and further restricting their language and social integration.[27]

Anchevska et al. and FRA share the same understanding on how deskilling can be connected to domestic work. Non-EU migrant women, in particular, frequently bear greater household responsibilities, and retraining is often deprioritized within families due to prevailing gender roles.[28] Many economically dependent migrant women report family responsibilities as the primary reason for their limited labour market engagement. [29]

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[16] Barslund et al. 2017 p. 2
[17] Anchevska et al. 2020 p. 4
[18] Barslund et al. 2017 p. 5
[19] Anchevska et al. 2020 p. 4, FRA, 2019 S. 22
[20] Dorn and Zweimüller P.67
[21] Anchevska et al. 2020 p. 4
[22] Dorn and Zweimüller, 2021 p. 68
[23] Anchevska et al. 2020 p. 4
[24] 'Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey Migrant women – selected findings'. (2019) *European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)*, pp. 5–56. p. 22
[25] Dorn and Zweimüller, 2021 p. 67
[26] Anchevska et al. 2020 p. 4
[27] FRA. 2019 p. 21
[28] Anchevska et al. 2020 p. 4
[29] FRA. 2019 p. 21, 28

According to Maroukis, Iglicka and Gmaj, migrants are one of the biggest groups of workers in the informal economy. Women are another big group.[30] FRA and Anchevska et al. all argue that the informal economy has a big part in fostering labour market inequality and insecurity. Migrant women, often the ones born outside the EU, are often employed in low-wage positions with insecure job conditions,[31] and in many EU countries, they are hired informally or as "black labour" within domestic work. In these roles, they may lack awareness of their rights and are frequently highly dependent on their employers, which further restricts their access to fair employment standards and social integration opportunities.[32]

2.1.2. Deskilling of migrant women in Sweden

Boréus et al. describes how some companies in Sweden hire migrants to promote workplace diversity, even though these positions often offer limited opportunities for career advancement. As a result, the initiative to increase diversity frequently results in Swedish individuals occupying leadership roles. This form of inequality reflects one aspect of deskilling that migrants encounter within the Swedish labour market.[33] Parsland and Ulmestig support Boréus, Neergaard and Sohls perspective on the existence of deskilling among migrants. Their research demonstrates that unemployment, particularly among migrant women, is often attributed to cultural stereotypes that position them as "other" and in need of special treatment. These women experience deskilling as they are perceived as belonging to a separate category, one that is seen as more naturally unemployed compared to other groups.[34]

Aslan et al. argue that a woman's cultural background can influence her perception of work as a meaningful activity. Cultural norms surrounding the expectations of being a "good mother" can for example hinder career progression.[35] Parsland and Ulmestig contribute to the discussion on the disproportionate family roles of women by illustrating how cultural expectations often push migrant women towards female-dominated fields such as childcare and service work.[36] Joseph and Lundström further support this argument, asserting that domestic work is often perceived as both a female and migrant-dominated sector, due to the perception that these workers are less qualified.[37] The authors at Jämställdhetsmyndigheten highlights how long waiting times and high childcare costs hinder women's participation in settlement programs. Since the responsibility for childcare and family duties disproportionately falls on women, this often results in an unequal distribution of parental leave days. Furthermore, foreign-born women receive less support and fewer targeted

[30] Maroukis, T., Iglicka, K. and Gmaj, K. (2011) 'Irregular Migration and Informal Economy in Southern and Central-Eastern Europe: Breaking the Vicious Cycle?', *International migration*, 49(5), pp. 129–156. p. 130
[31] FRA. 2019 p. 25
[32] Anchevska et al. 2020 p. 4
[33] Boréus, K., Neergaard, A. and Sohl, L. (2021) *Ojämlika arbetsplatser : hierarkier, diskriminering och strategier för jämlikhet*. Lund: Nordic academic press. p. 387
[34] Parsland, E. and Ulmestig, R. (2022) 'Gendered Activation at the Expense of Gender Equality? Activation and Gender Equality as Competing Logics in the Swedish Welfare State', *Affilia*, 37(2), pp. 279–299. p. 295
[35] Aslan, P. *et al.* (2021) '"Kids" in between? Views on work, gender, and family arrangements among men and women of migrant descent in Sweden', *Community, work & family*, 24(5), pp. 586–602. p. 593
[36] Parsland and Ulmestig, 2022 p. 285
[37] Joseph, C. and Lundström, C. (2013) 'Gender, culture and work in global cities: Researching transnational women', *Women's Studies International Forum 36,* pp. 1–4. p. 3,4

initiatives compared to foreign-born men from both the Migration Agency and the Public Employment Service.[38]

Parsland and Ulmestig also address structural discrimination, noting that international migrants have been distinctively segregated from other unemployed groups within the Swedish labour market.[39] Joseph and Lundström further contribute to this discussion, noting that women from countries with lower socio-economic status are often confined to domestic work, where they face insecure working conditions and low wages.[40] Family reunification is a common reason for non-EU women migrating to Sweden. Jämställdhetsmyndigheten notes that many of these women, excluded from the establishment program, do not register with the Public Employment Service. Consequently, many face a devaluation of their professional qualifications and are relegated to the role of dependents, reliant on their spouses, rather than being integrated as active participants in the labour market.[41]

Parsland and Ulmestig, Boréus et al., and Aslan et al. do not fully address certain perspectives; either they group all migrants together without examining gender differences, or they include a gender perspective but treat women as a homogeneous group, overlooking the impact of ethnicity and country of origin. Joseph and Lundström, however, address both perspectives by highlighting how gender, culture and race shape the experiences of migrants within the domestic workforce.[42] Jämställdhetsmyndigheten also adopts a more intersectional perspective by considering both gender, culture and race. However, similar to Joseph and Lundström, they do not sufficiently explore how variations in nationality and religion influence the deskilling experiences of women.[43]

2.1.3. Labour Market Participation of Migrant Women in Sweden

Rydgren states that newly arrived migrants in Sweden have lower chances of employment compared to native-born individuals, which can depend on various factors. However, the fact that migrants who have lived in Sweden for over 20 years still face a 40% higher risk of unemployment suggests that discrimination plays a significant role in migrant unemployment.[44] Parsland and Ulmestig, Joseph and Lundström, Aslan et al. and Boréus et al. all describe how racism is a factor that makes it difficult for migrants to participate in the labour market. Parsland and Ulmestig argues that discussing hostility toward immigrants is crucial, as a significant portion of the Swedish population experiences discrimination and exclusion from the concept of being "Swedish" based solely on their skin colour. This process of racialization reinforces a “we” versus “them” distinction, establishing a hierarchical structure within society.[45] Rydgren describes this as ethical discrimination, which is often stereotypical, individuals are categorised as a homogenous group with assigned character traits. These stereotypes are often wrong or exaggerated.[46]

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[38] ‘Stärkta möjligheter genom samverkan - insatser för att underlätta utrikes födda kvinnors inträde på arbetsmarknaden (2022:13) ’. (2022). *Jämställdhetsmyndigheten*. p. 15, 16
[39] Parsland and Ulmestig, 2022 p. 282
[40] Joseph and Lundström, 2013 p. 3,4
[41] Jämställdhetsmyndigheten, 2022 p. 18
[42] Joseph and Lundström, 2013 p. 3,4
[43] Jämställdhetsmyndigheten, 2022 p. 13
[44] Rydgren, 2004 p. 703
[45] Parsland and Ulmestig, 2022 p. 282
[46] Rydgren, 2004 p. 707, 708

Jämställdhetsmyndigheten along with Boréus et al., describe how racism and stereotypes can significantly influence migrants' employment opportunities. For example, foreign-born women often receiving unequal support from employment officers compared to men. Stereotypes held by caseworkers portray these women as "difficult to work with" or "unmotivated," resulting in fewer meetings, inadequate skills assessments, and a higher likelihood of being placed in activity-focused measures rather than job-oriented initiatives.[47] Managers may sometimes opt not to hire individuals who are not perceived as "fully Swedish," to avoid potential challenges associated with these employees' facing discrimination in the workplace.[48] Rydgren instead argues that employers make decisions based on stereotypes without realizing that they are stereotypical, which means the choice not to hire migrants is not entirely conscious.[49]

Aslan et al. also examine the challenges faced by women, particularly migrant women, in the workplace. In Sweden, occupational segregation by gender remains prevalent, with women more frequently taking parental leave and working part-time compared to men.[50] Joseph and Lundström add on this by stating that female-dominated fields, which are often those where migrant women are concentrated, are frequently perceived as less professional, contributing to wage disparities between men and women in the labour market.[51] Parsland and Ulmestig support their arguments by illustrating how migrant women in female-dominated fields frequently encounter racism. In healthcare settings, for example, migrant women may experience being ignored or rendered invisible by patients due to wearing a veil, having a different skin colour, or lacking fluency in Swedish.[52]

Parsland and Ulmestig highlight the need for a more intersectional approach to migration in the labour market. They argue that Sweden has been insufficient in addressing the inequalities that exist within subgroups of women. They emphasize the importance of understanding how gender inequalities are compounded by other forms of inequality. Boréus et al. does acknowledge that women face disadvantages in male-dominated fields and that women who experience discrimination in a racialized society are similarly marginalized in female-dominated sectors. For example, lot of managers hire women from third countries to workplaces such as laundrettes because they have been stigmatised to work hard. This offers an intersectional perspective on how both gender and ethnicity influence a migrant's position in the labour market.[53] Parsland and Ulmestig on the other hand refer to migrants as "international migrants" and therefor as a homogeneous group.[54]

2.1.4. Informal Economy Employment among Migrant Women in Sweden

Larsen defines the informal economy and unregulated labour, or "black labour," in Sweden as any form of paid work that should be subject to taxation but where tax obligations are not fulfilled. This category includes a range of activities, from undocumented immigrants compelled to work under exploitative conditions to meet basic needs, to casual services for

[47] Jämställdhetsmyndigheten, 2022 p. 19
[48] Boréus et al. 2021 p. 386
[49] Rydgren, 2004 p. 708
[50] Aslan et al. 2021 p. 587
[51] Joseph and Lundström, 2013 p. 3,4
[52] Parsland and Ulmestig, 2022 p. 384
[53] Boréus et al. 2021 p. 387, 388, 389
[54] Parsland and Ulmestig, 2022 S. 281, 282, 293

which households might otherwise perform themselves. Childcare and cleaning are particularly common sectors within this unregulated market.[55]

Joseph and Lundström, along with Parsland and Ulmestig, address the issue of the informal economy. Parsland and Ulmestig discuss how women and migrants are frequently viewed as individuals in need of any employment rather than meaningful or quality employment. They argue that this categorization perpetuates a segregated labour market, limiting these groups to roles that reinforce existing inequalities.[56] Joseph and Lundström further contribute to this discussion by noting that the sectors where migrant women are most frequently employed often offer substandard working conditions.[57] Larsen provides a broader perspective on the issue, highlighting the common exploitation of immigrants without work permits within the informal economy. Many immigrants participating in the informal economy views it as essential for earning a liveable income, underscoring the complexities of unregulated labour, where those being exploited often lack alternative options.[58]

There has been limited research examining how and which migrant women are affected by the informal economy in Sweden. Although the gender and culture dimension are somewhat included, none of the texts above explore the specific impact of nationality or religion on this issue.

2.2. Theoretical framework

This part introduces the theoretical framework used to analyse the material: intersectionality. Moreover, this is followed by a discussion on the relevance of the theory to the research field.

2.2.1. Intersectionality

Intersectionality emerged from Black feminist theory to analyse the experiences of black women in the United States.[59] Scholars has since developed intersectionality to range in many different fields.[60] It has been widely used in qualitative research on marginalization and has gained increasing prominence in medical research in recent years.[61]

A framework for understanding the complexity of human experiences and societal structures is provided by intersectionality. Social and political conditions, as well as individual lives, are rarely shaped by a single factor. Instead, they are influenced by multiple intersecting and mutually reinforcing factors. For instance, when analysing social inequality, it is more effective to consider how various axes of social division, such as race, gender, and class, interact rather than examining them in isolation. As an analytical tool, intersectionality offers a deeper understanding of both the complexity of the world and individual experiences.[62]

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[55] Larsen, L.B. (2012) 'Cleaning (in) the Swedish black market', *Anthropology in action (London, England : 1994)*, 19(1), pp. 8–21. p. 10
[56] Parsland and Ulmestig, 2022 p. 280, 294
[57] Joseph and Lundström, 2013 p. 3,4
[58] Larsen, 2012 p. 10, 18
[59] Bauer, G.R. *et al.* (2021) 'Intersectionality in quantitative research: A systematic review of its emergence and applications of theory and methods', *SSM - population health*, 14, p. 100798. P. 1
[60] Carbado, D.W. *et al.* (2013) 'Intersectionality: Mapping the movements of a theory', *Du Bois review*, 10(2), pp. 303–312. P. 304
[61] Bauer et al. 2021 p. 2, 9
[62] Collins, P H. and Bilge, S. (2016). *Intersectionality*. Cambridge: Polity. p. 1, 2

Individuals often adopt an intersectional perspective when they recognize the necessity for more comprehensive frameworks to navigate the complex forms of discrimination they experience. Groups that simultaneously face multiple social issues, such as black female workers, frequently find it difficult to locate social movements that fully address the entirety of their discriminatory experiences. Intersectionality emerged as an analytical tool in response to these multifaceted challenges and the insufficiency of existing solutions. Consequently, scholars and practitioners employ intersectionality in diverse ways to address a wide range of social issues.[63]

As a dynamic theory, intersectionality is not a universal solution. It is flexible and contextual, addressing different problems, operating in various environments, and applied to analyse diverse power structures. It is best understood as a tool for analysing power relationships rather than a comprehensive analysis or framework. Each intersectional analysis focuses on specific power structures but never addresses them all, making the theory inherently limited in scope. When Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced intersectionality, she described it as provisional—a starting point for understanding marginalization, rather than an exhaustive explanation. While this limitation leaves gaps in addressing all forms of marginalization, it also opens possibilities for exploring new contexts and questions.[64]

Using intersectionality allows us to examine not only vulnerability but also privilege, creating connections between experiences of discrimination and advantage. This study aims to achieve this by exploring not only marginalization but also understanding why it occurs, how it operates, and who, in contrast, experiences advantage.[65]

Women's experiences and outcomes in a given context cannot simply be understood as extensions of male experiences. Researchers must consider how various dimensions of stratification intertwine and influence one another.[66] This paper aims to address this complexity by adopting an intersectional approach. While significant research has explored how social class and gender shape individual outcomes, such as integration into the labour market, the role of nationality has received far less attention.[67] Nationality is a critical factor in understanding migrant integration and will therefore be a central focus of this analysis together with culture and religion.

When applying an intersectional framework, it is anticipated that nationality, culture and religion significantly influences how migrant women experience and navigate challenges in the Swedish labour market, particularly in relation to deskilling, participation in the informal economy, and opportunities for integration. Women from different nationalities, cultures and religions are anticipated to face varying degrees of marginalization, with the different aspects shaping their labour market positions in distinct ways. This study also aims to highlight how these differences contribute to maintaining structural inequalities by uncovering the mechanisms through which varying degrees of marginalization and privilege are produced and sustained in the labour market. These findings can shed light on broader social dynamics

[63] Collins, 2016 p. 2, 3, 4
[64] Carbado et al. 2013 p. 304
[65] Carbado et al. 2013 p. 306
[66] Flippen, C.A. (2014) 'INTERSECTIONALITY AT WORK: Determinants of Labor Supply among Immigrant Latinas', *Gender & society*, 28(3), pp. 404–434. P. 405, 406
[67] Flippen, 2014 p. 405, 406

that reinforce unequal access to resources, opportunities, and rights, perpetuating structural disparities in society.

2.3. Expected outcomes

Previous research found three areas where migrant women face challenges in integrating into the Swedish labour market: deskilling, labour market participation and involvement in the informal economy. The research also shows potential for improvement of intersectionality perspectives, such as nationality, culture, religion and gender. This represents a significant research gap.

To address this, this studies aim is to offer a more nuanced understanding of migrants in the Swedish labour market by incorporating both a gender perspective and an analysis of how different nationalities, cultures and religions influence deskilling, participation in the labour market and engagement in the informal economy.

Combining different variables will provide a more nuanced understanding of how various factors interact and influence outcomes in the Swedish labour market. Intersectionality is therefore expected to add depth to the research by examining five variables separately and simultaneously. Figure 2.1 demonstrates how the five main areas identified in previous research are analysed through the five key categories outlined in the theory.

Figure 2.1 Integration of Intersectionality into the research field.

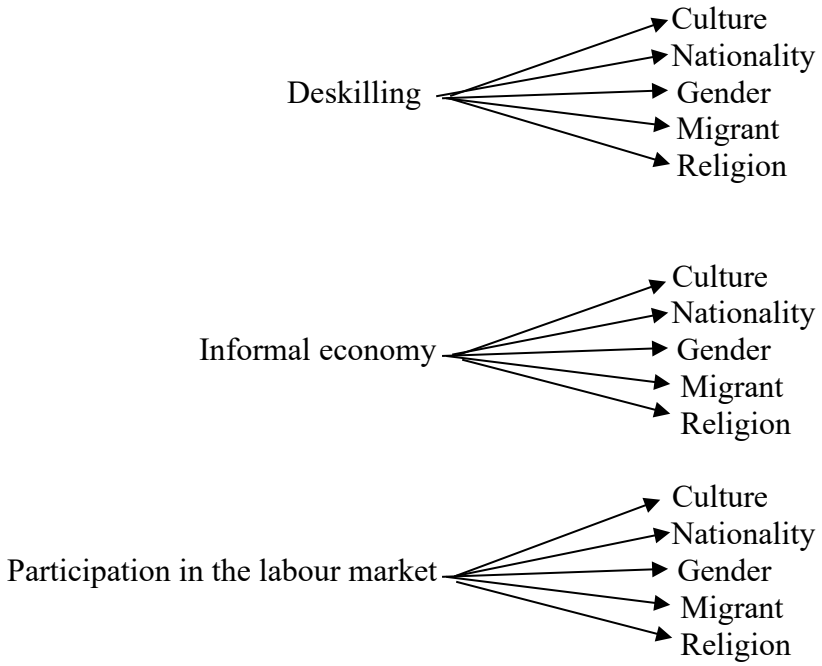

Figure showing five factors related to the labour market.

3. Material and Method

This chapter explains, among other things, how the material was gathered, why it was chosen and the methods used for its analysis.

3.1. Material and research strategy

For this study, I have used a qualitative method in the form of expert interviews. This approach is the most suitable for answering my research questions, as it allows for a deeper understanding of complex issues. Qualitative research is also well-suited for small sample sizes, as it focuses on gaining in-depth insights rather than broad generalizations. The flexibility of this method enables me to uncover new patterns and perspectives that might not emerge with more structured approaches. Furthermore, it provides valuable context and a holistic view, helping to explain not just what happens, but also why and how it happens.[68]

The material is based on qualitative interviews with five professionals actively working in the fields of integration, the Swedish labour market and migration. The experts were selected from various sectors of society to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the issue. This diversity was particularly valuable, as their expertise spanned different areas, allowing for the identification of patterns that might not have emerged if the perspectives were limited to one single sector. The participants were from Röda Korset (Red Cross), Räddningsmissionen (Rescue Mission), Regeringskansliet (Government Offices of Sweden), and Etableringslyftet (Employment Support Program).

The study also benefited from greater diversity by including individuals working on similar issues at different levels of society. Engaging with policy implementers, social workers, and integration actors enriched the empirical foundation of the study. I prioritized interviewing individuals who had worked in their roles or similar roles for a few years, ensuring they could discern whether the challenges faced by women were incidental or part of broader patterns, as well as identify the underlying reasons behind these patterns. The interviewees work in different parts of Sweden, providing a broad perspective on the general situation across the country. The work conducted by the interviewees spans six municipalities, offering a relatively comprehensive depiction of the context being studied.

I work alongside the interviewee from the Rescue Mission, which made arranging the interview straightforward. Apart from the contact at Rescue Mission, I had no prior personal relationship with any of the participants. I identified suitable individuals by researching professions and workplaces connected to the Swedish labour market, particularly in areas related to migration, social exclusion, and integration. All interviewees were contacted via email. When I first contacted the interviewees, I briefly described the purpose of the study, the expected duration of the interview, and the proposed timeframe for conducting it. All interviews were conducted online via Teams, as most of the interviewees were in different cities.

Conducting interviews via Teams instead of over the phone offered several advantages. It allowed me to observe body language, establish eye contact, and create a more comfortable

[68] Kvale and Brinkmann, (2014). *Den kvalitativa forskningsintervjun*. Tredje [reviderade] upplagan Lund: Studentlitteratur. P. 69

sense of connection by providing the interviewees with a visual impression of me. However, it is worth noting that nonverbal cues are generally easier to interpret in person than in a digital setting. Another advantage was that all interviews followed the same method, ensuring consistency and comparable quality across the collected data.

To ensure anonymity, the interviewees are not identified by name. However, they are categorized to facilitate the presentation of results. Each interviewee is assigned a letter corresponding to their organization.

Participant A: Red Cross

Participant B: Rescue mission

Participant C: Employment Support Program

Participant D and E: The Government Offices of Sweden

3.1.1. Case selection and limitations

Experts were chosen for their broad understanding of labour market dynamics across groups. While migrant women's personal experiences could offer valuable insights, such accounts are less suited to addressing this thesis's research questions. Experts in migration and integration provide a broader perspective on challenges linked to factors like nationality, culture, and religion, making their insights crucial for this study. Sweden was a practical choice due to its geographical proximity and the possibility of conducting interviews in a shared language, eliminating the need for interpreters and enabling more efficient data collection.

While it could be argued that interviewing more than five participants would have resulted in a more comprehensive investigation with a broader range of perspectives, practical constraints, particularly the availability of potential participants, limited the sample size. Having only five interviews may reduce the study's validity because a smaller sample size offers fewer data points for generalization and limits the ability to capture the full diversity of perspectives within the field. This also has implications for reliability, as it may affect the consistency of findings if repeated with a larger sample. However, the expertise of the participants reduces some of these limitations. All interviewees were highly knowledgeable in their respective areas and provided in-depth, detailed insights into the subject matter. As a result, their contributions make the study valuable, even with a smaller sample size, as their expertise enhances the depth and quality of the findings.[69]

3.1.2. Method

Several reasons justify the use of interviews in my study. First, since the interviewees were not personally involved in the cases they discussed, they were able to maintain objectivity. Additionally, their extensive experience in their respective fields provided them with a comprehensive understanding of the subject. Interviews also made it possible to ask the type of questions needed to answer the research questions.[70]

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[69] Ekengren, A. and Hinnfors, J. (2012). *Uppsatshandbok: hur du lyckas med din uppsats*. 2., [rev.] uppl. Lund: Studentlitteratur. P. 75

[70] Kvale and Brinkmann, 2014 p. 207, 208

The interviews were designed as semi-structured, providing flexibility for follow-up questions and allowing interviewees to steer the conversation toward areas where they had the most expertise. This approach facilitated comprehensive and in-depth discussions, ensuring that the interviews captured a wide range of insights. The semi-structured format is particularly advantageous as it combines the consistency of a structured framework with the adaptability to explore unexpected but relevant topics, thereby enriching the quality and depth of the collected data[71]. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and subsequently analysed using the analytical framework to explore the conditions and dynamics of the Swedish labour market. Each interview was around thirty to forty-five minutes. This duration ensured the collection of rich, focused data without overburdening participants or straying from the main topics.[72]

The semi-structured interview is an effective method for understanding the interviewees' perspectives by identifying key themes from their responses. It was particularly well-suited for my research as it can combine a clear focus on pre-determined themes with the flexibility to adapt to the interviewee's insights. The interviewer maintains a strong focus on specific topics by guiding the conversation through open-ended questions. These open questions allow the interviewees to highlight aspects they find most significant within the research field.[73] This approach allowed me to concentrate on specific themes in the Swedish labour market while avoiding preconceived notions, encouraging interviewees to speak openly within the study's framework. The open nature of the interview structure also made it possible to adjust the level of follow up questions depending on how extensively the interviewees spoke about the subjects.[74]

When constructing the interview guide (see appendix), I divided the questions into three sections, each corresponding to one of the analysis areas: the informal economy, deskilling and labour market participation. I formulated the questions to first ask whether the respondents believed a particular phenomenon was occurring, followed by why they thought so, and what role different factors might play. This approach ensured that all respondents had the chance to express if they did not think the phenomenon was happening at all. The interview questions aimed to equally cover all areas, but discussions naturally focused on topics where each interviewee had the most expertise, as their familiarity with other areas varied.

3.1.3. Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are crucial in conducting qualitative studies involving interviews to ensure that all participants feel comfortable and at ease throughout the process.[75] As the interviewer, I had no personal interests in the subject matter, and my opinions on the topic were not disclosed to the interviewees, ensuring they did not influence the study. Although I knew one of the interviewees prior to the study, I took steps to maintain a professional approach throughout the interview process by asking the same questions as all other participants. No participants received any form of payment or compensation for their involvement in the study. I also made it clear to each interviewee that their names or specific

[71] Kvale and Brinkmann, 2014 p. 45
[72] Ekengren and Hinnfors, 2012 p. 83
[73] Kvale and Brinkmann, 2014 p. 45, 48
[74] Kvale and Brinkmann, 2014 p. 208, 209
[75] Vetenskapsrådet (2017) *God forskningssed*. Reviderad utgåva. Stockholm: Vetenskapsrådet. P. 28

details about their roles within their respective organizations would not be used in the final report. Furthermore, after each interview, I provided each participant with a consent form (see appendix).

3.1.4. Analytical scheme

Figure 3.1 outlines the operationalization of intersectionality in relation to the analysis. It illustrates how intersectionality integrates the dimensions of gender, nationality, migration, culture and religion and how these factors are applied within the analytical framework.

Figure 3.1 Operationalisation of intersectionality.

Intersectionality				
Gender: Gender is one aspect of power and inequality. An intersectional analyse examines how the experiences of men and women vary because of gender and the interaction of other factors (nationality and migration). In this study, it will be examined which gender-specific obstacles migrant women meet in the labour market.	Nationality: Nationality is one factor in how an individual is treated. Migrants with different nationalities can meet different levels of inclusion or exclusion. In this study, it will be examined how migrant women from different nationalities face challenges and privileges in the labour market.	Migrant: A first-generation migrant can face different forms of marginalisation. An intersectional analyse examines how being a migrant can mean facing different experiences then second-generation immigrants or non-migrants. In this study, it will be examined what effect being a migrant has in the labour market.	Culture: culture is one factor that shapes an individual's position in society. An intersectional analyse examines how the experiences of being part of one culture can vary from another one. In this study, it will be examined which cultural-specific obstacles migrant women face in the labour market.	Religion: Religion is one aspect of social identity and can affect the way someone is treated. An intersectional analyse examines how being part of one religion can lead to an individual being treated differently from someone who is part of another religion. In this study, it will be examined which religions seem to hinder integration into the labour market.

Figure explaining how five factors will be analysed in the study.

All my respondents share the characteristics of being women and migrants, which serve as underlying factors consistent across all participants. As such, these aspects do not require extensive focus in the analysis, as they do not vary between respondents.

The study explored how nationality, religion and culture influence migrant women within three key areas of the Swedish labour market: deskilling, labour market participation, and the informal economy. The analytical framework outlined in Figure 3.2 was used to categorize interview responses, focusing on how interviewees perceived the challenges faced by migrant women in these three areas as shaped by their nationality, culture, and religion.

Figure 3.2 Analytical scheme.

Analysing areas	Deskilling	Labour market participation	Informal economy
Nationality, Religion, Culture Gender Migrant			

Figure describing how the collected data are categorized.

3.1.5. Results Execution

When analysing the material, the transcribed interviews were translated from Swedish to English. Next, the material was organized into five categories, each aligned with the research gap and theoretical framework. The categorized data was then analysed using thematic coding to identify key patterns and insights to describe the findings for the research questions and relate to the aim of the study. The conclusions drawn are in line with the expected outcome and most interviews said similar things as previous research which makes it more likely that the conclusions drawn are correct.

4. Results

This chapter will present an overview of the answers from the interviews.

4.1. Foreign-born vs. Native-born in Sweden

When asked what impact being a migrant has on an individual's integration into the Swedish labour market, the answers show that being a migrant vs. native born in Sweden place a big role in many areas in society. Participant C describes the complexity of the Swedish bureaucracy and how it can affect migrants.

> "These people must coordinate how different authorities are connected and who they should contact; how do the social insurance office, social services, the employment service and various initiatives fit together? They understand nothing." Quotation participant C.

Participant C explains that many people in Sweden believe that teaching migrants Swedish will help them understand how society works. However, many migrants come from entirely different contexts and struggle to grasp the individualistic mindset that exists in Sweden, where people are expected to turn to the state for everything. While the state is there to help, you must know where to go and what to ask for—a process that can be confusing even for native Swedes. The participant further highlights that when migrants do manage to reach the authorities, they often feel like a burden, sensing that officials simply want to pass them along to someone else to avoid dealing with them. This sheds light on a contradiction where migrants are expected to navigate Sweden's bureaucracy successfully even though Swedes often do not fully understand it themselves.

> "The focus of SFI (Swedish for Immigrants) becomes less about learning Swedish and more about fulfilling an obligation. There are many misunderstandings surrounding this, and no one seems to address them." Quotation participant C.

Migrants face numerous challenges around working and receive legal payment. Participant A highlights some of these challenges. For example, migrants need a coordination number from the tax office to access support from authorities. However, to obtain a coordination number, they first need to find a job and sign a contract so the employer can submit their information to the tax office. Participant A points out the same type of contradiction in the bureaucracy that Participant C mentioned: without a coordination number, it is difficult to get a job, and without a job, it is difficult to get a coordination number. But the issues do not stop at the coordination number.

> "The next step is the bank. There are plenty of rules to open a bank account, the process is long." Quotation participant A.

Like participant A and C, participant D can see a significant difference in how migrants are affected in the labour market compared to native-born.

> "It is obvious that migrants have a lower employment rate, in particular women and especially non- European women." Quotation participant D.

Employment rates are lower, making it more difficult for migrants to gain a foothold in the labour market, as explained by Participant D. When they do have a job, they often obtain less money than natives.

Participant E discusses residential segregation, highlighting a different perspective on how migrants are affected by Swedish society. When Statistics Sweden (SCB) examines socioeconomic factors in a residential area, they consider aspects such as education, labour market participation, and dependency on social benefits.

> "In areas with more socioeconomic challenges, there is usually a larger proportion of migrants living there (…) We can see a bigger concentration of newly arrived people in the areas with the lowest socioeconomic status. This also shows a tendency that once established, migrants have the opportunity to move to other areas that may be more socio-economically mixed or socio-economically stronger." Quotation participant E.

This shows that newly arrived migrants often settle in areas where many other migrants live, and these are often neighbourhoods where residents face significant challenges. Based on the answers above, it can be understood that even though not all of them specifically mention the labour market, the way migrants are treated clearly affects their ability to integrate into it.

4.2. Gender Disparities Among Migrants in the Swedish Labour Market

The study focuses on identifying different patterns in the Swedish labour market for migrant women based on their nationalities, culture and religion. To determine what privileges or disadvantages migrant women face due to their nationality, culture and religion it is important to first separate the factors related to being women or migrants. For this reason, a gender discussion was conducted with the interviewees. Participant B highlighted how migrant women experience vulnerability in the labour market.

> "We've had women who don't want to work in home care because they're afraid of being offered sexual favours or similar. I think that is a significant difference between women and men: as a man, you're not as vulnerable in the labour market as women, especially those from vulnerable groups. People often make assumptions about them." Quotation participant B.

This fear is based on thinking harassment might happen and if it does, they would not know where to turn for help or how to handle the situation. Participant B also talked about how being a female migrant affects which labour sector they end up in.

> "Ethnicity, nationality and gender can greatly impact on which type of workplace they end up in. For example, women are more likely to end up in the cleaning industry and floristry." Quotation participant B.

These jobs are often in the informal economy. The level of participation in the informal economy is similar between the genders but the workplace differs. Participant A supports this reasoning by noting that there is a division in certain jobs where men are more in demand.

> "Some workers want men more than women, for example if the job requires a strong body to carry things or similar." Quotation participant A.

Participant A also points out that most employers do not care whether the employee is a woman or a man; what matters most is how well they speak Swedish. Although employers do not always indicate whether they favour men or women, different authorities may do so. Participant E describes how the employment service has given less support to foreign-born women even though they have the same qualifications as foreign-born men.

> "There are preconceptions among employment service caseworkers that men are seen as more employable and ready to take a job than women. Even though they may have comparable qualifications." Quotation participant E.

Participant C, on the other hand, talked about how cultural norms and gender perceptions can affect migrant women in the labour market. For example, men are often portrayed as the bread maker and the head of the household.

> "If a woman gets an internship or a job before her husband, it can lead to humiliation for the man. This is not always the case, but it can be difficult in the family if the woman takes on that responsibility because it´s the man who should have that role." Quotation participant C.

Women might tend to not fully look for a job because the cultural norm is for the man to find one first. The migrant women are instead more likely to start studying because that suits them better, studies are easier to combine with family duties then work. The women are supposed to stay home and take care of the family and be a good mom taking care of the family and home.

4.3. Factors influencing migrant women in Swedish labour market participation

Participant B located two groups that face significant discrimination in the labour market: people from African countries and Romani people. Participant C and B both mentioned the roles clothes can have for participation in the Swedish labour market. Participant C explained that migrant women have a harder time finding work than migrant men and it is especially hard with an ethnicity that differs from the Swedish one.

> "Black women have it harder then white women, especially if they have clothes that deviate like a veil or long clothes. Then it´s different from what we usually do in Sweden." Quotation participant C.

One big aspect of finding work is to be able to fit into the Swedish society and the cultural norms, like style of clothing. Participant B also believes that ethnicity and nationality have a major impact on the level of discrimination in the labour market, more so than gender. One nationality that faces particularly high levels of discrimination because of their clothing is Roma.

> "They are not allowed to walk around in the clothes they usually wear in a workplace, if they go to an interview or work somewhere they have to change their clothes. People are afraid that they will steal, for example if they work in cleaning. They also face discrimination from their colleagues, they may make offensive comments about their heritage and so on." Quotation participant B.

Besides facing difficulties in the workplace, Participant B also discusses how dressing a certain way often leads to Roma not getting the job from the first place and therefore not

being able to join the workforce, or having to change the way they look to be able to fit in. Participant C also mentions that it is not always the employers that have a problem with a certain group, but it can also be the different nationalities that do not accept working in a certain workplace. Some women are not comfortable with handling pig meat or serving alcohol for example. Another nationality that often faces similar discrimination as Roma in labour market participation is Somali. Women from Somalia who wear traditional clothes often feel that they are misrepresented in the labour market, a problem that is even greater if they have children. Participant C states that:

> "It's pretty clear that they are one of the groups that have it the hardest." Quotation participant C.

Participant A continues in a similar path, explaining that Somali women are difficult to reach for SFI because they often have young children to look after. Therefore, due to lack of time and family responsibilities, they often find it more difficult to learn Swedish.

> "Somali women as a group are difficult to reach, some other groups, for example Ukrainians and Turks are easier, but Somalis are difficult, not only for SFI but also in general in the labour market." Quotation participant A.

Participant A also drew a link between language proficiency and labour market participation.

> "To approach the labour market, they need the language. Many Somali women lack English language skills and therefore find it harder to integrate and find work. In many countries from Africa, English is the mother tongue, which has made it easier to integrate. You can see this clearly with those from Congo, those who only know Swahili have difficulty learning Swedish while those who know English learn Swedish faster." Quotation participant A.

Women from Somalia and Thailand are at high risk of exclusion in Sweden as they are two groups that often arrive as relatives to family members, participant D explains it like:

> "The group of women who are family migrants sometimes never encounter Sweden's social institutions. They live in a small world of their own and are never integrated into society, they simply have no contacts." Quotation participant D.

One solution to this was for municipalities to organise open preschools for foreign-born women with young children.

Participant C tried to explain why employers often tend to remove, for example, Somali women as uninteresting. This is a combination of many factors, one of which is that people often want what feels familiar. What is often classified as better is what is similar to oneself. If you seem to belong, you are also valued more highly. If someone looks different, for example, they are not always valued as highly.

> "If someone comes along who is very different from you in the way they look and dress, it can lead to a feeling of insecurity. You don't know exactly where you stand, as you might when someone who looks like you arrive." Quotation participant C.

Even if some employers are blatantly racist, many employers act out of a structural racism where employers want to feel confident that they know how their employees' will function in different contexts. Employers need to quickly and easily find a worker they can trust to do the job correctly. Due to different cultural beliefs, some nationalities and ethnicities have been

categorised as not being as trustworthy as others. Sometimes migrant women also feel that Swedes are racist when it is really a matter of a culture clash.

> "Many people feel they are exposed to racism, and they are of course. However, a lot of it also comes down to how we are in Sweden. For example, when you get on a bus, where do you sit? Naturally, you sit as far away from others as possible. If someone sits next to you, Swedes think it's strange. Many migrants interpret this as racism, but that's just how we are." Quotation participant C.

The same kind of culture clash often occurs in the workplace. For instance, some women bring and share beautifully prepared food at work, but this has made Swedes uncomfortable because it is not something they typically do. As a result, these women have felt rejected. Participant A also mentions that some nationalities have it easier to integrate into the labour market. One such group is women from Turkey.

> "They often have high levels of education, almost all of them get a residence permit quickly, they don't need any help, they contact the National Council for Higher Education (UHR) directly and validate their diplomas. Most of the women wear a veil but it doesn't matter, they go out, they look for a job." Quotation participant A.

Participant A noticed the same type of determination among women from Ukraine and Eritrea too.

4.4. Factors influencing migrant women on deskilling in the Swedish labour market

Participant B argues that deskilling can manifest in different ways. One example is that migrant women often feel they must prove their worth and qualifications. Participant B explains that Roma women frequently avoid recommending their relatives to their employers because if their relatives were to make a mistake, they would be blamed for it. This is because trust between them and their employer is often already low.

> "They sometimes find it difficult to trust their relatives. For example, if they have a job themselves, they fear taking their sister there because if she is late or starts an argument, they could both lose their jobs. The employer might see them as the same person, lumping them together even though they are two different individuals. If someone else from the Roma community is hired, the same thing happens—they lump them together. If one of them makes a mistake, they could all be out of there." Quotation participant B.

One individual's competence often relies on the behaviour of others. If someone does not act appropriately, it is easy to get dragged down with them because employers may assume they are all the same. This means that, in some cases, such as for Roma women, an individual's qualifications do not speak for themselves, they often experience having to prove their worth. Participant A describes something similar saying that many employers feel the need to do extra check-ups on migrant women in the workplace to make sure everything is going smoothly. If they hear that they cannot speak Swedish fully then they assume they also can´t work well.

When asked which nationalities face greater problems with deskilling, participant C argues that it is the same nationalities and ethnicities that also face lower labour market participation.

> "If we only speak about nationalities, I think it will be the same. Many people in Sweden are white, do not wear a veil and come from a Christian religion. An employer can more easily relate to someone that looks similar. If you are getting a job, it usually starts at a very shallow level. Although many employers come from different countries, so this is not always the case." Quotation participant C.

When assessing someone's qualifications it is easy to accidentally think away someone because that person did not get their qualifications the same way as the norm or because they seem to be different, they also assume the qualifications are not going to meet the standard. Participant D mentions that women from Ukraine are another group that often face deskilling.

> "They are often highly educated and learn Swedish fast, but they might not always end up with the jobs they are qualified for anyways." Quotation participant D.

Ukrainians often have a high educational level when they arrive in Sweden, they often find work but not always one that matches their qualifications. The problem with deskilling is something that is happening to a greater extent to those with many qualifications, experiences and high levels of education. Participant A also talked about deskilling among Ukrainians.

> "Three Ukrainians I have been in contact with had higher educations within economy from Ukraine and they had also worked as accountants for a few years in Ukraine. They also worked with the same type of system as the one we have in Sweden but when they tried looking for a job in this field in Sweden it was impossible to find. One of them, she now works with cleaning to be able to support her family." Quotation participant A.

Even though they had experience working with a Swedish system and had good recommendations from previous employers they could not find something similar in Sweden. Immigrant women with low levels of education face other types of problems. Participant B explains that many, often from the Roma community, that comes to Sweden without education are scared to start studying, many women have never gone to any type of school before and some are analphabetic. Participant A support this argument by saying:

> "I know a few people that have two or three master diplomas from their home countries and work experience. Even though they have a good CV and personal letter it´s hard for them to find a job. It´s harder to find a job that suits them the more educated they are." Quotation participant A.

Most migrants start working with jobs that require less qualifications regardless of their previous experience because the more serious the job is the more the employer must be able to trust their employees. Migrant women are also likely to end up with internships, temp roles and volunteer work because they first need to prove themselves and their qualifications before the employer feels confident enough to hire them. Participant C brings in another perspective by saying that there are a few cultural differences that cannot be transferred the same way diplomas can and gives therefore one explanation to why many migrant women encounter deskilling.

> "Even if they come from Germany, which is in many ways similar to Sweden, there will be differences in how you apply for work and how you should speak on the interview for example. Even with an education and work experience there is still things that will hold you back, like understanding social ques." Quotation participant C.

4.5. Factors influencing migrant women on employment in the Swedish Informal Economy

Participant D highlights the difficulty of determining exactly how many people are involved in the informal economy or their nationalities, as it operates in a black market where accurate numbers are hard to obtain. The participant also talks about how being involved in the informal economy can lead to labour-related crime and other negative effects. Participant B supports this by saying:

> "Ending up in the informal economy can lead to a hard time integrating in the Swedish welfare system. In a lot of sectors within the informal economy they don´t speak Swedish, which might be one reason for why you ended up there from the first place, and then you will never learn Swedish. In another way, the informal economy can help with integration. Cleaning hotels for example is a good way to meet and interact with Swedish people. But with home cleaning services you don´t need to talk to people in the same way and then it´s harder to learn." Quotation participant B.

Participant E mentions that it is the group non- European born women that have it especially hard to integrate in the labour market. They are also the group that have a big risk of ending up in insecure employment, black market but also part time jobs and short time employment. Participant B explains it by saying that many migrant women work with one month's notice, hourly rate or similar. Because many never leave the informal economy it is hard for them to get an apartment because you can´t prove that you are receiving a salary or have a contract. You will also not have access to health insurance, pension or any kind of economic aid.

> "If something happens, then you're screwed. If you can no longer work, you will have no income and you will not be able to get any support from the state. The informal economy is very risky but often there is no other solution." Quotation participant B.

Many women who came to Sweden after working as tailors, for example, struggle to find legal employment. Participant A explains that the challenge is even greater if they lack English skills. They often begin with various cleaning jobs, which are rarely well paid. Two groups often end up in the informal economy, women from Somalia and Afghanistan. Many women that come from Afghanistan are illiterate and used to a different alphabet then the Latin one which makes it even harder to learn Swedish and find work. All migrants have two years to pass SFI and learn Swedish, if they fail after that they need to find work which is difficult if they are illiterate.

> "It´s hard for them to find work, who is going to play the role of translator between them and the employee? How will they understand what they should do?" Quotation participant A.

Participant A noticed the same type of problems with Somali women, most of whom also do not speak English. They often start working with cleaning or selling advertising, just to earn a living. Participant A said it can be hard to differentiate between nationalities in the informal economy because usually some women from most nationalities end up in the sector. Participant C discusses the importance with giving migrant women an education in how the informal economy works.

> "What is a white job and what is a black job? And what are the downsides with black jobs? I notice that they usually don´t know what it means with black jobs, the dangers of it. There is a lot of ignorance about it." Quotation participant C.

Talking to migrant women about the things that most Swedish people might find obvious to make sure there is an understanding for the Swedish society in the labour market context is crucial.

4.6. Analysing results to previous research and theory

The results are presented in relation to intersectionality and previous research through a discussion and the research contributions is clarified and described.

The results show that migrant women face various challenges in the Swedish labour market. To understand these challenges better, it is important to view female migrants as a diverse group and break down their difficulties into smaller parts. This helps reveal how different factors contributing to marginalization relate to each other. An intersectional perspective is therefore essential.[76]

One difficulty migrants face is that they must overcome bureaucratic obstacles and deal with different authorities. They often do not understand how the Swedish system works, which can lead to them having a generally lower labour market participation. They also often find themselves receiving lower wages than native Swedes. This is something almost all migrants must deal with. Add to this the fact that the migrant is a woman and you have a further set of difficulties, as intersectional theory states.[77] In addition to having to deal with the same bureaucratic difficulties as all migrants, they often face the fact that employees of various authorities are not willing to help them in the same way as they are willing to help men find work, as they "are more unserious". In addition to the fact that, like other migrants, they often receive lower wages, they also must worry about being sexually harassed in the workplace. Several factors, such as migration status, gender, and sexuality, intersect and hold therefore different meanings for women and men in the workplace.[78]

Add the fact that the migrant woman is not only a female migrant but also religious and a new set of perspectives emerges. For example, those women who have a religion other than Christianity often face xenophobia.[79] One reason for this is that Swedes are afraid of what is different from themselves. On top of worrying about sexual harassment and appearing unserious female religious migrants also need to convince authorities and employers that they are trustworthy. Besides this, if the female migrant´s clothing also deviates from the norm with for example a veil, it can become an additional challenge, reflecting Swedish cultural expectations. For example, Roma individuals often have to prove themselves more than Swedish people because they stand out from the prevailing cultural norms and style, appearing different. This shows, like intersectionality describe, how different factors intertwine with, and affect one another.[80]

[76] Flippen, 2014 p. 405, 406
[77] Collins, 2016 p. 1, 2
[78] Flippen, 2014 p. 405, 406
[79] Valkonen, S. and Wallenius-Korkalo, S. (2016) 'Practising postcolonial intersectionality: Gender, religion and indigeneity in Sámi social work', *International social work*, 59(5), pp. 614–626. P. 623, 619
[80] Flippen, 2014 p. 405, 406

It is almost impossible to look at one aspect of an individual without taking other aspects into account. For example, gender norms are closely linked to cultural beliefs.[81] The woman is often the carer of the family and household while the man earns money. This stereotype makes it more difficult for women to enter the labour market, especially if the woman is a migrant living in an area with a high proportion of other migrants and thus lacks a Swedish context and a network that can lead to work. The situation is further complicated if the migrant woman came as a family member and often without qualifications and contacts beyond her family.

Even if the migrant woman has a network of contacts, it can be difficult to find work depending on her nationality and previous skills. For example, a lack of language skills among Somali women is a major reason why they find it difficult to establish themselves, while women from Turkey and Ukraine, who often arrive with educational qualifications, find it easier to find work. On the other hand, cultural aspects come into play, even though Ukrainians have many qualifications, they have difficulty finding a desirable job. Many who are de-skilled because Swedish employers do not trust them to perform a complicated job as smoothly as a Swede. Due to xenophobia and lack of language skills, many non-European women also end up in the informal economy. This shows, like intersectionality states, how different forms of marginalization interacts and lead to different outcomes for individuals.[82]

Looking at just one aspect of a migrant, it is difficult to discern why they face a particular problem, intersectionality makes it possible to gain a broader understanding of why an individual faces difficulties or privileges.[83] For example, it is difficult to see why Romanian women as a nationality face such low levels of labour market participation without considering the cultural factors. Without using an intersectional perspective, it can also be difficult to come up with effective solutions. Migrants are not a homogeneous group and therefore they need solutions according to specific needs, these needs differ depending on who you look at and what aspects are included when studying the individual.[84]

Like this study, Boréus et al. describes in previous research how female migrants have a harder time integrating in the labour market since they often face resistance from government employees.[85] Similar to Rydgren, this study also describes how stereotypes play a big role in labour market participation.[86] However, this study elaborated on Rydgren's thinking on stereotypes by including ethnicity and nationality to the cultural and gender perspective. This study found that it is mainly people of African ethnicity, Roma and Thai people who are subject to negative stereotyping. For example, Somali women who have children and wear traditional clothing face particular difficulties in finding work. Unlike previous research, this study also included a discussion of which migrant women find it easier to enter the labour market.

When looking at deskilling, similar to the findings of this study, previous research Parsland and Ulmestig concluded that migrant women are placed in a category of being different and more frivolous from the normative Swedish, which means that their qualifications are not

[81] Parsland and Ulmestig, 2022 p. 384
[82] Carbado et al. 2013 p. 304
[83] Collins, 2016 p. 1, 2
[84] Carbado et al. 2013 p. 304
[85] Boréus et al. 2021 p. 386
[86] Rydgren, 2004 p. 708

taken as seriously and they are therefore subjected to deskilling.[87] Joseph and Lundström also mention that migrant women coming from countries with lower socio-economic status often end up in insecure jobs that usually require low levels of special skills.[88] This is similar to what this study found, namely that many from Romania, a lower socio-economic country, are not taken seriously and find it difficult to get a job because their skills are often minimised.

Most of the previous research shows to have looked at an equally strong cultural perspective that has been used in this study. However, this study has included more perspectives than previous research. The study found that Ukrainians are a group that encounters deskilling because they often arrive with high levels of education and work experience, making it difficult to match their qualifications in Sweden. The study also found that those who physically stand out because of their clothes must prove their qualifications more, something Romanian women often face. Romanian women's qualifications and experience are also often bundled together.

Like this study, Parsland and Ulmestig also argue that female migrants are often seen as a group in need of labour, regardless of the type of work.[89] This study builds on this by describing that it is especially women from Somalia and Afghanistan who end up in the informal economy and precarious employment.

Previous research often draws the distinction of non-European women as a general group rather than dividing them into sub-groups of nationalities[90] - One of my findings is that I have drawn clearer distinctions between groups of migrant women. A lot of previous research includes cultural and gender aspects, but not as often which nationalities are affected and why. The previous research less often included the effect of a woman's religion on the labour market, but this was also something that my study did not say anything further about. The research contribution of this study is thus to add a new dimension to the research on female migrants in the Swedish labour market, namely nationality, and therefore adding to the intersectional perspective. By adding an aspect, previous research has been built on, it is now more clear which nationalities are most/least affected by cultural and religious aspects in different areas of the labour market and what it depends on.

[87] Parsland and Ulmestig, 2022 p. 295
[88] Joseph and Lundström, 2013 p. 3,4
[89] Parsland and Ulmestig, 2022 p. 280, 294
[90] Rydgren, 2004 p. 698, 699, 700

5. Conclusions

In the chapter, the research questions are answered and the implications of the conclusions are discussed.

The nationalities with low labour market participation are female migrants from Somalia, Romania and Thailand; those with high labour market participation are female migrants from Turkey, Ukraine and Eritrea. Those most exposed to deskilling are female migrants from Rumania and Ukraine, and those with a high tendency to engage in the informal economy are female migrants from Somalia and Afghanistan.

1. According to experts, which factors influence migrant women's participation in the Swedish labour market?

One reason why migrant women face difficulties in establishing themselves in the labour market is that many of them stand out from the Swedish norm and thus face various forms of discrimination. For example, if they have an ethnicity that is far from Swedish or wear clothes that differ from the Swedish style. Another reason is that if the woman needs to take care of the family and household, they have more time constrains in learning Swedish. If the woman arrives as a family member, it is also difficult to establish herself and make Swedish contacts.

1 A. How do experts perceive factors influencing deskilling of migrant women in the Swedish labour market?

Migrant women are often treated as a single, uniform group in workplaces, where one person’s mistakes can impact others from the same background. For example, being qualified is not always enough to prove trustworthiness—everyone from the same nationality, like the Roma, is expected to work perfectly to avoid judgment. Highly educated migrant women are often undervalued because Swedes assume their qualifications don’t meet local standards. As a result, many end up in low-skill jobs, having to prove their worth before being given opportunities that match their abilities.

1 B. What are experts' reflections on which factors influence migrant women's employment in the Swedish informal economy?

Many people who come to Sweden without any work experience or education end up in the informal economy because it is the only way to earn money. This is particularly difficult if the person does not speak Swedish or English. Many also come from a different cultural context and do not always understand what undeclared and legal work is.

One consequence of many migrant women not integrating into the labour market is that they may become economically dependent on their husbands, families or social benefits. The informal economy harms both migrants and society, as unpaid taxes weaken public resources, while lack of insurance and stable income leaves migrants vulnerable.

The interviews reveal that adding more intersectional aspects increases the complexity of the issue. A limitation of this study is the potential to include additional perspectives, as intersectionality can always be deepened. Further research can explore other dimensions that shape privilege or marginalization and compare the findings in Sweden to other countries within the EU to draw generalisations.

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Appendix

In this chapter, the appendices utilized in the study will be presented.

Interview guide

The interview guide includes the questions asked to all participants, along with the most common follow-up questions, but it does not include the less frequently asked follow-up questions.

Background and Role:

- How old are you?
- Where were you born?
- How many years have you worked in the organization?
- Can you tell me about your role and responsibilities within the organization?

Labour Market Participation:

- Is there any interplay between gender and nationality in labour market discrimination?
- How do you view the interplay between gender and nationality in labour market discrimination?
- Are there examples where you have seen the Swedish labour market being more exclusionary for certain groups of migrant women compared to others?
- Do you think there are specific challenges faced by women from particular countries or ethnic backgrounds? Can you give exempels?

Informal Economy:

- How common is it, in your experience, for migrant women to end up working in the informal economy?
- Do you think gender and/or nationality influence the degree of inequity within the informal economy?
- What types of jobs do migrant women (from different ethnicities or nationalities) typically take in the informal sector. - and if that is the case then how could this affect their long-term integration?

Deskilling:

- Would you say that migrant women with high levels of education often work in jobs that do not require their qualifications?
- How often do you encounter migrant women with high levels of education who are forced to work in jobs that do not require their qualifications?
- Which countries are these women usually from?
- What do you see as the main reasons these women cannot secure jobs that match their education and experience?

Consent form

CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN - MARGINALIZATION AND OPPORTUNITY: IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN THE SWEDISH WORKFORCE

	Add your initials next to the statements you agree with
I confirm that I understand the information the researcher has explained about the research project and that I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	
I agree for the data collected from me to be used in relevant future research in an anonymised form.	
I agree to take part in the above research project.	

Name of participant	
Participant's signature	
Date	
Name of researcher	
Signature	
Date*	

*To be signed and dated in the presence of the participant.

Project title	*Document type*	*Version #*	*Date*
Marginalization and opportunity: Immigrant women in the Swedish workforce.	Consent Form	1.0	18/11/2024

Interview sessions

All interviews were conducted through Teams.

Participant A: 22/11 - 24

Participant B: 19/11 - 24

Participant C: 22/11 - 24

Participant D: 22/11 - 24

Participant E: 20/11 - 24