Trade union strategies for labor market integration of refugee immigrants in Sweden

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Abstract

Sweden’s social and labor policy have been influenced by strong labor movements. The role of trade unions is of significance, when speaking of labor market integration of refugee immigrants. This study aimed to examine how the Swedish Trade Union Confederation, LO, supports integration of refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market. Through semi-structured interviews with representatives from LO, reasons of exclusion of refugee immigrants from the labor market, strategies to integrate refugee immigrants on the labor market and current policies regarding integration of refugee immigrants, were investigated. The empirical data was analyzed using theoretical frameworks of social exclusion, empowerment and Esping-Andersen’s categorization of welfare state regimes. According to the LO representatives, refugee immigrants are excluded from the Swedish labor market due to reasons such as lack of language skills, discriminatory unemployment and segregated housing conditions. The results show that there is a lack of strategies used by LO to integrate refugee immigrants on the labor market, although elements of providing information and forms of influence for conscientizing and empowerment have been identified. Removing administrative barriers combined with protection of collective agreements and the solidary welfare state system are identified as important for a successful integration on the labor market. The findings are related to the shift of Sweden’s welfare state, from a universal to a more liberal one.

Keywords:
refugee, integration, labor market, trade union, exclusion, empowerment, welfare state
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1 Introduction

Especially due to the war in Syria, Europe has faced an enormous flow of refugees in 2015. The majority of people seeking asylum across Europe are refugees fleeing from the violence in Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq (Eurostat, 2015). In the third quarter of 2015, 42,520 first time asylum applicants were registered in Sweden, which makes Sweden the third main destination country, after Germany and Hungary (Eurostat, 2015). Sweden is known for being quite generous in accepting refugee immigrants and has long been a preferred destination for refugee immigrants, because it has given comparatively open access to the welfare state and the Swedish citizenship (Cochrane, Clarke & Gewirtz, 2001, p.211). However, receiving this many asylum seekers is a challenge for Sweden regarding the integration process in many different areas. In Sweden, ‘finding a job’ is the core of the refugee integration process (Peromingo, 2014). Furthermore, it has been discussed that employment is central to integration for many reasons and stands in correlation with other factors that impact integration (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2013, p.35). When asking refugee immigrants what would make them or what make them feel integrated, most of them say ‘having a job’, as a study shows. Many refugee immigrants think, that being introduced to different paths leading to employment, is the most valuable help (UNHCR, 2013, p.35). However, data has shown that refugee immigrants’ employment lags that of native Swedes basically for their whole life time in Sweden (Lundborg, 2013, p.219). Many different associations, such as the Swedish Public Employment Service (Arbetsförmedlingen) and the migration agency (Migrationsverket), contribute to the integration of refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market.

This study wants to explore the role of the Swedish Trade Union Confederation, (Landsorganisationen i Sverige, LO), in fulfilling the refugee integration process. LO is the central organization which organizes workers within the private and the public sector and therefore, LO is a key actor, in the field of the Swedish labor market. Three components have been in focus when exploring LO’s role regarding integration of refugee immigrants. First the reasons for exclusion of refugee immigrants from the Swedish labor market, according to LO, has been investigated. Second, the study focuses on the strategies of LO to integrate refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market. The third focus is on current Swedish refugee and labor market policies. This has all been examined from a trade union perspective, through
interviews with representatives from LO. One of the main reasons to examine a trade union perspective is the significance of trade unions in Sweden. For several decades, the labor movement has been of great importance in Sweden and has enjoyed a major impact on policy creation and the creation of the Swedish welfare in general. The integration of refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market should be of interests of Swedish trade unions, because of their importance and impact on the labor market policy. Lundborg (2013) states: "Employment is generally considered to be a crucial factor for the integration of immigrants" (p.219). Furthermore, it should also be in the state’s interest to integrate refugee immigrants successfully and as soon as possible on the labor market. Hence refugee immigrants can contribute to the system and do not cost the system resources in form of unemployment benefits. Because so many refugee immigrants arriving in Sweden nowadays, the question of a successful integration is more in focus than ever before and thus the integration of refugee immigrants on the labor market from a trade union perspective is analyzed within this study.

1.1 Aim and research questions

The aim of the study was to examine how the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) supports the integration of refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market.

Research Questions:

1. What are the main reasons for the exclusion of refugee immigrants from the Swedish labor market, according to the Swedish Trade Union Confederation?
2. What are the Swedish Trade Union Confederation's strategies to integrate refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market?
3. What policies should be implemented or modified to improve the situation of refugee immigrants on the labor market?

1.2 Essay structure

Chapter one finalizes with central significant definitions for this study and basic background information about LO. Chapter two presents the research design and methodology used in this study, as well as the essay credibility and study limitations. Earlier important research is presented and discussed in chapter three. In chapter four, the applied theoretical frameworks are presented, i.e. social exclusion, empowerment, and the Swedish welfare model, especially based on Esping-Andersen's (1990) theory on welfare state regimes. The results of the
gathered data and the analysis of this study in relation to the theoretical frameworks are presented in chapter five. The final chapter, chapter six, concludes the study with a discussion and presents suggestions for future research. A list of used references and appendices of relevance conclude this paper.

1.3 Definitions

1.3.1 Refugee

Three categories of people are requiring protection according to the Swedish Aliens Act. The first group of people requiring protection in the Swedish Aliens Act are refugees. In article 1 in the United Nations Convention (UNHCR & Migrationsverket, 2011), a refugee is defined as a person:

who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear... unwilling to return to it. (p.3)

The second group of people requiring protection in the Swedish Aliens Act, are persons “threatened with execution, torture, or other humiliation or who run a serious risk as a civilian of being injured owing to armed conflict” (UNHCR & Migrationsverket, 2011, p.3). The third group requiring protection are persons “who need protection from armed conflict, other severe conflicts in their country of origin, or severe violence; or who cannot return home owing to environmental catastrophe” (UNHCR & Migrationsverket, 2011, p.3).

1.3.2 Integration

Penninx (2003) defines integration as the process by which immigrants become accepted into society, both as individuals and as groups. Penninx (2003) further states that:

This definition of integration is deliberately left open, because the particular requirements for acceptance by a receiving society vary greatly from country to country. The openness of this definition also reflects the fact that the responsibility for integration rests not with one particular group, but rather with many actors; immigrants themselves, the host government, institutions, and communities, to name a few.
1.4 The Swedish Trade Union Confederation, LO

The labor movement has always played a great role in Sweden's history and an important aspect has been the cooperation between trade unions and the Swedish Social Democratic Party. The trade union-political cooperation between LO and the Swedish Democratic Social Party stems from the late 1900s and their policies and achievements have the same set of values (Landsorganisationen, 2015a). According to LO the center of all trade union-political cooperation have been and must be in the future basic values of equality, solidarity, mutual respect and confidence. In total, 14 affiliates, for which LO is the umbrella organization, organize workers within the private as well as the public sectors and have about 1.470.000 members and an independent status (Landsorganisationen, 2014a). Primarily, LO is responsible for coordination, research, signing labor market insurance schemes, and creating public opinion at central and regional levels. Thereby LO coordinates among others: "wage bargaining, international activities, trade union education, children's and young people's education, gender equality and social security" (Landsorganisationen, 2014a).

The most important tool for LO is collective agreements concluded between a trade union and an employer. Fundamental labor law, such as procedural rules for the right to negotiate, is laid down in the legislation in Sweden (Landsorganisationen, 2015b). However, the contents of individual labor contracts are mainly established in collective agreements. Unlike in Germany for example, there is no statutory minimum wage in Sweden. Only, collective agreements or individual contracts define the wage for the performed work (Landsorganisationen, 2015b). In the case a salary is not ruled by a collective agreement, employers can pay as much as much as they want, as long as the employees accept it. LO stresses that strong trade unions and employers’ organizations are the precondition for the collective agreement model. Furthermore, LO states that a high membership rate is a key feature for the collective agreement model. "About 90 per cent of the workers in Sweden are protected by collective agreements" and "[a]bout 70 per cent of all workers in Sweden are affiliated to a trade union" (Landsorganisationen, 2015b). Collective agreements are seen as a part of the Swedish model by LO (2014b), because when a job is covered by a collective agreement, it is ticket to collective insurance and pension schemes, which are characteristics of the Swedish welfare model.
On their webpage, LO (2014a) states its range of tasks and range of influence: “An important task for LO is to protect the trade union movement’s interests in relation to Parliament, the authorities and other organisations”. LO is a body being considered, in the case legislative measures are proposed, that affect the society as a whole. Representatives of LO are also involved in governing bodies of various governmental authorities, in matters concerning the Swedish labor market, and the political development as a whole. Furthermore, LO states: “Through the LO Districts and LO Sections, LO can coordinate trade union activities and influence public opinion at local level” (Landsorganisationen, 2014a).
2 Methodology

It is our obligation as researchers to be methodical in describing sufficient details of data collection and the analysis process to permit others to judge the quality of the study (Patton, 1999, p.1191). Therefore, this chapter offers a detailed description of methodology, including credibility and limitations of the study.

This research was conducted as a qualitative study. Rubin and Babbie (2011, p.471) claims that using a qualitative method gives the researcher(s) a deeper meaning of human experiences, in this study, integration of refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market. A qualitative research method is more applicable and suitable to study certain formal organizations, occupational roles, practices and settlements, which in this study regards LO (Rubin & Babbie, 2011, p.472). The data was collected mainly through interviews with representatives of LO. In addition to the interviews a literature search was made.

2.1 Literature search

Although this study is mainly based on qualitative interviews, a literature search of relevant sources for this study was made to provide a deeper understanding of the situation for refugees and the role of LO on the labor market. Therefore, various databases were searched for relevant articles and books. Search terms, such as exclusion, empowerment, refugee immigrants, welfare model, Sweden, trade union, and labor movement were used in various constellations to ensure a view in this topic from different discussions, researches, and theoretical perspectives. There is an extensive mass of literature covering the Swedish welfare model, empowerment, and integration of refugee immigrants on the labor market. Whereas the literature, about Swedish trade unions and LO connected with the integration of refugee immigrants, is, with few exceptions, very limited. Some background information about LO and official statements from LO are presented in this study to provide essential knowledge about LO itself and its principles.
2.2 Selection of informants and entering the field

The beginning process of the study started by deciding the amount of interviews that would be needed for gathering the data. The amount of participants required for this study was five, including one interview per participant. Five interviews seemed realizable in the limited timeframe of the study to obtain a sufficient amount of data for the analysis. Interviews with five representatives within different work positions in LO ensured a reasonable diversity of data. Thus, the interviews were conducted with representatives of LO, who worked in various levels, meaning central level, district level, and connected local associations.

The selection of informants for this study was a form of snowball sampling where there were no specific participants selected beforehand. This technique gives the researcher the ability to start a sample with a few relevant participants that the researcher has identified and then expands through referrals (Rubin & Babbie, 2011, p.480). The sampling process started by contacting representatives of LO on district level, which then through referrals lead to additional numbers of interviews with representatives of LO on the central level and a connected local association. The participants were contacted by telephone and asked to take part in this study in form of an interview. This process of sampling functioned very well in regards of gathering interviews. Each of the participants were sent an information letter (Appendix 1) beforehand. The aim of the study, as well as the process of the interview, confidentiality of the participation, consent of digital audio recording, and contact information were covered in this information letter. Each interview took place at different days within approximately three weeks. There were some difficulties while conducting interviews due to rescheduling issues, but all of the planned interviews have been executed successfully.

2.3 Data collection

The data was collected through five semi-structured interviews with mostly open-ended questions using an interview guide (Appendix 2). The interview guide first presented some general questions, about the informants' work position followed by the three main questions, presenting the research questions. Each research question was broken down into four to eight questions, whereby the answer to these questions should lead to answer the main research questions. The semi-structured interviews include an outline of relevant topics of the study with suggested questions (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p.130). The open-ended questions gave
the participants possibilities to answer the questions while using their own knowledge rather than giving a short one-word answer. This interview method ensures that the researchers can follow the interview guide, while still be open to new topics that might occur during the interview process.

Three of the interviews were held at each participant’s working place, and the remaining two were conducted by telephone. The participants interviewed by phone were not able to meet us, due to a long distance. The interviews lasted between 60 – 90 minutes and were all recorded with a digital audio recorder device with the acknowledgment and consent from all the participants. During the interview, two digital audio recording devices were used, as well as some notes taken. Tape recording is an important tool to use in a qualitative interview, not only to ensure verbatim recording but also to free the interviewers to keep their full attention focused on respondents (Rubin & Babbie, 2011, p.507).

The interviews were held in English, although, for the sake of convenience, some respondents asked to answer some questions in Swedish instead of English, which we agreed to. Therefore, some notes were necessary to refer to while transcribing and translating parts of the recorded data.

2.4 Transcribing the interviews

According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p.178), a transcript of an interview is a translation from one narrative mode, oral discourse, into another narrative mode, written discourse. Extra attention was put when transcribing the interviews, since a few answers in the interviews were given in Swedish by the respondents. Therefore, it was important to listen to the recording multiple times while also using the notes for assistance to ensure the accuracy of the written discourse. After the interviews have been transcribed completely, the Swedish parts were additionally translated to English.

The transcribing of the interviews started immediately after each completed interview session. There were no errors of any digital audio recordings and all recordings of the five interviews were able to be saved.
2.5 Analysis

The process of data analysis is iterative, which means that we read and reread the volumes of the collected data (Grinnell, 2001, p.111). After rereading, irrelevant data were deleted and relevant responses were explored further. We had a lot of data from the interviews, which was very interesting to study and analyze further, but the data needed to be narrowed down. The decision, which responses would be used to be present in this study was made as follows: First, the method of organizing the data was based on the process of coding, in which responses are classified into meaningful categories (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008, p.335). The data was organized into three categories related to the content of the research questions, i.e. reasons for exclusion, strategies to integrate refugee immigrants, and political situation. Second, we decided through cross-checking what responses should be brought up in the analysis. The data was then divided in three main- and several subthemes, in relation to patterns we found in the interview data. Each subtheme presents findings of the interviews, such as quotations of the informants. The findings were then analyzed by using the chosen theoretical perspectives. The theoretical framework for this study has been primarily assigned during the data collection process and includes the concepts of social exclusion, empowerment, and the Swedish welfare model. Those concepts cover the main aspects of the study, i.e. the reasons for refugee immigrants’ exclusion from the Swedish labor market, strategies used by LO to integrate refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market, and also the political context as a whole. Furthermore, the findings were linked to relevant earlier research. The method of breaking down the findings in different themes and subthemes created a structure to simplify the analysis and presentation of the results.

2.6 Credibility

Credibility is the criterion for evaluating qualitative research and refers to which extent a research is believable and appropriate, especially in regard to the level of agreement between participants and the researchers (Flick, 2007, p.140; Mills, 2010).

One way to maximize credibility is the method of communicative validation, which arises through the assessment of results or data by asking the participants for their consensus (Flick, 2007, p.140). Due to a limited time frame, there was no possibility to do so in this study. However, we checked during the interviews, if something was mistakable and brought it up
immediately in that case. Additionally, the participants provided to get back to them, if questions would come up, during the process of analyzing the results.

Triangulation is defined as the combination of different methods, theories, data and/or researchers in a study and contributes to the credibility of the findings (Flick, 2007, p.143). For this study, the method of qualitative interviews was supported by a literature search in order to get an understanding of the role of trade unions in relation to refugee integration on the labor market. Moreover, two collaborating researchers worked on this study, which can promote the quality of the study (Flick, 2007, p.141).

2.6.1 Reliability

Reliability relates to the consistency and trustworthiness of research findings and is often treated in relation to the issue, whether findings are reproducible at other times and by other researchers (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.245). In this study, the reliability was strengthened, because two researchers conducted and transcribed the interviews and analyzed the findings. Moreover, constant cross-checking with each other enhanced the consistency of the research findings.

2.6.2 Validity

"Validity refers to whether or not something actually measures what it claims to measure" (Robson, 2014, p.56). Authors, such as Rubin and Babbie (2011), Flick (2007) and Grinnell (2001) differentiate between internal and external validity. According to Grinnell (2001): "Internal validity refers to the degree to which the instrument actually measures the concept being studied and, moreover, measures the concept accurately” (p.183). As a way to maximize internal validity, we followed a guideline presented by Grinnell and when creating the interview guide, we always considered Grinnell’s (2001, pp.186-189) recommendations: making questions clear, using simple language, keeping questions short and asking questions that respondents are qualified to answer.

Rubin and Babbie (2011) state that: "External validity refers to the extent to which we can generalize the findings of a study to settings and populations beyond the study conditions" (p.247). In this study qualitative interviews with a small number of representatives from LO
were made. Therefore, it is doubtful to be able to generalize the findings beyond the study conditions, such as a setting outside Sweden, for example.

2.6.3 Generalization

Generalization is defined as the extent to which the research findings can be generalized to larger populations and different settings (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008, p.114). The statements made by the five informants cannot be generalized to all employees of LO, and their statements might sometimes be based on personal feelings and opinions. However, we met the informants as representatives from LO and thus it is likely to assume, that other representatives from LO would have express similar feelings and opinions (especially talking about strategies and policies of LO), which could lead to similar findings.

2.7 Ethical considerations

As researchers we have responsibility towards our research participants but also to the people whom we will present our findings to. Therefore, it is important that the ethical aspects are being considered and included into the research study. According to Grinnell and Unrau (2005, p.36), informed consent is a critical concept of ethical consideration. The research participants must be informed about the purposes, methods and risks associated with the research study, and they must voluntarily consent to participate in it (Grinnell & Unrau, 2005, p.36). The selected interviewees all participated voluntary and were informed and provided with information about the study during the early stages of the research to assure that they thoroughly understood what they were participating in. Furthermore, it was ensured to the informants, that the gathered data was only used for this study. The gathering of data was confidential, meaning that the participants had the choice to remain anonymous unless they have given permission for release of their identity. Although it was ensured not to use the informants' names in the study, we realized during the process of data analysis, that the work-position of each informant might be of interest for the data analysis. Nevertheless, this could be sensitive as stating the work-position could lead to an identification of the informant and put the confidentiality at risk. Therefore, we asked all informants for the approval using their work-position in the study. All of them gave the consent to this by e-mail. Eventually, it has been offered to the participants, to provide them with a copy of the final bachelor thesis, if requested.
2.8 Limitations of the study

The most significant limitations for this study, was the size and time frame. The study has been conducted in about ten weeks and therefore only a small sample was chosen to ensure the realization of the study. A further limitation represented the language. Since one of the authors does not speak Swedish fluently, it was sometimes very time consuming to translate and interpret text passages from the interviews, which were spoken in Swedish. The same applies to the literature search. A lot of the available and significant material was written in Swedish, which made it sometimes difficult using it.
3 Earlier research

In this chapter earlier, research on the topic is presented. First, some general information about refugee immigrants’ situation on the Swedish labor market is given. Second, earlier research on refugee immigrant’s exclusion is presented. Third, research addressing the empowering of refugee immigrants is presented and finally, literature regarding the role of trade unions is provided. Within chapter five, the earlier research is related to the collected data of this study and supports the analysis.

3.1 Refugee immigrants’ situation on the Swedish labor market

One of the main challenges for refugees trying to integrate in their host country, is to find a suitable job (Peromingo, 2014, p.76). Migrants, and even more refugees, are often considered as less skilled by default. Furthermore, analyses in various countries have shown "that refugees always perform worse in labor market integration than other migrants, even if their skills levels are comparable" (Peromingo, 2014, p.76). Additionally, refugees have limited access to labor market support provisions, such as unemployment benefits, compared to migrants in general (Peromingo, 2014, p.76). In terms of Sweden, previous data has shown that refugees’ employment lags that of natives basically for their whole life time in Sweden (Lundborg, 2013, p. 219). Additionally, "refugees from culturally distant Iran/Iraq and Horn of Africa experience considerably more days in unemployment than refugees from the less distant Eastern Europe and Latin America" (Lundborg, 2013, p.219). This is especially important for this study, because the latest statistic about asylum applications, published by the Swedish migration board (Migrationsverket, 2015), shows that people from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq are the majority of those seeking for asylum in Sweden.

According to a report from Statistics Sweden (SCB, 2009, p.56), newly arrived immigrants are particularly sensitive and affected by cyclical changes. These changes often result in cutbacks within temporary employments which have a strong preponderance of foreign born individuals. In addition, many just had time to establish themselves in the labor market and are thus the first to be dismissed when the economy turns downward resulting in fewer employments recruits and thereby intensifying competition for each available job (SCB, 2009,
This applies to all, but for those who have not had time to establish themselves in the labor market, this will be an additional difficulty (SCB, 2009, p.56).

The fact, that immigrants are generally more vulnerable during an economic crisis is supported by a statement from a report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] (2009):

i) they tend to be overrepresented in sectors which are more sensitive to the business cycle; ii) they have less secure contractual arrangements, with more temporary and part-time jobs; iii) they are overrepresented in less skilled occupations; iv) businesses owned by immigrants may be more at risk of bankruptcy; and v) they face potential discrimination in hiring and layoffs. (p.3)

Additionally, another SCB Integration report (2008, p.13) has presented differences in regards to the employment rates between native-born and foreign-born persons. A factor of great importance is how long a person has lived in Sweden. Persons who have lived less than five years in Sweden have very low levels of employment, while persons who have been living in Sweden for twenty years or more have a much higher employment rate, but are still below the employment levels of a native-born persons (SCB, 2008, p.13). The SCB integration report (2009, p.56) states that disadvantages usually affect foreign-born people who stayed only for a relatively short time in Sweden. Anyone who lacks or has inadequate experience and credentials will then have difficulties to compete with more experienced people looking for the same job (SCB, 2009, p.56).

A report published by Statens Offentliga Utredningar, SOU, (2006a, pp.61-62) argues that foreign born employees are primarily working in industries that have higher proportion of unskilled occupations, meaning that majority of these jobs do not require any study related qualifications. Some of these industries are employment services within the hotel and restaurant sector and some private services (SOU, 2006a, pp.61-62). It is further stated that the chance to have a qualified job is considerably lower for foreign-born people from countries outside the European Union and the European Economic Area than for native Swedes with the same education, age, gender, and marital status (SOU, 2006a, pp.61-62).

Lane (2015) argues that focusing on realizing the economic potential of refugee immigrants is central to Sweden's integration policies and something the government has invested heavily in
over recent years. However, recent developments show that there is anxiety in Sweden about the impact of integrating so many migrants into the economy and labor market (Lane, 2015). Additionally, the Government Offices of Sweden (Regeringskansliet, 2015) argues that there has been “significant shortcomings in the current policy concerning the establishment of new arrivals in the labor market and in society”. A reason therefore is that Swedish municipalities do not share the responsibility of receiving refugees, which affects the procedure of the integration by not being able to begin the process of getting settled as quickly as possible (Regeringskansliet, 2015).

3.2 Reasons that refugee immigrants being excluded from the labor market

Additionally, to Peromingo’s statement, that refugee immigrants are often considered as less skilled by default (2014, p.76), there are other reasons described in previous literature, explaining the exclusion of refugee immigrants from the labor market.

Lundborg (2013, p.220) states that integration of immigrants into the labor market, is nowadays more challenging, than it was in the 1950s and 1960s. Immigrants, weather from Southern Europe as labor immigrants or from Eastern Europe as refugees, could be integrated more easily on the Swedish labor market (Lundborg, 2013, p.220). This is caused by the transition from the industrial society of that time to the service society, which may have had a dejecting effect on the request for immigrated labor (Lundborg, 2013, p.220). Skills of multi-tasking and good communication abilities, including being able to talk the language of the immigration country and English, are often required in the service sector as well as more modern manufacturing jobs (Lundborg, 2013, p.220). While these skills improve with labor market experience, the lack of them is a hindrance to integration and more so today than what used to be the case (Lundborg, 2013, p.220). “With the uncertainty of the skills of refugee immigrants, their attractiveness to many employers may be low” (Lundborg, 2013, p.220). In an article about Baltic refugee immigrants and the refugee policy formation in Sweden, Köll (2015, p.430) states that Sweden accepted state responsibility at an early stage and that changes of refugee policy should be interpreted as part of the emerging welfare state conception.

As a further factor for the exclusion of immigrants from the labor market, Lundborg (2013, p.220) mentions the issue of discrimination, which is related to the issue of employer
uncertainty. When immigrants from African, Asian, and Slavic countries change their surnames into Swedish sounding names, it obtains substantial effects on their earnings, which indicates discrimination on the part of employers: “Employers’ reaction to job applicants with Arabic sounding names supports the general notion that refugees from Muslim countries are exposed to labor market discrimination” (Carlsson & Roth, 2007, as cited in Lundborg, 2013, pp.222-221).

Summarizing, Lundborg (2013, p.230) states that refugee immigrants from Muslim countries have the worst chances on a successful labor market integration during their first 20 years in Sweden. “[A] fact that suggests either that these refugees have worse initial conditions for entering the Swedish labor market, that they are exposed to more discrimination owing to their cultural and ethnical background, or both” (Lundborg, 2013, p.230). Again, this precondition is especially of interest in this study, because most of the refugee immigrants arriving in Sweden nowadays, come from Muslim countries.

3.3 Empowering refugee immigrants

In their study, conducted in Sweden, Pooremamali, Persson, Östman and Eklund (2015) highly validate the relationship between occupational well-being of refugee immigrants and empowering them by giving support:

The participants described their desire to gain power, control, and autonomy such that they could manage their life circumstances and difficulties. At the same time, the participants acknowledged how moving from a position of exclusion and powerlessness to inclusion and empowerment required being emotionally, practically and functionally supported by the local authority services. (p.231)

Pooremamali et al. (2015, pp.235-236) states that for all participants of the study, receiving support and being empowered were important for retaining control over the work conditions that formed their future. The participants’ hopes and ambitions for their future could not be realized if they felt ignored and neglected by the system and a gap between their current unemployment and their actual desires and goals created powerlessness and uncertainty about the future (Pooremamali et al., 2015, pp.235-236). Furthermore, they state there is a need for a broader approach addressing the refugee immigrants’ integration and bond to society.
“According to participants, being empowered and supported were essential to strengthening their capacity to build work skills and community integration” (Pooremamali et al., 2015, p.236). In conclusion, Pooremamali et. al (2015) promotes the role of empowerment and support to increase refugee immigrants’ occupational wellbeing. The typical individualistic elements of empowerment, such as autonomy and decision-making, as well as a typical collectivist empowerment, such as support in maintaining safety and continuity, might have a great impact on refugee immigrants’ occupational wellbeing (Pooremamali, 2015, p.238).

In a report for the Institute for Evaluation of Labour Market and Education Policy (Institutet för arbetsmarknadspolitisk utvärdering, IFAU) Erikson, Skans, Sjögren and Åslund (2007, pp.18-19) state that political decisions and different institutions are one of the external factors that have a great influence on the choices that individuals make when entering the labor market. According to Erikson et al. (2007, pp.18-19), there are a number of specific policies that have a great impact on immigrants entering the labor market, such as the economical and institutional opportunities for language learning, ability to receive foreign qualifications translated and validated, and if it is necessary to complete their education.

In case of empowering refugee immigrants to integrate on the labor market, the Swedish Public Employment Service has a key role. According to a report of the Government of Sweden (2014, p.9) the Swedish Public Employment Service holds the responsibility to guide and support migrants to integrate on the Swedish labor market, hence a person who holds a refugee status or has a residence permit, take up employment on equal terms as Swedish citizens (Government of Sweden, 2014, p.9). The Swedish Public Employment Service has been one of the actors involved in adapting different methods of promoting refugee immigrants’ integration on the labor market, such as creating step-in jobs and offering Swedish lessons (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2015). Peromingo (2014) describes further how the Swedish Public Employment Service works regarding employers and their refugee immigrant employees: “The public employment service also reaches out to employers, identifying those who are willing to hire refugees and negotiating with those who show less readiness to invest in skills development” (p.77). Furthermore, continued assistance after the refugee immigrant starts working is a way of ensuring sustainability of employment (Peromingo, 2014, p.77).

Offering free Swedish lessons is one way to empower refugee immigrants in Sweden. In a study conducted by UNHCR (2013) this is further explained:
It is generally accepted that the Swedish language is key to integration in Sweden in order to find employment, manage everyday life situations and facilitate participation in society. Language tuition is offered free of charge to all immigrants, including refugees, through SFI [Swedish for Immigrants] with courses at progressive levels. (p.21)

The aims of the SFI courses are to provide basic functional competency in Swedish, prepare the participants for future studies, and improve access to the labor market and thus, SFI is controlled and influenced by education policies and goals, and labor market objectives (Statskontoret 2009 & Skolverket, 2012, as cited in UNHCR, 2013, p.21). In the study conducted by UNHCR (2013, p.32) refugee immigrants stated language as central to integration, because Swedish skills are a requirement for most jobs and it makes the life in Sweden easier, through facilitating participation in society and increasing a sense of belonging.

Fernandes (2015) critically reflects on the empowerment of refugee immigrants through introduction programs in Scandinavian countries. Introduction programs for (non-EU) immigrants and refugee immigrants have the goal to meet challenges, newly arrived immigrants and refugee immigrants faced in their new societies, such as high levels of unemployment, marginalization, social exclusion, and discrimination (Fernandes, 2015, p.246).

The aim of the Swedish introduction program (Lag om etableringsinsatser, §1, translation provided, as cited in Fernandes, 2015) is formulated as follows:

To facilitate and hasten newly arrived immigrants’ establishment in working life and society. The measures shall provide newcomers with the opportunity for self-reliance and strengthen their active participation in the labor market and society. Completion of the introduction program should provide knowledge of Swedish society, language and working life. (p.252)

Fernandes (2015, pp.252-253) argues that the aim only addresses the individual level, i.e. the empowerment is connected to the self-sufficiency of immigrants and refugees, the labor market participation and language skills. The program is adapted to address their lack of competence and to improve their entrance to the labor market (Fernandes, 2015, pp.252-253). In general, empowerment according to the introduction program, is about changing the
individual and not about addressing structural barriers in the society, which exclude immigrants and refugee immigrants from entering the labor market (Fernandes, 2015, pp.252-253).

3.4 The role of trade unions

Trade unions, in general, enjoy an influence on Swedish policy creation and the society as a whole in Sweden. According to Johansson (2014, p.98), LO specifically has always been deeply involved in Swedish labor migration policymaking. However, there are limited sources addressing LO and its contact to refugee immigrants and strategies used by LO to support a successful integration of refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market. Nevertheless, LO officially commented and expressed demands regarding the refugee crisis. In its report to the 2016 LO congress, full employment and a wage policy of solidarity, the LO Executive Council (2015) states regarding the faster introduction of newly arrived immigrants:

All newly arrived immigrants must be covered by equivalent support for introduction to the labour market. The Swedish Public Employment Service needs more resources for faster preparation of introduction plans and start-up of labour market and training measures. This means the waiting period for own accommodation must be shortened. It is also necessary to improve and develop teaching of Swedish for immigrants (SFI) with the aim of everyone reaching the completed course level.

In its statement, everyone is entitled to protection and help. The LO Executive Council (2015) states in response to the refugee crisis that it is a matter of humanity and decency that "all EU countries must share responsibility for people fleeing from war and persecution". The LO Executive Council (2015) states further, that the current situation of desperate people fleeing from their homes, although they are fully aware that this puts them in mortal danger, requires that the focus must be on solidarity. LO and its affiliates themselves must do what they can, to tackle the present situation (LO Exective Council, 2015). As a direct contribution, money is given to UNHCR and "another part is to create possibilities for newly arrived immigrants to enter the labour market as quickly as possible… We are ready to cooperate to improve the integration of people arriving here" (LO, Executive Council, 2015).

In a research about trade union identities in Sweden Tsarouhas (2011, p.419) states that trade unions have been under pressure over the last decades, because of the restructuring of the
world economy and the attendant changes in production and labor markets. These “have made employment prospects more uncertain, recruitment more difficult, and job security more precarious” (Tsarouhas, 2011, p.419). Especially in times of uncertainty, organized labor is of importance. However, trade unions have also been struggling with internal problems, because of dissatisfaction with union performance. To overcome those struggles, new strategies are formulated and one of the most significant of these strategies “is the need to give expression to new forms of solidarity and mobilize potential adherents” (Tsarouhas, 2011, p.420). Trade union revitalization is important, because trade unions are an integral part of democratic societies and industrial relations systems, and trade unions’ weakening can have a significant impact on national economic systems and welfare states (Behrens, Hamann & Hurd, 2004, as cited in Tsarouhas, 2011, p.421). “While unions have been under pressure since the 1980s, it is important to remember their potential contribution to lower unemployment” (Calmfors and Driffil, 1988, as cited in Tsarouhas, 2011, p.421).
4 Theoretical framework

In this chapter the three theoretical frames and their connection to the study are explained. The data collection showed that the theory of social exclusion and the theory of empowerment are suitable and supportive to analyze the results, because they can be linked strongly to reasons for exclusion and strategies to integrate refugee immigrants. Another important basis for the analysis of the empirical findings are the fundamental characteristics of the Swedish welfare model, because it is related to the findings covering the Swedish policy. Therefore, Esping-Andersen’s (1990) theory on welfare state regimes represents the third theoretical perspective used in this study.

4.1 Social exclusion

The term 'social exclusion' originated in Europe during the 1970's (Barter-Godfrey et al., 2009, p.6). It was first used by French socialist politicians as well as researchers related to the European Commission when referring to individuals who were not covered by the social security system (Littlewood, Herkommer & Koch, 2007, p.14; Barter-Godfrey et al., 2009, p.6). Labor market and the economic wealth were the areas where social exclusion was first introduced. Individuals were either 'deserving', meaning they were unable to support themselves such as the sick and the elderly, or 'undeserving', meaning those who were seen to support themselves (Barter-Godfrey et al., 2009, p.12). Later on, social exclusion became to be a much broader term.

Levitas (2007, as cited in Barter-Godfrey et al., 2009) states:

Social exclusion is a complex and multi-dimensional process. It involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in society, whether in economic, social, cultural, or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole. (p. 8)

According to Munck (2013, p.35), exclusion is based on structural processes within society that systematically create inequalities and barriers for social advancement by the poor, the disempowered, and the oppressed in society. The several dimensions of social exclusion can
affect a refugee immigrant on different areas. One being the economical dimension in which it involves the income, employment and labor market, goods and services which includes housing, health and education (Barter-Godfrey et al., 2009, p.12). Another force that drives the process of social exclusion is the effect of the local area or neighborhood (Pierson, 2010, p.13). Two other dimensions of social exclusion are the political rights and citizenship, and the social dimension which includes the ability for an individual to participate in social settings as well as having the opportunity to be included in political decision-making (Barter-Godfrey et al., 2009, p.12). Social exclusion occurs where there is a denial, or non-realization of rights which are accorded universally within society, to all individuals and groups (Sheppard, 2006, p.8). “Citizenship is an important form of participation at the macro, state level, and a lack of or ineligibility for citizenship is a form of social exclusion” (Barter-Godfrey et al., 2009, p.24), which can consequently suffer restricted access to education and employment.

Refugees and asylum seekers often face experiences of dislocation, powerlessness and discrimination, while having fewer systems to call on (Pierson, 2010, p.184). Pierson (2010, p.7) further explains that asylum seekers are prone to being excluded, facing barriers in the labor market, minimal or non-existent support networks of their own, having difficulties in receiving benefits from the welfare state, and children having to face poverty and marginalization in the school system.

The dimensions of social exclusion can have major effects on a refugee immigrant's ability to integrate on the Swedish labor market. Therefore, the concept of social exclusion is of importance for this study, to analyze the reasons according to LO, why refugee immigrants being excluded from the Swedish labor market.

4.2 Empowerment

A further theoretical tool for this study is the concept empowerment. According to Adams (2008), empowerment may be defined as “the capacity of individuals, groups and/or communities to take control of their circumstances, exercise power and achieve their own goals” (p.17). Furthermore, Payne (2014, p.294) describes empowerment as a social democratic practices, implemented to enable people to overcome barriers in achieving their life objectives, to gain access to services, and to improve services.
Empowerment has become a buzzword, which is widely used by politicians and policy makers in very different ways (Adams, 2008; Cowden & Singh, 2007; Dominelli, 2012; Graham, 2004, as cited in Fernandes, 2015, p.248). However, the definition of empowerment is not straight-forward, as its concept can be understood in many different and competitive ways such as a goal, a process and an approach (Fernandes, 2015, p.248). Nevertheless, the core concept of empowerment is, that it is concerned with the transmission of power. People with less power or who are disempowered are supposed to be given back their power (Askheim, 2003, p.230, as cited in Fernandes, 2015, p.248). Among others, political participation has been seen as an important component of the process of empowerment (Donovan & Karp, 2004; de-Shalit, 2004, as cited in Hur, 2006, p.525).

Furthermore, Adams (2008, p.17) describes empowerment as a process in which people, individually and collectively, being enabled to help themselves and others to maximize the quality of their lives. We distinguish between individual and collective empowerment. Individual empowerment is accomplished through strengthening intellectual capabilities, whereas collective empowerment is described as a process by which individuals join together to break their solitude and silence, help one another, learn together and develop skills for collective action (Boehm & Staples, 2004; Fetterson, 2002, as cited in Hur, 2006, p.530). Empowerment develops from individual and social conscientization or a critical consciousness to collective action and the components leading to empowerment include individual factors, i.e. strengthening intellectual capabilities, and social factors, namely mobilizing collective action and maximizing power (Boehm & Staples, 2004, as cited in Hur, 2006, p.530).

In this study the concept of empowerment is of importance, because empowerment may counteract the social exclusion of refugee immigrants. More specifically, by creating and providing various different strategies to help and guide refugee immigrants to integrate into the labor market, empowerment can be created. Strategies, used by LO to integrate refugee immigrants, are assigned to the concept of empowerment in the analysis of this study. Collective empowerment is the key concept of trade unions in general. In relation to the aim of this study, one aspect is to explore if and how LO uses the concept of empowerment to integrate refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market.
4.3 The Swedish welfare model

A third theoretical point of departure for this study is the Swedish welfare model and its characteristics. Three different welfare state regimes defined by Esping-Andersen (1990) are presented, whereas the focus is on the Swedish welfare model. Cochrane et al. (2001, p.6) define a welfare state as a state being involved in the provision of welfare services and benefits. In his classical work Esping-Andersen (1990) identifies three different welfare state regimes, based on their "qualitatively different arrangements between state, market, and the family" (p.26). The liberal welfare state’s characteristics are among others, means-tested assistance, low universal transfers, low social insurances and low benefits (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p.26). The liberal welfare state (as the USA for example) is market-based, benefits are limited and stigmatized and has a low redistribution (Cochrane et al., 2001, p.11). The second type of welfare state regimes Esping-Andersen identifies is the corporatist welfare state. This welfare state has a conservative character, since it is typically shaped by the church and traditional values (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p.27). Furthermore, “[t]he state (rather than the market) is likely to be important in the delivery of welfare, but not in ways that encourage redistribution or equalization” (Cochrane et al., 2001, p.10). In a corporatist welfare state (such as in Germany for example) there is typically a low level of maternity leave or collective forms of childcare (Cochrane et al., 2001, p.10). The last, and for this study most crucial, welfare state regime, identified by Esping-Andersen (1990, p.27), is the social democratic (also called general or institutional) one, as it was established in Sweden during long periods of Social democratic governance. It is characterized by universalism and equality and encourages equality across classes and high redistribution. Through a strong public sector (e.g. providing support for children and elderly) the state takes in and socializes a lot of traditional family responsibilities and encourages individual independence (Cochrane et al., 2001, p.11).

A corner stone of the Swedish welfare model was the active labor market policy for full employment. In the 1930s Sweden established a social democratic breakthrough with active welfare and employment policies. Strong universal trade unions were, among others, a foundation therefore (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p.167). The most notable characteristic of the universal welfare model is possibly the fusion of welfare and work. This welfare model "is at once genuinely committed to a full-employment guarantee, and entirely dependent on its attainment" (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p.28). The right to work has the same status as the right
of income protection and to manage the enormous costs of maintaining a universalistic welfare system, minimizing social problems, and maximizing revenue income is highly necessary. This is mainly possible with most people working and less people as possible living on social benefits (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p.28). According to this welfare model, the successful integration of refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market should be ensured, because it is based on the fundamental ideas of universalism and equality.

The universal welfare model is most desirable to counteract social problems. According to the characteristics of the universal welfare model, a successful integration of refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market should be ensured in this universal welfare model. In this study, the integration of refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market was put in relation to the Swedish welfare model. Furthermore, it has been analyzed how the transformation of the Swedish welfare model has had an impact on the trade unions’ role and the integration of refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market in general.
5 Results and analysis

The results and the analysis are divided in three themes, where each theme is related to each research question. Under each theme there are three subthemes, which represents the main results. The results related to theme 1, “main reasons that refugee immigrants being excluded from the Swedish labor market”, are mainly analyzed using the theoretical perspective of social exclusion. The results related to theme 2, “LO's strategies to integrate refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market”, are mainly analyzed using the theoretical perspective of empowerment. And finally, the results related to theme 3, “views on Swedish policies”, are mainly analyzed using the theoretical perspective of the Swedish welfare model. However, in the analysis of some themes and subthemes, not only one, but rather two or all theoretical perspectives have been used. This shows a strong connection between labor market exclusion, the concept of empowerment, and the characteristics of the Swedish welfare model.

Because of the confidentiality and research ethics in this chapter, the informants have been assigned as follows: Ombudsman 1 and Ombudsman 2 (those two Ombudsmen work at the central level within LO), Ombudsman union (this is the Ombudsman from one of the unions organized under LO), and Researcher 1 and Researcher 2 (those two researchers work within the central unit of LO). Doing so had not only the reason of confidentiality and ethics. To know in which position the informant works or who made this statement, could be relevant for the analysis and results. Furthermore, it emphasizes differences in opinions, which may be based on the informants’ different positions in LO, but also shows similarities in opinions, although the informants have different positions.

5.1 Reasons that refugee immigrants being excluded from the Swedish labor market

In order to explore the integration of refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market it is important to learn in which ways refugee immigrants are excluded from the Swedish labor market. Theme 1 is divided in three sub themes representing the main noticeable findings that, according to the LO informants, are strong factors that cause refugee immigrants to be excluded from the Swedish labor market. The main results of theme 1 are divided in three
subthemes: 1) language skills, 2) discriminatory unemployment, and 3) living in a segregated suburban area.

5.1.1 Language skills

One reason for refugee immigrants being excluded from the Swedish labor market is the lack of Swedish language skills, which was highly discussed and repeated by all the representatives from LO. According to Researcher 1:

“Not obtaining Swedish language skills is a major obstacle in the establishment of integrating into the Swedish labor market”.

To obtain Swedish language skills is a crucial factor for refugee immigrants to establish themselves on the Swedish labor market. Researcher 1 further explained that,

“Employers have a tendency to place very high demands on the foreign born workforce, especially regarding the knowledge and usage of the Swedish language”.

Immigrants arriving from English-speaking countries or obtaining English language skills are more favorable on the Swedish labor market, than immigrants who do not have any English language skills, because the majority of Swedish people can speak English, as outlined by Ombudsman 1 and Ombudsman 2. According to the informants of LO, the majority of their union members require workforce that obtains Swedish language skills and that is sufficient enough to be used within the work place with coworkers and customers. The Ombudsman of the union explained:

“The lack of language skills is a big problem because in the work places, they often require workers to be able to communicate in Swedish, because the workers need to talk to people”.

This has caused many employers to become more hesitant and more demanding when hiring workforce with a foreign background if there is a possible language barrier when hiring a person, as Researcher 1 stated. The importance of obtaining Swedish language skills was very much emphasized by all representatives of LO, as language skills are an important factor for communication, which can lead to possibilities for social networking, and enable to participate actively. This can be closely connected to the theoretical concept of social
exclusion, since missing language skills results in the inability to participate in the economic life and distance from the mainstream society and therefore drives social exclusion (Duffy, 1995, p.17, as cited in Barter-Godfrey, 2009, p.7).

Broomé, Bäcklund, Lundh and Ohlsson (1996, p.2) stress that communication and social skills are as important as professional skills in the labor market. To be able to collaborate effectively in the working place the workers need to be able to communicate with each other, which is why the knowledge of Swedish language skills is of a great importance to obtain in the working place (Broomé et al., 1996, p.2) The lack of Swedish language skills can therefore create issues for refugee immigrants who are seeking jobs, especially during job interviews with employers.

Although, the majority of the LO informants agreed on the importance of obtaining Swedish language skills when entering the Swedish labor market, some also expressed that language skills can be something that can be learned in the working place as well. Entering the labor market can also in another way help refugees to learn the language quicker while also having the ability to create a social network at the work place, as explained by Ombudsman 1.

Swedish language skills have then been shown to be an important factor for refugee immigrants to establish themselves in the Swedish labor market. Refugee immigrants are vulnerable as it is when arriving to a new country, they often face experiences of dislocation, powerlessness and discrimination (Pierson, 2010, p.184). The lack of Swedish language skills has shown to be a barrier and a reason for rejection of refugee immigrants on the labor market.

5.1.2 Discriminatory unemployment

All LO informants stressed that they do not differentiate between refugee immigrants or native-born Swedes being excluded from the Swedish labor market. However, the LO informants explained that there has been high unemployment in Sweden since the early 1990's, which has affected both native Swedish born and foreign-born persons, but the effect of the high unemployment crisis has been more difficult on foreign-born persons than native Swedish persons.
According to the LO informants, various processes of racism are noticeable in different forms, regarding the integration of refugee immigrants on the labor market. Researcher 1 mentioned that:

“Refugees have experienced discriminating recruitments while applying for a job, they do not get a fair chance due to their foreign background”.

According to the LO informants, employers tend to have much higher demands on foreign-born persons than native Swedish born persons. This is reasoned that newly arrived migrants in Sweden often do not have certificates on previous employments or education credit that is valid enough to be approved in Sweden. While Ombudsman 1 and Ombudsman 2 explained, that employers tend to employ people who have a similar background as themselves, knowing of Swedish traditions and culture, because the employers feel like it is easier to understand and relate each other. These statements by the LO informants are in accordance with Lundborg’s statement (2013, p.220), that a factor for the exclusion of refugee immigrants from the labor market, is the issue of discrimination, which is related to the issue of employer uncertainty. Fewer companies see the benefits of employing people with various backgrounds and LO tries to bring forward companies which are role models in employing people of various backgrounds and supports employees who are a role-model in employing refugee immigrants, as explained by Ombudsman 2.

Full employment was a part of the Swedish labor market model and policy based on a Keynesian oriented economic and social policy. In the 1990s Sweden witnessed a dramatic change as unemployment rates increased sharply to around 10 per cent occasionally and foreign-born faced a rate of unemployment three times higher compared to native Swedes (Cochrane et al., 2001, p.205). The Keynesian policy was gradually abandoned and there were restrictive changes to sickness and unemployment benefits and pensions (Cochrane et al., 2001, p.199). Refugee immigrants have found the labor market and the housing market increasingly exclusionary, especially during this time (Cochrane et al., 2001, p.211). This is also supported by a SOU report (2001, pp.78-79) where it is stated that one of 1990's most obvious defining feature were the difficulties that foreign-born groups were faced concerning the labor market and livelihood. The report stated that it was till then by far the strongest flow of refugees that had arrived during the period 1992-1994, i.e., the same year as the Swedish economy and the labor market underwent its most adverse phase. The opportunities for the
newly arrived refugee immigrants to find livelihood opportunities in the open labor market was therefore very limited (SOU, 2001, pp.78-79). Even if Sweden basically managed to recover from this mass-unemployment-period, the economic strains of this period have exposed the tensions between the multi-ethnic reality and the monocultural tradition (Cochrane et al., 2001, p.212). This has resulted in “leaving the minority ethnic communities increasingly exposed to various processes of racism within the labor market and the welfare state” (Cochrane et al., 2001, p.212).

Researcher 2 stated that many of their members who are foreign-born, have to greater extent not a permanent employment contract, but are rather employed on certain period contracts. In general, foreign-born people have a lower union density than native Swedes. To some extent that is linked to temporary employment, the union density decreases compared to persons who have a permanent employment. However, Researcher 2, reveals that the Swedish Building Maintenance Workers’ Union (Fastighetsanställdas Förbund), which organizes among others cleaners in cleaning companies, has 45% foreign-born members and in Stockholm this union has approximately 80-90% foreign-born members.

“The Fastighetsanställdas Förbund [Swedish Building Maintenance Workers’ Union] and the association dealing with restaurant and hotel workers, their average income is lower compared to other unions… These jobs do not require a formal education” (Researcher 2).

Jobs in the service sector, such as restaurants, are low payed, often precarious and stressful and “do not bring either the higher income or the valued sense of inclusion in a workplace where a person is trusted and respected” (Sennett, 2007, as cited in Pierson, 2010, p.18).

Speaking of the situation of refugees in the labor market, the representatives of LO reveals their concern regarding the situation of the black labor market. Researcher 2 explained further:

“The Swedish labor market is not taking enough care of refugees arriving to Sweden. Many undocumented refugees are desperate of finding a job and therefore often tend to turn to the black labor market in hopes to get a job. Refugee immigrants can face poor working environments in the black labor market, become a victim of wage dumping and not having any written forms of working conditions”.
However, Researcher 2 stated in behalf of the Swedish current refugee policy that

“Sweden is an exception in Europe, asylum seekers have the possibility and right to work while the residence permit is handled and this right has existed in Sweden around 20 years”.

Even, if that right exists theoretically, refugee immigrants particularly suffer from unemployment in Sweden practically. As it was outlined by the informants, refugee immigrants suffer the most when unemployment rates increase, because of precarious employment contracts, based on various processes of discrimination. This affects their social status and makes it even more difficult for them to fully integrate on the Swedish labor market. Through various processes of discrimination, they lack the ability to participate in the economic arena, which strives their social exclusion. Levitas (2006) stresses the importance and advantages of active labor market participation, because it provides “an arena of social contact and interaction and as the basis of self-esteem and social recognition, as well as the instrumental benefit of affording a (potential) route to an adequate income” (p.136).

Pierson (2010, p.17) states that facing hard demands of qualifications and discriminatory recruitments from employers can cause refugee immigrants to become frustrated by inhabiting feelings of hopelessness. An employment not only gives a financial and emotional stability but it also provides a sense of purpose and creates possibilities for social interaction and networks that are difficult to find anywhere else (Pierson, 2010, p.17).

5.1.3 Living in a segregated suburban area/neighborhood

A third reason refugee immigrants being excluded from the Swedish labor market is, according to the informants of LO, their resident area. This is in accordance with Pierson (2010, p.13), who has shown, that the effect of the local area or neighborhood is a force that drives the process of social exclusion, e.g. through inhabitants adjusting to negative experiences of life chances, withdrawal of public and private services, and lack of participation and access to social, cultural and political arenas.

According to LO, it takes about 10 years for a migrant woman to enter the labor market in Stockholm and 7 years for a migrant man. Moreover, in suburban towns, e.g. Södertälje outside of Stockholm, the period for receiving an employment is even longer and the situation
for migrants are worse in regards to the integration process overall, as Ombudsman 2 said. Refugee immigrants either move to areas where they have relatives or they move to suburban areas which are less expensive to reside in. "For newly arrived refugees, relationships with relatives and countrymen are particularly important in a period of their lives characterized by challenges related to a new cultural and linguistic environment" (Integrationsverket, 2000, p.61, as cited in UNHCR, 2013, p.20). However, it can make the integration process even harder, if those relationships require refugee immigrants to move to areas with little job opportunities.

Ombudsman 2 stated:

"Refugee immigrants who are unemployed and live in suburban towns, in which majority of the residents are migrants, will have much more difficulty leaving these areas to find other job opportunities; this is a very tough cycle to break... Having no jobs, increases the risk to not having the chance to move to a better area, where you have more job opportunities".

This shows the interdependency between housing and employment integration, which is also emphasized in a report by UNHCR (2013, p.19). Boverket (2009, pp.8-9, as cited in UNHCR, 2013) supports this view: "Demands from housing companies and landlords related to employment and income are also crucial hurdles to acquiring appropriate housing in Sweden" (p.19). Living in segregated suburban areas can cause a feeling of being excluded from the mainstream society, because there is no sense of belonging to the rest of the society. This in turn creates an even more difficult integration process. Levitas (2006, p.155) argues that employment status and household type are two factors affecting levels of social participation and are a key issues of exclusion form social relations. The LO informants explained that there are discriminating views of some suburban areas with many immigrants, because the immigrants are not seen as individuals, rather as a group and people have certain preconceived opinions regarding groups. The character of certain areas has been proved to suggest that the residents of the area has become less attractive as job applicants, so employers make discriminatory assumptions about inner-city ethnic minority recruitment process (Phillimore & Goodman, 2006, p.1718). According to Burchardt et al. (1999, as cited in Pierson, 2010) a person is "socially excluded if resident in a neighborhood, community or country but is kept from participating in society through circumstances not of their own making" (p.11). This is connected as well to the previous mentioning of the discriminating
employment recruitment process where employers dismiss certain persons on behalf of ethnicity and residential area, as Researcher 2 argued. Richardson and Le Grand (2002, as cited in Barter-Godfrey et al., 2009, p.20) state that living in stigmatized communities can hinder the prospects of employment or other opportunities afforded to those who live in communities which are viewed more favorably by outsiders.

Ombudsman 1 expressed the concern that also in Sweden a lot of refugee immigrants might be put outside of the communities and might build their own community. Areas that are primarily populated with unemployed residents and have high levels of economic inactivity, can cause social problems and exclusion. Residents of those areas might feel trapped and depressed regarding their living conditions, which can result in frustration and negative behavior (Phillimore & Goodman, 2006, p.1718).

Social exclusion has a geographic dimension, because participation in society depends on proximity, mobility, networks, and location and being located in a lower socio-economic environment may precipitate discrimination at many levels (Barter-Godfrey et al., 2009, p. 25). Refugee immigrants are often most affected from living in such areas. According to Phillimore and Goodson (2005, p.1720) most forced migrants often find themselves in places where they have no pre-existing contacts and may have limited knowledge of the language. Unlike other migrants who have arrived earlier, as a part of a chain migration process, to areas where they can create networks that were instrumental in helping to negotiate new systems and locate employment (Phillimore & Goodson, 2005, p.1720).

5.2 LO’s strategies to integrate refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market

This theme is divided in three subthemes representing the main noticeable findings regarding LO’s work to integrate refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market, namely 1) LO’s contacts to refugee immigrants, 2) Information as a strategy to empower and 3) LO’s influence as a strategy to empower. First, some general statements the informants made regarding the integration of refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market are presented. Those statements build an important starting point to reflect on the later presented and analyzed subthemes.
All informants state that LO and its affiliates are aware and well prepared for the ongoing flow of refugees coming to Sweden. However, one ombudsman stated that the refugee topic is something quite new for LO and needs to be worked on:

“We can see and learn from the difficulties that migrants have experienced within the Swedish labor market”. (Ombudsman 1)

Further, the ombudsman stated, that programs like Swedish for immigrants, active labor market programs and supported employment practical placements are methods in Sweden to integrate refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market and highly valued by LO. One researcher stated that there are current discussion regarding the collective agreements and new agreements to integrate and introduce refugees in a new way on the Swedish labor market. Programs like Swedish for immigrants for example can be seen, according to the definition of Parpart et al. (2003, as cited in Hur, 2006, p.530), as an individual factor in the process of empowerment, because it strengthens the intellectual capabilities. However, the following analysis highly concentrates on LO as an actor in collective empowerment of refugee immigrants, because "[p]ersonal empowerment should be consistent with collective empowerment to improve the value of social and economic justice more effectively" (Staples, 1990, as cited in Hur, 2006, p.531).

5.2.1 LO’s contacts to refugee immigrants

Through our interviews it became quite clear that LO has mainly no direct contacts to refugee immigrants being excluded from the Swedish labor market. This is caused by the matter of fact, that:

“The work for LO starts, when the refugee immigrants being employed”. (Ombudsman 1)

It is usually a long process till a refugee immigrant enters the labor market and because there is no possibility to join a union without having an employment, the possibility for LO to reach out to refugee immigrants and vice versa, is very limited. Pierson (2010) outlines the strong correlation between an employment and the access to unions, in case of being able to interact socially: “Work can provide a sense of purpose and social interaction and networks that are
difficult to find anywhere else, it also can facilitate contact with relatively powerful institutions such as trade unions or professional associations” (p.17).

Historically, the whole thought behind LO was collective empowerment and, to be successful, as much people as possible need to be included. Through organizing people in unions, their demands towards employers and the state is more powerful. A demand from one person towards an employer or the state, may be not as powerful as a whole group of people claiming for it. Thus, to organize different groups of people, unions, under one union confederation, such as LO, makes the voice of each single person in a union even stronger. The fact, that you need to have an employment to join a union is contradictory to the thought of getting as much people as possible together and represent their interests. How does LO create collective empowerment, by just concentrating on employed people? Unemployed people, if refugee immigrants or not, are clearly left out from this system. As stated by Kreisberg (1992, as cited in Hur, 2006) "power has been understood as shared because it can actually strengthen while being shared with others" (p.524). According to this principle, not only refugee immigrants, who are looking for a job, but also trade unions themselves can be strengthened, when trade unions also organize unemployed refugee immigrants. This is supported by Tsarouhas (2011, p.420), who states that it is necessary for unions in Sweden, to mobilize potential adherents, as a strategy to overcome struggles and be strengthened.

Additionally, to this general ‘being left out from the system’ when someone is unemployed, refugee immigrants are more vulnerable to not experience the empowerment ensuing from a membership in a union. Foreign-born people have a lower union density than native Swedes and are to a greater extent not on a permanent employment contract, but rather short time contracts, as stated by Researcher 1. As it is quite expensive to be a member of a union in Sweden, it is often difficult, when someone has a short time contract and do not earn enough money, to pay for a membership, as explained by Researcher 2 and Ombudsman 2. A statistic that proves the low union density of foreign-born people is presented by Kjellberg (2012, as cited in Woolfson, Fudge & Thörnqvist, 2014):

From 2006 to 2011, union density in hotels and restaurants fell from 52% to 33%, a decline of 19%. In 2004, more than one-third of the members of the Hotel and Restaurant Workers’ Union were born abroad, while between 2007 and 2008 the union lost one third of its members… In fact,
the largest shrinkage in union density for workers employed in Sweden was among foreign-born workers. (p.704)

Furthermore, Kjellberg (2012, as cited in Woolfson et al., 2014) state, that although the union density is high in Sweden in general, “the recent decline in union membership has most affected those sectors that employ foreign-born workers” (p.704). That foreign-born people have a low union density in Sweden, makes them even more vulnerable on the labor market, because they do not experience the empowerment ensuing from a union membership. A union membership is a form of political participation, which has been seen as an important component of the process of empowerment (Donovan & Karp, 2004; de-Shalit, 2004, as cited in Hur, 2006, p.525).

A statement that reflects the conception of LO was made by Researcher 2:

“We do not organize them, because they are refugees or immigrants, we organize them, because they are workers”.

All informants strengthened the importance of equality, hence LO works according to the principle that there is no difference between native Swedes or immigrants, when it comes to their demands regarding the labor market. Researcher 2 further stressed that LO does not discriminate and that anyone is welcome as a member. LO organizes asylum seekers and undocumented workers as well but the requirement is that the individual needs to have a job. Ombudsman 1 formulated the significance of an equal treatment as follows:

“When it comes to our work as LO, it is important that they [refugee immigrants] feel welcomed and treated as everybody else... Actually, we shouldn’t have any special stuff at all for refugees, because they should be treated as anyone else in every way. But we have opinions about how you should treat people who are unemployed in general”.

Even if that statement shows an attitude of seeing everyone equal, if native Swedish or not, it creates a question if this attitude is possible. We have seen in the analysis of theme 1, that refugee immigrants are, because of different reasons, actually more vulnerable regarding the access on the labor market. Therefore, strategies especially to empower refugee immigrants are needed. Here empowerment is needed to guarantee refugee immigrants equal rights and opportunities as the rest of the Swedish society. Even if theoretically, refugee immigrants
have the same rights and duties as native Swedes, they need to be empowered to enable them, "to overcome barriers in achieving their life objectives, to gain access to services and to improve services, contributing to practice a focus on social injustice" (Payne, 2014, p.294).

However, the need to empower refugee immigrants especially has been recognized by LO lately. LO is currently organizing a trade union office for undocumented refugees and examines to what extent municipalities offer support of community introduction, as the researchers stated. Implementing such measures is in accordance with Barter-Godfrey’s et al. (2009, p.33) argument, that inclusion is something done to people rather than by them.

In conclusion, LO’s contact to refugee immigrants is, based on different reasons, very limited. Researcher 1 said that there is no specific plan or strategy on the LO central level at the moment that is used to reach out to newly arrived. Nevertheless, LO is aware about the numbers of refugee immigrants coming to Sweden and will soon enter the labor market, what will also lead to an increasing membership of LO in 2-3 years, as explained by Researcher 2 and the Ombudsman of the union. Ombudsman 1 stated:

“We are not talking to refugees directly, because for us the work starts when they got a job. Maybe we should do something else there. I don’t think we do that actually right at this moment”.

5.2.2 Information as a strategy to empower

All the interviews showed that there are limited strategies used by LO to integrate refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market. However, there are some methods used by LO, such as providing information, to enlighten refugee immigrants about their rights and duties. According to Adams’ definition of empowerment (2008, p.17), those methods are strategies to empower refugee immigrants, because they strengthen the refugee immigrants’ capacity to take control of their circumstances.

The informants stated that not all refugee immigrants make use of their rights regarding the integration on the labor market, because they often do not know their rights. As explained by the participants, LO informs refugee immigrants about their rights and also about how the Swedish rules and system work in different ways. An example therefore is that representatives from LO go to SFI courses and talk to the course participants about the Swedish labor market,
the Swedish laws, the Swedish labor market model, trade unions and the different parties in Sweden. In terms of Hur’s (2006, p.530) definition of empowerment, SFI courses itself are a way to create individual empowerment, through strengthening intellectual capabilities. Whereas the LO’s strategy to provide information in SFI courses reaches a lot of newly arrived collectively and develops collective empowerment, through conscientization, knowledge provision, and awareness building about the society. However, Ombudsman 1 stated that they do not reach everyone and they should meet a lot more people. Furthermore, LO cooperates with different kind of organizations, such as the Trade Union Center for Undocumented Migrants (Facklighetscenter för papperslösa), and also religious networks to spread information. To reach people who do not speak Swedish, several union members distribute information in different languages. In Stockholm for example union members stand in front of the subway station in the mornings and distribute flyers in five different languages, as explained by the Ombudsman of the union. This is another good example for practicing collective empowerment, because it is a way of conscientizing people and building networks between them. That this way of informing refugee immigrants is necessary has also the reason that refugee immigrants often have bad experiences with the concepts of unions from where they are coming from:

“Our department in Stockholm is especially working with domestic work and they meet a lot of unorganized people who are working in this sector. And they are afraid, they don’t want their employers to know that they have contact [to the union] so they have meetings on Saturdays. Many of them come from eastern Europe and the unions was equal as the parties. And I think it is the same for people coming from Syria or Africa”. (Ombudsman union)

Especially therefore, it is important to empower refugee immigrants to make use of their rights regarding the labor market. Because this empowerment protects them from being misused and hence it protects the Swedish welfare model and its fundamental ideas, such as universalism and equality (Cochrane et al., 2001, p.196).

5.2.3 LO’s influence as a strategy to empower

LO’s influence on the politics and the society always has been of major importance. Esping-Andersen (1990, p.164) describes that especially starting in the post-war era, powerful, all-encompassing and centralized trade unions in cooperation with a governing labor party
engaged in central national-level, or industry-wide negotiations with employers. Today, LO uses its status to influence politicians and the society as a whole but also the political measures, as explained by Researcher 2. This influence also represents a way of empowering refugee immigrants, because it creates awareness, comprehension and sympathy for their needs and demands.

All participants stated that LO is aware of their role regarding opinion- and policy creation in Sweden. The reasons for LO’s influence was explained as follows:

“Our arguments and proposals are built on knowledge and research and that LO is seen as a reliable union” (Researcher 1).

Furthermore, LO’s influence on the politics in Sweden is based on a strong cooperation with the Swedish Social Democratic Party. The strong cooperation between the Social Democratic Party and the labor movement in Sweden has a long history and has been a corner stone for establishing the social democratic welfare model in Sweden (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p.167). Ombudsman 1 stated that LO’s influence on policy creation is not focused on the question who should or should not enter Sweden, for example. It’s mainly focused on everything concerning the labor market, because this is LO’s sector. LO has a voice in the political debate and this voice speaks for the workers, the work places and collective agreements, as explained by Researcher 1. However, there is an awareness that pressure needs to be put on different systems, mainly the labor market policies, health care and also housing, as Researcher 1 said further. Additionally, Ombudsman 2 stated that LO has an actual impact on the creation of refugee policies in Sweden, because LO’s opinion and reports are taken in consideration when creating new refugee policies. An example for such a report was given by the Ombudsman of the union:

“The head economist of LO did an economic forecast for the upcoming years, which says that the population will increase. But this is not something we can see or analyze until 2017, because the residence permit process time is a long period, so the results will not be noticeable until 2-4 years from now. But to be able to prepare for this, the economist states that preparation needs to take place in time and the amount of resources needs to be added up to the increased amount of population”.
Additionally, to the influence on politics, LO uses its status to create opinions among the population, which takes place in different ways. Presidents of LO talk in public (e.g. on demonstrations) and they make statements in papers and on television shows. This is a way of conscientizing in public, because LO draws attention to the situation of refugee immigrants to the rest of the society, those having power and are not excluded from the labor market. This attention can help to improve services and can help refugee immigrants to gain access to services, which is in accordance with Payne’s (2014, p.294) description of empowerment. As a reason why it is highly necessary to conscientize in public, is, that there is a dramatic change, that even a lot of members of LO unions vote and support parties, which LO calls racism, as Ombudsman 1 stated. LO tries to conscientize by explaining those members what these parties’ policies mean to LO.

Furthermore, Ombudsman 1 explained concerning the necessity of the intervention:

“A lot of people are out there, who don’t like other people. And that’s a big issue and it’s really easy to spread hate… And this is pretty obvious these days and I hope this will change, because this is a really big problem for the society, that people are angry and don’t understand and they just care about themselves… We had that problem back in the 90s and then it disappeared but now it looks like nationalism is growing over the world in a really frightening way… People do not believe in democracy that much, then 5 or 10 years ago. And that’s a threat to the society and democracy”.

This statement illustrates a change in the Swedish society. Originally, the Swedish welfare model constructed an essentially universal solidarity in favor of the welfare state, where "[a]ll benefit; all are dependent; and all will presumably feel obligated to pay" (Esping-Anders, 1990, p.28). The growing mistrust in democracy and a social democratic welfare model threatens a universal solidarity and the work of LO, which is built on the fundamental ideas of the social democratic welfare model. However, this growing mistrust also emphasizes the need for LO to use its status to inform and influence politics and the society as a whole.

However, in a welfare state, changing from a universal to a more liberal one, LO faces a decreasing influence. The origins of the Keynesian full-employment concept and the social democratic welfare state have been shaped by the capacity of strong working-class movements (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p.18). Thus, the weakening of the universal character of the Swedish welfare model, leads to weaker trade unions. According to Esping-Andersen
(1985, as cited in Esping-Andersen, 1990, p.16) strength and unity of collective power mobilization, such as LO, is only possible in a universal welfare model, because this welfare model pursues the necessary preconditions, i.e. social rights, income security, equalization and eradication of poverty.

5.3 Views on Swedish policies

This theme outlines LO’s main views on the policies regarding refugee integration in Sweden. It also reflects on contents and changes of the Swedish welfare system and contains some recommendations to improve the situation of refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market. The subthemes presented are 1) Removing administrative barriers, 2) The necessity for Sweden to integrate migrants on the Swedish labor market and to protect collective agreements we finalize with an answer to the question 3) Is Sweden prepared for the ongoing flow of refugee immigrants. Before going deeply into the analysis of these subthemes, some general thoughts regarding the Swedish policies are presented.

In general, all participants stated that the current official policies support the integration of refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market. However, there are some drawbacks, which should be worked on to improve the situation. The suggestions of the participants concerning the improvement of the refugee immigrants’ situation on the Swedish labor market are: to concentrate more on labor market policies in general, to increase the chance of occasional training, to have more labor market focused education, to subsidize employment security and a better validation of earlier education and grades.

5.3.1 Removing administrative barriers

Peromingo (2014, p.77) describes it as a strength of the Swedish integration program, that the training and the integration of refugee immigrants starts parallel. Peromingo (2014, p.77) highly evaluates that refugee immigrants in Sweden do both, participating in a language course for example and start looking for a job, at the same time. However, the process from arriving as a refugee to being established in the Swedish labor market is a long process which involves various steps that need to be taken into account in order to reach that level. One participant described those steps as follows:
“First, there is the waiting period until the person receives the residence permit. It’s important during this period to already start learning Swedish and also to start mapping the educational background and working experience. This can relieve the integration process… When the refugee receives the decision about the residence permit, the process of finding a place to live, which is already difficult because of the lack of housing, starts. Then shortly after this, different activities begin which strives to increase the opportunities for an establishment into the labor market”.
(RESEARCHER 1)

According to the informants, this process contains two main problems. First of all, this process was described as way too time-consuming. The Ombudsman of the union stated that the Swedish system is slow, due to too many legislations and that it takes too long time from arriving in Sweden to entering the labor market. The Ombudsman explained further, that the waiting time between different steps are too long in Sweden, e.g. the decision about a residence permit, which results in nervousness and discontent among refugee immigrants. A way to make this system faster and more effective, without breaking laws or doing it in a bad way, is necessary. This was basically the core opinion of all informants. “Refugee immigrants need to enter the labor market as soon as possible to ensure a successful integration” (OMBUDSMAN 2). A study by Rooth (1999, as cited in Lundborg, 2013, p.220) reinforced this point of view. An early establishment in the labor market plays an important role for the future employment situation, because a late entrance often implies a further poor labor market situation (Rooth, 1999, as cited in Lundborg, 2013, p.220).

A report by UNHCR (2013, p.21) stresses the importance of validation of refugees’ formal qualifications, training and professional experience to facilitate further education and employment opportunities. “This is addressed in Sweden by a number of validation efforts – and there are more reforms and measures underway” (UNHCR, 2013, p.21). However, the process of validation and education was the second main problem, which was mentioned by the participants. In the validation process, refugee immigrants are often lowered one class down, meaning that they do not end up in a job they are qualified to. One way to prevent that and also fasten the process is a new implemented method called fast track (Snabbspår). Snabbspår is a method to integrate new immigrants on the labor market quick and according to their qualities. Immigrants are validated according to their educational and work background and do a two weeks’ practice in their work field. After that it is decided, if the immigrant needs more education or not. At the same time the immigrant participates in Swedish for professions (yrkessvenska). As explained by the Ombudsman of the union:
“This method has already been implemented for cooks and it is in the process of planning to implement it for mechanics and for professions in the care system”.

To implement Snabbspår on a wider range enables to improve the education and validation process. Therefore, LO has a lot of contacts with the labor department (Arbetsmarknadsdepartementet), the Public Employment Service, the schoolboard and employers to see how they can implement Snabbspår successfully on a wider range. This collaboration can be justified with the characteristics of the Swedish welfare model, where strong institutions and strong relations between those institutions are seen as a supporting system.

Additionally, the participants claimed for policies, which allow faster and more specific action. Action should be taken immediately, in form of education, when a profession is needed. Short educations, practical experiences, and labor related language, when studying the Swedish language, are needed, as stated by Ombudsman 2. The report from UNHCR (2013, p.31) stresses that refugee immigrants coming to Sweden, have very different educational backgrounds, ranging from professor to no previous schooling. Therefore, it is seen as important to adapt “counselling and information around education to the specific needs of the individual and to the person’s previous training and profession” (UNHCR, 2013, p.31). Furthermore, it has been agreed on that validation of previous training and experience is best performed as soon as possible, in such a way that the refugee immigrant can start appropriate supplementary education or internships (UNHCR, 2013, p.31). Timely and correct information is seen as central and should cover: “Swedish tuition options, secondary school level education, validation, internships, professional mentors, as well as which university courses and programs could be relevant” (UNCHR, 2013, p.31). Because there is a strong connection between education and labor market entry in Sweden (UNHCR, 2013, p.21), there needs to be special attention to fasten the process of validation and education.

In conclusion, there was the consent, that the whole system needs to be more flexible and administrative barriers need to decrease, to integrate refugee immigrants faster and more effective on the labor market. However, this needs to be done carefully, as Researcher 2 stated:
“A lot of the politicians try to use the refugee crisis in order to support their interests and political opinions. They say for example that the labor market is too regulated and the employment security needs to resolve. Since we as LO work against those kinds of policies, we have been criticized for standing in the way of making the system more flexible”.

Creating more flexibility, can lead to weakening current regulations, as collective agreements for example. Thus, basic characteristics of the Swedish welfare model and the Swedish labor market can be discontinued. Therefore, through LO’s work against policies, that deregulate the labor market, LO tries to protect basic current characteristics of the Swedish welfare model.

5.3.2 The necessity to integrate migrants on the labor market and to protect collective agreements

The participants stated that LO is in the process of preparing itself for the ongoing flow of refugees coming to Sweden and LO’s employees discuss how this ongoing flow will affect the labor market. All participants had agreed on, that it is necessary to put resources (e.g. in form of education) into the increasing population, to ensure a successful integration, especially on the labor market. Furthermore, Researcher 1 stated:

“It is also in the state’s interest, having a large population of the refugees in the labor force. Sweden is a wealthy country, the more labor force we have, the more resources are possible to create and manage”.

This is clearly related to the basic idea of the Swedish welfare model, where full employment is a central element, because it makes it possible to pay the costs of welfare (Cochrane et al., 2001, p.11).

As a reason for integrating refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market, the ombudsman of the union took the history of migration in Sweden in consideration:

“We need them [the immigrants] in our welfare system. If we haven’t got the migration, starting in the 60s, there would be 2.5 million less people in Sweden and the welfare system wouldn’t be that good as it is”.

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However, at this point one could argue, that the change of the welfare system, starting in the 1990s, had a major impact on the fundamental idea of fusion of welfare and work. Till the beginning of the 1990s unemployment was really low and almost the whole population, including immigrants, had an employment. Therefore, they paid taxes and contributed to the resources of the welfare state. When there is no longer full employment, then the unemployed people, cannot contribute resources, in form of taxes, to the welfare state, instead they cost resources, in form of unemployed benefits. As argued by Cochrane et al. (2001, p.211) the development in the 1990s has led to a shift: Immigrants were no longer acknowledged as contributors to the costs of the welfare state, as in 1970s, instead they were seen beneficiaries and over-dependent on the welfare state.

In the research by UNHCR (2013) it is stated that refugee immigrants “emphasized that they wanted to work and earn their own salary, and that no one wants to be dependent on income support” (p.35). This attitude is linked to feelings of acceptance and respect by the society, but also to pride in oneself and being content with the life in Sweden. Further, many refugee immigrants said that they wanted to give something back by paying taxes to the society that has given them a safe place to live (UNHCR, 2013, p.35). There was a consent between the interviewees, that refugee immigrants needed to be integrate on the Swedish labor market, also in behalf of employers and the state in general. Again, it was outlined, that the key to this integration is good validation and education of refugee immigrants. Ombudsman 1 stated, that a lot of immigrants could have jobs, they are better it, also in favor of the employees “We should use the possibility of having high educated immigrants working in their jobs” the ombudsman further stressed.

Further, the ombudsman of the union explained that more jobs will be created, because of the immigration: When more children go to school, then there is a need for more teachers, cooks, after school care and so on. This is an argument for taking in refugee immigrants, to strengthen the welfare state in the future. More jobs will be created, when the population increases. Therefore, more resources will be put into the welfare state and strengthen it. But first, resources, in form of education, need to be put into the growing population, to have a successful outcome in the future.

When the informants talked about the integration of refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market, they also mentioned demands they have as LO. Collective agreements are one of the
main instruments trade unions use to represent their members’ interests. We heard the term ‘collective agreements’ several times in all the interviews, and clearly it is one of LO's function to protect the purpose and content of collective agreements. As already mentioned, it is a concern of LO that the current situation leads more and more to a deregulation of the labor market and therefore to a roll back of collective agreements. More individualized wage negotiations, as a result of liberalization of social policy and the welfare model, have already led to weakening collective agreements. This liberalization has its origin in the economic globalization of the 1980s and was further undermined by the unemployment crisis in the 1990s (Cochrane et al., 2001, p.218). As part of this liberalization, the Employers’ Federation claimed for a diminished role for organized labor (Clement, 1994, p.375, as cited in Cochrane et al., 2001, p.218), which was the beginning of the role back of collective agreements and a connected weakening of trade unions.

Ombudsman 1 expressed his feelings and demands about the current situation, that Sweden faces an enormous flow of refugees, as follows:

“It’s a crisis of course and we are trying to make the best out of it… It’s the main question for us that no one, it doesn’t matter who it is, if it’s a refugee or it’s someone else, no one should work cheaper…And why we think that’s even more important when it comes to refugees, because they are more desperate probably. When you have no money, you may feel force to take a work for less money and that could be a problem we think… Our demand in salary is what you need to live a normal life in Sweden”.

The ombudsman of the union stated that LO of course wants refugee immigrants being employed, but at the same time, defined working conditions and salaries should be adhered to. If a lot of people do not have the right education, they can do the work for a lower salary as the ones having the right educational background. LO wants to avoid such a development, which is one reason why programs that concentrate on education of refugee immigrants are that important.

A further issue is, that refugee immigrants might not be aware of their labor rights, like the right amount of salary, and therefore there is a risk that they be taken advantage of by employers. LO’s role in this case is to put ‘pressure’ and obligations on the employers to reduce the risk of employers taking advantage, as explained by Ombudsman 2. However,
refugee immigrants are afraid that such an intervention of LO can cause their dismissal. Ombudsman 2 explained this as follows:

“This can cause that the refugees are put in a ‘hostage effect’, meaning that they are hesitant to reach out to us, but also being stuck with poor labor conditions”.

Without collective agreements, employers can pay as much as they want, as long as the employees accept it. Refugee immigrants are likely to become victims of such an exploiting employment, because they are often desperate or do not know what their rights are. The concerns expressed by the informants are justified by Woolfson et al. (2014, p.696), who argue that there is the potential emergence of an unregulated secondary labor market in Sweden. This secondary labor market occurs with significantly lower wages and poorer working conditions for immigrant workers, and is based on weak labor inspection and enforcement, especially in sectors where low-skill immigrants are employed (Woolfson et al., 2014, p.696). To avoid such an emergence a high union density associated with a high union representation at workplaces is necessary (Woolfson et al., 2014, p.696).

5.3.3 Is Sweden prepared for the ongoing flow of refugees?

Clearly it is not a yes or no question, for people working every day of their lives with topics regarding the Swedish politics, the labor market and its development and integration processes. However, the development in Sweden regarding the ongoing flow of refugees were already a clear answer to this question. While the two weeks’ process of conducting the interviews, the Swedish politics showed their discord and overextension regarding the ongoing flow of refugees. Every single interview took place under another requirement. Once the Swedish policy refugee was very gentle, then the attitude towards some EU member states got worse, because of dissatisfactions with their behavior, simultaneously the limit in many municipalities exceeded, because there were no more room for placing all the arrival refugees, and ultimately it ended in new forms of regulations, such as strict border controls at the Swedish external borders. This development provided a lot of topics to discuss.

First of all, the participants generally agreed on that the current situation, of so many people coming to Sweden, is a question of humanity and not migration and that Sweden and its society need to show solidarity. Furthermore, Sweden can be regarded as a highly multiethnic
society also resulting from a general quite generous refugee policy (Cochrane et al., 2001, p.211). However, it is a new phenomenon that is currently happening in Europe, which creates some uncertainty. There has not been this amount of refugees fleeing since the second welfare and this will create major challenges, as stated by Ombudsman 2. Some feelings of fear and anxiety about the current situation will affect the power of certain extremist parties, was further stated. One researcher stated that the right political spectrum wants to lower wages and cut down social benefits to tackle the crisis, which of course does not present a solution in LO's view.

"If we lower wages, cutting down social benefits and unemployment benefits, we will only increase the gap of divided living conditions between migrants and native Swedish people in Sweden". (Researcher 2)

As discussed earlier, refugee immigrants are, due to various reasons, often excluded from the Swedish labor market and the society in general. Although there are policy efforts to facilitate the integration of minority ethnic communities into the society and in the welfare state, difficulties to sustain the social democratic model make these efforts increasingly apparent in times of economic difficulties (Cochrane et al., 2001, p.21). Social Democrats want to be humanistic, tolerant, and welcoming, like the social democracy used to be historically in Sweden. However, the Social Democratic Party itself, was involved in the liberalization of social policy and the welfare state, starting in 1980s, which resulted in major cutbacks of resources and public services (Cochrane et al., 2001, pp.198-199). As a consequence, the welfare state no longer had resources and systems, necessary to fulfil the originally social democratic welfare policy, including its immigration policy.

It was obvious that the participants identify themselves with the fundamental ideas of the Swedish welfare model. In their profession as employees of LO and its affiliates they promote and protect this fundamental ideas day by day. Therefore, their feelings are really strong towards every development which could put those fundamental ideas at risk. However, all of them were really open towards changes, which could promote a successful integration of refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market and into the Swedish society in general. Some participants expressed anxiety that the labor market will not keep up with the ongoing flow of refugee immigrants coming to Sweden, if the Swedish politics do not get a critical understanding of what is going on. It requires a good prognosis to be able to understand and
be prepared, otherwise it will lead to several cutting downs of social policy and create income inequality, as one Researcher stated. It has further been outlined that the situation requires a change of the view on the integration process in Sweden in general:

“So Policies are too focused on the subject of having a job. Integration is so much more than just having a job. Integration is democratic rights, how a person functions as a part of society, how a person can use their democratic rights. I fear that we lose out on a whole range of other important factors and unfortunately I think that we will pay the price for this later on. Housing and employment is important for integration but in the long perspective there are a whole range of other questions that are equally important”. (Researcher 2)

It is obvious that the situation requires a good plan to not have bad outcomes, such as social exclusion and an increasing gap between refugee immigrants and the rest of the population, in the future.
6 Discussion

6.1 Summary of results in relation to the aim

The aim of the study was to explore how LO supports the integration of refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market. The research questions focused on how representatives of LO consider the reasons of exclusion of refugee immigrants from the Swedish labor market, on LO’s strategies to integrate refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market, and on what kind of policies, which should be implemented or modified to integrate refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market.

Three main reasons why refugee immigrants being excluded from the Swedish labor market according to LO, have been analyzed. First the issue of language skills has been discussed. Not having Swedish language skills, hinders refugee immigrants to integrate on the Swedish labor market and drives the process of social exclusion. All interviewed participants emphasized the importance of obtaining Swedish language skills. Free of charge language courses, offered to refugee immigrants, were therefore highly evaluated by the participants. A second reason for the exclusion of refugee immigrants from the Swedish labor market is the issue of discriminatory unemployment. High unemployment rates, starting in the 1990s, had mostly affected foreign-born people in Sweden. Reasons therefore are, according to the LO representatives, forms of discrimination, mostly based on employer uncertainty, leaving refugee immigrants in precarious employment contracts, such as short-term contracts, exposed to the black market or even entirely excluded from any form of employment. As a third main reason why refugee immigrants being excluded from the Swedish labor market, the effects of living in a segregated suburban area/neighborhood have been discussed. Refugee immigrants often move into areas less expensive to reside in. In many suburban areas, the unemployment rate is higher as elsewhere. There is an interdependency between housing and labor market integration: Without having a job, people cannot move to an economical strong area, where housing is more expensive and are often excluded from the mainstream society.

Limited direct strategies used by LO to integrate refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market, are identified. A reason for the lack of more extensive strategies, is that LO consider itself to be mainly responsible for people having an employment and therefore are not
excluded from the labor market. To become a union member, someone has to be employed. Furthermore, the LO informants argued, that they do not make a difference between foreign-born or native Swedes, because their principles are based on equality and anti-discrimination. However, the LO informants stated that they, as LO, have recognized the importance of dealing with the integration of refugee immigrants and are currently organizing investigations. Within this study, providing information, in order to conscientize and empower, is analyzed as an already implemented strategy to support refugee immigrants to integrate on the labor market. Representatives of LO inform refugee immigrants, e.g. in SFI courses, about their rights, the Swedish rules and how the Swedish system works in general. As a further strategy to support refugee immigrants to integrate on the Swedish labor market, LO influence Swedish policies and the society in general. LO’s influence is strongly based on a historically strong cooperation with the Social Democratic Party. LO uses its impact to participate in policy creation, also refugee policies, and to form public opinions.

Within the third research question, which policies should be implemented or modified to integrate refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market, three subthemes are identified. Firstly, there is a strong opinion to remove administrative barriers, to integrate refugee immigrants faster on the Swedish labor market. Therefore, a good and fast validation of earlier education and work-experience of refugee immigrants was highly recommended by the informants. However, it is important not to threaten current social and labor market policies, such as collective agreements, when removing administrative barriers. Secondly, the importance of integrating refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market and the protection of collective agreements are stressed. Sweden has a long history of immigration and immigration was a factor that strengthened the Swedish welfare state. According to the LO informants, the successful integration of refugee immigrants is important, for strengthening the Swedish welfare state in the future. However, the shift of the Swedish welfare model to a more liberal one, makes the integration of refugee immigrants harder and also weakens the role of collective agreements and trade unions in general. The third subtheme presents thoughts concerning the question, if Sweden is prepared for the ongoing flow of refugees. During the weeks of conducting the interviews, Sweden seemed overwhelmed with the ongoing flow of refugees and almost every day new investigation and solutions were presented. This was a basis for discussion during the interviews and the LO informants stated that they do not see that Sweden is prepared right now and that there are a lot of uncertainties. They saw it as the most significant aspect, to show solidarity with the refugee immigrants and
to protect basic ideas of the welfare state, because lowering wages and cut down benefits, will increase the gap of divided living conditions between immigrants and native Swedes.

6.2 Methodology discussion

For this study a qualitative approach was chosen, because it led to more depth information, than a quantitative study would. Through extensive individual interviews, much data was collected, because all interviewees were really open with sharing their thoughts, opinions and also emotions. Furthermore, through the interviews we’ve got a personal insight, into the work environment of the LO informants, which we wouldn’t receive applying a quantitative approach. Earlier research, in addition to the interviews, supported the collected data from the interviews and strengthens the credibility of this study.

Interviewing refugee immigrants who have had experiences with LO, and examine the aim of this study from their perspective, would have been interesting as well. However, it would have been difficult, due to the limited time frame of this study, to find suitable and enough participants. The selection of the participants was relatively unproblematic, due to the reason, that some participants referred us to possible participants and therefore they were really supportive in finding suitable participants. Overall, the interviews with the LO informants were really inspiring. We have learned a lot during the interviews and the whole research process and we will apply what we have learned as students and future social workers.

6.3 Earlier research discussion

The earlier research chapter is divided in four sections. First some general information regarding the situation of refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market is presented. In this section it is stated that it is central to Sweden’s integration policy, to integrate refugee immigrants on the labor market. However, our analysis shows, that this central key is not fully realized, what is also in line with some earlier research, saying that foreign-born people are more vulnerable for unemployment than native Swedes.

In the second section of the earlier research chapter some reasons why refugee immigrants being excluded from the Swedish labor market are presented. Here it says that nowadays it is more challenging to integrate immigrants on the labor market, than it was in the past. This is
in accordance with what the LO informants stated. This change is caused through the change of the welfare state and the economic sector, which requires special skills and Swedish language skills in particular. Furthermore, discrimination as a reason for exclusion, which is mentioned in the earlier research section, has been identified during the analysis process.

In the third section, earlier research on empowerment of refugee immigrants is presented. Political decisions and different institutions are assigned as an important factor to empower refugee immigrants in their ability to enter the labor market, which was also discussed by the informants of LO. Furthermore, as a way to empower refugee immigrants, SFI courses are highly evaluated in earlier research and by the LO informants. However, some earlier research argues that the Swedish introduction program basically addresses empowerment of refugee immigrants only on the individual level, i.e. changing the individual and not addressing structural barriers. The interviews revealed that even if the representatives of LO supports the content of this Swedish introduction program, such as SFI courses, they also address structural barriers in their work.

In the last section of earlier research, the role of trade unions in regards to refugee immigrants’ integration on the Swedish labor market is presented. There is limited literature covering this topic. However, LO’s influence on policy and opinion creation has always been strong, which was also discussed by all informants of LO.

6.4 Theory discussion

Three theoretical frameworks are used for this study. To explore the reasons why refugee immigrants being excluded from the Swedish labor market, the concept of social exclusion was used. The analysis shows that that refugee immigrants are being socially excluded, because of different factors, such as a lack of language skills, discriminatory unemployment or their housing situation. Structural processes in the society create inequality and barriers for refugee immigrants to integrate on the labor market. Especially employers’ uncertainty results in various forms of discrimination and exclude refugee immigrants from the labor market.

Furthermore, the concept of empowerment, especially collective empowerment, was used to analyze the collected data. Strategies used by LO to integrate refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market were examined using the concept of empowerment. LO creates a form
of empowerment, when informing and conscientising refugee immigrants, e.g. in SFI courses. Furthermore, LO uses its influence on policies and the society as a whole. However, the strategies are very limited to individual empowerment, by creating consciousness, but lack a collective factor, by mobilizing action.

Finally, the collected data was analyzed on the basis of Esping-Andersen’s (1990) definitions of welfare state regimes, with focus on the Swedish model. According to the principles of a universal welfare model, the integration of refugee immigrants should be ensured. This is in accordance with what the LO informants stated, that Sweden has a long history of immigration and benefits from integration of immigrants on the labor market. However, starting with high unemployment rates in the 1990s, Sweden liberalized social and labor market policies, through cutbacks and deregulations, and abandoned its universal character. This has affected more foreign-born people more than native Swedes.

6.5 Further research suggestions

As the issue of refugee immigrants’ integration on the labor market is lately more of significance than ever before, further research on this topic is highly suggested. In particular, the role of LO, due to its status, is of importance in the process of integration of refugee immigrants. Further research, with special attention to possibilities to create collective empowerment, could help to create more strategies within LO to integrate refugee immigrants on the labor market. It could also be interesting to conduct similar studies in other EU countries, to examine strategies used there, especially from trade unions, to integrate refugee immigrants on the labor market. Furthermore, choosing refugee immigrants as participants in a study within this area is an option to explore this topic from a different perspective. In further research within this area, there could also be implemented a quantitative approach. A quantitative approach accomplishes that more informants can participate. Therefore, in a study conducted with a quantitative approach, more representatives of LO and trade unions can contribute with their conceptions about strategies for integration of refugee immigrants and one could also include the refugee immigrants themselves.

The integration of refugee immigrants at all levels, is highly discussed in the whole EU. The situation of so many refugees entering the EU lately, requires fast and effective solutions for integration. Otherwise, the issue of social exclusion will increase and it will become harder
and harder to gain control of it. Therefore, further studies, with the overall aim to learn from each other, to explore successful strategies for integration and to tackle social exclusion is highly necessary.
References


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Informationsbrev om examensarbete

Examensarbete: Labor market integration of refugee immigrants in Sweden

Hej,


Vi vill informera om att deltagandet i studien är frivilligt, namn kommer inte att nämnas i vår studie och all samlad information kommer att behandlas konfidentiellt av oss och vår handledare. Det insamlade intervju materialet kommer inte att spridas vidare. Deltagaren har även rätt att när som helst avbryta sin medverkan i studien.

Tack på förhand, vi ser fram emot att träffa er!

Vänliga hylningar,
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Appendix 2: Interview guide

Interview guide

Background information

1. In which department do you work here in LO?
2. What exactly is your position here in LO?
3. For how long do you work here in LO?
4. Does the department you work in deal with refugee immigrants?
5. What is LO’s view on the refugee crisis in Europe?
6. Have a lot of refugee immigrants joined trade unions in Sweden lately?

Theme 1: What are the main reasons, according to the Swedish Trade Union Confederation, that refugee immigrants are being excluded from the Swedish labor market?

7. Does LO have an official statement to refugee immigrants being excluded from the Swedish labor market?
8. What factors make it difficult to integrate refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market? (e.g. language, shortage of jobs, employers…)
9. How do you experience, in the department you work in, the exclusion of refugee immigrants from the Swedish labor market?
10. How do you think that the current flow of refugees has affected a successful integration of refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market?

Theme 2: What are the Swedish Trade Union Confederation’s strategies to integrate refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market?

11. Which kinds of contacts does the department you work in have with refugee immigrants having difficulties being integrated on the Swedish labor market?
12. How does LO work to integrate refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market?
13. What special strategies does the department you work in use to integrate refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market?

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14. How successful do you think those strategies are?

15. How does LO work to enlighten refugee immigrants about their rights regarding the integration on the Swedish labor market?

16. To which extend do refugee immigrants make use of their rights regarding the integration on the Swedish labor market?

17. LO has faced some criticism for not being concentrated enough on refugee immigrants and their integration. In which ways has this criticism affected the LO strategies to integrate refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market?

18. LO and trade unions in general always played an important role in Sweden and always had great influence on the Swedish society. How does LO use its status to influence the society’s view on the integration of refugee immigrants?

19. How do you consider that LO is prepared to work on the integration of more and more refugees coming to Sweden?

Theme 3: What policies should be implemented or modified to improve the situation of refugee immigrants on the labor market?

20. Do you have the impression that current official policies support/not support the integration of refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market?

21. How do current policies support/not support your work concerning the integration of refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market?

22. In which way is the Swedish refugee policy a role model for other countries in Europe?

23. In which ways do you consider there are policies which should be modified to improve the integration of refugee immigrants on the Swedish labor market?

24. How do you consider the impact LO has on the creation of refugee policies in Sweden?

25. How do you consider that the Swedish politics are prepared for the ongoing flow of refugees coming to Sweden?