



LUND UNIVERSITY
School of Economics and Management

Highly-Educated Immigrants in Sweden

A Study of the Perception of HEI from Syria on Prerequisites to Enter
the Swedish Job Market

by

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this thesis is to provide the reader with insights regarding what Syrian highly-educated immigrants (HEI) in Sweden think are the underlying prerequisites and actions needed to facilitate their entrance into the Swedish job market.

Key Research Question: What are the key requirements needed to expedite the employment of HEI in the Swedish job market, and take up relevant jobs within the scope of their studies, as perceived by Syrian HEI?

Methodology: Using a mixed-method to collect quantitative and qualitative data from Syrian HEI by using: 1) a survey and 2) a series of semi-structured interviews.

Key Findings: According to HEI:

- The employer's low perception of their qualifications poses the biggest employment challenge.
- Discrimination is among the least challenging aspects to their employment.
- Swedish language fluency is important, but it is not a decisive factor.
- Good personality traits such as being persistent, responsible, and goal-oriented as well as having positive attitude and self-confidence, are the most important prerequisites for HEI's employment in Sweden.
- Job training is a valuable requirement that bridges the gap between HEI and employers and accounts for references which increases employability.
- Networking increases the likelihood of HEI getting employed and provides them with references.
- Prior experience, specifically in Sweden, is highly valued by employers.
- The recognition of qualifications and granting of work licenses is a key requirement for HEI with regulated professions, especially medical degree holders.
- There is a sign of a variation in the perception of HEI based on their employment status. Employed HEI in Sweden emphasized on requirements relating to personal efforts, and non-previously employed emphasized on requirements relating to external entities.

Practical implication: This study raises the awareness of the stakeholders regarding the perceptions and expectations of the HEI. Additionally, it provides relevant insights from HEI's perspective, which could be augmented into the design of programs that aim to facilitate their employment and overcome the challenges relating to their integration into the job market.

Keywords: Swedish job market, Syrian immigrants, highly-educated immigrants, employment of immigrants, Swedish Public Employment Service, Arbetsförmedlingen

Definitions

EEA:	European Economic Area
EU:	European Union
HEI:	Highly-educated immigrants
OECD:	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
SFI:	Swedish for Immigrants
SPES:	Swedish Public Employment Service (“Arbetsförmedlingen” in Swedish)
UK:	United Kingdom
US:	United States

Perception: The perception of the highly-educated immigrants in this study refers to their opinions and insights, independent from the researchers’ or stakeholders’ own opinions.

Prerequisites: Requirements needed to facilitate the employment of highly-educated immigrants within their specializations. The terms “prerequisite” and “requirement” are used interchangeably in this study.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

Sweden needs approximately 64,000 new foreign workers annually to join the workforce to maintain its highly-developed welfare system and respond to its economic growth (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2015). The country generally sources its foreign labour force from both labour and refugee immigrants (Lemaître, 2007). During the recent years, Sweden accepted a large number of refugee immigrants and registered the ever-highest inflow of immigrants per capita in an OECD country in 2015 (OECD, 2016).

This sudden surge in the number of immigrants imposed a significant pressure on the Swedish government, to accommodate and settle these immigrants especially from year 2013 onwards, making this a current hot topic in Sweden. A fair share of attention, in both the public domain and the academic field, has been given to the immigrants' integration problems in Sweden. According to the Minister of Employment, Ylva Johansson, *"Despite the many initiatives taken, several major challenges remain, not least because Sweden has received a large number of asylum seekers in a short period of time"* (William, 2016). A professor in social anthropology at Malmo University, Aje Carlbom, also said *"Sweden is statistically one of the worst countries at the integration of foreigners"* (Financial Times, 2017). The unemployment rate among the immigrants in Sweden is high and many remain jobless for years (The Economist, 2016). Statistics from December 2016 showed that the unemployment rate among foreign-born immigrants (22.8%) was significantly higher than their native counterparts (4.3%) (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2016a).

As a result of the integration flounder, a considerable number of the immigrants, who recently arrived in Sweden and are highly-educated, lag behind their native counterparts when it comes to their employment (The Economist, 2016). The highly-educated immigrants (referred hereinafter to as "HEI") are 30% less likely to be employed compared to their, similarly educated and trained, native counterparts in Sweden according to a report by SCB (2016). Based on the report, this gap is expected to further increase when considering the large number of asylum seekers who arrived in Sweden in 2015. Various research studies discussed this challenge which can be attributed to different structural and individual factors (Singley, 2003) such as cultural, educational, institutional and social.

Ideally, the human capital represented in immigrants would be used to fuel the labour force in Sweden, both the low skilled and highly-skilled immigrants. While there are efforts that aim to facilitate the integration of immigrants into the job market, these efforts need to expand and adopt a holistic approach where all views of stakeholders, including the immigrants', are considered. Understanding the issue from the immigrants' point of view provides policy makers and stakeholders with insights that may consequently enable them to take better measures and provide better solutions for the issue of the unemployment of HEI. Honig (2003) argued that,

instead of merely seeing immigrants as a problem in need of a solution, there is a need to shift the focus and think of how immigrants can contribute and solve the country's problems.

This study explores the perception of immigrants regarding the requirements to facilitate their employment in Sweden. The research focused primarily on the HEI from Syria which is attributed to two main reasons. First, Syrian immigrants represent the largest share of the total number of immigrants in the past few years. Second, a considerable percentage of the Syrian immigrants have high qualifications. The percentage of HEI from Syria was estimated by the Swedish Public Employment Service in 2015 to be 38% of total the Syrian immigrants in Sweden (Aftonbladet, 2015). Johan Nylander, head of refugee integration at the Swedish Public Employment Service, said:

“Ever since the Syrian situation started we have seen the education level of people in introduction programmes continually rising [...] A quarter of refugees in 2014 had higher education - up almost five percent on the previous year. More than two-thirds of them had skills which matched graduate job vacancies” (The local, 2015).

Given the statistics above, and provided that proper and effective integration policies and efforts are made, the Syrian HEI can cater to the country's annual demand of foreign workers and, therefore, contribute to its economy and social welfare on the long run. Additionally, this can help alleviate the impact of the ageing population and its implications on the Swedish labour market (The Economist, 2016), a key demographic and employment challenge in Sweden (Regeringskansliet, 2013).

1.2 Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to provide insights on what HEI think are the prerequisites and required actions that would facilitate their entry into the Swedish job market and take up relevant jobs within the scope of their studies.

This could improve the understanding of the stakeholders in Sweden, regarding the HEI perceptions, and thus encouraging them to take actions based on the insights provided. This study is made available to concerned stakeholders such as the Swedish Public Employment Service, managers and employers in Swedish companies, universities, recruitment companies, Swedish Migration Agency, and other groups of HEI.

The main research question that the study answers is:

- What are the key requirements needed to expedite the employment of HEI in the Swedish job market and take up relevant jobs within the scope of their studies, as perceived by Syrian HEI?

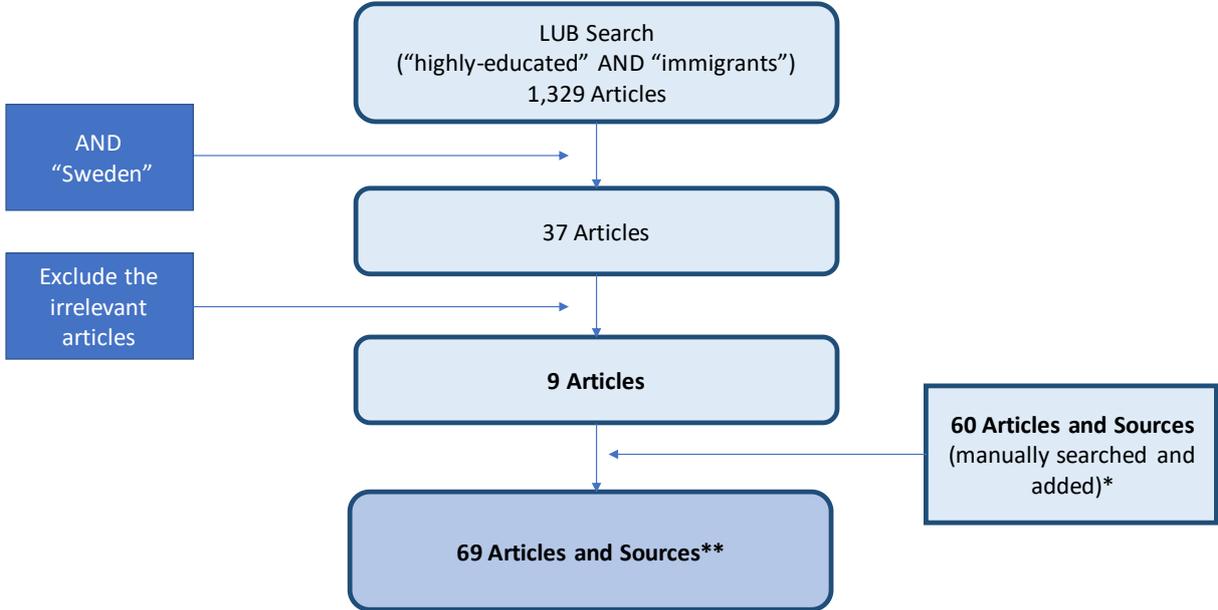
To answer the main research question, the following related sub-questions were addressed:

- How do the Syrian HEI perceive the employment challenges facing immigrants in Sweden?
- What do Syrian HEI perceive as key prerequisites to get employed in Sweden?
- How do Syrian HEI perceive the effectiveness of the current initiatives and programs in facilitating their employment in Sweden?
- What are the needed practical actions, perceived by HEI, to facilitate their employment?

2 Literature Review

This section of the study provides an overview of the best available knowledge and the research conducted previously in relation to the immigrants and particularly the highly-educated immigrants in Sweden in the context of the labour market integration. The literature used was acquired from academic research studies, publications, and reports released by governmental and non-governmental institutes. The literature review presents existential relevant topics on recent immigration to Sweden, the integration policies, and regulations, the HEI in the Swedish labour market, and the key challenges for HEI to enter the job market in Sweden.

The literature was obtained by searching Lund University’s electronic library database (LUB Search) and performing a manual search using internet search engines, google scholar and online governmental sources. The keywords and phrases used in the LUB Search were (highly-educated), (immigrants), and (Sweden). The manual search included similar keywords and other keywords used in different combinations based on relevance to the area of interest. Additional articles were located by reviewing the references of studies related to the topic and then they were manually searched and obtained through the above-mentioned search engines. The literature search was not time limited but was primarily limited to articles written in English. However, few articles in the Swedish language were added at a later stage due to their direct relevance to the research. An overview of the search activity for the whole study is illustrated below:



* Manually found articles and sources were through internet search engines, google scholar and government agencies and organizations. It included also sources from LUB that were searched by article’s names
 ** This final number of references excludes the methodology references (14 references)

Figure 1: Overview of the study’s search activity

2.1 Sweden’s Immigration Overview

Immigration in Sweden has been primarily fuelled by refugee immigrants along with labour immigrants (Lemaître, 2007). Due to political and economic turbulences between the years 2000 and 2011, Sweden received more than 315,000 asylum seekers from countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iraq, Somalia, Eritrea, and Serbia. In 2012 onwards, Sweden received a large number of refugees from the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa due to the political and economic instability in these regions. Year 2015 was a peak year as Sweden received 162,877 asylum seekers (Swedish Migration Agency, 2016a), which was six times more than the average number of asylum seekers received annually between 2000 and 2011 (Swedish Migration Agency, 2017)

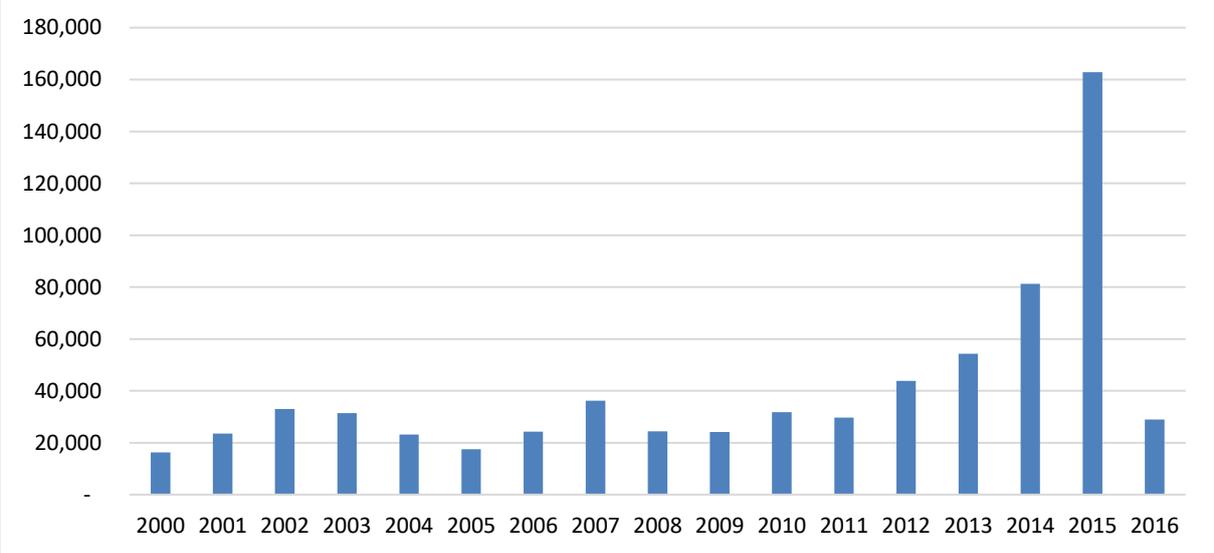


Figure 2: Number of asylum seekers in Sweden between 2000 and 2016

Asylum seekers from these regions (the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa) represented about 55% to 82% of the total number of immigrants to Sweden between 2012 and 2016. The immigrants who fled the Syrian war accounted for the highest share of the asylum seekers at around 38% and 32% in years 2014 and 2015 (Swedish Migration Agency, 2017). A significant decrease in the number of asylum seekers occurred in 2016. This was primarily due to the change in the immigration policies and the toughening of rules for newly-arriving immigrants to Sweden, along with the strict control of borders that halted the large influx of immigrants (Swedish Migration Agency, 2016b).

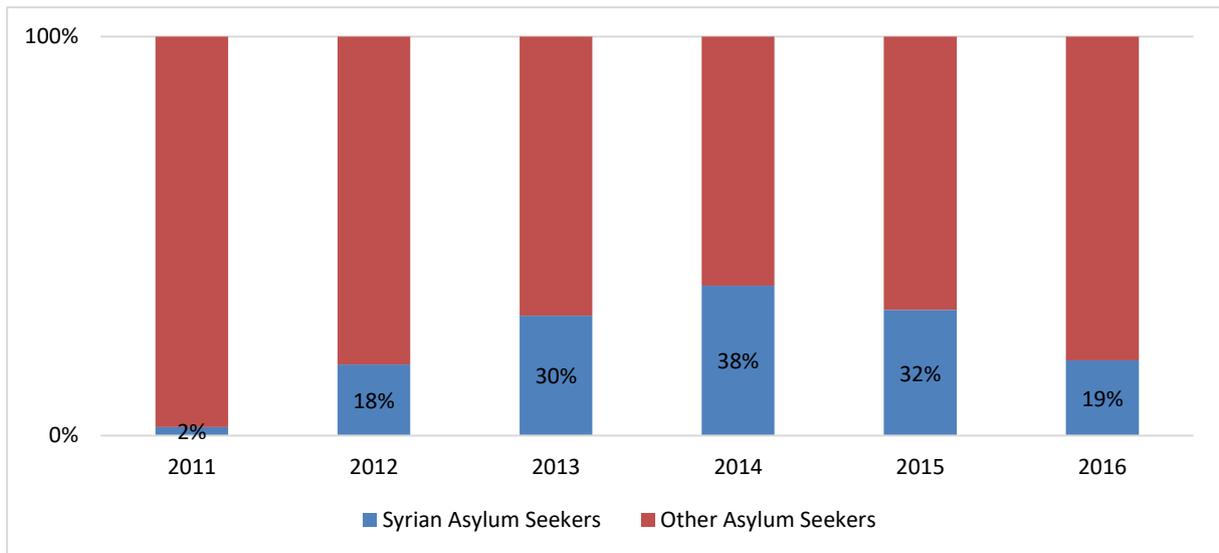


Figure 3: Annual share of Syrian asylum seekers in Sweden between 2011 and 2016

Sweden has had a relatively more stable number of labour immigrants moving to Sweden for work between 2000 and 2016. Data showed that Sweden received as low as 6,000 labour immigrants in 2005 and as high as 19,900 in 2013, an average of 13,800 labour immigrants annually during the whole period (2000 - 2016). These numbers exclude the family members of labours, and the immigrants from the EU and EEA countries (Swedish Migration Agency, 2017).

On the other hand, Sweden's emigration rates (the number of people immigrating from Sweden) increased from 15,000 in 1960 to 46,000 in 2016, an average annual growth rate of 2.0% during the same period (SCB, 2017). The number of immigrants to Sweden outpaced the number of emigrants between 2010 and 2017. Therefore, the net migration difference between immigrants and emigrants between 2010 to 2016 was the main basis to the increase in the Swedish population along with the new births in the country. This resulted in an annual population growth rate of 0.5% between 1960 and 2016, where population grew from 7.5 million in 1960 to almost 10 million in 2016 (SCB, 2017).

2.2 History of Integration Policies in Sweden

Based on the European Commission (n.d.), the integration policies in Sweden are trans-sectorial meaning that the objectives of the integration policies are to be realised through initiatives and measures within several policy areas and by many different ministries and governmental agencies. The goal of the integration policy in Sweden is to ensure equal rights, obligations, and opportunities for all, irrespective of their ethnic, religion, and cultural backgrounds.

Historically, Swedish immigration policies have varied tremendously depending mainly on emigration and immigration conditions. The year 1969 witnessed the establishment of the

Swedish Immigration Board which carried on all immigration-related issues (Lemaître, 2007). By 1970, free-language training programs were introduced and imposed by the government, and in the following two years the government passed a bill which guaranteed newly arriving immigrants some 240 hours of salaried language training. Initially, immigrants had no rights of owning property, running a company, or working for the state. Eventually, by 1974 these rules changed and foreigners could take on public jobs except for police, army, judiciary, and senior governmental jobs (Lemaître, 2007).

According to an article from the *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies*, the changes in the demographics of the population and the deteriorating indices representing labour market integration rates for immigrants, have placed the immigration and integration-related policies higher up on the government agenda for the last decade (Dahlstedt & Bevelander, 2010). For the Swedish integration policy, the cornerstone of the program is a two-year introductory program that targets the newly-arriving asylum seekers. The program is made up of language trainings, civic orientation and other activities that aim to enhance the integration process. The Swedish Public Employment Service, jointly with the immigrant's respective municipality arrange for the provision of these services (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2017a; OECD, 2016). As part of the integration program, the Swedish Public Employment Service, facilitates job training opportunities for immigrants in cooperation with interested Swedish organizations and companies for a certain period (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2017b).

Some in-effect policies encourage quick introduction and integration of the new immigrants. For instance, if an asylum application is calculated to take longer than 4 months, the applicant is given permission to work. Additionally, the Swedish Migration Agency arranges some activities for immigrants to participate in and provides them with daily allowances, while the municipalities are expected, through voluntary agreement with the integration board, to arrange schools for the children of asylum seekers. Moreover, the integration board provides the municipalities with grants for each asylum seeker that is participating in the introduction program (Lemaître, 2007).

Despite the integration policies in Sweden, Nekby (2002) concluded in a working paper that, immigrants with 20-25 years of residency in Sweden continue to show a significant employment gap to natives while assuming homogeneous human capital and time effects. The study compared this to the US labour market where immigrants reach employment levels of natives after ten years of residency in the US.

Based on the OECD report published in 2014, seven key challenges have been perceived by the Swedish government and OECD member countries to be the underlying reasons for the low outcome of the integration and employment of immigrants in Sweden. The report is a result of a workshop where development of policies aimed at resolving these challenges were discussed. The policies discussed in the report were mainly regarding the introduction program and targeted certain requirements to facilitate the immigrants' integration into the job market. These requirements revolved around enhancing language and basic skills, validating, and assessing foreign qualifications, supporting and encouraging employers to hire immigrants, anti-discrimination policies, networking and job search facilitation, school to work transitioning, and coordination among different actors and stakeholders (OECD, 2014).

2.3 HEI in Sweden and the Labour Market

Sweden enjoys a well-developed national social welfare system and has a low-income inequality gap of 0.25 Gini index. The country belongs to the group of nine most equal OECD countries in terms of income levels, where the income taxes play a key role in redistributing income in Sweden and reducing inequality among the population (OECD, 2015).

Due to its developed social security welfare system and the low-income inequality, Sweden can pose as an attractive destination for immigrants with low education and low skills. At the same time, it could be a less attractive option to highly-educated and highly-skilled immigrants who have the possibility to land better economic statuses in countries with more social mobility potentials (Milanovic, 2016). Tobias Billström, the Swedish Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy in 2009, stated that Sweden needs to stay competitive in the global competition for labour and improve skilled migration (Shklyar, 2012). Interestingly, the proportion of immigrants in Sweden with high education appeared to be higher than that of the native Swedes. Out of Sweden's total highly-educated population, about 50% are foreign-born individuals who obtained their high education outside OECD countries, this ratio puts Sweden second to Denmark among OECD countries (OECD, 2014).

Based on a survey conducted by Swedish Statistics Agency in 2004 on a sample of HEI who came to Sweden between 1991 and 2002, data showed that almost 11% of the HEI from the sample were unemployed while it was 3% for their native counterparts. Furthermore, 20% of the employed HEI mentioned that they have jobs that do not require high education (SCB, 2004). In 2015, the same survey was conducted again on a sample of HEI who came to Sweden between 2003 and 2014. Data showed that the situation worsened for the HEI compared to the results of the survey conducted in 2004, as a higher percentage of HEI mentioned that they have jobs that do not require higher education. Eriksson (2011) and Lorentzson (2015) indicated also that immigrants generally end up unemployed, or taking low pay jobs in the Swedish labour market, and the HEI are often seen taking jobs inferior to their qualifications due to the various employment obstacles they face.

Lemaître (2007) argued that Sweden is among the countries with the highest unemployment rates among the foreign-born. Sweden's unemployment gap between foreign-born and native-born was larger than that in countries like Australia, Canada, and the UK where most of the convergence to natives' results was already achieved within five years of the immigrant's presence in these countries. Recently, the Swedish Public Employment Service, in its 2016 report on the job market, stated that 16% of the highly-educated foreign born were unemployed compared to only 5% of native counterparts in 2015 (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2016b).

Many debates and discussions have been made to explore whether the recruitment of foreign workers is a profit or loss for the receiving countries (Myklebust, 2016). In 2016, a study was conducted by a think tank named "DEA" on behalf of the Confederation of Danish Industry. It included 10,000 companies and aimed to investigate the economic benefits of foreigners working in Denmark between 2003 to 2013. The study found that both western and non-western highly-educated immigrant workers make a highly positive contribution to public financing and

constitute a solid income for the treasury (Myklebust, 2016). Based on a OECD (2014) report, Sweden cannot afford to waste the valuable skills embodied in immigrants, given the large and growing share of immigrants in Sweden and the challenges associated with an ageing population. If the HEI are effectively integrated in the job market, these immigrants can form an important resource that supports the country's economic growth.

2.4 Key Employment Challenges Facing HEI in Sweden

Based on the review of several previous research studies and reports, HEI and immigrants in general face a number of challenges that hinder their entry to the labour market in Sweden. Certain key challenges have been addressed in almost all the studies and reports and they primarily pertain to Swedish language skills, discrimination, social and professional networks, and recognition of HEI's qualification.

2.4.1 Learning the Swedish Language

A key challenge that newly-arrived immigrants have to deal with in Sweden is their lack of knowledge of the Swedish language. This challenge makes it difficult for the immigrants to establish themselves in the Swedish society and the labour market (Rogova, 2014). Based on OECD (2014), knowledge of the host-country language is a key factor in determining the speed and success of integration in the society and labour market. The language skills are an essential requirement in the ability of the foreign-born to build their social and professional networks with the native population and to search for jobs. Since both networks and employment are important routes to build further language skills, poor knowledge of the host country's language can lead to a vicious cycle.

Rogova (2014) argued that the language policy has not been as effective as anticipated because opportunities to use the language skills in practice and achieve positive interaction between different groups in society are scarce. Krumm and Plutzar (2008) also argued that integration programs primarily focusing only on the language acquisition and at a one specific level, would lose their objectives. This is perceived to be the case since such programs do not take into consideration the varying specifics of language learning during immigrants' settlement that is affected by various social and cultural factors.

Several studies show that knowledge of Swedish language is one of the main challenges facing the immigrants in general and the HEI in particular when it comes to their integration into the Swedish labour market (Alaj, 2005; Faris, 2016; Nasrabadi, 2014; Rogova, 2014). Despite the integration policy related to language education through the immigrants' introduction program, there exists some critiques towards these programs, such as the substantial variation of the quality of the language programs across the country, and the language education being inappropriately tailored to the language-specific needs of the immigrants (OECD, 2014).

Lemaître (2007) and Orhamn (2016), however, discussed that the language deficiencies and the other challenging factors do not totally explain the slower convergence of immigrant labour market outcomes to those of the natives. Certain integration challenges may partly be a result of consequences of broader migration or entry policies and may require more intensive efforts or speciality tailored policies by the government.

2.4.2 Discrimination

According to literature, discrimination has a major impact on the employment and integration of immigrants in Sweden. Rogova (2014) stated that “*ongoing discrimination, especially in the labour market, restricts immigrants from fully participating in everyday life. Without positive interaction and active participation, language learning and integration in general cannot be successful*”.

Attström (2007) argued that employment is an important means of individual’s participation in the society, and discrimination in employment leads to a waste of valuable human capital and it risks the success of the integration of immigrants. This could also lead to social isolation and tensions, and economic loss for individual enterprises, as well as the national economy, she argued.

The International Labour Office, with the direction of the Swedish Integration Board, conducted a study on discrimination in employment against Swedes of immigrant background in Sweden during 2006. The study showed that Swedes with immigrant origin often had to make three to four times as much effort as native Swedes in terms of job applications in order to get to the next stage in the recruitment process (Attström, 2007). Bursell (2012) indicated that job applicants with Swedish-sounding names were called back twice as often as applicants with foreign sounding names with the same qualifications and merits.

Carlsson and Rooth (2007) concluded in a research study that there is an evidence of discrimination against men with Arabic-sounding names in Sweden and showed that every fourth employer discriminates against the minority. The study showed that the discriminatory employers have, to a large extent, a male person who is responsible for the recruitment process. Field experiments were conducted by Bursell (2007), and Carlsson and Rooth (2008) to test employer’s discrimination in Sweden against candidates with foreign sounding names. All experiments indicated the existence of discrimination. One experiment showed that the foreign sounding names explained 77% of the probability of not getting invited for a job interview while discrimination against the foreign qualification explained the remaining 23%. The other experiment showed that discrimination based on names existed in all of the occupations tested with varying extent between the occupations.

Protection against discrimination and unequal treatment in Sweden is found at both constitutional and legislative levels. There are four laws in the Swedish labour law that prohibit discrimination on different grounds, such as ethnicity, religion, gender, disability, and sexual orientation. There has also been a law that bans discrimination in higher education since 2001 (Attström, 2007). In 2009, the Swedish Anti-Discrimination Act consolidated an anti-

discrimination policy to fight discrimination and promote equal rights and opportunities for everyone living in Sweden. The act introduced a new penalty for discrimination to both prevent discrimination and to compensate for its consequences and effects. The number of complaints received for discrimination in 2012 were 1,559, which was a 20% decrease in the number of complaints from 2011 and 40% from 2010 (OECD, 2014).

2.4.3 Lack of Social Network

Behtoui (2008) stated that a reasonable explanation for the disadvantaged position of minority groups in the labour market is due to the lack of access to social networks that contain the needed resources for finding a job. He concluded that immigrants are less likely, when compared to natives, to find jobs using the informal methods in Sweden. Several studies were conducted to provide empirical data regarding the recruitment of minority groups and immigrants, the studies deduced that the lack of social networks is an explanation for the low employment rates of immigrants in the current labour market situation (Marx & Leicht 1992; Petersen, Saporta & Seidel 2000; Ports 1993).

Coverdill (1998) noted that “informal channels” are richer, more trustworthy, whilst at the same time cheaper to employers and job seekers, and information that travels through those channels spread quickly and widely. A study by Bäckman, Korpi and Minas (2014) that focused on the relationship between social networks and employment in the Swedish labour market found that the size of a social network is directly related to finding a job. In other words, the bigger the social network for immigrants is, the more likely they will get employment in the labour market. Petersson (2013) suggested that immigrants benefit more from having natives than foreign-born people in their networks, especially if social contact occurs at the workplace. When it comes to efficiency, immigrants’ who utilize their social networks, have a better outcome when compared to employment agencies (Olli-Segendorf, 2005). A study by Helgertz (2010) noted that immigrants are believed to have harder time utilizing informal job search channels since they typically have smaller networks in the labour market.

In relation to the immigrant’s own ethnic social network, Bångman and Norén (2007) concluded in their study that the quality of the immigrant’s ethnic social network is of great importance when matching between education level and profession. The immigrants with the higher proportion of highly-trained network (quality network), have a better chance of matching between their education and profession. On the other hand, the high proportion of the immigrant's own ethnicity in the municipality, that are not highly-trained (quantity with lack of quality), affects the individual negatively. Strömgren, Tammaru, Danzer, Ham, Marcińczak, Stjernström, and Lindgren (2014) also concluded that self-selection into residential neighbourhoods is very important for the workplace integration of immigrants as immigrants living in less-segregated residential neighbourhoods reduces segregation at the workplace level. Hedberg and Tammaru, (2010) concluded that while residential neighbourhoods have a relation to the segregation of immigrants in the job market in Sweden, the neighbourhood effects seem to be of less significance in larger cities that are globally competitive, due to their generally different labour market structure and also their openness to diversity. Overall, the studies

showed that segregation is negative for immigrants, and there is much to gain by promoting integration both in the society and labour market.

2.4.4 Lack of Recognition of HEI Qualification

The National Agency for Higher Education evaluates higher education programmes and decides on a recognition of qualifications of a minimum of two years (Guo & Andersson, 2006). This process does not yield a Swedish qualification rather a validation of the foreign qualifications (Faris, 2016).

Many HEI are confronted with their competencies being disparaged while others experience many obstacles to get recognition and acceptance of their qualifications to be treated equal to that of Sweden's (Emilsson, Magnusson, Törngren, & Bevelander, 2014; Guo & Andersson, 2006). Additionally, Sweetman (2004) stated that a foreign-acquired education is almost always considered to be of a lower quality than the native-acquired.

Lorentzson (2015) concluded in her study that competencies acquired in foreign countries are not acknowledged in Sweden. This impedes the rate at which the immigrants enter the job market in jobs matching their professions, and often discourage many from entering the job market at all. The study also presents cases where immigrants are forced to give up their pre-migration careers and get their work and educational qualifications downgraded. HEI experience a large discount on their higher qualifications in the labour market, which can be due to the difficulty employers experience when trying to assess and relate the actual competencies and qualifications (OECD, 2016).

3 Methodology

The research onion framework (Saunders, Thornhill & Lewis, 2012), discussed in this section, highlights this study’s methodology, approach, design, and data collection and analysis adopted to answer the research questions to fulfil the purpose of the study. The methodology of choice adopted in this research is highlighted below and each subsequent part is elaborated upon in the below sections.

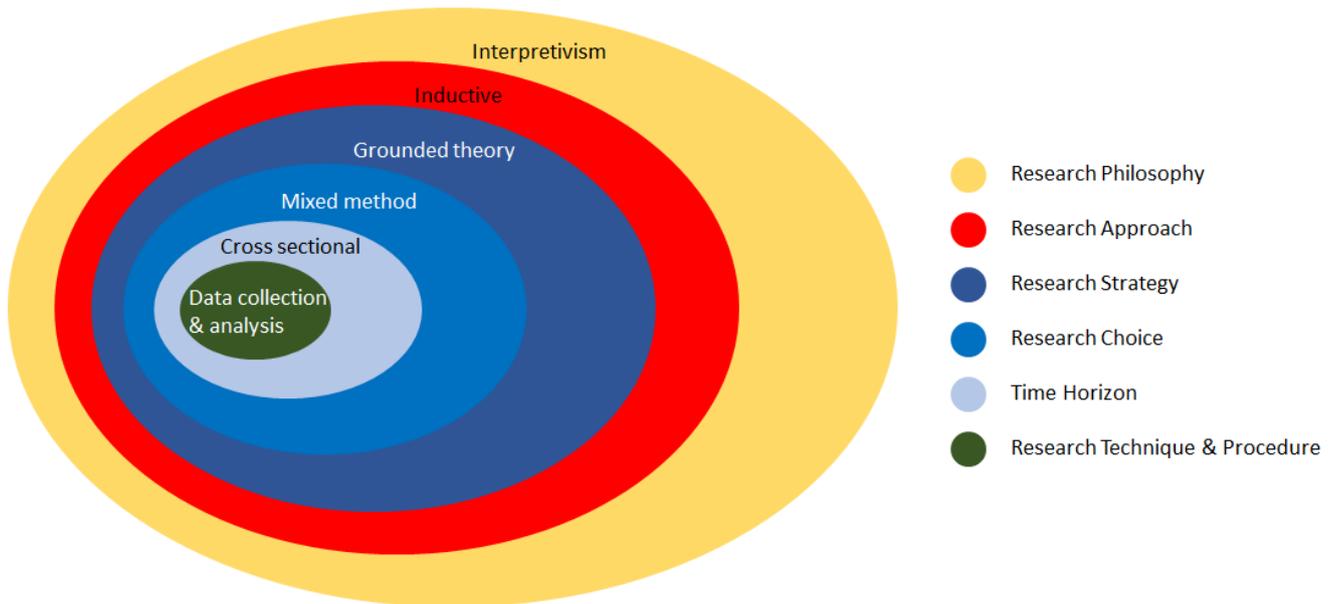


Figure 4: The study’s research onion

3.1 Research Philosophy

Even though research philosophy is the outer layer of an onion that can largely be discarded due to being mistakenly perceived as irrelevant to the core findings of a research, it is of particular importance for the researchers who need to be clear on their philosophical stances, on a given research. It particularly aids in determining the research strategy of choice as well as the overall comprehension of the subject matter (Johnson & Clark, 2006).

Given the complexity of business and managerial researches, assumptions are made on a wide plethora of environments. Therefore, it is inescapable that the assumptions made have direct effect on the way the researchers interpret the research questions as well as the data and choice of methodology in the research (Crotty, 1998).

Because the subject matter, the perception of HEI, is of a subjective nature and the interest group perceived the requirements and actions needed in varying ways according to their own view of the external factors, therefore, the ontological aspect of this thesis’s research philosophy is subjective and the epistemology is that of interpretivism (Saunders et al., 2012). This is in

line with the relativist approach as the perception is of a unique nature that is dependent on individualistic situations rather than being an absolute. Finally, as Saunders et al. (2012) stated that interpretivism is deduced from symbolic interactionism, i.e. it is in a continual process of interpretation of the social world, and given the subject matter's nature, it is also likely that the perceptions are in a constant state of change to readjust according to varying interpretations of the social world.

3.2 Research Approach

Generally, the research approach aims to collect data using mixed method, find patterns, explore hypothesis, validate it, and finally form a theory (Hinkelmann & Witschel, 2013). The research approach used in this study is of an inductive nature. The use of an inductive approach is due to the scarcity of theoretical knowledge covering a comparable perspective to the one chosen in this study, namely the perceptions of HEI, with a specific ethnicity. Finally, it is worth noting that even if inductive approach is used, forming a theory could not be achieved as the exploratory study yielded findings in development stage, and there was a time limitation.

3.3 Research Design

An exploratory research design aims to ask open questions to highlight conditions and understand the basis of a specific problem (Saunders et al., 2012). Based on this definition, the research design adopted in this study is of an exploratory nature as it aims to serve the purpose of this study by shedding light on the perceptions of the HEI regarding the requirements and actions needed to facilitate the process of them finding relevant jobs.

3.3.1 Research Strategy

Grounded theory methodology points out a researcher's choice to use grounded theory to conduct the research (Bryant & Charmaz 2007; Charmaz 2005; Corbin & Strauss 2008). The grounded theory strategy refers to a theory that is grounded and inducted from a set of data collected in a study (Saunders et al., 2012). Even though this study did not induce a theory, the analytical methods used to analyse the data fall under the grounded theory methodology.

3.3.2 Research Choice

The research choice adopted in this paper is the mixed method research. This type of research choice entitles the use of both quantitative and qualitative research methods during a single phase of the research, i.e. the data collection and analysis phase (Saunders et al., 2012). Additionally, the result of this research choice is a combination of both methods which are

quantitative and qualitative to provide better interpretation and more detailed response to the research questions when compared to adopting a mono method (Saunders et al., 2012).

3.3.3 Time Horizon

The time horizon used is cross-sectional due to the time constraint when compared to longitudinal time horizon which is time extensive. Given the subject matter of this research, the study is focused on the perception of HEI at a specific timing “snapshot” which is the timing during which this study was conducted by posing the questionnaire as well as the series of interviews conducted over a short period of time (Saunders et al., 2012).

3.4 Data Collection Method

3.4.1 Background Information

Data collection phase was a critical phase of this research and a lot of time was consumed before the required and relevant set of data was collected. A key challenge relating to data collection was finding the targeted group of respondents, who match the set of criteria for the relevance to the research. Therefore, early on in December 2016 the researchers created a closed group on Facebook under the name “Högutbildade Syrier i Sverige” or “Highly-educated Syrians in Sweden”, to gather a sample of the Syrian HEI living in Sweden in one place and, therefore, enable data collection for the research.

The Facebook group was regularly publicized across other Facebook groups where large populations of Syrians in Sweden mingle. The researchers carefully screened the profiles of the members who joined the group to ensure the research is targeting the population relevant to the research questions. This was done by checking that Facebook accounts represent genuine persons, and the information in the accounts indicate that the persons are from Syria and currently living in Sweden. Approximately 15-20% of requests to join the group were rejected for not matching the required criteria. Between January and April 2017, the Facebook group had more than 700 members who were primarily HEI from Syria and currently live in Sweden. The group initially served as a platform to share knowledge among the Syrian HEI on their endeavour of getting their certificates attested, finding a job, taking relevant courses, and sharing personal advice on different aspects. Ultimately, the group was the pool from which the researchers could conduct their quantitative and qualitative data collection. For the purpose of the quantitative and qualitative research, the criteria set for the eligibility to participate in the research were: 1) to have a minimum of a bachelor's degree in any discipline, 2) to have come from Syria during the past few years, and 3) to be currently living in Sweden. These criteria were explicitly stated to the participants in the quantitative and qualitative data collection phase, and participants in the quantitative questionnaire were requested to confirm their eligibility and to participate only if the criteria apply to them.

Finally, the researchers conducting this study, share some common characteristics with the HEI and speak the same language. This has been useful in effectively communicating and accessing valuable information. Consequently, this enabled the researchers to obtain a deeper understanding when collecting the Syrian HEI's point of view.

3.4.2 Quantitative Data Collection Method

Sampling in this quantitative research of the study was used to overcome challenges like time constraints and the impracticality associated with surveying the entire population. Additionally, as noted by Barnett (2002), using samples can possibly result in higher accuracy than using a census since less time will be needed to collect data from a sample while more time can be dedicated to designing the plot of data collection and analysis, and the presentation of the collected data and findings. For the sake of sampling, non-probability sampling method was used. The questionnaire, found in Appendix A, was internet-mediated and self-completed where the respondents were among those members who joined the Facebook group. Due to the use of non-probability sampling, it is known that statistical inferences cannot be made (Saunders et al., 2012). For this study, volunteer self-selection sampling technique was used. The number of completed questionnaire responses was 121, gathered between March 25th - April 10th, 2017. One duplicate response was excluded and therefore the final number of responses considered for further analysis was 120.

3.4.3 Qualitative Data Collection Method

According to Saunders et al. (2012), for sampling used in a qualitative method, such as interviews where the aim is to elaborate on common attributes from the input of a homogenous target group, the minimum sample size ranges from 4-12, where 12 interviews would suffice according to Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006). The qualitative research focused on the Syrian HEI who are *currently employed* in Sweden within their scope of studies or expertise. Given that the target interviewees are homogenous in nature, i.e. Syrian, highly-educated, immigrants to Sweden, currently employed, etc., and due to the time constraint, the number of interviews conducted was five interviews.

Primarily, the interviewees were purposively selected according to the researcher's own judgment (judgmental sampling) to ensure relevance to the research questions is established (Saunders et al., 2012), and that the samples would be particularly informative (Neuman, 2005). The selection of the interviewees was based on their employment status, where they need to be among the employed HEI within the field of their studies or expertise. Secondly, they were selected based on their availability, and helpfulness. Four out of the five interviewees were among those in the Facebook group for Syrian HEI in Sweden who showed interest in participating in the research while the fifth interviewee was approached through contacts from outside the Facebook group.

The qualitative research was based on semi-structured interviews (King, 2004) where some questions were planned but the interviews would vary to extract the most relevant information

with regards to the research questions. The reason semi-structured interviews were used is due to the advantage that such interviews promote two-way communication (Galletta, 2012) between the interviewer and the interviewee, which encourages follow-up questions that can best relate to this research's questions of the study (Kallio, Pietilä & Kangasniemi, 2016). The interviews guide used can be found in Appendix B.

The interviews were conducted over the phone due to the remoteness of the interviewees who lived in different cities across Sweden and took place upon agreement with the interviewees on timings convenient to them. A brief introduction was presented to familiarize the interviewees with the main areas to be discussed before the start of the interview as the interview questions were not shared with the interviewees earlier. The interview guide was designed to cover three key areas to explore, namely HEI's job-related information, requirements needed and channels used to get a job, and advice to facilitate the employment of HEI in Sweden.

According to the interviewees' responses, some questions expanded to elaborate on the experiences of the employed Syrian HEI in getting employment in Sweden and their perceptions of the requirements that facilitated their entrance to the job market in Sweden. The strengths of using semi-structure interviews, as listed by Hardon, Hodgkin, and Frelse (2004), were apparent throughout the interviews such as: as in-depth information, gaining insights on the perspectives and experiences of the interviewee, and the ability to revert to the core questions of the interviews whilst occasionally wandering off topic to extract more insights.

3.5 Data Analysis

3.5.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

The data collected from the survey questionnaire was not numerical in nature and cannot be classified by only two sets. Moreover, since it cannot be placed in a ranking order, the data classifies as descriptive/nominal data. The analysis for such data is dependent on the number of occurrences or frequency of responses (Saunders et al., 2012). Since the majority of the questions in the survey are of a descriptive nature, most of the analyses used for the survey questionnaire yielded graphical and descriptive representations of the data. For questions, such as those collecting the opinions regarding a set of challenges, the responses were compiled and ranked in a descending or ascending order, i.e. most challenging and least challenging. Additionally, where patterns could be inferred, proxies were used to compare a group of respondents for drawing comparative relationships that would be later used in the study's discussion for making a point.

3.5.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

Analysing qualitative data gathered from interviews is daunting and poses a challenge mainly since the data collected is ultimately subject to the interpretation and social constructionism of the researchers (Saunders et al., 2012). At the same time, Saunders et al., (2012) stated that: “*qualitative data are likely to be characterized by their richness and fullness*” (p. 546) so the researchers aimed to explore and clarify the data while maintaining some balance between structure and interpretation. Five phone interviews were conducted and notes were taken whilst the interview was taking place. Because transcribing interviews is a time-consuming activity where one hour of audio takes from 6 to 10 hours to transcribe, the time was reduced using data sampling technique, where only the sections of direct relevance and importance to the research questions were noted (Saunders et al., 2012). The data was further categorized descriptively according to its relevance to the general theme of the study and ultimately the research questions.

To achieve the research objective of answering the research questions, relevant means to analyse and present the findings, according to the researcher’s best knowledge, were used. Additionally, the main point from incorporating the qualitative analysis has been to explore the perceptions of Syrian HEI who are employed to get a deeper understanding of the requirements, job channels used, and suggestions from their perspective.

Finally, the researchers drew on the benefit of combining the narrative analysis along with the semi-structured format. It is worth noting, however, that narrative analysis here means that the participating interviewees narrated their experiences as a response to the questions posed by the interviewers, which is different from narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is collecting responses as a whole complete answer without segmenting the responses into pieces of data (Saunders et al., 2012).

3.6 Data Quality

Because the quality and seriousness of a study is directly linked to its authenticity and reliability, the researchers adhered to the various quality criteria governing the quality of research. Additionally, since the subject matter of this study is based on an interpretivist and relativist epistemology, the quality criteria that were ensured is not that of a positivist researcher, i.e. reliability, construct validity, internal validity, and external validity (Saunders et al., 2012). The subsequent section clarifies the relevant quality criteria used.

3.6.1 Quantitative Data Quality

For the purpose of quantitatively testing the perceptions of the HEI, the questionnaire was distributed in a closed Facebook group that was moderated to ensure that the members satisfied the criteria of the interest group discussed earlier. The questionnaire was scripted in Arabic, and

translated into English. Before testing the questionnaire, it was tried over various platforms and browsers to ensure compatibility. Afterwards, the Arabic version that was used in the actual survey went through a pilot experiment. It was sent out to various people to get their feedback regarding factors such as the clearness of the questions, the interest level of the survey, and whether there were any mistakes or areas for improvement.

Moreover, the non-probability sampling criteria were followed and the sample was not subject to any biases on behalf of the researchers as the survey was internet mediated, and the respondents were volunteers who both self-selected and self-completed the survey. Therefore, generalizations can be drawn from the responses but not on statistical basis (Saunders et al., 2012). Finally, the responses were filtered and checked for any discrepancies or duplicates, and one duplicate response was found and excluded.

3.6.2 Qualitative Data Quality

According to Saunders et al. (2012), the aspects to take into consideration when addressing qualitative data quality for semi-structured interviews are reliability, forms of bias, generalizability, and validity. In this section, the researchers address each one of these criteria to demonstrate the authenticity of the study to the readers.

Because this is an interpretivist study that is prone to subjectivism, the reliability of the qualitative study is best defended with the argument that it is not necessary to be repeatable because it reflects in-depth findings of a reality at the time the study was conducted, and the data collected is dynamic and subject to change (Saunders et al. 2012). The researchers attribute the choice of semi-structured interviews to the fact that the subject matter is of a complex and dynamic nature that is best explored using the flexibility that characterizes semi-structured interviews (Saunders et al. 2012). Finally, to demonstrate the reliability of the research, notes on the choice of this research's design and strategy, and collected data are kept. These notes can be shared to provide fellow researchers, who are interested in re-examining this research, with the essential data collected to be equipped to re-examine this study.

The researchers followed the measures provided by Saunders et al. (2012) to prevent any bias from either the interviewers or the interviewees. Firstly, it was ensured that adequate knowledge was gained on the culture of the interviewees. Secondly, the level of information provided by the interviewers to the interviewees ensured the content was relevant to the subject matter. Thirdly, closed and open questions were asked in a non-leading fashion. Fourthly, it was constantly communicated to the interviewees that the interviewer is attentive and listening actively. Finally, the data was accurately recorded in the form of notes to ensure proper extraction for relevant information would follow.

When it comes to generalizability, a limitation of this study is that generalizations based on statistical backgrounds cannot be made due to the fact that the sampling technique used was non-probability sampling. As noted earlier, even if generalizations on statistical grounds cannot be made, the study draws on the perceptions of a niche group, the Syrian HEI, and found commonalities that can therefore be reflective of the larger body of the Syrian HEI.

Finally, from a qualitative validity perspective, the semi-structured interviews posed were advantageous because the researchers used them as channels for clarifying the themes of the questions, the responses, and the context through which statements were made.

3.7 Limitations

The study was based on conducting a survey and interviewing a sample of Syrian HEI in Sweden. Due to the non-probability sampling technique, where the sample would not have a similar characteristic of the whole population of Syrian HEI in Sweden, statistical inferences cannot be made.

Some of the biases in this study are perceived to relate to participant's bias, researcher's bias, and the biases of the used media. The researchers followed a methodological approach and addressed these biases throughout the study. For example, the use of self-selection sampling prevents the "homogenous group" effect that snowball sampling creates (Saunders et al., 2012). Additionally, the researchers were cautious not to lead the interviewees, by posing open questions and minimally interfering only when elaboration is needed. Finally, the researchers used multiple media sources to limit media bias from influencing the research.

Moreover, the survey and the interviews were conducted in Arabic, the mother tongue language of the participants, and the responses were translated to English. Translating the text and quotes provided by the participants includes the risk of not precisely conveying the original meaning by the participants. However, the researchers have considered both the literal translation and the implied meanings to convey the most accurate meaning made by the participants.

While the survey was distributed in the Facebook group and due consideration was made to only include those respondents relevant for the research, there was still a risk of receiving responses from respondents who do not qualify for the survey based on the set criteria for the research. This is primarily due to the difficulty to perfectly ensure that every participant matched the set criteria for participation, given the self-select and self-complete questionnaire. However, the researchers stressed in the first page of the questionnaire that all participants must comply with the conditions of the survey and to participate only if they match the set criteria.

4 Analysis and Findings

4.1 Quantitative Findings

This section presents the findings of the quantitative research that is based on 120 questionnaire responses. The findings are divided into two sections: 1) Syrian HEI participants' profiles, and 2) Syrian HEI participants' perceptions of the Swedish job market.

4.1.1 Syrian HEI Participants' Profile

Participants' Demographics

Detailed graphical representation of the data is provided in Appendix C. The summary of the participants' demographics are as follows:

- The participants were 59% males, and 41% females.
- 86% of the participants belonged to the age group of 25 - 44 years.
- 117 out of 120 participants were Syrians and Palestinian-Syrians. Three participants have another nationality and were not excluded since their profiles were very similar to the Syrian HEI participants.
- 76% of the participants have a bachelor's degree as their highest attained degree and remaining percentage has post bachelor's degrees.
- Engineers represented the largest group (19%), followed by art/literature degree holders (16.7%) and business degree holders (15%). The rest of the participants hold degrees in various majors including medicine, pharmacy, law, computer science, social science, and others.
- 74% of the total participants moved to Sweden between 2014-2015, during the peak immigration period to Sweden. Around 13% moved to Sweden in 2016 and onwards.
- 36% of the participants live in the largest cities Stockholm, Göteborg, Malmö, Örebro. The majority of participants (64%) live in other 57 cities across Sweden.

HEI's Employment Profile

- 12.5% of the participants (15 participants) were employed while the remaining 87.5% were unemployed.
- One-third of the employed participants (five participants) have jobs within their studies and/or expertise, two participants have jobs close to their scope of studies, and the rest have jobs that are out of their studies or expertise.
- 10% of the unemployed were optimistic and think they may get jobs in less than 6 months. 55% think they may get jobs after 6 months and before two years. The remaining 36% think they may not get employment before two years.
- One-third of the unemployed participants think they may get employed within their scope of studies, while the two-thirds did not think so or were unsure.

4.1.2 Syrian HEI Participants' Perceptions of the Swedish Job Market

This section presents the key requirements and suggested actions that the Syrian HEI perceive needed to facilitate their employment in the Swedish job market. The perceived requirements and suggestion are thought to be arising from the perceived challenges hindering HEI's employment in Sweden. Therefore, it is important to understand how the Syrian HEI perceive the challenges and barriers for their employment. These employment challenges could be structural or individual in nature (Singley, 2003). Examples of structural barriers in general can be related to recognition of qualifications, workplace discrimination, labour market regulations, government policies. Individual barriers can be related to deficiencies in skills, lack of networks, lack of education or experience.

HEI's Perception of the Employment Challenges in Sweden

A list of nine key employment challenges facing immigrants in Sweden was created based on challenges addressed in different research studies and reports in Sweden. The participants were asked to assess how they perceive these challenges. The list of challenges based on (Alaj, 2005; Faris, 2016; Nasrabadi, 2014; OECD, 2014) are shown in the below graph with "weighted average" scores that were used to quantify the assessment level of the different challenges based on HEI's perception. These weighted average scores are only indicative, and used for ranking the challenges from highest to lowest.

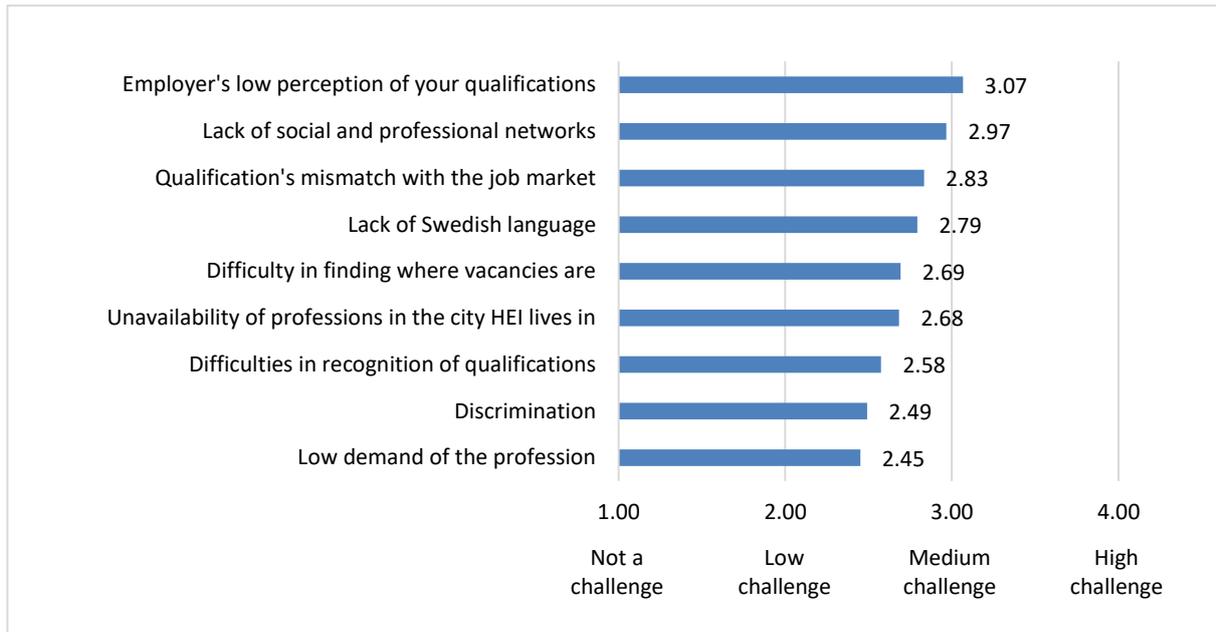


Figure 5: HEI's assessment of the employment challenges in Sweden

Data shows that the employer's low perception about HEI's qualifications is perceived to be the biggest challenge and considered between a medium and a high challenge. Building social networks appears to be the second biggest challenge. Other challenges such as the skills mismatch, lack of language skills, difficulty in finding the vacancies, availability of job in the living cities, and the recognition of qualifications all came next and were rated as low to medium challenges. Discrimination was perceived as one of the lowest challenges for the participants' employment.

Participants through the survey had the chance to provide any challenges they perceived beyond the provided list. Some notable challenges mentioned by the HEI participants were:

- The new regulation introduced in 2016 making the residency permit temporary (for 13 months) discourages employers to employ immigrants with temporary permits.
- The bureaucratic and slow government procedures.
- The age of an immigrant could be an obstacle for the old-aged.
- The housing problem in the country that affected the feeling of settlement and ability to look for jobs.
- Stereotyping against women with headscarf.
- The lack of transportation for kids to and from school which is an obstacle when taking up a job or committing to it.

HEI's Perception of the Most Responsible Entity for Their Employment

The participants were asked to identify the entity that has the *biggest* responsibility for their employment in Sweden.

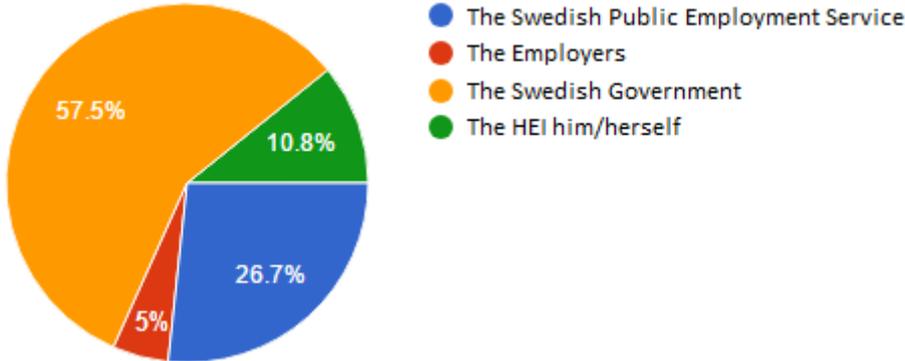


Figure 6: HEI's perception of the entities with biggest responsibility for their employment

Around 84% of participants perceived that the government including the Swedish Public Employment Service have the biggest responsibility in the employment of HEI in Sweden while only 11% indicated that the HEI themselves have the highest responsibility. This perception signals a dependency by HEI on the government to facilitate their employment. This can be an indication of the seriousness of the barriers and particularly the structural ones, that need government involvement and might not be easily tackled by HEI themselves.

HEI's Perception of the Effectiveness of Various Entities and Program

Participants were asked to assess how they perceive the level of effectiveness of a number of programs and entities to facilitate the employment of HEI in Sweden. A weighted average score for each entity/program in terms of effectiveness was calculated and assigned based on the responses of the participants. These weighted average scores are only indicative, and used for ranking from highest to lowest.

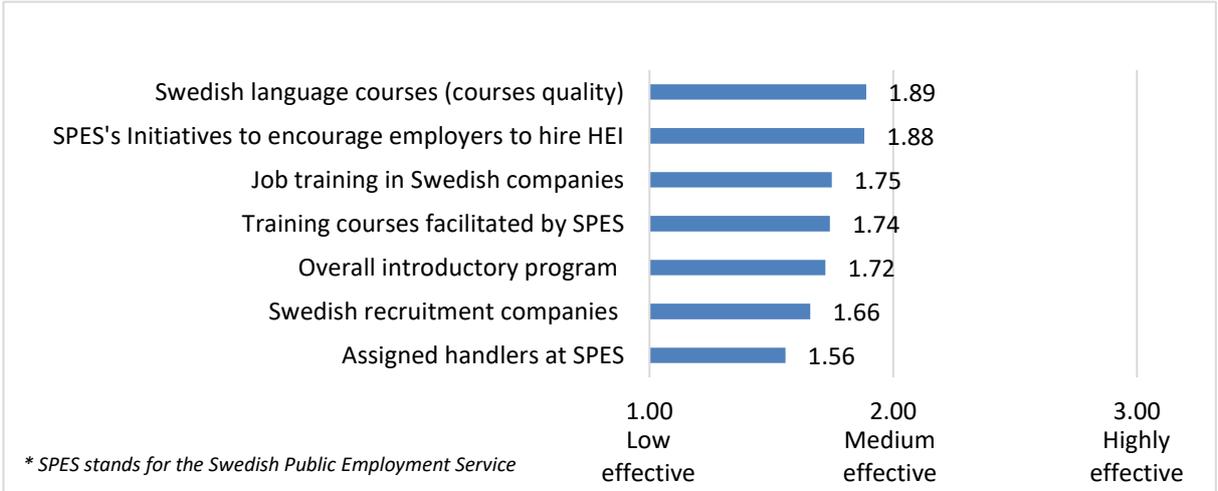


Figure 7: HEI's perception of the effectiveness of various entities and programs

Participants rated, on average, the Swedish language courses enabling them to learn the language of the country, and the initiatives by the Swedish Public Employment Service to encourage employers to hire immigrants as the most effective programs for their employment. However, their effectiveness is still perceived between low to medium. On the other hand, the participants gave the handlers at the Swedish Public Employment Service the lowest rating in terms of effectiveness and almost 50% of the participants rated their handler as “low effective”. All programs arranged by the Swedish Public Employment Service such as the initiatives to encourage employers, job training, the introduction programs were rated higher in effectiveness than the handlers at the Swedish Public Employment Service. These handlers are assumed to be responsible for assisting immigrants in the process of getting employment in Sweden. This variation in the perceived effectiveness of the different elements of the Swedish Public Employment Service can be an area for further exploration by interested bodies.

HEI’s Perception of the Seriousness of Various Entities Concerning HEI’s Employment:

Participants were asked to assess their handlers at the Swedish Public Employment Service, the Swedish employers, and the recruitment companies based on their seriousness in the employment of HEI. A weighted average score for each entity was calculated and assigned based on the responses of the participants. These weighted average scores are only indicative, and used for ranking from highest to lowest.

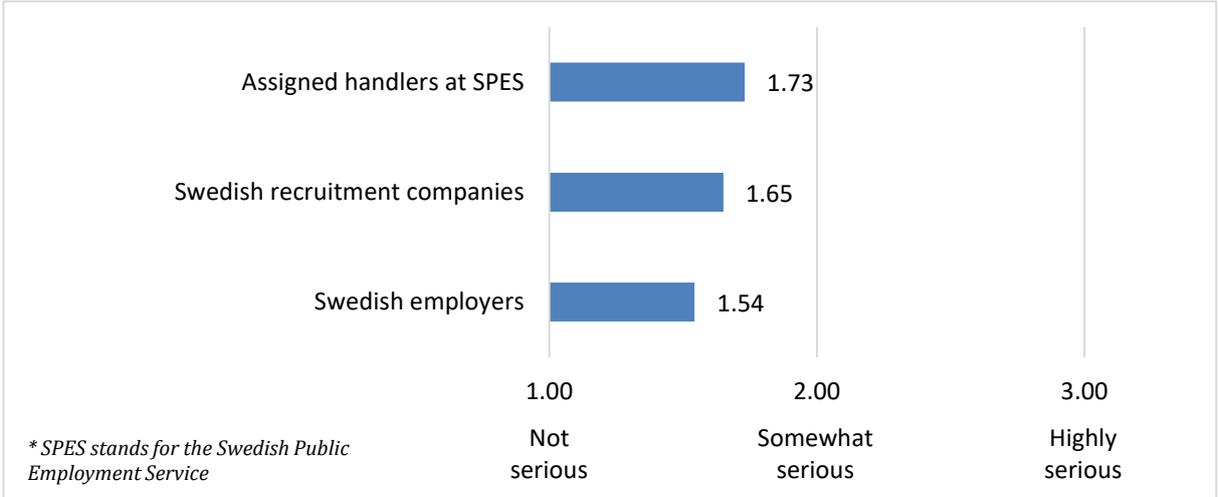


Figure 8: HEI’s perception of the seriousness of various entities

While all three entities in the graph had a low perceived seriousness, the handlers were rated higher than the recruitment companies and employers in terms of their seriousness concerning the employment of HEI. The overall low seriousness in these entities can provide an indication of the trust level of the HEI in these entities which would affect their interaction with them based on HEI’s cognitive perception of these entities.

HEI's Perception of the Key Requirements Needed for Employment in Sweden

Participants were asked to provide the key requirements needed for their employment in Sweden. The different requirements mentioned by the participants were classified into 12 categories as follows:



Figure 9: HEI's perception of the key requirements for facilitating their employment

These requirements were analysed and the frequency of mentioning each requirement by the participants was identified. The requirements were then ranked based on the frequency of mentioning them from highest to lowest as follows:

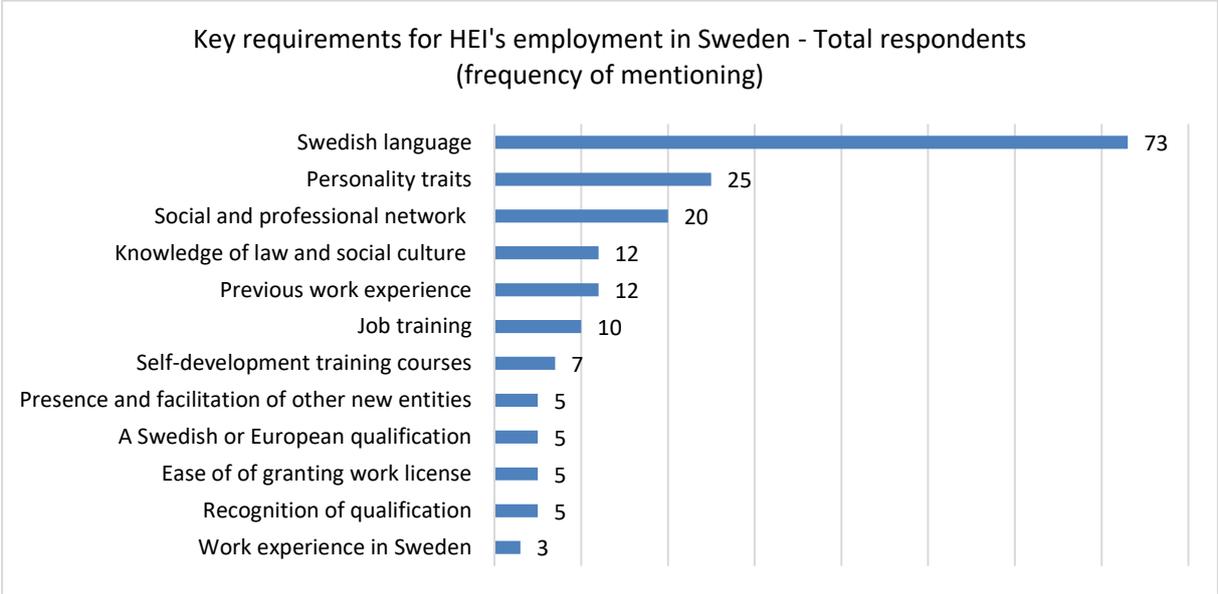


Figure 10: Frequency of mentioning the requirements by the HEI participants

Learning the Swedish language was the most mentioned requirement for getting employment in Sweden. It was also mentioned several times that a reasonable language proficiency level is sufficient which implies that high proficiency is not crucial for employment. The second most mentioned requirement was personal traits which were exemplified by participants as being

persistent, self-confident, proactive, patient, flexible in terms of relocating and accepting lower level positions but within the field of studies, enthusiastic, etc. The third most frequently mentioned requirement was the availability of a social and professional network. The rest of requirements were mentioned by a lower number of participant (3-12 times).

Some requirements, such as work experience in Sweden, recognition of qualifications and ease of granting licenses to practice their own professions or having a Swedish or European qualification, were noticed to primarily pertain to participants who have medical degrees. The medical and medical-related degree holders such as doctors, pharmacists, and dentists, seem to be facing challenges related to getting their qualifications certified and obtaining licenses to practice their profession, due to the stringent requirements imposed on such regulated professions in Sweden based on the responses.

The overall requirements were further analysed based on the employment status of the HEI participants. The participants were divided into two groups based on employment status in Sweden:

- Group 1: Employed and previously employed participants, (25 participants),
- Group 2: Non-previously employed participants (95 participants).

The requirements mentioned by the two groups were gathered to identify any differences and trends in the requirements mentioned by the two groups. The motive behind this was to check if the employed or previously employed participants have different perceptions on requirements based on their experiences from working in Sweden compared to those who never got employed in Sweden.

To have a comparison between the two groups a proxy was made by dividing the number of mentioned requirements for a group by the number of participants in that group. For example, Group 1 consisting of 25 participants mentioned the Swedish language, as a requirement for getting a job in Sweden, 18 times. Then, the proxy was calculated by dividing 18 over 25 to arrive at 0.72 or 72% (i.e. 72% of the participants in Group 1 mentioned Swedish language as a requirement). The same calculation was done for all mentioned requirements for both groups. The higher the proxy for a requirement is for one group, the higher the relative importance of the requirement is perceived to be for that group. The proxies for each requirement for both groups are presented as follows:

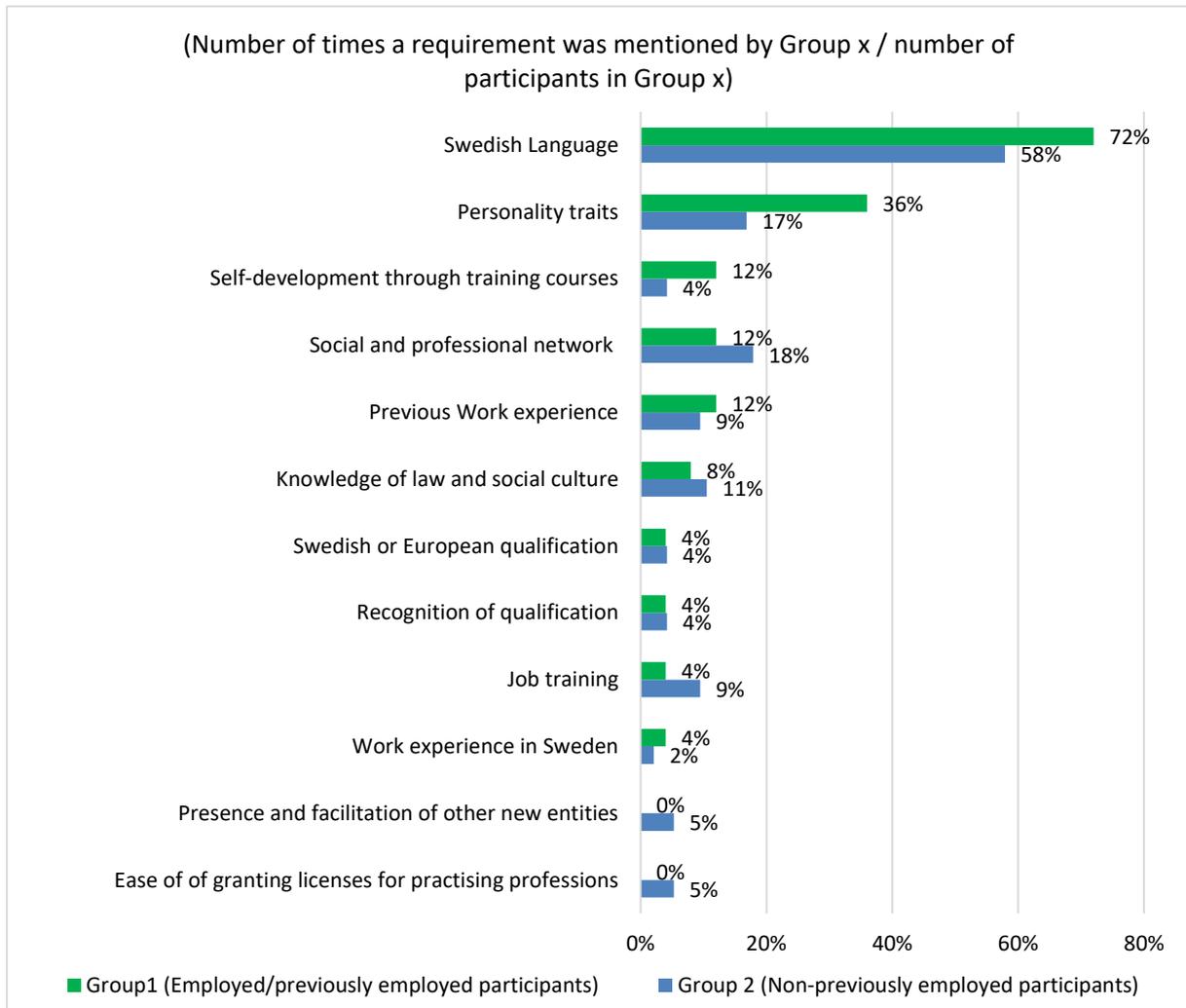


Figure 11: HEI's perception of the requirements based on their employment status

From the above graph, Group 1 mentioned five requirements relatively more than Group 2. These are the Swedish language, personality traits, previous work experience, work experience in Sweden, and self-development through training courses. Group 2, on the other hand, mentioned certain requirements more than Group 1, such as networks and social integration, presence and support of other entities, job training in companies facilitated by the Swedish Public Employment Service, and ease of granting licenses for work by concerned authorities. By looking at the nature of each set of requirements emphasized by each group, there is a sign of a variation in the perception based on employment status. Group 1 participants mentioned relatively more the requirements that are dependent on personal effort, such as gaining language skills, having good personality traits, and self-development. On the other hand, Group 2 mentioned relatively more the requirements that have a higher dependency on other entities to get a job in Sweden, such as networks, facilitation of other entities, and job training.

Suggested Actions for Facilitating HEI’s Employment:

The participants were asked to suggest practical actions to stakeholders that aim to facilitate the employment of HEI in Sweden. The suggested actions were collected and carefully reviewed. These suggestions were initially classified into two groups, namely relevant suggestions, and irrelevant suggestions. The suggestions should provide a specific and clear actions in order to be relevant. The suggestions that provide a general or vague ideas were considered irrelevant and discarded. Examples of irrelevant suggestions provided in the survey were: “*The experience of HEI should be considered*” or “*Choose the best and open opportunities for potential capabilities*”.

The total number of relevant suggestions were found to be 79 suggestions addressing different areas, these areas were used to categorize these suggestions. It should be noted that some suggestions could fall into two or more different areas. However, these suggestions were placed in the areas to which they are closely related. The following graph illustrates the suggestion areas and the number of suggestions in each:

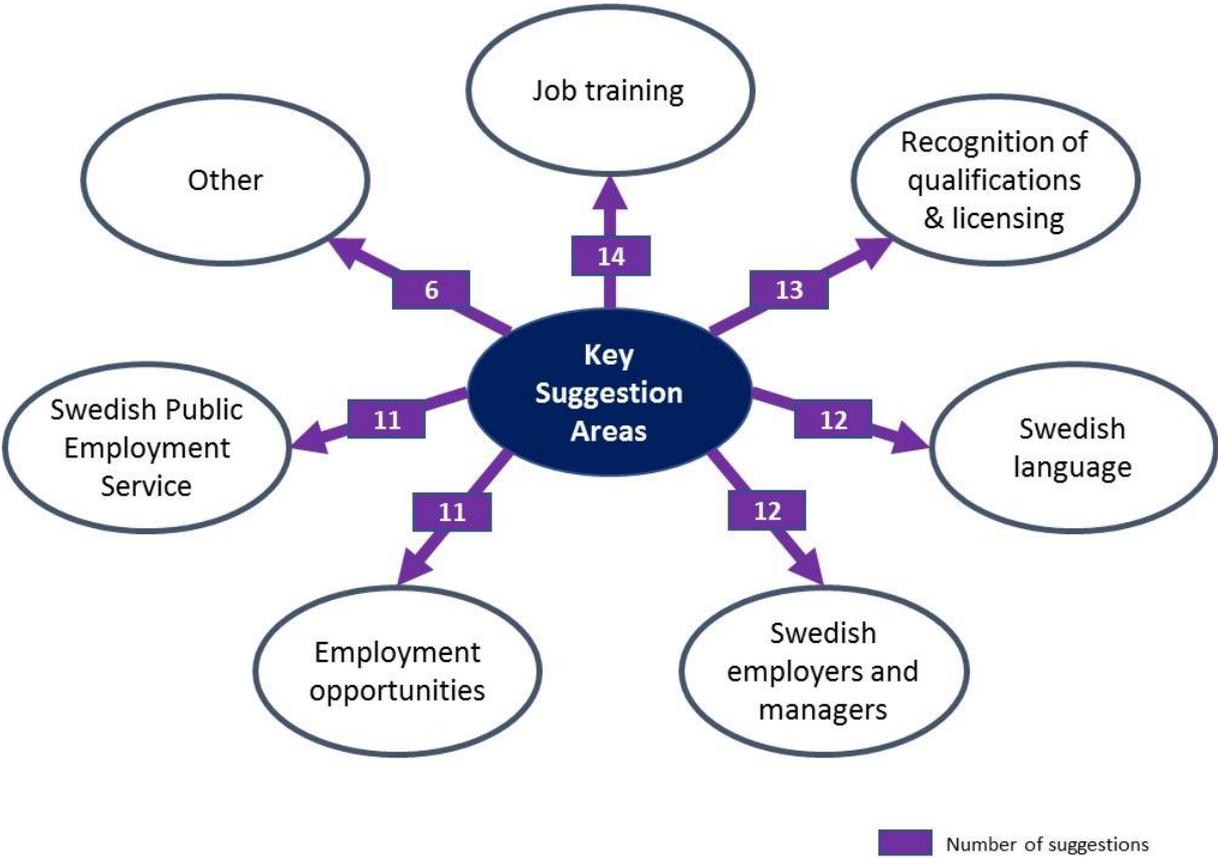


Figure 12: Key suggestion areas for facilitating HEI’s employment in Sweden

There were many similar suggestions provided by the participants. These suggestions in each area were combined to provide more comprehensive suggestion themes, as follows:

Table 1: Main themes of HEI's suggestions

Suggestions Areas		Main Themes for Suggestions
1	Job training	Provide and facilitate more and serious job training opportunities with private companies as well as government organizations.
2	Recognition of qualifications and licensing	Ease, facilitate and expedite the recognition of HEI's qualification and the process for granting work licenses/permissions particularly for medical degree holders.
3	Swedish language	Improve the quality of the Swedish language courses so it is more standardized, specialized, and intensive for the HEI and assign more effective and experienced language teachers.
4	Swedish employers and managers	Increase the communication between the HEI and Swedish employers and managers through exhibitions, field visits, forums, etc. to improve their awareness of HEI's qualifications and encourage them to employ HEI.
5	Employment opportunities	Increase the visibility of the available job opportunities for HEI and increase the job opportunities whether permanent or temporary within the government entities using a quota system for employing HEI.
6	Swedish Public Employment Service	Increase the effectiveness of the Swedish Public Employment Service by providing more serious initiatives and assign experienced and specialized handlers. Establish a more specialized and effective entity to take over the Swedish Public Employment Service's responsibilities.
7	Other	Provide the basic needs for HEI such as housing while fighting illegal labour and housing market.

4.2 Qualitative Findings

This section provides the findings from the qualitative research that included five interviews with employed Syrian HEI within their scope of studies. The interest behind interviewing *employed* HEI was to get insights from those who successfully managed to get relevant jobs and understand what requirements they perceived needed and facilitated their employment in Sweden. The list of interviewees and their information is outlined as follows:

Table 2: Interviewees' profiles

No.	Interview Date	Interviewee*	Gender	Age	Degree, Major	Profession	Interview Duration
1	15 April 2017	Interviewee 1	Male	38	BSc, Physical Education	Pedagogue for immigrant children	24 min
2	16 April 2017	Interviewee 2	Male	52	MSc, Pharmacy	Pharmacist	35 min
3	16 April 2017	Interviewee 3	Male	42	BSc, Civil Engineering	Entrepreneur Engineer	40 min
4	18 April 2017	Interviewee 4	Female	43	BSc, English Literature	Coach and Job Matching for Arab Immigrants	29 min
5	21 April 2017	Interviewee 5	Female	33	MSc, English Literature	Swedish and English substitute teacher	22 min

* Interviewees were made anonymous for the preference of some of them.

The findings from the qualitative research are divided into three main themes: 1) channels for getting employment, 2) requirements needed for HEI's employment, 3) advice and tips by employed HEI.

4.2.1 Channels for Getting Employment

When it comes to how the HEI have gotten their employment, *Interviewee 1* got his employment through an arrangement by the Swedish Public Employment Service. He visited the Swedish Public Employment Service to express his dissatisfaction with the quality, pace, and seriousness of the SFI program. An activity coordinator working there overheard him and arranged for him to meet with a manager for an opportunity that later yielded employment.

Also through the Swedish Public Employment Service, *Interviewee 2* concurred that him getting employed was the result of a job training opportunity that the Swedish Public Employment Service provided him with. He stated that after 6 months of job training within his profession, he got recognition for his qualifications and approval to practice his pharmaceutical job. The job training was through the Swedish Public Employment Service, which also assisted him with all the paperwork necessary to get approved for practicing his profession in Sweden. Therefore, it can be inferred that getting job training and approval from the municipality was vital for *Interviewee 2* to get into employment, which was facilitated for him by the Swedish Public Employment Service.

Interviewee 3 shared a different experience. Upon his arrival in Sweden, he lived in Vansbro. It was there that he met another Swedish engineer who later asked *Interviewee 3* to work with him in a flexible (on and off) job related to real estate and land registration work. For *Interviewee 3* second and full-time employment, he explains how it was an initiative he took himself. After the Swedish Public Employment Service arranged for him to have a 15-days job training in a construction company with no job guaranteed afterwards, he contacted another branch within his specialty, of the same company for employment. They replied with an offer of 2-months training after which he got employed. The Swedish Public Employment Service were initially against him doing the 2-months additional training as they had arranged for him another 15- days training with a different company.

As for the employment channel for *Interviewee 4*, it can be attributed in entirety to the personal effort and the initiative and network of the interviewee herself. *Interviewee 4* narrated her employment endeavour by stating that she has been sending her CV for almost two years but without any luck. She took the initiative by contacting a colleague from SFI who had relatives in a Syrian refugee camp. Accordingly, she went to the camp and inquired about the possibility of getting employed and she provided her CV, which demonstrated her experience and involvement in social help and coaching, two weeks later she started working. As for her second job, it was also due to networking. A good friend of hers recommended her, for her role, to the manager of a new Swedish company who gave her the job.

As for *Interviewee 5*, she explained how she got her jobs through the Swedish Public Employment Service. According to her story, her handler at the Swedish Public Employment Service was constantly and actively arranging meetings for her with employers who are requesting substitute teachers. Her first job was a 3-month training at a company. Her second job was also arranged for by the Swedish Public Employment Service where she worked half time (50%) as English/Swedish substitute teacher for immigrants at a language school for a period of one year. Finally, for her third job, her employer had been sending her to different

schools to teach as part time or half time. Eventually, one of the schools expressed their interest in her for (60%) workload while she's studying for a teacher degree.

4.2.2 Requirements Needed for HEI's Employment

The second main theme for the interviews' findings revolved around the opinion of the interviewees regarding what requirements were needed to facilitate their employment in Sweden based on their own experience.

Interviewee 1 stated that:

"The job training done in Sweden was of extreme importance towards my employment"

Recognition of the qualifications and experience was the second most important factor to the interviewee followed by his ability to speak three languages (Arabic, English and Swedish).

"During my interview with the manager who later gave me the job, he was particularly interested in my past experience and my ability to speak 3 languages".

As for *Interviewee 2*, who was a pharmacist, he believed the requirement to him getting employed was not Swedish language, even though it was of some importance as he needed a sufficient level of Swedish skills to be able to communicate with pharmacy visitors and patients. He added:

"What was of extreme importance to me was to get permission to practice my profession, as it is a regulated profession, and to demonstrate a good attitude, high level of knowledge, and competency in my field of work. Showing certificates of completed trainings and experiences in Sweden, that pertain to my profession, was highly appreciated by my employer as they demonstrated my awareness of the system, and familiarity with the work environment. Accordingly, my manager gave me the job"

Civil engineer, *Interviewee 3*, said that his past experience and competency in various projects relevant to the job, were the main basis for him getting employed. On the other hand, even if he got his qualifications recognized, he said that the employer did not ask or check for any recognition of certificates. He stated:

"During my interview, I was told that I claim to have past experience with these different projects [...] so the company told me that they, also, as a company claim that they are a good company [...] and to validate each other's claims, they invited me for a two-month job training that would be followed by a full-time job".

As for language requirements, *Interviewee 3* stated that it depends mainly on the company's language and the job functions and requirements.

“If part of your job demands that you write reports, and conduct meetings in Swedish, then your level of Swedish language is important and your fluency in English would be of less relevance”.

According to him, networking, whether with Swedes or Syrians, was not as nearly as important as competency and experience.

Interviewee 4, who has a bachelor in English literature and past experience working in the social help, stated that high proficiency in Swedish was not an important requirement for her getting a job. She noted that her employment was particularly linked to personal attributes.

“Being motivated, proactive, and willing to take initiatives are the main qualities that employers look for. One cannot just sit waiting for employment to come around but rather actively search and apply independently [...] for example this new job I have is for a newly established Swedish company and being proactive, and on the run to execute the various tasks the company needs is crucial.”

Interviewee 4 stated that her employer was mainly interested in the vast experience she had with coaching and previous social work outside, as well as in Sweden for a year.

Interviewee 5, who holds a bachelor degree in English literature and currently studies to become a licensed teacher in Sweden, stressed on the importance of past experience, but specifically in Sweden.

“My employer was impressed with my CV [...] They were interested in my work experience in Sweden more than my work experience outside Sweden. I believe it is because they wanted to make sure that I know the rules and regulations relating to my profession in Sweden [...] my previous employer requested to see a certificate of my qualifications”.

Because *Interviewee 5* works as a teacher for immigrants mainly, requirements that were critical for her was her knowledge of the 3 languages: Arabic, English and Swedish. She also adds

“I got assistance from a university colleague where I am currently studying, to write an appealing and professional CV and cover letter [...] the employer expressed that they were impressed with my CV and cover letter”

4.2.3 Advice and Tips by Employed HEI

The third theme that findings from interviews revealed fall under the advice by the interviewees to HEI to help them get relevant jobs. Advice were collected from all interviewees and summarized as follows:

- Stop perceiving themselves (HEI) as immigrants and stick to employment within their specialty.
- Demonstrate good personality traits such as persistence, good attitude, and self-confidence. Be serious about employment and maintain integrity.
- Rely on yourself and work hard by looking for opportunities.
- Pressure the Swedish Public Employment Service to help you.
- Grow a network in your community and professional societies and introduce yourself
- Familiarize yourself with the system and regulations in Sweden
- Apply vigorously for job trainings at many companies.
- Get as much Swedish certifications (courses, experience, etc.) as possible
- Create an appealing CV and Cover letter.
- Be active and constantly send job applications.
- Follow-up and be persistent after sending CV's or contacting an employer.
- Work on interview skills.
- Be flexible about salary and starting in a junior position in the beginning, as long as it is within one's own specialty to get practical experience in Sweden.

Advice given by the interviewees focused on adjusting personal behaviours and relying on personal efforts to be able to get employment in Sweden, which such factors appeared to have had a significant impact on the interviewees' ability to get relevant jobs in Sweden.

4.3 Summary of Key Findings

This section provides the summary of the key findings from both the quantitative and qualitative research. The key findings based on HEI's perceptions:

- The employer's low perception of their qualifications is the biggest challenge. This resulted in several requirements and suggestions mentioned by HEI to tackle this challenge and to increase the awareness of employers of HEI's qualifications and experiences.
- Discrimination is among the least challenging aspects to the HEI's employment. Additionally, interviewed employed HEI, perceived discrimination as barely identifiable in the workplace.
- Swedish language fluency is important, but it is not a decisive factor for employment in many instances.
- Good personality traits such as being persistent, responsible, and goal-oriented as well as having positive attitude and self-confidence, are the most important personal prerequisites for HEI's employment in Sweden. The personality traits perceived by HEI in the qualitative research and particularly demonstrated by the interviewees seemed to be the most significant impact on their ability to get employed. Also, the employed HEI's advice for HEI to get employed in Sweden, were revolving around demonstrating good personality traits and behaviours.
- Job training is a valuable prerequisite and its importance stems from its ability to bridge the gap between HEI and employers, potentially provides full-time job opportunities, accounts for references, and provides local experience, that would increase HEI's employability. Most of the interviewees concurred that perhaps the Swedish Public Employment Service's most prominent role in assisting HEI getting employed, is to provide them with opportunities to go on job training. According to four of the interviewees, job training has led (directly or indirectly) to their employment, and therefore it was the main channel that helped them secure employment.
- Networking is effective for HEI's employment. It also assisted some of interviewed HEI getting job training opportunity and temporary jobs, before their current employment.
- Prior experience of HEI, and particularly in Sweden, is highly valued by employers. All interviewees had varying work experiences outside Sweden, and took up job training or part-time jobs in Sweden before getting full-time jobs.
- The recognition of qualifications and granting work licenses is a key requirement that poses a challenge for HEI with regulated professions, especially medical degrees as stringent regulations and lengthy processes hinder their quick employment.

- There is some variation in the perception of HEI based on their employment status. Employed HEI emphasized on requirements relating to personal efforts, and non-previously employed emphasized on requirements relating to external entities.
- Key suggested actions to facilitate the employment of HEI in Sweden revolved around improving the Swedish language courses, improving the qualifications-recognition and work permission process especially for medical and pharmacy degree holders, facilitating more and serious job training, increasing awareness of employers and encouraging them to hire HEI by implementing effective programs, and increasing job opportunities and training in the public sector.

5 Discussion

This part of the study synthesizes and discusses the findings from both the quantitative and qualitative analyses. The discussion will primarily circle around 1) the key requirements, and 2) the practical suggested actions, for facilitating the employment of HEI from their perception.

5.1 Key Requirements for HEI's Employment

While the study was not aiming at exploring the underlying reasons for the high unemployment rates and the employment challenges facing the HEI in Sweden, it was important to understand how HEI perceived these challenges. The challenges were the subjects of various research studies and reports in Sweden which were gathered by the researchers of this study. The findings of the key requirements perceived for HEI's employments seem to be arising from the awareness of the challenges the HEI face, whether structural or personal.

The Syrian HEI perceived the employer's low perception of the HEI's qualifications as the biggest challenge for their employment which is a structural barrier, a similar finding was highlighted in a study by Lorentzson (2015). Various research studies identified the poor recognition and low perception of HEI's qualifications as a key challenge facing immigrants in the job market and HEI's qualifications are almost always perceived inferior to the native's (Eriksson, 2011; Sweetman, 2004). The Syrian HEI in this study perceived some requirements (such as job trainings and building social and professional networks), and suggested actions (such as improving employers' awareness of HEI qualification through arranged meetings), that can be possible measures to tackle the challenge of low employer's perception and, thus, lead to increasing the employability of HEI.

Discrimination, interestingly, appeared as among the least challenging factors facing HEI in their employment. However, Bursell (2007), and Carlsson and Rooth (2008) in their field experiments showed evidences of discrimination in the Swedish labour market against immigrants based on ethnicity. The experiments showed that immigrants with Arabic-sounding names have harder time getting interviews and receiving employment in Sweden. Possible reasons for discrimination being perceived as a low challenge for employment of Syrian HEI can be that discrimination acts may not be easily identifiable or proven, and immigrants being discriminated against in the recruitment process may most likely not be aware of such acts if happen.

The requirements mentioned by the HEI participants are perceived to vary in terms of their importance and impact on the employment of HEI. A key prerequisite such as learning the Swedish language appeared to be the most mentioned requirements for the integration of HEI into the Swedish job market from the quantitative research. The high importance of the Swedish language for integration into the job market and society in Sweden was stressed on by various previous studies (Alaj, 2005; Faris, 2016; Krumm et al., 2008; Nasrabadi, 2014; OECD, 2014;

Rogova, 2014). However, the findings from the interviews with HEI indicated that while language is important, it is not a decisive factor for employment in Sweden based on their own experiences. Almost all employed HEI from the interviews, except one who is teaching Swedish language, mentioned that a reasonable level of Swedish language is initially enough to secure a job. One of the employed HEI also mentioned that employers are aware of and are familiar with the low level of language skills of immigrants. Lemaître (2007), indicated that the language and the other challenging factors do not totally explain the slower convergence of immigrant labour market outcomes to those of the natives. Gustavsson (2004) argued also that factors other than mastering Swedish seem to have been decisive for getting jobs in Sweden, where basic knowledge of Swedish can be sufficient. The HEI's overemphasis on Swedish language skills as the most mentioned requirement in the quantitative research is a perception that can be influenced by the HEI's enrolment in the Swedish courses as the primary activity during the introductory program arranged by the Swedish Public Employment Service.

Demonstrating good personality traits appeared to be a key requirement and it was the second most requirement mentioned after language. Through the quantitative research and the interviews, HEI perceived personal traits, such persistence, initiative, positivity, and self-confidence, are essential for their employment. Interviewees such as *Interviewee 5* mentioned that she sends on average 50 job applications a month. *Interviewee 4* visited different employer's locations several times to present her qualifications and show her interest in work. *Interviewee 3* applied personally to job training opportunities with employers. Gustavsson (2004) concluded that the personality traits such as being responsible, goal-oriented, positive, industrious, and imaginative are decisive factors for getting a job in Sweden. Another study identified those immigrants with the right blend of personality traits such as their ability, hard-work and determination has succeeded in getting employment (Lorentzson, 2015).

Job training was perceived as a key requirement and as a facilitator for HEI's employment from both the interviews and the quantitative research. Some of the interviewees agreed that job training was an important factor for their employment in the same company at which the training was conducted. Other interviewees mentioned that employers also appreciated job training since it reflected local experience of the HEI in the Swedish job market. Job training within the HEI's scope of studies is perceived to be helpful from various aspects. It would provide the HEI with a valuable opportunity to gain a local experience and knowledge of the working conditions and culture in Sweden, practice and improve the language skills, build a professional network, and an opportunity to demonstrate the skills and capabilities of HEI to employers.

Building social and professional networks deemed to be an important requirement from HEI perception to facilitate their employment. Many research studies (Behtoui, 2008; Bäckman, Korpi & Minas 2014; Coverdill, 1998) concluded that the personal network that is referred to as "informal channels" are very effective and becoming more trustworthy for employment. Behtoui (2008) and Marx and Leicht (1992) also emphasized the importance of networks as a key factor for employment, and the low employment rates among immigrants can be partly explained by the lack of networks. Immigrants generally are at a disadvantage when it comes to employment through the informal channels due to their limited networks (Helgertz, 2010), especially if they are new in the receiving country. The personal network has also proven

effective for some of the HEI interviewees in the qualitative research in getting temporary or training jobs in Sweden. However, opposite opinions also were received from some HEI interviewees that networks are not so effective and generally if they would help they most probably bring low-skilled jobs. Therefore, it is believed that the importance of networks primarily lies in their ability in increasing the chances for getting employed which is highly dependent on the quality of the network and having the right contacts and probably luck.

The above four requirements discussed (language, personal traits, job training, and networks) appeared to be the most influential factors perceived by HEI for employment in Sweden. Other requirements were also perceived important such as the recognition of qualifications and granting work licenses, mainly for those who hold medical degrees such as doctors, and pharmacists.

An interesting finding from exploring the perceived requirements for HEI's employment in Sweden was the signs of a variation in the perceptions of the HEI based on their employment status. Employed or previously employed HEI appeared to emphasize on requirements that are primarily dependent on the HEI's efforts to get a job in Sweden while, non-previously employed HEI appeared to emphasize on requirements that have a higher dependency on other entities to get a job in Sweden. One of the possible reasons for this variation, can be the different experiences in getting employment between the employed and the non-employed HEI, as the employed HEI knew how they successfully got jobs in Sweden and talked from experience. Another possible explanation could be the self-serving bias where people, in general, claim their acts were behind their success and external factors were behind their failure (DeLamater & Myers, 2011). Therefore, the employed HEI could be attributing their success in getting employment to their own efforts and personality traits, while the unemployed attribute their unemployment to external factors. However, the interviews with employed HEI helped enhance the observation, obtained from the quantitative research, that a variation of perception based on employment status can exist. It also emphasized the utmost importance of the personal effort in getting employment, leaving a slim chance for the variation to be only a result of a self-serving bias.

To conclude the discussion on requirements, the HEI in Sweden perceived that they need a combination of prerequisites to enter the job market in Sweden, that are perceived to tackle the various barriers for their employment. The following graph illustrates how the requirements perceived by the HEI can be linked to the various employment challenges to overcome them.

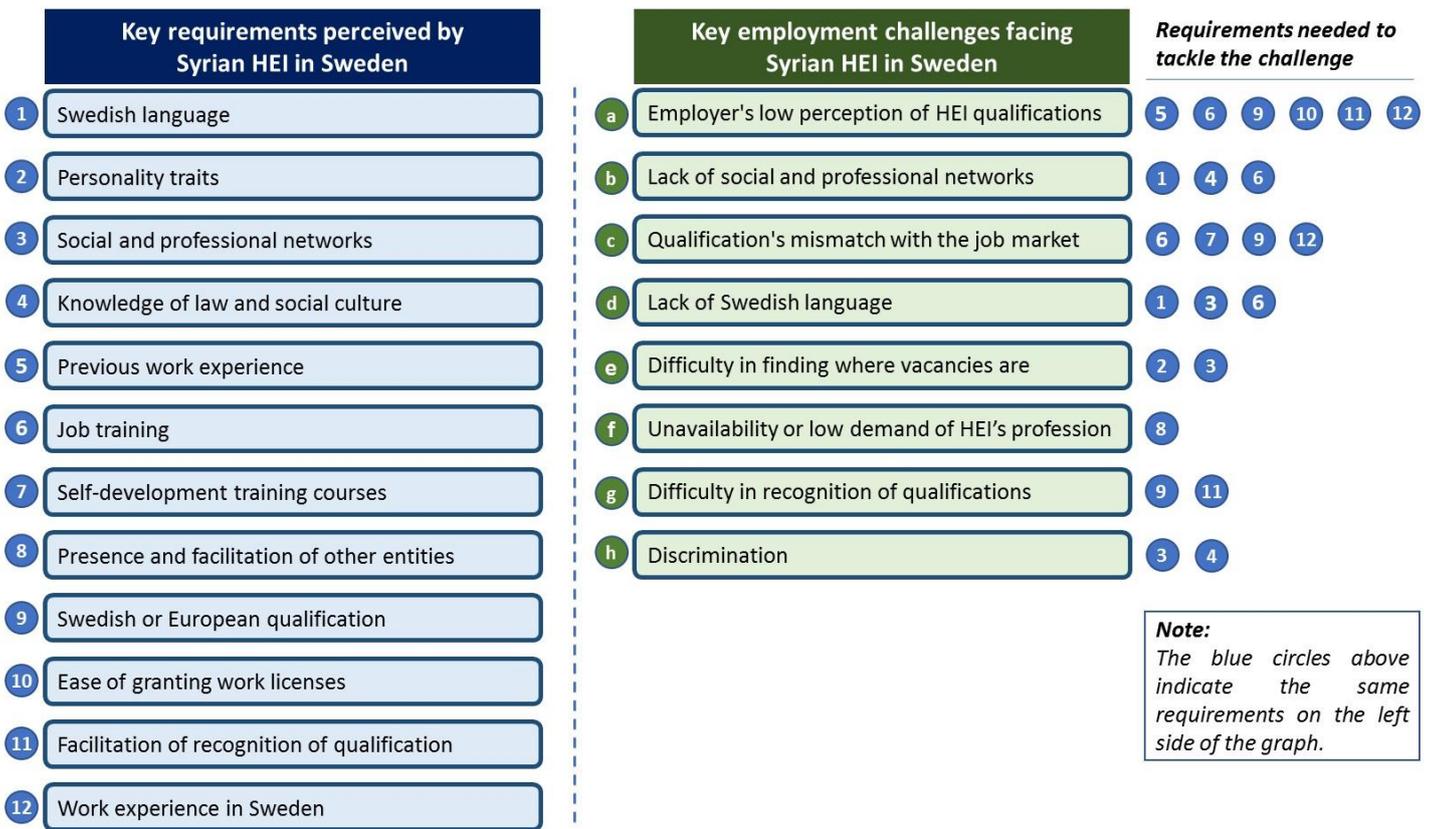


Figure 13: The perceived requirements needed to tackle the employment challenges

5.2 Key Suggestions to Facilitate HEI's Employment

The HEI's suggestions are primarily arising from their perceptions of the effectiveness of the programs and initiatives laid forth for them by various Swedish entities, and what they think would effectively facilitate their employment. The suggestions presented by the HEI were aimed at different initiatives or entities such as the Swedish language programs, job trainings, Swedish Public Employment Service, employers, recognition of qualifications and licensing, and employment opportunities. Each of these sections are discussed below.

The job training received the highest number of suggestions that circled around facilitating more serious opportunities for trainings within the HEI's field of specialization and also providing continuous trainings with government agencies. According to the qualitative analysis, four out of the five interviewees received their employment, either directly or indirectly, as a result of getting job trainings. Providing HEI immigrants with job trainings addresses numerous requirements such as building networks and gaining professional contacts that can help in the integration of the HEI (Orhamn, 2016). It also helps learning the language terminologies that relate to the specialty of the HEI, gaining local experience and most importantly demonstrating the level of competence the HEI possess which contribute in changing the misconceptions managers have about their qualifications and competencies.

When it comes to Swedish language programs, the main suggestions theme was to improve the existing language courses in terms of seriousness and intensiveness and to change the current system into a more standardized system, for the generic curriculum, among all Swedish language programs whilst also providing language courses that target different professions and specializations of the HEI. Moreover, the teaching quality was picked on with regards to improving the effectiveness of the language teachers to reduce the duration needed to complete the course. The basis of these suggestions is thought to be arising from how the HEI perceived the Swedish language programs of having low quality, prolonged programs that stretch for long time, and the curricula varying in quality. Addressing these suggestions would mean equipping the immigrant with a good level of Swedish language fluency in shorter periods of time, which in return help the HEI integrate and enter the job market. Torty (2009) concluded in a study about Swedish language learning for immigrants that giving immigrants a voice and understanding their perspectives regarding Swedish language learning would help avoid creating a language learning system that treats immigrants as though they do not know what they want from the process.

The Swedish Public Employment Service has many roles when it comes to aiding Swedes and immigrants, whether HEI or not. Suggestions by HEI called for mandating the Swedish Public Employment Service to provide a certain percentage of HEI with jobs, others urged it to meet regularly with the HEI to get their views and experiences on the programs and initiatives in place for them. Some comments suggested appointing experienced handlers who are specialized in the field of work and the qualifications of the HEI. These suggestions root back to how the HEI perceive the Swedish Public Employment Service, namely as ineffective in providing them with jobs, and providing inexperienced or unserious handlers, the effect of which is demonstrated in the high unemployment rates of HEI. An anonymous source working

as a manager for the Swedish Public Employment Service was asked informally by the researchers, in a career event that took place in 2017, to confirm whether the HEI suggestions regarding the handlers and the Swedish Public Employment Service were relevant. The source confirmed that, in the current situation, the handlers who are supposedly “specialized” lack in-depth knowledge. Additionally, the source stated that there are specific programs targeting different unemployed groups, the flaw of such system is that it does not account for some unemployed individuals who are left out of those categorical divisions and, therefore, the handlers have hard time aiding them. However, it appeared from the interviews that the Swedish Public Employment Service helped secure job training for the interviewed HEI that in most cases contributed directly or indirectly to the employment of those HEI. This is a contradictory finding as it is not in line with the feedback from both the quantitative findings and the media articles that reflected a low effectiveness and a lack of confidence in the Swedish Public Employment Service (HD, 2017; SVT, 2016). The researchers in this study believe it is important to distinguish between how the HEI’s perceived the effectiveness of some initiatives such as job training facilitated by the Swedish Public Employment Service, and the effectiveness of the handlers at the Swedish Public Employment Service who are assigned to assist immigrants in their integration into the job market. The findings from the quantitative research showed that the initiatives and programs provided by the Swedish Public Employment Service are rated higher in effectiveness than its handlers. Interviews also revealed that Swedish Public Employment Service assisted most of the interviews in their employment directly or indirectly. The HEI’s low perception of the effectiveness of the handlers could be negatively impacting the overall image and perceived effectiveness of the Swedish Public Employment Service as the main entity for integrating the immigrants in Sweden.

The suggestions concerning the process of qualifications’ recognition, aimed at hastening the recognition process, and licensing medical practitioners for practicing their specialty under supervision, on temporary basis while undergoing certification. Most the suggestions concerned with the recognition process came from those HEI who want to practice a regulated profession such as doctors and pharmacists. Musoke (2012) concluded that medical doctors from non-European countries face more stringent requirements to be able to practice medicine in Sweden and the process for accepting foreign doctors and validating their competence is confusing, frustrating and unnecessarily long.

The research has further yielded suggestions aimed at bridging the gap between employers and the HEI. The employer’s lack of information regarding the skills and qualifications of the HEI, and their risk averse attitude (Hwang & Ström, 2016) could be the underlying causes for the low tendency of hiring immigrants (OECD, 2014). Magnus Berg, a Swedish integration activist stated that:

“there’s more talk and initiatives than there is real action [...] Swedish employers are the real challenge, and are the ones who can help change the situation [...] Many (Managers) say that they want to get involved, and [...] are looking for skilled workers. In fact, they’re not, and they’re quick to complain, and blame the migration agency or employment office for their processing, and for not providing the best candidate/expertise.” (The Local, 2016).

To tackle this, suggestions included arranging for exhibitions and forums, by the government agencies, that provide the channels for employers and HEI to interact and familiarize with one another. Other suggestions referred to informing the employers regarding the seriousness and competence of the HEI by arranging for field visits that bring the HEI to the employer's workplaces. This can give both parties the opportunity to meet and communicate directly on professional grounds which can significantly help build knowledge and awareness for the employers and the HEI.

Various suggestions received from the HEI revolved around employment opportunities. Some of these suggestions meant to deal with increasing the visibility of such opportunities by means like distributing leaflets to HEI at programs where they are studying for Swedish, or placing ads of vacancies in a location or website. The Swedish Public Employment Service's database of jobs shows only 40% of the total number of vacancies available (OECD, 2014). The majority of the feedback were suggestions concerned with providing HEI with temporary jobs, and increasing their representation in governmental jobs. This will equip the HEI with local experience and references which employers perceive of high value since it demonstrates that the HEI has worked in Sweden and enhances their employability chances in the private sector. However, the employment of the immigrants in the government sector is lagging behind the private sector in Sweden although it has been increasing in the recent years (OECD, 2014).

Other suggestions such as easing the process for getting accommodations is perceived important while indirectly related to facilitating employment for HEI. Sweden has a severe shortage in the residential market and particularly in main cities (Emanuelsson, 2015), and standing in a queue for rent-controlled housing in a city like Stockholm can take on average nine years (BBC, 2016). Easing the process for newly arrived HEI to get accommodations can contribute to their quick settlement and ability to look for jobs when they feel settled.

The current government's program for the integration of immigrants into the Swedish job market is considered as "liberal empowerment", which places high responsibility of integration and employability on the individual immigrants and thus holding them accountable for their active participation and self-management given the various employment challenges. Alternatively, "radical empowerment" combines both the individualistic aspect as well as addressing the structural barriers and "power relations" that endorses injustices and differences (Fernandes, 2015). The drawback of the liberal empowerment approach is that it fails to consider the structural barriers that may hinder the immigrants' ability to integrate into the society (Fernandes, 2015). Many of the suggested actions by the HEI that aim to facilitate their employment seem to fall under the radical empowerment which addresses the various structural and personal barriers. Based on Mossaad (2014), empowerment initiatives such as the quota system and the positive discrimination, by recruiting immigrants even when there are other applicants who qualify for the jobs, can be deemed effective especially if structural barriers related to employers' discrimination and reluctance of employing immigrants are prevalent.

The following graph illustrates how the key suggestions by HEI could make available some of the requirements needed for HEI which, in turn, would help overcome some of the key employment challenges for HEI in Sweden.

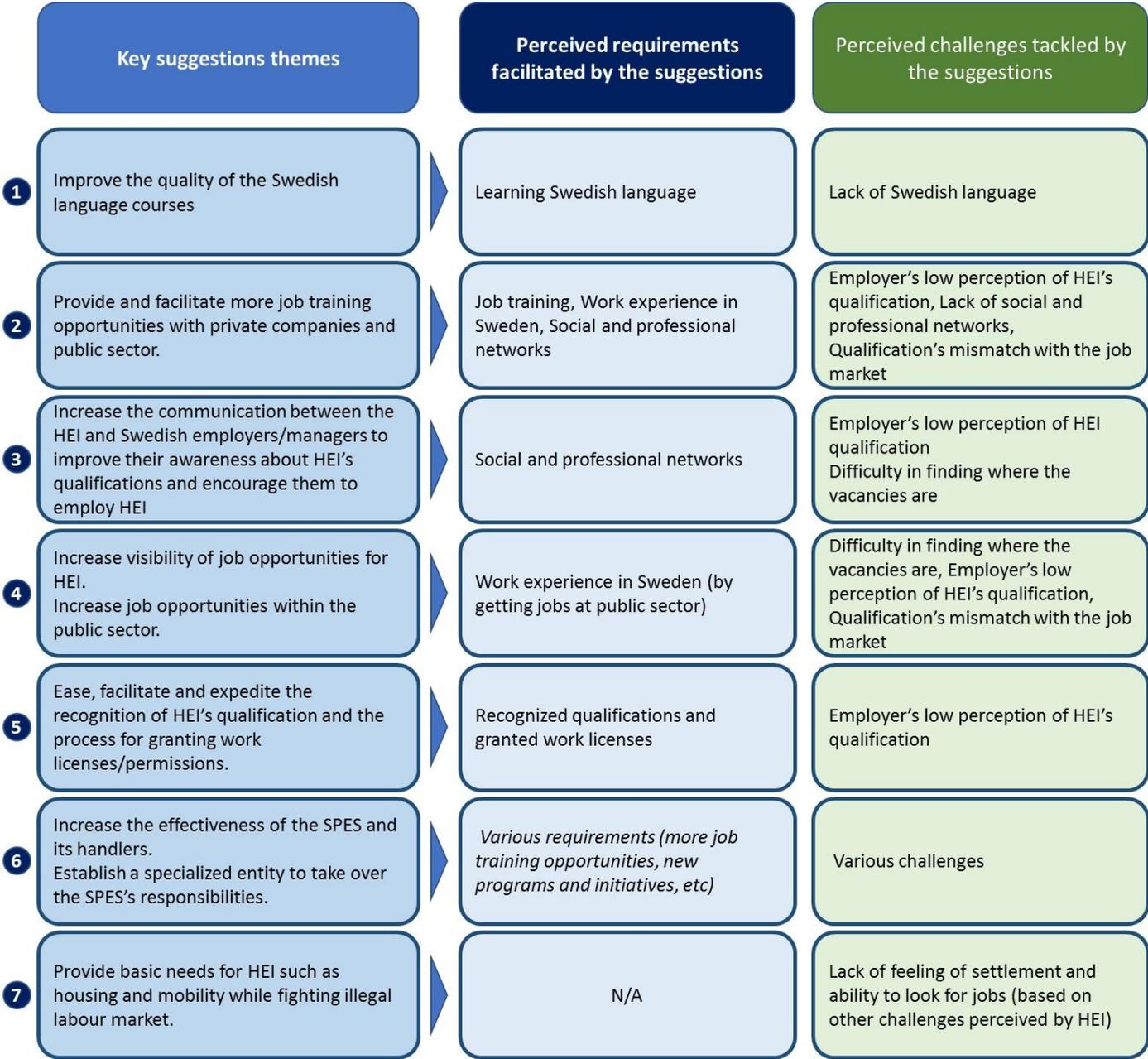


Figure 14: The suggestions' linkage to the employment requirements and challenges

6 Conclusion

This research aims to explore, from the perspective of the Syrian HEI in Sweden, the requirements to facilitate their employment in the job market. This study contributes to developing a better understanding by providing insights to the stakeholders in Sweden on how to facilitate the entrance of HEI to the job market and thus encouraging them to take actions based on the insights provided by the HEI.

Unemployed HEI in Sweden are human capital with considerable skills and capabilities that are underutilized, which comes at the cost of the Swedish social welfare rather than having the HEI contribute to the society and the economy when they are employed. The government in Sweden has an integration program in place that aims to facilitate the employment of immigrants in general. However, the outcome from this integration program is perceived not to live up to the expectations, especially when looking at the numbers of unemployed immigrants in Sweden.

The research reveals that requirements such as Swedish language skills, good personality traits, job training, networking, and prior experience are the most important requirements perceived by HEI for employment. The recognition of qualifications and granting work licenses is a key requirement particularly for those who have medical degrees. This is due to the strict regulations in Sweden associated with the recognition of the qualification and granting work license for HEI with medical degrees obtained from outside the EU countries. The government's efforts represented by initiatives and programs to facilitate the employment of the immigrants provide many of those requirements that are perceived important by the HEI. However, the suggestions made by the HEI through the research have addressed various flaws in the integration program which they perceived as an obstacle to their employment. Many suggestions call for improving or modifying different elements of the integration program such as improving the Swedish language programs, increasing both quantity and quality of job training opportunities, and easing of licensing for medical professionals. Other suggestions addressed a structural challenge related to employers' low perception and awareness of HEI's qualifications that call for increased efforts to facilitate more interaction between the employers and the HEI. While the HEI opinions stressed the importance of institutional initiatives and actions to empower them and to facilitate their employment in Sweden, the employed HEI also emphasized on that HEI need to maximize their efforts, to help these initiatives materialize their desired outcome of employing them.

In conclusion, it is believed that all directly influential entities in the subject of HEI's employment (the government, the Swedish managers, and the HEI) should fulfil their responsibilities towards tackling the structural and personal barriers to facilitate the employment of HEI in Sweden. This is a decision that needs to be taken seriously which would positively impact all involved entities and lead to a virtuous circle in the economy and the social welfare in Sweden.

Practical implications

This study sheds light from the perspective of Syrian HEI on the requirements they need to overcome the structural and individual barriers and thus enabling them to integrate into the job market in Sweden. Understanding the perception of HEI could be important for stakeholders such as the government and the Swedish managers for two reasons. First, it raises the awareness of stakeholders regarding the perceptions and expectations of the Syrian HEI who represent a considerable share of the recent influx of immigrants to Sweden. Second, it provides insights from Syrian HEI's perspective that could be augmented into the design of programs that aim to facilitate their employment and overcome the challenges relating to their integration into the job market.

Research Limitations

Some limitations are related to the HEI participants and the concept of exploring a perception that is subjective in nature. A share of the HEI participants (13%) appeared to have come to Sweden recently in 2016 and 2017. This indicates that these HEI are relatively new to the country and may have not yet established a profound perception and understanding of the job market requirements and challenges in Sweden. Moreover, exploring and understanding the perceptions of HEI from a quantitative survey has its limitations where a lot of insights and details may have been missed. Finally, there is a slight risk of speculation when expressing the perceptions of the HEI and misinterpretation of their perceptions by the researchers using a survey.

Recommendations for future research

This study reveals some findings that constitute areas for further research studies. There was a sign of a variation in the perceptions about needed requirements by HEI based on their employment status. Employed HEI emphasized on requirements to enter the job market that are related to personal efforts while unemployed HEI emphasized on requirements related to the assistance of external entities. Such a variation and its implications on HEI's ability to get jobs could be an area to research and validate.

The research also found that the Swedish employer's low perception and awareness of HEI's qualifications poses the highest challenge for the employment of HEI from their perception. Exploring the underlying reasons behind this perception by interviewing Swedish managers to understand how serious this challenge is and how to overcome it, is a viable area for further research.

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Appendix A: Quantitative Questionnaire

A study on requirements and suggestions to facilitate the employment of HEI in Sweden

Dear Participant,

We would like to thank you for your interest in participating in the questionnaire, which was prepared to conduct research to gather views and perceptions of highly educated immigrants in Sweden (mainly immigrants from Syria) regarding the requirements and suggestions to facilitate their entry into the Swedish labour market. This research study will be presented to the Faculty of Economics and Management at Lund University in Sweden.

It should be noted that all information, opinions and suggestions that will be shared by the participants in the questionnaire will be processed in a confidential way and will be used for the purpose of conducting the research study only.

We hope that you answer the questions with the highest credibility and honesty since the identity of the participants in the questionnaire will not be known to the authors of this research or any other entity and cannot be determined in any way.

Your participation in the questionnaire is very important and appreciated by us. It is optional and you are free to withdraw your participation at any time during the questionnaire if you wish.

By continuing to complete the questionnaire, you acknowledge that you are a university degree holder with a minimum bachelor's degree in any discipline, currently residing in Sweden, and that you voluntarily agree to participate in this questionnaire.

We hope you read the questions carefully and take the time to answer the questions and to express your views and suggestions.

The expected time to fill out the questionnaire is approximately 10 minutes.

Note: The questionnaire was tested to work on all internet browsers and smartphones. If the survey does not work correctly in a particular browser, please try another browser. (Like Google Chrome)

* Required

1. What is your gender? *

Mark only one oval.

- Male
 Female

2. What is your age? *

Mark only one oval.

- 20 - 24
 25 - 29
 30 - 34
 35 - 39
 40 - 44
 45 - 49
 50 +

3. What is your nationality? *

Mark only one oval.

- Syrian
- Palestinian - Syrian
- Other

4. Highest level of university degree obtained? *

Mark only one oval.

- Bachelor's degree
- Post graduate diploma (Post Bachelor's degree)
- Master's degree
- Doctoral degree (PhD)

5. Academic degree major? *

Mark only one oval.

- Arts degree (literature, history, geography, others)
- Business Administration; Finance, Economy, others
- Computer sciences degree; Information technology
- Engineering degree
- Law degree
- Medical degrees (medical doctors, dentist, veterinary, others)
- Medical-related degrees (radiology, nursery, lab specialists, others)
- Pharmacy degree
- Sciences degree (maths, physics, chemistry, biology, others)
- Social sciences degree (psychology, sociology, political science, others)
- Other

6. When did you move to Sweden? *

Mark only one oval.

- Before 2011
- 2011
- 2012
- 2013
- 2014
- 2015
- 2016
- 2017

7. When did you receive residency to live in Sweden? *

Mark only one oval.

- Before 2011
- 2011
- 2012
- 2013
- 2014
- 2015
- 2016
- 2017

8. Which Swedish city do you live in? (Please write it in Swedish) *

Questions on languages proficiency and work

9. Did you finish the Swedish For Immigrants (SFI) program? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- Still in the program
- Discontinued studying the program
- Have not started the program yet

10. What is your Swedish language proficiency? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Very Low	<input type="radio"/>	Very High									

11. What is your English language proficiency? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Very Low	<input type="radio"/>	Very High									

12. Did you get full time employment in Sweden? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes - I am currently employed *Skip to question 15.*
- No - I never got employed in Sweden
- I was previously employed in Sweden and currently unemployed

13. If you are not currently employed, when do you think you will receive an employment in Sweden? *

Mark only one oval.

- 0 - 6 months
- 6 - 12 months
- 12 - 18 months
- 18 - 24 months
- More than 24 months
- I do not believe I will be able to get employed in Sweden

14. Do you believe you will get employed within your field of studies and expertise? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes Skip to question 16.
- No Skip to question 16.
- Maybe Skip to question 16.

15. If you are/were employed in Sweden, was it within your scope of studies and expertise? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Close to my scope of studies and/or expertise

Opinions and suggestions of highly educated immigrants to enter the Swedish job market

16. Based on previous recent studies, below are the most common challenges that HEI face, what is your evaluation of these challenges? *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Not a challenge	Low challenge	Medium challenge	High challenge
Difficulty in finding where vacancies are	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Discrimination	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employer's low perception of your qualifications	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learning Swedish language	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Low demand of your profession	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Networking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Recognition of qualifications by Swedish Council for Higher Education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Unavailability of professions within your expertise in the same city where you live	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your qualification's match with the Swedish job market	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

17. If there are any other challenges, please mention them below

18. Which entity do you think has the (highest) responsibility to integrate the highly educated immigrants in the Swedish job market? *

Mark only one oval.

- The employers
- The Swedish government
- The Swedish Public Employment Service
- The highly-educated immigrant him/herself

19. What is your assessment of the level of effectiveness of the following agencies or programs in facilitating the employment of highly educated immigrants in Sweden? *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Low level	Medium level	High level	Neutral/I do not know
Job training in Swedish companies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Swedish language courses (courses quality)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Swedish Public Employment Service's initiatives for employers to employ migrants (through tax reduction and others)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Swedish recruitment companies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The overall introductory program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Training courses provided by the Swedish Public Employment Service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your handler at the Swedish Public Employment Service to assist in finding you a job	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

20. What is your assessment of the level of seriousness of the following entities in the desire or assistance in the employment of highly educated immigrants in Sweden? *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Not serious	Somewhat serious	Highly serious	Neutral/I do not know
Employers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Recruitment companies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your handler at the Swedish Public Employment Service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

21. In your opinion, what are the most important aspects that a highly-educated immigrant needs to get employed within his scope of studies in Sweden? *

22. Finally, what new initiatives or changes do you suggest to obtain the important aspects you mentioned above or to facilitate the employment of the highly-educated immigrants in Sweden? *

Appendix B: Qualitative Interview Guide

Background questions

- How old are you?
- What is your highest qualification?
- What is your academic major?
- When did you come to Sweden?
- When did you receive your residency permit?
- In which city do you live currently in Sweden?

Job-related questions

- What is your current profession?
- What is the type and duration of your job contract?
- How long have you been in your current job?
- How many jobs did you have in Sweden?
- Through which channels did you get your job(s)?
- Did anybody personally you to get your job?
- What were the main requirements by the employer to hire you?
- How important for your employer were requirements such as previous experience in your home country, Swedish language proficiency, recognition of your qualification by the National Agency for Higher Education, job training done in Sweden?
- What challenges did you face while looking for a job, or while we are employed?
- Do you feel being treated equal to your native colleagues at work? (If no) why? and how?

Perception-related questions

- What do you think the most effective channels to apply for jobs are in Sweden?
- What do you think the most important requirements that are needed for the employment of HEI, and why?
- What do you think the greatest challenges that face the HEI to get employed, and why?
- What do you think the HEI needs to develop after he/she gets employed to preserve his/her job?
- What's your advice regarding what the HEI need to do to get a job?
- Finally, what's your suggestions to different Swedish entities (e.g. government, agencies, employers) to facilitate the employment of immigrants?

Appendix C: Other Quantitative Research Graphs

Participants' Demographics

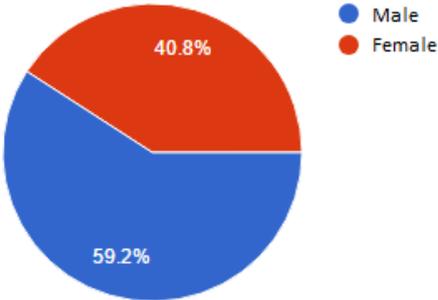


Figure 15: What is your gender?

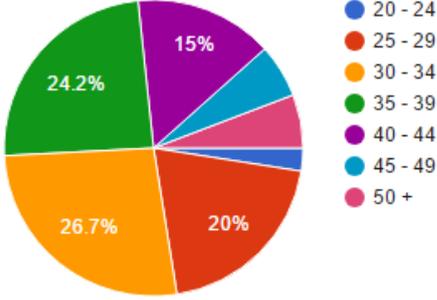


Figure 16: How old are you?

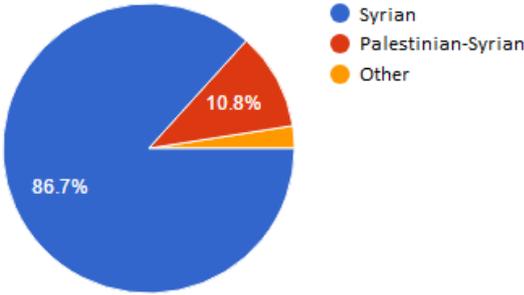


Figure 17: What is your current citizenship?

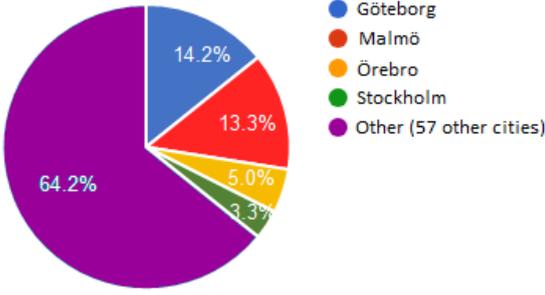


Figure 18: Where do you live in Sweden?

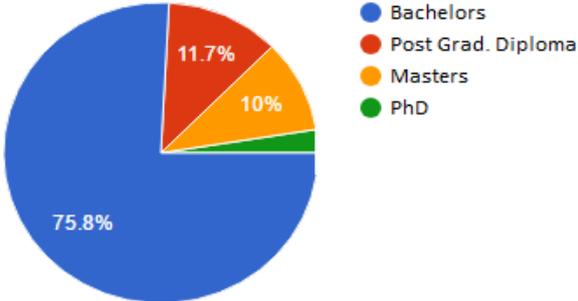


Figure 19: What is your highest attained degree?

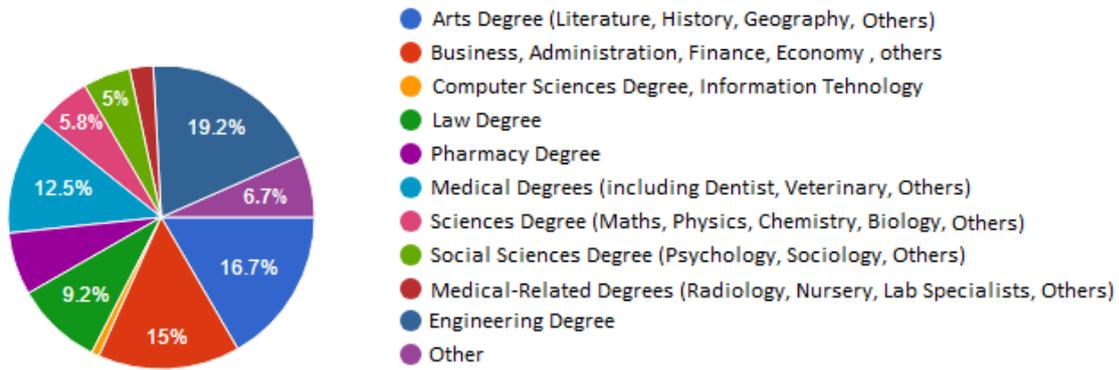


Figure 20: What is your academic major?

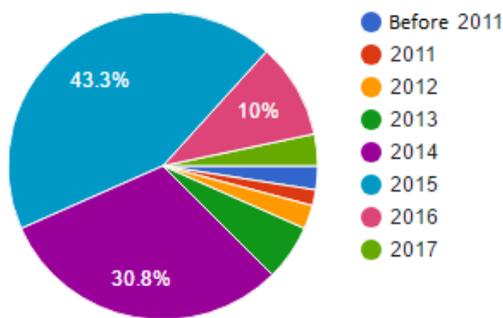


Figure 21: When did you move to Sweden?

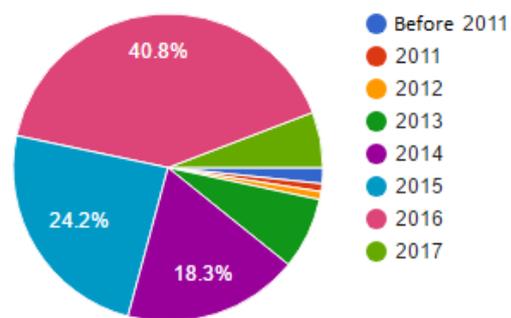


Figure 22: When did you get your residence permit in Sweden?

Participants' Language Proficiency

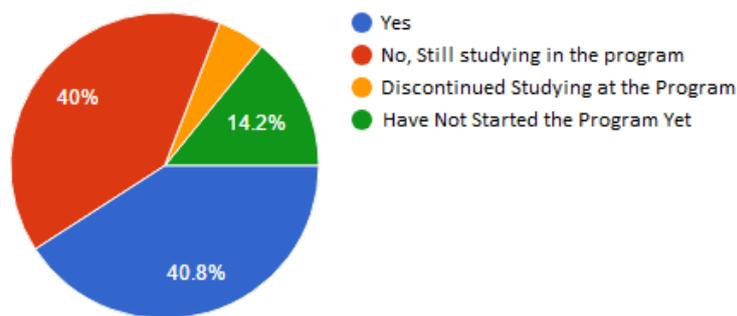


Figure 23: Have you completed the Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) program?

(1: low proficiency, 10 high proficiency)

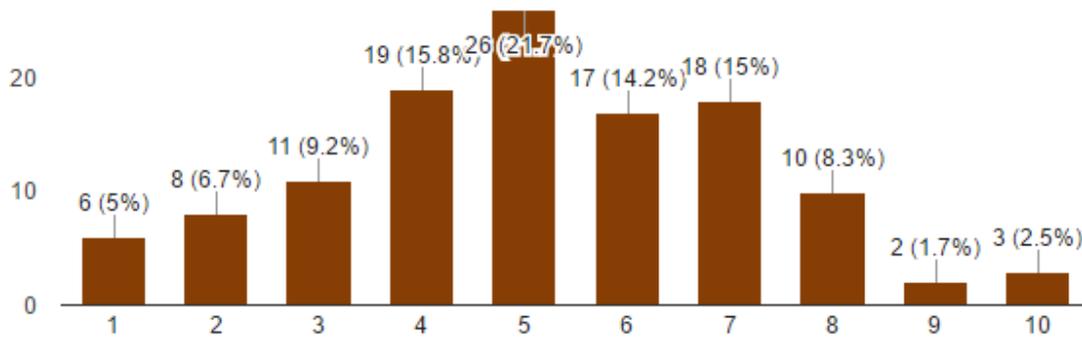


Figure 24: The participants' perception of their Swedish language proficiency

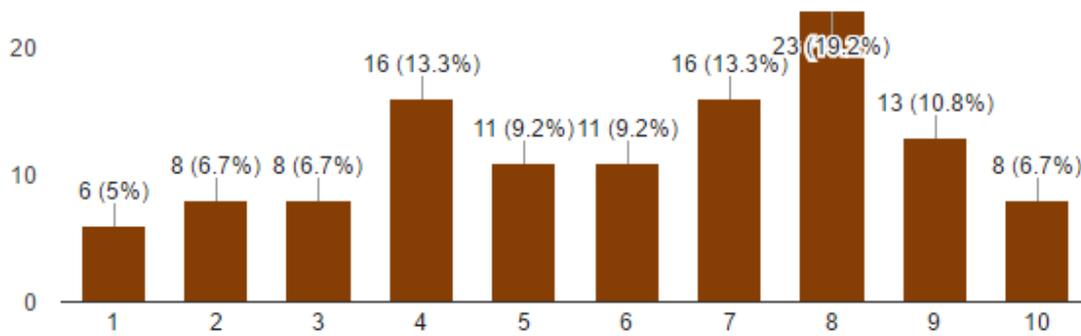


Figure 25: The participants' perception of their English language proficiency

Participants' Employment Profile

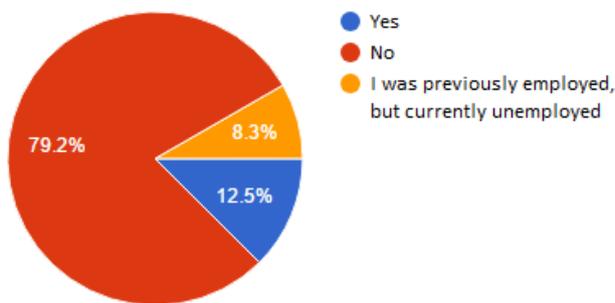


Figure 26: Are you currently employed?

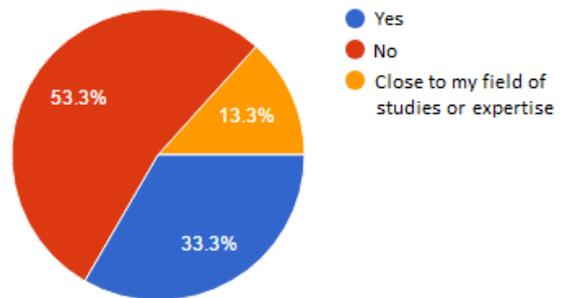


Figure 27: If employed, is your job within the scope of your studies or expertise?

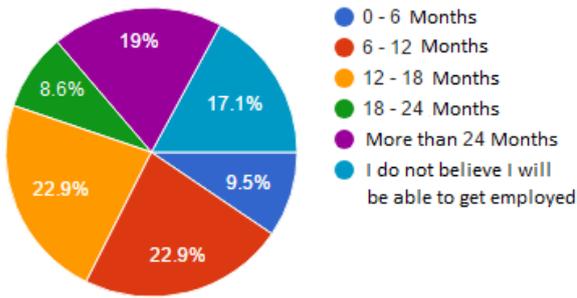


Figure 28: When do you think you can get a job in Sweden?

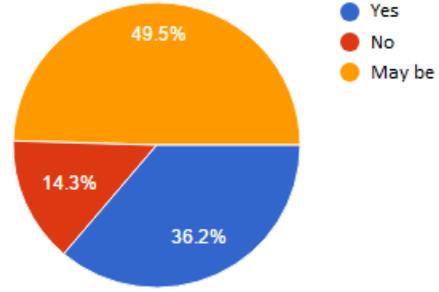


Figure 29: If unemployed, will you get a job within your scope of studies?

Participants' Perceptions

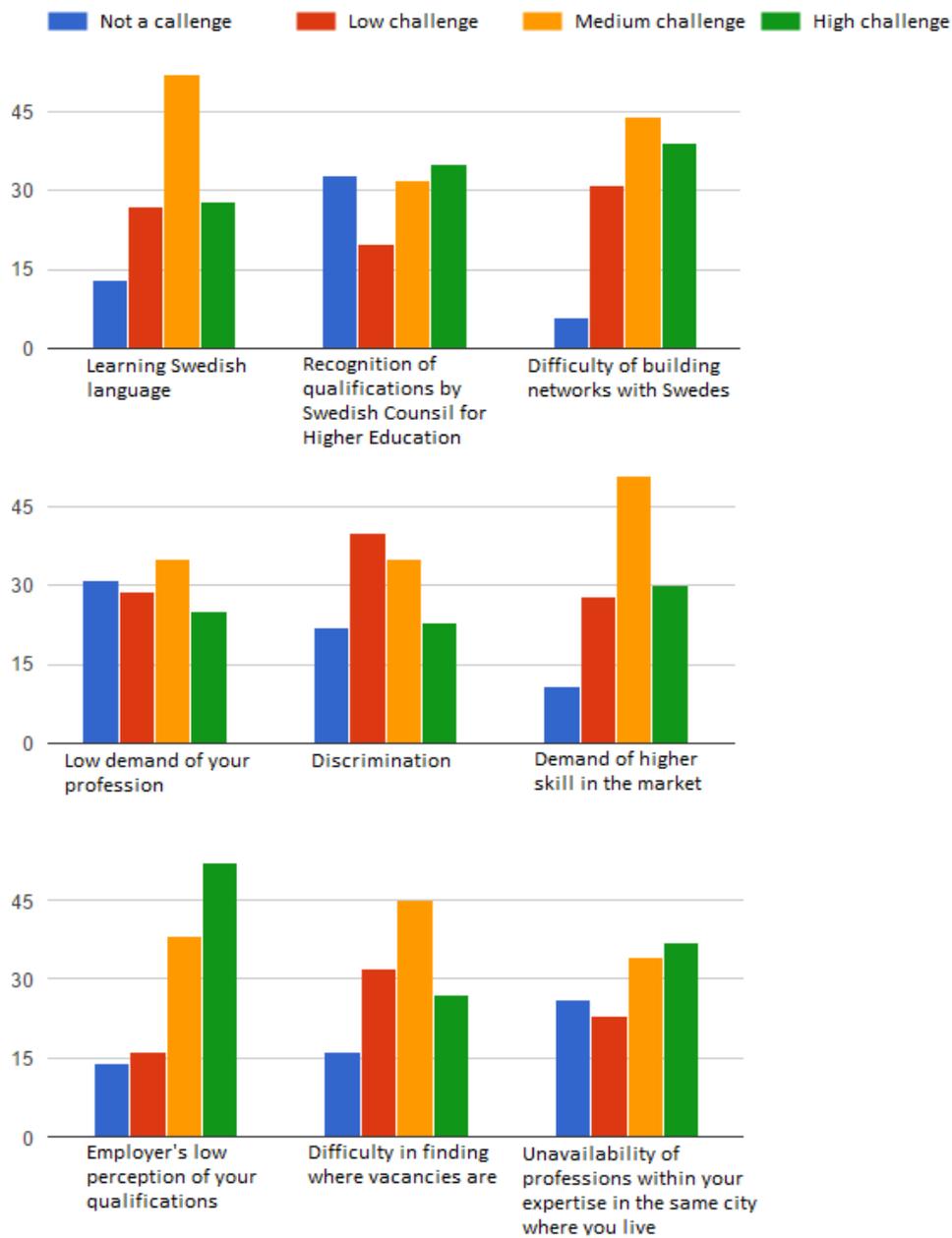


Figure 30: HEI's evaluation of the listed employment challenges

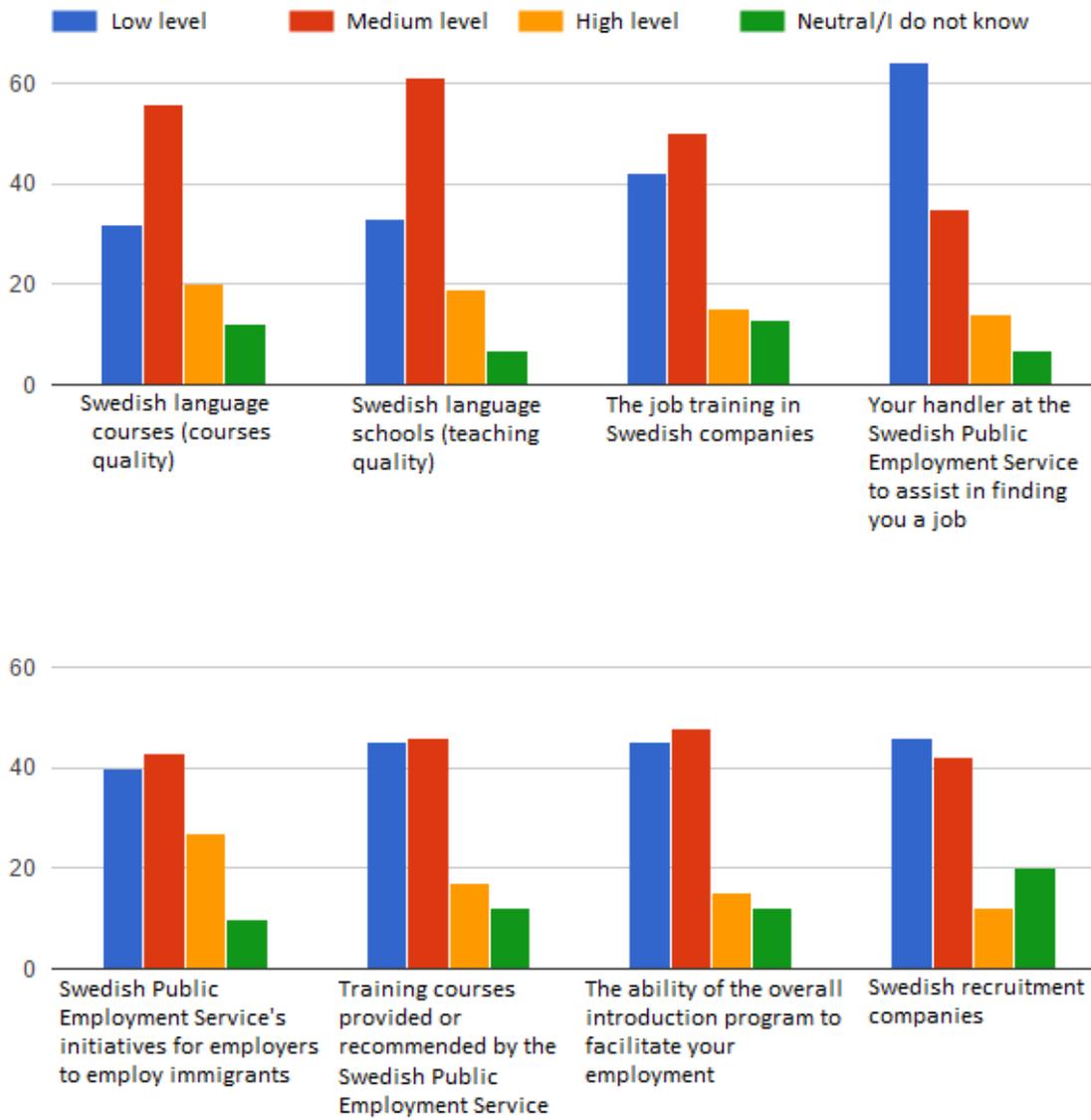


Figure 31: Levels of effectiveness of various entities and programs

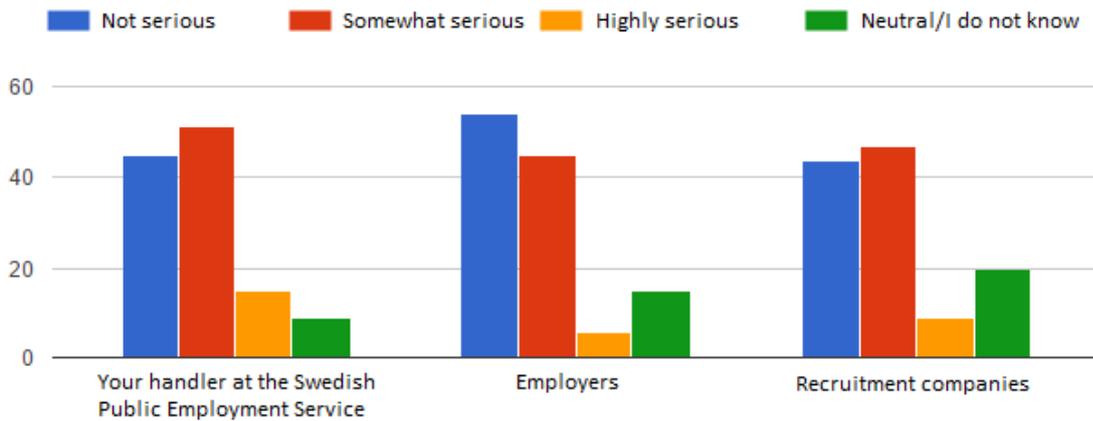


Figure 32: Levels of seriousness of various entities