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*Academically skilled refugees' experience of  
discrimination while integrating through the Danish  
and Swedish labor market*

Discursive structures, Discrimination and Human Capital

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## **Abstract**

From empirical material collected through semi-structured interviews, this master's thesis is conducting a critical discourse analysis, investigating to what extent discursive structures entails discriminatory treatments of academically skilled refugees in the integration process of entering the Danish and Swedish labor market. Academically skilled refugees and relevant caseworkers from both Denmark and Sweden have been interviewed to investigate individual experiences related to the integration process. A research on both the Danish and Swedish immigration and integration policies and the labor market policies is presented, combined with the importance of the national identities, Danishness and Swedishness. The chosen methodological approach includes the use of Teun A. van Dijk's critical discourse analysis, which is supplemented by Stuart Hall's classification of representation and his interpretation of Michel Foucault's definition of discourses, together with Norman Fairclough's elaboration of the complexity of discourses. The semi-structured interviews are explained by professor of general psychology and qualitative methods, Svend Brinkmann, and professor of educational psychology Lene Tanggaard. To investigate discriminatory treatments, the analysis includes the Discrimination Theory presented by Rebecca M. Blank, Marilyn Dabady and Constance F. Citro, together with Gary S. Becker's definition of Human Capital Theory. Throughout the analysis, following points will be presented and discussed: Personal experiences on discriminating situations, the difference in the Danish and Swedish discourses about the subject, flaws in the system leading to a lack of understanding the existential importance of education and experience, and finally the paradox seen through human capital theory. The thesis concludes, among other things, that some extent of discriminatory treatments through discursive structures, are present when academically skilled refugees enter the Danish and Swedish labor market. However, discrimination is found to not solely be the cause of inequalities in the labor market.

**Keywords:** Critical Discourse Analysis, Discrimination, Human Capital, Danishness and Swedishness, Labor Market policy, Immigration and Integration policies

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## 1 Introduction

The analysis made by Danmarks Videnscenter for Integration: *Danskerne tror, integrationen går meget værre end i virkeligheden* published in October 2021, shows a tendency amongst Danes to believe that the integration in Denmark is not as successful as it actually is, according to the statistics. It suggests that there is a tendency to think that immigrants, refugees, and other newcomers are not succeeding in the Danish society, which Danmarks Videnscenter for Integration's analysis actually proves wrong (Brygger, Nielsen, Breidahl, & Andersen, 2021). The results from this research raised a curiosity as to how integration is measured – how do countries measure their success in the integration?

Denmark and Sweden are “worlds apart” when it comes to immigration and integration policies, according to Haider Abbas<sup>1</sup> book *Immigration and Integration policy in Europe. Denmark and Sweden, 1970-2010* from 2021. However, they are very similar on many other relevant measures, like political and electoral structures, population, and economic conditions (Abbas, 2021, p. 2), which makes it interesting to investigate the two countries in relation to one another. The Danish and Swedish criteria for successful integration are quite the same: On the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Integration in Denmark, the Danish government's nine key figures in their so-called “integration barometer” is presented. They are meant to show the progress on the integration ambitions in Denmark. The first three key figures of this barometer are focusing on employment, education, and Danish skills (Udlændinge- & Integrationsministeriet, 2022), indicating that the Danish integration policy highly values employment and self-sufficiency when contributing to, and integrating into the Danish society. Likewise, the labor market and education are highlighted on the official website of the Swedish government and the government offices, as the most important factors when establishing newcomers in the Swedish society (Regeringskansliet, u.d.). This shows that the criteria for successful integration in both Denmark and Sweden, includes employment, education, and self-sufficiency. Refugees, immigrants, and other newcomers are expected to become self-sufficient and join the Danish and Swedish society through the labor market, as soon as possible, in order to be considered “well-integrated”.

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<sup>1</sup> Haider Abbas received an A.B. in Public Policy and International Affairs from Princeton University, and currently works as a Strategy Consultant at AMR International, UK.

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Refugees all over Europe experience difficulties when finding jobs, despite being highly skilled with work experience, according to The International Organization for Public-Private Cooperation's forum; The World Economic Forum's article *How do we make the most of refugees' skills?* written by Financial Times in 2015. Sheila Heard, the director of the non-profit organization that advises highly skilled refugees on careers, states that refugees often have a combination of problems that "keep the door shut" when it comes to finding a job. Untreated traumas from different conflicts and the experience of fleeing their homes, the language barriers and the prejudices and lack of recognitions from employers and workplaces, becomes great obstructions for highly skilled refugees in the European labor market (Financial Times 2015). In connection to this, Jacob Arendt's article *Syriske flygtninge mangler danske kompetencer* from 2015, published on VIVE – The National Research and Analysis Center for Welfare in Denmark, presents how several analyses in Denmark shows that educations from, in this case, Syria, is not necessarily an advantage when entering the Danish labor market. Many academically skilled refugees from Syria are overqualified for their employment in Denmark because they are not able to – or allowed to use their brought education in the Danish labor market, due to a lack of recognition of the education by Danish employers (Arendt, 2015).

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## **1.2 Research problem**

From these statements and results, I found an interest in investigating how academically skilled refugees in Denmark and Sweden are experiencing their access to the labor market and through that, their integration into the Danish and Swedish society. The previous mentioned differences in the two Scandinavian countries' integration policies, has led to reflections on whether or not academical competences are credited or acknowledged, when they belong to refugees – people from marginalized groups in the society. What are their possibilities and how do academically skilled refugees experience their access to the Danish and Swedish labor market? Furthermore, an interest for the seemingly importance of human capital in the two countries, has occurred. Consequently, the following final research definition with connected research questions has been formulated:

### ***1.2.1 Research definition***

**To what extent is discriminatory treatment expressed through discursive structures in the Danish and Swedish integration and immigration system, represented by academically skilled refugees' access to the labor market?**

The following questions are created to keep the focus on the area of interest and to achieve detailed and well-investigated results connected to the research problem:

- How is the discursive structures affecting the academically skilled refugees' opportunities in the Danish and Swedish labor markets?
- Is the human capital of the academically skilled refugees being utilized in the Danish and Swedish labor market?
- Does the Danish and Swedish integration policy differ in relation to academically skilled refugees' chances in the labor market?

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### **1.3 Thesis structure**

The structure of the thesis consists of different chapters divided into sections. In this first introduction chapter, some research and articles leading to the thesis focus, have been presented, together with the final research definition. The second chapter defines some of the central concepts of the thesis, to clarify for the reader which intentions and understandings are behind these concepts. The third chapter presents the relevant research and historical information surrounding immigration and integration policies and labor market policies in Denmark and Sweden. Chapter four clarifies the methodological decisions for the thesis, including the semi-structured interview, the different interview categories, and the critical discourse analysis, with the relevant concepts and definitions. A reflection on the methodological choices is also presented. The fifth chapter about theories, presents the chosen discrimination theory, including different types of discrimination and prejudices, together with the supplementary theory of human capital; the importance of people's education, experiences, training, hobbies etc. This chapter also includes theoretical reflections. Chapter six presents the final analysis together with critical discussions about the analytical findings of the empirical material collected. The chapter is divided into smaller sections, to emphasize different themes found through the analysis. The last, seventh chapter summarizes the findings and discussions of the analysis, leading to a final conclusion on the research definition.



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## 1.4 Concept definitions

When it comes to people leaving their country of origin and changing their residence to a new country, whether it is a necessity, lifesaving, economically beneficial or voluntarily, there tend to be many different terms and definitions for them. Several of the concepts can be associated with different perspectives and preconceptions that are not relevant for this thesis. Therefore, to ensure clarification of the further reading, this chapter will explain what migration and immigration involves, what it means to be an asylum-seeker or a refugee and what integration refers to. In order to simplify the complex term ‘integration’, definitions from Gregg Bucken-Knapp, Vedran Omanović and Andrea Spehar’s book *Institutions and Organizations of Refugee Integration* from 2020 are being presented. Additionally, Eurostat’s online glossary lists have been used, to keep the definitions of ‘migration’, ‘refugee’, and ‘asylum’ simple and from a homogenous perspective. For clarification, a short description of the expression ‘academically skilled refugees’ adapted to the thesis and the term ‘refugee’, has also been added, together with a description of the expression ‘caseworker’ used in this context.

### 1.4.1 Integration

Bucken-Knapp, Omanović and Spehar addresses the complexity of the term ‘integration’, and argues that the definition varies depending on countries, change of time, values, interests, and perspectives of actors involved. To simplify the term, they describe integration as a process intended to assist migrants on achieving equal positions and opportunities as the native population, in the society (Bucken-Knapp, Omanović, & Spehar, 2020, p. 5). The authors also argue that integration requirements can function as a way to control migration. If migrants are considered difficult to integrate, based on the requirements, it will be possible to regulate the migration and thereby better control the process (Bucken-Knapp, Omanović, & Spehar, 2020, p. 7). This definition is, as mentioned, a simplification of the term, which matches the purpose and perspectives of this thesis. However, I am aware that the definition might seem too simple or naïve in relation to other factors of integration, than the labor market. Migrants might differ from the society through their cultural, religious, or political perspectives, which could affect the integration processes, and some migrants could be well-integrated on some relations, but not on others.

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### ***1.4.2 Migration***

Migration refers to the number of migrants – people who change their residence to or from a country during a longer time period, due to different reasons (Eurostat, 2018). An **immigrant** is a person undertaking an immigration, which refers to the situation where a person with residence in one country, establishes their residence in another country for a period of at least twelve months. The action of leaving one's residence in a country is called to emigrate from the country (Eurostat, 2018).

### ***1.4.3 Refugee***

Being a refugee refers to a third-country national who, because of fear of being persecuted based on religion, nationality, ethnicity, political point of view or belonging to a specific social group, is located outside of the persons country of origin, and does not have the opportunity to get protection from that country. This also applies to a stateless person, who is located outside of its former country of origin due to the same reasons as mentioned above, and is reluctant to return, out of fear, and who is not included in the Article 12 *Exclusion* of Directive 2011/95/EU<sup>2</sup> (Eurostat, 2017).

### ***1.4.4 Asylum***

The term 'asylum' refers to the kind of protection given by a state based on the principle of non-refoulement (no sending back) and internationally or nationally recognized refugee rights. It is given to refugees – people who are unable to seek protection in their country of origin or residence, due to a fear of being persecuted based on their ethnicity, religion, political stance etc. (Eurostat A, 2019). Being an asylum seeker or -applicant refers to the people whose application for international protection is still pending (Eurostat B, 2019).

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<sup>2</sup> The main goal of Directive 2011/95/EU is both to secure a use of common criteria for identification of people in need of international protection, by all member states, and to secure a minimum of advantages for these people in all member states (EUR-Lex, 2011).

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#### ***1.4.5 Academically skilled refugees***

As this research will focus on different labels and discrimination based on discourses and prejudices, a clarification of the use of the term ‘refugee’ in different settings is important. When ‘academically skilled refugees’ are mentioned, it will refer to individuals with university degrees from their country of origin, who have refugee-experience. This includes the interviewees and other relevant people for the research, as their status as a refugee and their level of education is a requirement for the research. At the same time, it is acknowledged that the term ‘refugee’ refers to the before mentioned legal definition of groups of people that has certain rights according to international laws such as asylum. It will therefore be used in the thesis when discussing the general group of people, and not the individuals.

Furthermore, the European Commission’s official website informs that the largest groups of people receiving asylum in the EU in 2020, were from Syria, Venezuela and Afghanistan, and a total of 88 per cent of first-time asylum-seekers in EU were from non-European countries in 2020 (European Commission 2021). Therefore, both the term ‘refugee’ and the expression ‘academically skilled refugee’ will refer to non-European refugees, to secure a representative research.

#### ***1.4.6 Caseworker***

When using the term ‘caseworker’ about some of the interviewees, it is meant as a collective description of people whose profession is to help academically skilled refugees enter the Danish or Swedish labor market. Therefore, the so-called caseworkers in this thesis, are people with different educations and job titles, who have in common, that they have experience in helping academically skilled refugees into the labor market.

## 2 Research field

When investigating integration through the labor market and the available procedures in the Danish and Swedish societies, different policies, founding models and settlements are relevant to highlight, together with historical developments of national identities and integration processes. This chapter will therefore present a definition of a welfare state in relation to the description of the specific Nordic Welfare model. This is followed by presentations of the relevant details of the immigration and integration- and labor market policies in Denmark and Sweden. Included is also a definition of both countries' national identity and self-image, Danishness and Swedishness, and presentations of the different steps in the Danish and Swedish system, that works to integrate refugees through the labor markets.

### 2.1 The Nordic Welfare model

The narrow and simple definition of a welfare state is referring it to the role of the state in different social services like education, health, housing, poverty relief and social insurance. The broader approach focuses on the welfare state as a specific type of state, polity, or society, but also a specific type of capitalism that supports capital accumulation, regulate and discipline labor and is a result of the power of the working class. A welfare state is often related to state interventions aimed at reducing market failure, guaranteeing a decent living standard and a specific level of equality and intergenerational distribution. Therefore, the welfare state is important when discussing issues of people's lives, such as employment, income security, health, housing, and education (Greve, 2020, p. 32).

When researching some fundamental parts of the Danish and Swedish system; the labor market- and immigration and integration policies, it is relevant to clarify the founding types of state and society that has settled the direction of these policies in both countries. The societal system of Denmark and Sweden has been built on the *Nordic Welfare model*, together with the rest of the Nordic countries<sup>3</sup>, since the early 1900's. Even with differences, these countries are known to be parliamentary democracies and highly developed welfare nations. Internationally, they are characterized for being relatively small and homogeneous nations with great economic, political, and cultural openness towards the outside world. The development

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<sup>3</sup> The Nordic countries include Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Iceland, Greenland, Faroe Islands and Åland Islands (Karker, 2009)

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of the democracy is built on a large popular participation both locally and nationally, with a focus on the farmer- and worker movements. Politically, they are directed by a peaceful handling of conflicts (Karker, 2009).

The Nordic Welfare model defines the formation of the welfare state, where the ground principles are *universalism* – welfare benefits for everyone regardless of social status, tax financing, and a large public sector. The Nordic countries are furthermore characterized, internationally, by the high employment rate of their women and their status in the welfare system. The development of the Nordic welfare is connected to strong social democratic worker movements, but at the same time, it is characterized by the great level of political agreement about the central reforms (Karker, 2009).

## **2.2 Integration and immigration policy**

This section aims to clarify Denmark and Sweden's political view on integration and immigration, a description of the national identities in play and a comparison of the very different directions that the two countries' policies on the matter have.

Exploring the reasons and conditions to the differing policies on immigration and integration in Denmark and Sweden, will enable a better understanding of the different policy choices and decisions together with an explanation on why these two neighboring and seemingly similar countries differ so radically on this specific area (Abbas, 2021, p. 2). Despite being “worlds apart” in the immigration and integration area, as mentioned previously, Denmark and Sweden have much in common. They belong to the same welfare state-type government, which is characteristic for its generous and distributive benefits and welfare services meant for the whole population. The welfare state is also an important factor in the understandings of the national identity and self-image of the two countries (Abbas, 2021, p. 9f.).

### **2.2.1 Danishness and Swedishness**

These national identities – the identity discourses – of the two countries, ‘Danishness’ and ‘Swedishness’ is described by the postdoctoral researcher in Political Science, Marilena Geugjes, in her book *Collective Identity and Integration Policy in Denmark and Sweden* from 2020. She summarizes the significant values of Danishness and Swedishness, by enhancing the

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uniqueness of the two Scandinavian countries in both their differences and similarities as neighboring countries with a relatively similar set of values.

Geugjes' research highlights how Denmark has become one of the most homogeneous societies in the world, based on the defeats and massive loss of territory during time. The battles and losses have resulted in a strong, politically stable, and unified nation with a very strong national identity (Geugjes, 2020, p. 12). The Danish universal welfare state with generous, inclusive, and extensive benefits intended for the whole population, is seen as a national pride and highly important in the understanding of the national identity. Danishness is based on the idea that Danish democracy is quite unique and therefore, most suitably practiced on Danish territory (Geugjes, 2020, p. 21).

Unlike Denmark, Sweden has not in the same way, endured massive territorial losses and military defeats. Sweden's political history is almost characteristically unique for the lack of war and conflict. According to Geugjes' research, this has resulted in a Swedish national identity that originates from the idea of a homogeneous ethno-cultural past and equal qualities of a free people. Swedishness is based on an ideology that believes in the collaboration and interdependence between the individual and the state – the people are the basic units of the society, liberty generates independence and equality, and the state have the power to emancipate the individual. The freedom of the people is a national Swedish project. In comparison with Denmark however, the Swedish national identity is also very closely linked to their welfare state institutions. The concept of the *Folkhemmet* (People's home) plays an important role in the Swedish welfare society – a feeling of togetherness, communality and where no person should be left behind. Everyone should be treated equal, considerately, and cooperatively and the Swedish population is seen as a family – This system builds on the fact that the people accept to pay for others in need, because they expect the same in return, when they are in need (Geugjes, 2020, p. 24 f.).

Geugjes emphasizes that Sweden is generally seen as more openminded towards immigration than Denmark. However, this has also led to less desirable living conditions for immigrants in Sweden, as they have “not been so successful at integrating migrants over the past 20 years” (BBC News 2018). Geugjes stresses that Sweden's openness towards immigrants does not automatically result in societal progressiveness (Geugjes, 2020, p. 2). Furthermore, the

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Swedish society or the Swedish national identity is built on the conviction that Sweden is the world's most modern country. The reluctance to having any specific culture, is ironically a very important part of Sweden's culture (Geugjes, 2020, p. 25).

### ***2.2.2 Differences***

Additionally, the differences in the immigration and integration policies of the two countries, can be linked to the way the countries view their far-right parties. In Sweden they are treated as the "beast" or an enemy and the mainstream unites against their rhetoric, which makes it less likely that the mainstream would agree with or support the far-right parties' anti-immigration policies. In Denmark, however, Islam is treated as the "beast", which makes propagating anti-Islamic and anti-immigration rhetoric easier. This is proven through reviewing the mainstream media of Denmark, where problems of integration are highlighted, as they can be related to Muslim immigrants (Abbas, 2021, p. 8).

Historically, the Swedish immigration policies were influenced by the universal welfare state principles after World War II. This approach is unique because it is meant to promote benefits and welfare services for the entire population, as mentioned earlier. The aim was to combine welfare state universalism with the promotion of cultures and identities of immigrants, as successful integration comes from distributing some citizenship rights equally between natives and immigrants. These rights are considered crucial in Sweden, and therefore seen as a necessity for immigrants integrating into the society. Moreover, Abbas argues, the welfare state and the capacity of institutions to integrate immigrants are seen as promoters of integration, and not established social and cultural areas. Therefore, the challenge of immigration, is the institutions' ability and capacity to include everyone, and not the culture and value of immigrants. This logic is conceptualized by the national identity of Sweden, which is based on a state-centered approach – where political institutions are seen as main promoters of social inclusion and equality. Consequently, in relation to immigration and integration policies, the organization of welfare state institutions is seen as the important factor of enduring national solidity and integration and is included in the culture. During the years, a requirement from countries, for immigrants to learn the language, culture and history of the host country has been pushed forward. These conditions are seen through different integration tests in the integration process, and they are linked to the ability of gaining certain rights in the society (Abbas, 2021, p. 16f).

In Denmark, the post-World War II period, started a different development of immigration policies. Abbas claims that the Danish approach is more assimilationist or even anti-multiculturalist. The Danes promoted Danish cultural, linguistic, and political uniformity and both employment benefits and residence permits were dependent on language requirements. Danish immigration and integration policy can therefore best be understood as a set of strict integration demands and the achievement of those demands are connected to the access to rights – Immigrants are included in the welfare state, if they adapt to the Danish culture, tradition, and values. This logic is connected to the unique conception of national identity and solidarity in Denmark, where a society-centered perspective emphasizing on social unity and cultural assimilation as a necessary requirement for public institutions to persist, is dictating the official political discourse. The functioning of this perspective depends on cultural homogeneity and trust (Abbas, 2021, p. 17).

It can therefore be argued that the Danish and Swedish welfare systems have a lot of the same commitments to egalitarianism, but they apply it on two very different ideas of social success (Abbas, 2021, p. 17). Additionally, Geugjes argues that the national collective identity is constructed, reproduced, and changed through the discourses in the society, because an interaction between all citizens of the nation, is not physically possible. This construction of a self-image in the society – the collective identity – will inevitably bring forward the society's image of the Other together with its view on cultural heterogeneity. This is, according to Geugjes, the awareness of how a society creates its relationship or position with the Other (Geugjes, 2020, p. 6).

### **2.3 Labor market policies**

As this thesis focuses on academically skilled refugees' access to the Danish and Swedish labor markets, a description of them is relevant. This section will include a short presentation of the historical foundation of both the Danish and the Swedish labor markets, their approaches to integration through the labor market, together with a connection of the two countries, based on their cooperation as Nordic countries.



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### ***2.3.1 The September settlement***

Historically, the Danish labor market was grounded through the *Septemberforliget 1899* (the September settlement 1899), where the *Dansk Arbejdsgiver- og Mesterforening* (Danish Employer- and Master association) made an agreement with *De samvirkende Fagforbund* (The Cooperating Unions), as a termination of the greatest battle of employment in the Danish history. The settlement included that the Danish Employer- and Master association accepted the workers' rights to lead and distribute work assignments. It founded the general development of the Danish labor market, as it determined some of the still valid, professional principles. These principles have been given the name "The Danish model" and represents a labor market where employers and employees enter voluntary agreements with almost no interference from the state (danmarkshistorien.dk, 2013).

### ***2.3.2 The Saltsjöbaden Agreement***

The founding labor market agreement in Sweden is called *Saltsjöbadsavtalet* (Saltsjöbaden Agreement) and was agreed upon by *Landsorganisationen LO* (Sweden's National Trade Union Federation) and *Svenska Arbetsgivaresförbundet SAF* (Swedish Confederation of Employers) in 1938. It founded the labor market relations for over half a century, defining the rights of employers, employees and third parties (Nordstrom, 2020). It set the norm of the Swedish labor market and founded "The Swedish model" which has since been based on the employers' organizations and the unions cooperatively taking responsibility for developing the rules that applies in the Swedish labor market (PTK, 2021).

### ***2.3.3 Nordic cooperation***

From these historical overviews, the Danish and Swedish labor market foundations show many similarities, where employers and employees share the responsibility of settling the terms of the labor etc. In his book *Arbejdsmarkedspolitik* from 2020, Niels Henning Bjørn further explains how the Danish and Swedish labor market policies are similar, due to a particular Nordic cooperation in the labor market field, established in 1954. This cooperation secures that citizens from the Nordic countries are able to migrate between the Nordic countries, enter the labor market and benefit from almost the same rights as the natives. The reason for this Nordic cooperation is the great similarity of the Nordic countries, including a very comparable level of welfare and salary. Furthermore, this cooperation is based on mutual research and orientation

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on the development of the countries' labor markets, exchange of experiences and inspiration together with a cooperative research on the conditions of the labor markets. Finally, the establishment of the Öresundsbridge has led to a collaboration on reinforcing a common labor market between Denmark and Sweden (Bjørn, 2020, p. 151).

Even if historically, there are many similarities, Denmark has evolved a more liberal labor market, through their flexicurity model – a special composition of terms of employment, unemployment benefits and efforts of activations, creating a balance between flexibility and security. The security of employment in Denmark is relatively low, compared to other European countries, because companies are able to dismiss their employees with short notice. This also makes it easier for the companies to hire people, which creates a lot of job opportunities and -turnovers. To compensate for the high risk of unemployment, the unemployment insurance is quite generous, especially for the lowest paid workers, who most often face unemployment. Furthermore, unemployed are required to participate in different offers related to job search. The flexicurity model has been a great asset for the Danish labor market and the social economy throughout the last years (Bjørn, 2020, p. 102ff.), and has resulted in a more liberal approach in the Danish labor market.

#### **2.4 Integration through the labor market**

To construct a clear picture of Denmark and Sweden's similarities and differences in the process of integrating refugees through the labor market, the report *Inspiration för integration – en ESO-rapport om arbetsmarknadspolitik för nyanlända i fem länder* conducted in 2017 by Patrick Joyce has been used. Joyce investigates and compares how the Danish and Swedish labor market policies handles newcomers, both refugees and other immigrants. In Sweden and Denmark, different actors within the state and the municipalities are involved in receiving and helping refugees into the labor market. Both the labor market and the civil society contributes. However, the municipalities have a bigger responsibility in Denmark than Sweden (Joyce, 2017, pp. 37, 60).

In Sweden, the state has the main responsibility for receiving and integrating refugees, when they first arrive in the country. The state-run *Migrationsverket* receives asylum-seekers, and help the ones in need, with housing. The government decides how many refugees, each county should receive, and the county administrative board then decides how many for each

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municipality. The state-run *Arbetsförmedlingen* is responsible for the different efforts aimed at establishing refugees in the labor market – the two-year program called ‘Etableringsuppdraget’ (The establishment assignment). The responsibilities of the municipalities include housing, Swedish for immigrants (sfi), social orientation, adult education and even labor market initiatives. The labor market actors cooperate with the state, through first of all, the so-called ‘snabbspåren’ (fast tracks) that aims to speed up the access to the labor market for newcomers with educations or experience within professions with a shortage of labor, and profession-introductory jobs. Lastly, organizations within the civil society organizes different measures that aim to improve health and social activities for participants of ‘etableringsuppdraget’, with the support and recommendation of the state. They also assist the municipalities with guidance and contacting families for the refugees. These actions are encouraged by the government through different financial contributions. Private actors do participate in the integration process, but to some extent, at the expense of the state (Joyce, 2017, p. 37f.).

In comparison, the Danish state is responsible for receiving, housing and accommodation of asylum-seekers – who almost exclusively live in asylum centers, mostly run by the government institution *Udlændingestyrelsen*, but in some cases by Red Cross or the municipalities. The state also administers Danish activities and education, while the asylum-applications are being assessed. After residence permit, the municipalities overtake the responsibilities of housing, support, and integration efforts, although a state-run regulatory still directs which type of compensation newcomers are entitled to in the first seven years in Denmark, which type of housing the municipalities must arrange and also which type of integration efforts to assemble. The labor market actors have, in collaboration with the state, arranged different types of training positions – IGU-employment, Danish education within the employments, mentor programs and a financial bonus for all companies who hire newcomers. Again, different NGOs are organizing important measures to improve the lives of the newcomers, however in Denmark, they are not in the same way formally included in the integration process (Joyce, 2017, p. 60f.).

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### 3 Method

In order to collect qualitative and personal empirical material through interviews, the method *semi-structured interviews* have been chosen. Interviewing both academically skilled refugees who has entered the Danish or Swedish labor market and caseworkers helping refugees into the Danish or Swedish labor market, provides individual experiences and perspectives from different angles. The results of these interviews will be analyzed using the method *critical discourse analysis*. This analysis will enable a research on the linguistic messages in the immediate response and experiences of both the interviewee categories relevant for this research area. It will be used to investigate if academically skilled refugees are experiencing discriminatory treatment in the Danish and Swedish labor market, through the discursive structures.

#### 3.1 Semi-structured interview

Svend Brinkmann and Lene Tanggaard explains the important features of the semi-structured interview as a method, in their book *Kvalitative metoder* from 2020. The semi-structured interview is the most often used form of interview in the modern interview-research. It is an interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee based on an interview guide with questions, that the interviewer has prepared in advance – leaving room for the interviewer to include impulsive relevant questions during the interview. This ensures a similarity between the interviews, while still obtaining the interviewees' personal perception and understanding of the subject. Brinkmann and Tanggaard emphasize the importance of being well-informed about the research area, as the interviewer, to be able to add informative questions during the interview, if relevant. Therefore, a thorough investigation of the research area beforehand, is needed to decide what knowledge to achieve, before deciding how to achieve that knowledge (Brinkmann & Tanggaard, 2020, p. 42). It is commonly discussed if too much research beforehand makes the interviewer biased and therefore might limit the interviewer's view on the answers and their objectivity and neutrality. However, as Brinkmann and Tanggaard argues, no research interview can be objective or neutral, as there will always be a specific agenda (the interviewer's) which should be theoretically justified (Brinkmann & Tanggaard, 2020, p. 42f.). As mentioned, the semi-structured interview makes it possible for the interviewer to deviate from the prepared interview-guide, and instead listen to the interviewee and let the questions be based on the story that the person is telling. This form of interview therefore requires the

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interviewer to be creative within the framework that is prepared and can give a more personal or detailed answer from the interviewee (Brinkmann & Tanggaard, 2020, p. 44). Like every other research method, interviews have some limits, yet it is one of the most effective methods when conducting information about people's experiences and view on their life and the system (Brinkmann & Tanggaard, 2020, p. 39).

### ***3.1.1 Interview guide***

Brinkmann and Tanggaard stresses the importance of creating an interview guide before the actual interview, in order to keep a structure and a focus for the interview, but still leave the interviews open for differences depending on the answers. They advise to divide the guide into two sections: research questions and interview questions, as research questions tend to be complex and abstract and are usually not as compatible or natural as interview questions. Therefore, interview questions need to be easier and more straightforward, to achieve a successful interview (Brinkmann & Tanggaard, 2020, p. 46f.). When deciding on the types of interview questions in the interview guide, it is important to begin with preliminary questions that lets the interviewees tell their story and experience relevant for the research area. In order to keep the conversation going and secure elaboration of relevant dimensions and descriptions, follow-up questions can be applied. As the interviewer, it is therefore important to interact with and encourage the interviewee while still keeping focus on the research questions (Brinkmann & Tanggaard, 2020, p. 48).

For this thesis, Brinkmann and Tanggaard's guidelines have been used to design two different interview guides adapted to the two interviewee categories. The guides are therefore created from the same structure but are slightly different in terms of research- and interview questions. The motivation for the research questions of the interview guides, is the interest in how academically skilled refugees and relevant caseworkers experience the possibilities and experiences that academically skilled refugees have in the Danish and Swedish labor market. The questions have been kept neutral and open, due to a desire of letting the interviewees use their own words and explain from their point of view. Still, some additional questions were asked, with a more direct intent, to make the interviewees elaborate on their own reflections, which has given a great variety of answers. The interview guides are attached as appendix 1 and appendix 2.

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### 3.1.2 Interviewees

The interviewees are divided into two categories, characterized by the following traits of interest for this research:

Category 1: *Academically skilled refugees*: Non-western refugees who have arrived in Denmark or Sweden with a university degree from their country of origin and have experience with the Danish or Swedish labor market.

Category 2: *Caseworkers*: People who have experience in helping academically skilled refugees into the Danish or Swedish labor market.

As the academically skilled refugees are the focus group for this thesis, the decision to also interview caseworkers, comes from a desire to get a different viewpoint on the subject, and to ensure some perspectives on different situations from an observant's point of view. As discrimination or other types of inequalities can be a sensitive matter, I found it important to include observations and experiences from the people around the academically skilled refugees, the caseworkers.

Some of the interviewees have requested to stay anonymous, hence I have chosen to keep all interviewees anonymous in this thesis. Therefore, they will be called by pseudonyms when quoted in the analysis. The pseudonyms have been chosen from an aspiration to match sex and ethnic background accordingly. The nine interviews have been conducted in the period of 7<sup>th</sup> Of April to 9<sup>th</sup> Of May 2022 and the different interviewees will be presented below.

#### 3.1.2.1 Academically skilled refugees

**Hussein** (born in the 1970s) came to Sweden in 2014 as a Syrian refugee. Hussein has completed both a bachelor and master's degree from Damascus University in Agronomy, Agricultural Economics, and -Development. Furthermore, he has a Ph.D. from Bucharest, specialized in Rural Development. He is currently working as a caseworker in the Swedish state-run institution, *Arbetsförmedlingen*. Hence, he will function as an interviewee in both the chosen categories. He has worked with the focus group for around four-five years. He started as an intern in *Arbetsförmedlingen*, after completing the Swedish integration program *etableringsuppdraget* (Interview with Hussein, 2022).

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**Henok** (born in the 1980s) came to Denmark in 2014 as a refugee from Eritrea. He has completed a bachelor's degree in Applied Marine Science from Eritrea Institute of Technology and a master's degree in Aquatic Biology from the Technical University of Denmark. Henok has worked in different unskilled jobs in Denmark, such as a cleaning assistant, student assistant in biomanipulation and he has also interned in *DHI – Danish Hydraulic Institute*. He currently works as an unskilled substitute in different companies (Interview with Henok, 2022).

**Selma** (born in the 1970s) came to Sweden in 2017 as a Syrian refugee. She has a bachelor and master's degree in Economy from Damascus University and is an authorized accountant from the Ministry of Finance in Damascus. Selma has volunteered in *IM - Individuell Människohjälp* and is currently working in the county administrative board as a health communicator (Interview with Selma, 2022).

**Yousef** (born in the 1980s) came to Sweden as a Syrian refugee in 2018. He has a bachelor's degree in Translation Science from Syria, specialized in translations between Arabic and English and has worked in both Syria and Turkey. Yousef has furthermore completed the certification as an assistant nurse in Sweden and is now temporarily working as a team-substitute assistant nurse (Interview with Yousef, 2022).

**Fawaz** (born in the 1980s) came to Denmark as an Iraqi refugee in 2015. He has a bachelor's degree in International Relations from the American University of Iraq and is in his second semester of a master's degree in International Business and Politics at Copenhagen Business School. Fawaz currently has a paid internship as a business minded intern at Novo Nordisk, while he is completing his studies (Interview with Fawaz, 2022).

### 3.1.2.2 Caseworkers

**Ingrid** (born in the 1960s) is working as a program manager for a mentor program in *DJØF*, a Danish union for social science academics. In 2015-2016 Ingrid coordinated a specific mentor program for academically skilled refugees that matched DJØF's members, which has been functional since (Interview with Ingrid, 2022).

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**Marie** (born in the 1980s) is working in the Danish municipality of Odense, as an education ambassador in the integration department. She has worked with the focus group for around seven years in total (Interview with Marie, 2022).

**Anna** (born in the 1980s) is working as a caseworker in the Swedish state-run institution, *Arbetsförmedlingen*. She has been working with the focus group for almost six years (Interview with Anna, 2022).

**Daniel** (born in the 1980s) has previously worked as a caseworker in the Swedish regional project called *Korta Vägen* and has also worked with the focus group for around six years (Interview with Daniel, 2022).

### ***3.1.3 Ethical interview completion***

The interviews have been conducted online, via Zoom, due to geographical and practical reasons. This has given the opportunity to reach people from various backgrounds and professions and ensured video recordings that provide better understandings of the interviewees' experiences, through facial expressions or other non-verbal messages. A disadvantage of this type of interview is of course that it may feel awkward or stilted to speak through a screen, which may affect the answers (George, 2022).

Additionally, in order to ensure that the participants in the interviews feel properly informed about the purpose and terms of the interviews, they have all read and signed a written consent form, stating the reason for the interview and their rights as the interviewee (George, 2022). Therefore, ethical reflections on how to respect the interviewees and their experiences have been central throughout the process, also leading to the decision of anonymizing everyone and giving them the option to terminate their participation if they wished. The template for the consent form is attached as appendix 3.

### ***3.1.4 Transcriptions***

The interviews have both been completed in Danish, Swedish and English, depending on the interviewee. I, as the interviewer, have therefore been using both my first and second languages, resulting in minor linguistic defaults when interviewing in Swedish or English. Likewise, some of the interviewees have spoken a, for them, second language, which has



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resulted in small linguistic shortages. Therefore, I have chosen the intelligent verbatim transcription form where filler words like “umm” or “like” and other linguistic defaults are excluded, and grammatical issues are fixed (George, 2022). This is possible, because the focus is on the different discursive structures, and therefore it is the linguistic messages in the interviewees’ experiences that are relevant for the analysis. As the interview guides are built on very open-ended questions, letting the interviewees tell their story, as they want, I have used an inductive approach. This allows the empirical material to determine the theme and direction of the analysis (George, 2022). All interviewees have received the transcriptions, giving them the option to correct misunderstandings and letting them approve the quotations before use. Therefore, all quotes and information from the interviews are verified and approved by the interviewees.

### **3.2 Critical discourse analysis method**

In order to conduct a critical discourse analysis (CDA) on the collected empirical material, definitions of discourses and representations are necessary. The meaning of representation will be presented through the sociologist and cultural theorist Stuart Hall’s book *Representation. Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* from 1997, together with a presentation of the philosopher and writer (among other things) Michel Foucault’s definition of discourses. Additionally, the complexity of discourses will be explained through the Professor of Linguistics, Norman Fairclough’s descriptions, and the CDA will be conducted from the linguist Teun A. van Dijk’s approach to the method. Important to notice, is that the chosen theoretics have different opinions on this area, and I will therefore only focus on the parts that is found relevant for this thesis.

#### **3.2.1 Representations**

In the chapter “The Work of Representation”, Stuart Hall describes representation as the production of meaning through language. This both includes describing, depicting, and portraying something by placing a likeness of it before our imagination. Representation also includes symbolizing, to be an example of, to stand for or to substitute for something. As an example, Hall mentions the cross in Christianity, that represents the suffering and crucifixion of Christ (Hall, 1997, p. 16).

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Hall stresses that “representation is the production of meaning of the concepts in our minds through language” (Hall, 1997, p. 17). Representation is the link between concepts and language, that enables people to refer to either the ‘real’ world of objects, people, or events, or to the imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people, or events. Therefore, Hall introduces the two systems of representation – the system where all objects, people and events are associated with sets of concepts or mental representations with which we interpret the world. As Hall underlines, this is a very simplified explanation of a very complex process. Important to remember, is the fact that we also form concepts of things that we cannot see, feel or touch – abstract and sometimes incomprehensible things. This system of representation consists of individual concepts, but also of different ways of organizing, and classifying concepts, and of the establishment of complex relations between them. That can be described by using similarities or differences as a way of relating concepts to or distinguishing them from each other (Hall, 1997, p. 17). People carry their own individual conceptual map, which could suggest that everyone sees and interprets the world completely different. However, we actually share approximately the same conceptual maps, which makes us interpret the world in similar ways, making communication and thought sharing about the world possible. Hall defines this as belonging to the same culture – We are able to build a shared culture of meanings and thereby construct a social world, because we interpret and view the world comparably to each other (Hall, 1997, p. 18).

To be able to exchange meanings and concepts with each other – creating representations – we need to have a shared language, which Hall defines as the second system of representation, that plays a part in constructing meaning. We need to translate our conceptual maps into a common language, so that we can associate our concepts and ideas with written words, spoken sounds or visual images – *signs* – these signs represent the different concepts together with the conceptual relation between them, and in collaboration, they define the meaning-systems of our cultures. Common languages, organized by signs, enable us to translate our thoughts and interpretations into words, sounds and images, with which we can express meaning to others. Again, Hall emphasizes the importance of remembering that languages also include facial expressions, fashion, traffic lights, music etc. (Hall, 1997, p. 18f.). The process of linking – creating relations between ‘things’, concepts and signs is what Hall defines as ‘representation’ (Hall, 1997, p. 19).

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### 3.2.2 *Discourses*

Representation does not solely come from our language, cultural background, and signs. It is also created in the shape of discourses. Hall emphasizes that discourses are usually seen as a linguistic concept, where it means “passages of connected writing or speech”. However, Hall refers to the known philosopher Michel Foucault’s definition of discourses, that gives it different meaning (Hall, 1997, p. 44). When talking about discourse, Foucault meant:

“a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment... Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But ... since all social practices entail *meaning*, and meanings shape and influence what we do – our conduct – all practices have a discursive aspect”

(Hall, 1997, p. 44).

Foucault argues here that discourses add meaning to everything, and it is therefore the discourse that has the power. When Foucault wrote about representations, it was the discourses’ influence on what objects are allowed to represent (Hall, 1997, p. 44). Furthermore, Foucault stated that discourses change, which means that the truth they represent, change as well. The historical context becomes a relevant part of the discursive power. The representation of different objects will change according to the historical and social practice, and it cannot only be seen as historically originated. Foucault thereby suggest that everything is changeable through discourses (Hall, 1997, p. 46).

### 3.2.3 *Critical Discourse Analysis*

In the Danish translated collection of Norman Fairclough’s works on discourse analysis, *Kritisk diskursanalyse* from 2008, Fairclough argues that critical discourse analysis (CDA) can be seen as a theoretical perspective on language and more generally on semiosis – including visual language, body language etc. (Fairclough, 2008, p. 93f.). When using the term “discourse”, Fairclough refers to the use of language as a form of social practice more than only an individual action or simple reflections of situations. This both implies that discourse is a way of acting, a form in which people act in relation to the world and especially in relation to each other, and a way to represent the world in. Additionally, it involves the fact that a dialectic relationship between discourse and social structures and more generally between social

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practices and social structures exists. On the other hand, Fairclough also argues that discourses are being shaped and limited by social structures on all levels: Class and social relations in the society, specific institutional relations, classification systems and different norms and conventions of discursive and non-discursive nature (Fairclough, 2008, p. 17). Discursive events varies in the structural determination depending on the social domain or the institutional frames, they are generated within. At the same time, discourses are socially constituent, which indicates that they contribute to the constitution of all dimensions of social structures, that directly or indirectly shapes or limits the discourses – Discourse is a practice that not only represents the world, but also gives the world meaning, constituting it and constructs its meaning (Fairclough, 2008, p. 17f.).

For this thesis, Teun A. van Dijk's version of a CDA, will be the methodological frame. By conducting a CDA, the aim is to highlight how or if a dominating/powerful group – being the labor markets and the integration systems in the Danish and Swedish society – is contributing to discourses that creates or maintains subtle discrimination of dominated or marginalized groups in the society – being the academically skilled refugees. In his article “Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis” from the journal *Discourse & Society* (1993), van Dijk is presenting the CDA as a tool to understand the subtle and underlining structures and methods that exists and is used in discourses. He focuses on *the role of discourse in the (re)production and challenge of dominance*, when discussing matters of social inequality. Here, van Dijk defines dominance as the exercise of social power that different elites, institutions, or groups practices, which results in different types of social inequality; political, cultural, class, ethnic, racial or gender inequality (Dijk, 1993, p. 249f.). CDA aims to clarify which structures, strategies, or other types of signs that plays a part in the reproduction process of dominance (Dijk, 1993, p. 250).

Van Dijk emphasizes that we tend to be biased in this relation, as we focus less on ‘bottom up’ relations of resistance, compliance, and acceptance, and pay more attention to the ‘top down’ relations of dominance instead. Not suggesting that we view power and dominance as something one-sidedly forced on others, but that power and power misuse often seems produced cooperatively. For example, when dominated groups are convinced that dominance is legitimate or somehow a natural thing. Therefore, van Dijk argues that an analysis of strategies of resistance and challenge is necessary for our understanding of the actual power

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and dominance relations in the society, and such analysis also requires a broader theory of power, counter-power and discourse, the critical approach that will be used, focuses mainly on the elite and the discursive strategies that maintain inequality (Dijk, 1993, p. 250).

The power that van Dijk concentrates on, involves the control that members of one group – the dominant group – holds over members of another group, the dominated. The dominant group can both limit the dominated group's freedom of action, but also have an impact on their minds. This form of control and power appears in different strategies that turns the thoughts and actions to the dominating group's favor – such as persuasion, dissimulation, or manipulation. This is where CDA and discourses are relevant. Controlling or affecting other people's mind will always come down to the sign, the function of text and talk. However, affecting others' mind, is not always direct and obvious. Often this dominance appears and is reproduced in subtle, normal, and everyday forms of signs, that is viewed as quite acceptable. This emphasizes the importance of focusing on the discursive strategies that legitimate control and dominance, or in some way normalizes the social relations of inequality, when conducting a critical discourse analysis (Dijk, 1993, p. 254). Hence, the CDA method is relevant for this thesis, when identifying and focusing on the discursive structures that, in subtle ways, might uphold or validate a discriminatory and unequal treatment of academically skilled refugees in the Danish and Swedish labor markets.

Van Dijk highlights how the justification of inequality involves the two strategies of creating a positive representation of one's own group – the dominating group – and a negative representation of the Others. This is exactly what happens in, what van Dijk calls the white discourses about ethnic minorities. The different arguments, stories, semantic moves, and other structures of the discourses will consistently and sometimes subtly, have these negative implications. This can for example appear in everyday conversations, political discourses, books, or news reports. Consequently, various models and strategies are being expressed and convincingly delivered, which differentiates Us from Them, through stressing how 'we' show tolerance, sympathy or tend to help in contrast to the rather negative social and cultural differences, deviance, or threats, that 'they' are characterized by (Dijk, 1993, p. 263f.).

In order to conduct the CDA, van Dijk emphasizes the importance of identifying the discursive framework through the awareness of the specific context in which the material is

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conducted, which genre of material is used, how the relevant actors relate to the focus group in question (the social rules), and which position the actors are in. Additionally, he highlights different discursive structures that enables the representation of us and them. However, since the empirical material collected in the interviews for this thesis does not ensure a clear or directly defined discourse, it is important to ‘read between the lines’ when searching for the subtle and ‘natural’ types of discriminatory discourses. Van Dijk presents six examples of discursive structures for the CDA, however, due to a focus on the, in van Dijk’s definition, dominated group, instead of an analysis of the dominating group, the following three discursive structures are viewed relevant for this thesis. They will be used when researching how academically skilled refugees experience entering the Danish and Swedish labor, and if they are subjects to discriminatory treatments, through statements from the interviewees.

- A. Argumentation: a negative (or positive) evaluation of facts.
- B. Lexical style: the choice of words and language that imply both negative and positive evaluations.
- C. Quoting credible witnesses or other sources.

(Dijk, 1993, p. 263f.).

The analysis of the thesis will therefore examine different underlying discourses through the interviewees’ words, sentences, language use and overall structures that may reflect a sense of subtle discrimination or otherwise relate to the relevant context of this research. This will be done through the mentioned analysis points – personal experiences on discriminating situations, the difference in the Danish and Swedish discourses, system flaws and the paradox in relation to the importance of Human Capital. As the discourses can be seen as a linguistic message in a certain social context, the message or meaning of what they have experienced, more than an explicit or blunt type of discrimination, will be the interesting factor of the analysis.

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### **3.3 Reflections on methodology**

The following will offer insight in some of the reflections I have done in relation to the methodological choices and implementation. This will both include the choice of interviewees, the different languages used during the interviews and the processing of the interviews. Furthermore, reflections on my own position as both Danish and Swedish will be presented.

As I have chosen to interview academically skilled refugees and caseworkers, working with academically skilled refugees, I am hoping to achieve a more first-hand impression on the process the focus group is going through when integrating through the labor market. If I wanted a more top-down approach, interviews with specific employers, politicians or others representing the decision makings in the integration process, would have been appropriate. However, as this subject is well-discussed, the interest of getting the personal experiences arose and I chose to follow a more bottom-up approach, where the different individuals are the voices and initially the empirical material to analyse. In addition to this, reflections on the different languages have also been significant. As mentioned, some of the interviews have been done in Danish, some in Swedish and some in English. Therefore, I have reflected on the importance of interpreting, translating, and transcribing the interviews as correct as possible. All interviews done in Danish, and Swedish have been transcribed into Danish, whereas the English interviews are transcribed in English.

Furthermore, reflections on my own position as both ethnic Dane and Swede, seems relevant when discussing the two national identities and discursive difference. A distancing to both sides, has been quite natural to maintain, but at the same time, identifying with and recognizing different cultural and individual notions, especially included in the national identities, has definitively also affected the findings and conclusions of this thesis. I have been aware of keeping the semi-structured interviews as neutral as possible, even if, as Brinkmann and Tanggaard argued, the interviews have without a doubt been affected by my own opinions and thoughts about the subject.

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## 4 Theory

This chapter will present the discrimination theory, explained in the book *Measuring Racial Discrimination* (2004), by the authors Rebecca M. Blank, Marilyn Dabady and Constance F. Citro. The theory has been chosen to investigate if refugees experience discrimination when entering the Danish and Swedish labor market with academical skills. This theory enlightens different aspects of discrimination and challenges of meeting societies with various narratives and prejudices when belonging to a marginalized group – refugees. The theory emphasizes the many different forms and situations where people can experience discrimination. Additionally, as the Danish and Swedish integration and immigration policy focus on employment and self-sufficiency, the human capital theory explained by the Nobel Prize in Economic Science recipient, Gary S. Becker in his book *Human Capital. A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis with Special Reference to Education* (1993), will also be presented as a supplement to discrimination theory.

### 4.1 Discrimination theory

In their book, Rebecca M. Blank, Marilyn Dabady and Constance F. Citro introduce four different types of discrimination. The first one is called ‘Intentional, Explicit Discrimination’ which, shortly described is where an individual behave negatively towards people with a different ethnicity, for example with verbal aggression, avoidance, exclusion, violence and even extermination. The other three types of discrimination are of more unconscious nature; they involve the inhabited and unmentioned discrimination in the society (Blank, Dabady, & Citro, 2004, p. 56). As this thesis focuses on the underlying messages and discriminating discursive structures, that might exist in the labor market, these three types have been viewed as most relevant for this research.

#### 4.1.1 Subtle, Unconscious, Automatic Discrimination

The ‘Subtle, Unconscious, Automatic Discrimination’ occurs because a lot of people still have prejudicial attitudes towards people of different ethnicities, even if there is a common consensus that racial resentment is distasteful. Discriminatory behavior is not necessarily a consequence of these attitudes, but they can still result in an unconscious and subtle form of racial discrimination. This kind of *subtle prejudice* as the authors call it, is often encouraged by different narratives and portrayals of “nonwhites versus whites” in the media, as well as



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through segregation in both education, occupations, and housing (Blank, Dabady, & Citro, 2004, p. 58). The authors explain how the subtle prejudice is a phenomenon based on unconscious beliefs and associations, which affect the opinion and behavior of people from, what the authors call, the ‘ingroup’, towards people from the ‘outgroup’ (Blank, Dabady, & Citro, 2004, p. 59), a version of van Dijk’s definition of dominant- and dominated groups – with the focus of this thesis, these groups represent ‘the Danes and Swedes’ as the ingroup versus ‘academically skilled refugees’ as the outgroup, a division of us and them. According to the authors, the people from the ingroup often face an internal conflict, because of this disconnection between the societal resentment towards racism and the societal insistence of racism. They may have good intentions when it comes to the outgroup, but cognitively they are racially biased, their categorization and associations still exist. The outcome is this subtle form of prejudice which occurs “underneath the surface” in order not to conflict with the official antiracist norms of society. Subtle forms of prejudices can be characterized as indirect, automatic, ambiguous, and ambivalent. Each of these forms have been explained by the authors, together with a clarification of their implications of discriminatory behavior (Blank, Dabady, & Citro, 2004, p. 59):

The *indirect prejudice* makes the ingroup blame the outgroup for their disadvantage as the outgroup, meaning that they should try harder and do better than the majority (the ingroup), to improve their own disadvantage. But at the same time, they should not intrude where they are not wanted. The differences between the two groups – language, culture, religion, sexual orientation etc. – are often exaggerated, which portrays the outgroup as outsiders, people who should be excluded and avoided. The indirect prejudice can further result in support for policies that promotes disadvantage of the outgroup (Blank, Dabady, & Citro, 2004, p. 59).

The *automatic prejudice* occurs when the ingroup categorize the outgroup, based on gender, ethnicity, or age. Studies have shown that the ingroup’s instant reaction towards the outgroup can include some primitive anxiety and fear responses in the brain, negative stereotypic associations, and eventually discriminatory impulses. These automatic and instant reactions do also, in some cases, lead to stereotype-confirming behavior (Blank, Dabady, & Citro, 2004, p. 59f.).

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When the subtle prejudice favors the ingroup rather than disadvantaging the outgroup, they are called *ambiguous prejudice*. This form focuses on a greater liking to the majority, the ingroup, rather than directly disliking the outgroup. This can be described as a specifically positive and rewarding behaviour among people from the ingroup. They distribute discretionary resources to ‘their own kind’, views their group in a positive light and highlights the strength of the ingroup, which leaves the outgroup disadvantaged and discreetly discriminated. The outgroup’s so-called defects or flaws then justifies these ambiguous prejudices (Blank, Dabady, & Citro, 2004, p. 60).

Lastly, the *ambivalent prejudice* suggests that the outgroup might be disrespected but still liked condescendingly. And at other times, it might be the other way around – outgroups may be respected but disliked. According to the authors, the important point about this form is that the reactions does not necessarily only foster negativity and discrimination. A person from the ingroup might acknowledge a person from the outgroup’s competences in something but will not see the person as social and comfortable, and therefore, the ingroup member will not see the outgroup member as “one of us” (Blank, Dabady, & Citro, 2004, p. 60).

All these forms of subtle prejudices are a lot more difficult to document than other more obvious forms, leading the effects on discriminatory behaviour more difficult to determine. However, they can still result in huge hostile effects (Blank, Dabady, & Citro, 2004, p. 60).

#### ***4.1.2 Statistical Discrimination and Profiling***

In the case of ‘Statistical Discrimination and Profiling’ an individual or a company are using some overall beliefs about a group of people, to make decisions about one individual from that group. This individual is assumed to fit into the alleged characteristics of the group. Therefore, an employer may sometimes judge an individual from a group average, based on assumptions and prejudices, instead of from that individual’s own qualifications and competences (Blank, Dabady, & Citro, 2004, p. 61). Statistical discrimination or profiling refers to situations of discrimination, that is based on the beliefs that reflect how characteristics of different groups are actually being distributed. Some might view this type of discrimination as economically rational, however it is not allowed in situations as hiring people, as group characteristics cannot be used to make decisions about individuals. Nevertheless, statistical discrimination is often used in situations where the information is limited, like choosing the right candidate for a job,

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based on their resume. Employers or other decision makers often view an individual's statements about themselves as untrustworthy, as everyone can easily state how hard they will work, or how good they are at cooperating, which can just as well be true as untrue. Therefore, the employers or decision makers look for information that cannot be faked as easily, like education credentials etc. But as this information does not reveal all aspects of a person's qualifications and characteristics, the decision makers are forced to make judgements based on things they know, in some cases knowledge about group characteristics. The result can therefore be statistical discrimination – the individual is treated in a certain way, because of information that can be associated with the person based on their (often) racial group membership (Blank, Dabady, & Citro, 2004, p. 61f.).

#### ***4.1.3 Organizational Processes***

'Organizational Processes' focus more on the institutional, societal processes than the individual behaviour, that may lead to discrimination. This form involves the different laws and other processes that affects a society; organizational rules that appear neutral on the surface. According to the authors, organizations tend to reflect a lot of the same biases and prejudices as the people who work within them. But if the organizational processes are creating differential racial treatment or outcomes, the result can be discriminatory. This kind of institutional, organizational process, that happens formally and informally in a society, can also be referred to as structural discrimination (Blank, Dabady, & Citro, 2004, p. 63).

As the theory shows, a lot of different unconscious or conscious forms of discrimination exists in a society, all based on different types of prejudices and beliefs about others. For this thesis, the focus is mainly on the unconscious and subtle forms of prejudices and discriminating behaviour, as the aim is to investigate areas of the society, where signs of direct or conscious discrimination should not exist.

#### **4.2 Human capital theory**

The discrimination theory focuses on the in- and outgroups, the influence of ethnic, racial, cultural, and linguistic differences and the different prejudices and representations existing in a society. As the research specifically targets people with an academical background, in their role as refugees in Denmark or Sweden, I found it important to supplement the discrimination

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theory, with human capital theory, that highlights the educational and intellectual significance of people who has invested in education and job experience.

In his book *Human Capital. A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis with Special Reference to Education* (1993), Gary S. Becker describes that human capital represents the resources that follows an individual, for example his or her education, training programmes through the labor market and labor experiences, where the education and the training has the highest value (Becker, 1993, p. 16f.). As human capital is inherent in the individual, its economic value will not transform until it is being converted in the labor market. The value of human capital consists in the increase of the potential of the individual's productivity. Through that, an increase of the "sales value" in the labor market is happening, in the form of higher wages and greater job security. According to Becker, the individual's decision to invest in human capital, depends on the expense associated with the investment, relative to the expected profit from the labor market (Becker, 1993, p. 30f.).

The choice of including human capital theory, as a supplement to discrimination theory, is due to the seemingly importance of human capital in the Danish and Swedish societies and systems. They are built as welfare states, where first of all, the philosophy is that everyone should have equal rights and be treated equally. Furthermore, the systems connect both the labor market and education with the success of the welfare states. And as mentioned, both Denmark and Sweden highlights education and labor as some of the main criteria for successful integration. This suggests that human capital is a valuable factor in the two countries. They invest in the citizens through education and job opportunities, that builds up human capital, making the citizens more valuable in an economical perspective, leading to a thriving national economy. However, as Anders Ejrnæs argues in his book *Integration eller Isolation? - Etniske minoriteter på arbejdsmarkedet* (2008), human capital theory does not include the importance of both networking and social- and cultural competences that are often needed in a successful job search. Human capital theory focusses mainly on the economic benefits and values of human capital. As the organization of jobs has become more dependent on the social structures in networking, a lack of human capital cannot alone explain any inequalities or marginalisation in the labor market among individuals with higher educations (Ejrnæs, 2008, p. 51f.).

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### **4.3 Critical reflections on theory choices**

As the main focus of this thesis does not investigate the economic benefits of the academically skilled refugees in Denmark and Sweden, the human capital theory will not play the same fundamental role in the analysis, as the discrimination theory. It will function as a supplement by its emphasis on the value that investing in human capital has, in the welfare states and how this can be connected to academically skilled refugees' experiences in the Danish and Swedish labor market. Additionally, the different types of discrimination are all present in the society, in bigger or smaller degrees, to that there is no discussion. Their significance in this thesis, will therefore be marked by an investigation of whether or not these types can be detected in the experiences of the two categories that has been interviewed, and if so, how it may affect the academically skilled refugees. As Ejrnaes' underlined, the impact of social and cultural structures and networking plays a big role in people's opportunities in the labor market as well, which emphasizes the fact that there are many factors involved, other than one's human capital, in a job search. Hence, the analysis of to which extent academically skilled refugees experience discrimination in the Danish and Swedish labor market, will also pay attention to other factors that may create inequalities, which does not necessarily derive from the mentioned types of discrimination.

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## 5 Analysis and discussion

The following chapter will present an analytical examination of the collected empirical material. To answer the research questions presented on page 6, different quotes and experiences from the interviewees will be analyzed and compared using the methodological tools offered through the critical discourse analysis, together with the important features of the discrimination theory and human capital theory. A critical discussion of the analytical findings will be implemented throughout the chapter, to offer relevant nuances and keep a critical perspective on the conclusions.

To investigate and analyse to what extent academically skilled refugees are experiencing discriminatory treatment in the Danish and Swedish integration and immigration system, through their access to the labor market, the framework and structures of van Dijk's critical discourse analysis will be used. The context, genre, social rules, and the position of the material will be identified together with the discursive structures involving the argumentation, lexical style, and quotation (Dijk, 1993, p. 263ff.). The empirical material collected through the semi-structured interviews with both caseworkers and academically skilled refugees in Denmark and Sweden offers many different perspectives and could be used to analyse the interest area from a lot of angles, which would probably result in different discussions and conclusions. However, I have chosen to highlight some interesting points, which I have found relevant for the thesis. These points include an analysis of personal experiences on discriminating situations, the difference in the Danish and Swedish discourses about the subject, flaws in the system leading to a lack of understanding the existential importance of education and experience, and finally the paradox seen through human capital theory.

In order to remember and recognize the interviewees, a short repetition will be presented below:

### *Academically skilled refugees*

**Hussein** – academically skilled refugee, who came to Sweden in 2014 from Syria, and also a Swedish caseworker from Arbetsförmedlingen in Malmö.

**Henok** – academically skilled refugee from Eritrea, who came to Denmark in 2014.

**Selma** – academically skilled refugee from Syria, who came to Sweden in 2017.

**Yousef** – academically skilled refugee, who came to Sweden in 2018, from Syria.

**Fawaz** – academically skilled refugee who came to Denmark in 2015 from Iraq.

*Caseworkers*

**Ingrid** – Danish caseworker from DJØF.

**Marie** – Danish caseworker from the municipality of Odense.

**Anna** – Swedish caseworker from Arbetsförmedlingen in Malmö.

**Daniel** – Swedish caseworker from Korta Vägen.

### 5.1 Personal experiences of discrimination

One of the interesting factors from the collected material, is the position and experiences of the caseworkers, as they all have an interest in helping and guiding academically skilled refugees. When the Swedish caseworker Anna explains the procedures of helping academically skilled refugees into the Swedish society, she enhances the opportunity of getting an internship in a Swedish company. She highlights how this is the best way to achieve knowledge about the labor market, the social rules, and the Swedish language. She also states that an internship is a way to show the competences you have as an academically skilled refugee, and then you might be able to get a job afterwards (Interview with Anna, 2022). Anna gives an impression of a very successful and well-established process, with different steps that helps academically skilled refugees enter the labor market, and achieve cultural, social, and linguistic experience. However, when talking about internships, Hussein paints a very different picture, as an academically skilled refugee. He explains how he was originally offered an internship in a kitchen, which he refused, as it would not lead to a paid job. He then talked with a recruitment manager in a Swedish municipality about an internship there, where he was told that they do not accept interns due to confidentiality. As Hussein is now himself working in Arbetsförmedlingen, he emphasized that her answer about confidentiality cannot be the reason. He was sure she just did not want him, because of his foreign background (Interview with Hussein, 2022). Whether or not this is actually what the recruitment manager meant, it is at least how Hussein experienced it. According to van Dijk (view page 29), Hussein is using the discursive structure of argumentation, as he evaluates the situation negatively. He continues to explain how she then offered him an internship as a ‘mother-tongue-teacher’ for another intern. And at that point, he states: “I felt discriminated there” (Interview with Hussein, 2022). This example could suggest that Hussein felt effects of ambivalent prejudices; the recruitment manager have most likely acknowledged Hussein and his competences, but still had a condescending attitude, putting him in the outgroup (view page 33), making him feel

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discriminated. Furthermore, Hussein describes how difficult it was for him to make his caseworker believe that he could actually work in Arbetsförmedlingen. He explained to her, that he found the tasks interesting and relevant for him, as he has experience in state-planning and -communication as a kind of consultant within the Ministry of the State in Syria. However, his caseworker answered, “it does not matter” (Interview with Hussein, 2022) to his question of which education is required. When Hussein finally got an internship-interview with Arbetsförmedlingen after all, he experienced that the employers did not, in his words “believe the competences that comes to them” as they kept asking him if he was sure he understood “what it means to work within an authority” (Interview with Hussein, 2022). Again, Hussein experienced what Blank, Dabady, & Citro refers to as ambivalent prejudices, as he was acknowledged as a person of interest for an internship, but they still could not view him as equal – from the ingroup. Additionally, it could be argued that the repetition of that specific question could suggest some automatic prejudices (view page 32); that the employers were negatively stereotyping Hussein based on... maybe his background, his name, his ethnicity or his education? As the authors emphasize, it is difficult to determine the discriminatory behaviour, and of course I cannot be sure of the purpose or the intention of that question. Nevertheless, it resulted in a situation where Hussein was not treated in a way that made him feel equal or acknowledged. The question is, if the employers would ask or rather repeat that type of question to everyone, or if it felt necessary to repeat it in front of Hussein, due to prejudices?

The experiences of Hussein stand in great contrast to Anna’s opinion on internships. Even if Hussein also helps academically skilled refugees enter the labor market now, through internships, in his job in Arbetsförmedlingen, he stresses the importance of finding internships that actually match the competences of the person, instead of just sending people into internships for the sake of the internship (Interview with Hussein, 2022). This argument is also used by Selma, who indicates that if the activities and the internships the academically skilled refugees are offered, does not match their competences or their experiences, it seems pointless (Interview with Selma, 2022). It can be argued that Anna shows a sense of naivety or unrealistic assumptions in relation to the integration process, or the specific offers the system is providing. Her explanation of the importance of internships is valid enough, which both Selma and Hussein also imply. Yet, some academically skilled refugees find the specific offers pointless or even a bit condescending. It is important to notice that Hussein emphasizes that he does not



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experience discrimination often. He only had these few experiences related to the municipality (Interview with Hussein, 2022). Comparing these opinions about internships as part of the integration process, it is interesting to focus on the positive perspective that Anna gives. As a caseworker for Arbetsförmedlingen, she is representing the integration and immigration policy of Sweden. Her experiences are from a professional point of view, and she must believe in the effects of the different steps in the process. However, from Hussein's perspective, it is personal, it affects him and his identity. He finds the offers discriminating, even if the intentions are not meant to be. So, even if Anna represents positive and proactive measures, it could also be argued that some type of lack of understanding is present. This theme will be elaborated later in the analysis.

The interview with Henok, shows a similar job-related experience. When asked what he thinks his biggest challenge in finding a competence-matching job in Denmark is, he first answers the language. This is mentioned by almost all the interviewees as the biggest challenge. However, Henok also implies that "there is something behind the country, and I always think that" (Interview with Henok, 2022), suggesting a more unspoken cultural or social rule in Denmark, that Henok finds difficult to define. As an example, Henok frustratedly explains how he often receives refusals on a lot of job applications to relevant jobs, **before** the deadline of the application, negatively evaluating the situation through his lexical style. He argues that the chance of getting a job is higher, if you go through your social network, than by sending applications, because employers sometimes look at the name and think "you are a Muslim", which leads to the refusal (Interview with Henok, 2022). According to Blank, Dabady, & Citro, Henok's experience can be qualified as statistical discrimination (view page 33), as the employers have, in Henok's opinion, based their evaluations on group characteristics, after assuming Henok is Muslim. Additionally, Henok felt that receiving the refusals before the deadline shows a lack of interest or acknowledgement of his competences and experiences, which amplifies his feeling of not belonging to the ingroup. Likewise, it could be argued that the prejudices that might have affected the judgements of Henok's applications, are well-integrated in the Danish culture, according to Abbas' statement; that Islam is seen as the 'beast' in the Danish society, and Islam is also connected to immigration, resulting in a representation of immigrants and newcomers being a problem (view page 14).

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The implication that there is something with the Danish culture, that Henok a bit vaguely suggests, is backed up by Ingrid. She points out cultural differences and prejudices in the Danish society, as the main factors in the handling of refugees in general. She suggests that the willingness to take risks in relation to refugees is higher now – with the Ukrainian refugees – than back in 2015-2016 with the Syrian refugees, due to a bigger cultural similarity between Danes and Ukrainians (Interview with Ingrid, 2022). Likewise, Fawaz mentions what businesses calls the “liability of foreignness”, the disadvantage of foreign companies or individuals, as a reason for any challenges in getting into the labor market, as a foreigner. He suggests that part of the reason why he has been successful in utilizing his competences, is because he “was kind of exposed to the culture” from his time in the American University of Iraq. With this argument, he also highlights that for those who does not have this kind of background, it can be very difficult to integrate into the labor market (Interview with Fawaz, 2022).

### ***5.1.1 Partial conclusion of Personal experiences of discrimination***

Hussein and Henok both felt discriminated in different situations connected to entering the labor market, and it could be argued that the same situations would not happen to a native Dane or Swede. Additionally, it is interesting to notice that Henok has finished his education in Denmark, which could suggest that the failure of finding a competence-matching job, cannot solely be linked to his human capital – as he also has a Danish education. Therefore, in Henok’s situation it is very reasonable to think that his job search is affected by discrimination, as he suggests. Furthermore, even Selma’s job-situation can suggest discrimination, as she has experiences as an accountant in a Syrian Ministry, which should be possible to match in Sweden. However, Selma has not found a competence-matching job in Sweden, which may imply that prejudices or generalization about the Syrian government can affect employers’ judgment on Selma’s human capital. As already mentioned, the subtle, unconscious, automatic discrimination and the statistical discrimination and profiling are difficult to determine or verify. If the specific caseworkers and employers in question, were asked, they would quite possibly deny any sort of discriminating treatment, as they have most likely never wanted to act discriminating towards any of the interviewees. Discrimination is a quite complex term as it defers from person to person. Throughout the discrimination theory, the focus is mainly on how people from the ingroup are discriminating people from the outgroup, in different ways. Likewise, van Dijk focus on the dominating versus dominated group, giving the impression

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that the dominance and the different groups will always be related to discrimination. However, the interesting factor in this analysis is the personal experience of people from the outgroup. Some might find specific treatments discriminating, while others may not notice the same. Therefore, it could be argued that the discrimination theory is quite limited, as it does not consider how the outgroup handles the different supposedly discriminating behaviors or structures. Furthermore, the factors of cultural differences or language barriers for example, that may affect opportunities and place refugees in an 'outgroup', does not necessarily equal discrimination.

## 5.2 Danish and Swedish discourses

While conducting and transcribing the interviews, an interesting factor appeared. In some sense, through the information in the research field, it may not be that surprising, but anyway, it was not something I had specifically expected. The Danish and Swedish caseworkers used very different discursive structures in their answers. It seems like the Swedish caseworkers are very careful and aware about the use of generalizing or discriminating opinions or observations. When discussing the difficulties in finding relevant jobs, when you do not have a network, as a refugee in Sweden, Daniel makes sure to state that he should be careful not to generalize, but that cultural differences definitely creates some challenges for academically skilled refugees (Interview with Daniel, 2022). Daniel's statement can be compared with Ingrid's statement "and the Danes are difficult to get in contact with. (...) if they (refugees) are more socially oriented, which they typically are, right?" (Interview with Ingrid, 2022), referring to the same struggles with the lack of social network. These two ways of addressing the issue, shows a big difference in the Swedish discourse compared to the Danish, which can be related to the two national identities. Swedishness is specifically known for the feeling of belonging to one big family and to welcome everyone and treat everyone equal. It can be argued that criticisms or generalization of people does not fit into that perspective. Danishness, on the other hand, could suggest a feistier character, rooted in a fight for "what is ours" and a protection of Danish tradition and culture (view page 12f.). This may lead to a more critical and direct way of expressing things in the Danish society. The Danish caseworker, Marie showed the same kind of critical views on the integration process on several occasions in her interview. She questioned the amount of time it takes to evaluate and validate academically skilled refugees' educations, sometimes they wait up to three or four years. Likewise, she pointed out some of the flaws in the integration process, by explaining how registering as an academically skilled

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person, may sometimes create disadvantages, for example making Danish-courses more expensive (Interview with Marie, 2022).

The previously mentioned ‘naivety’ of Anna also indicates that a more critical and direct discourse about the issues, is definitely present from the Danish caseworkers, compared to the Swedish. But the critical views were also present in Daniel’s interview. He noticed how even he reacts to applications written in a language that is ‘a bit crooked’, emphasizing that this is something **he** needs to work on (Interview with Daniel, 2022). Here, he is addressing one of the issues that might affect the refugees’ chances in the labor market. However, he kind of takes responsibility for it himself, showing the Swedish humbleness, instead of, for example, blaming the system or the employer, which was seen from the Danish caseworkers.

### ***5.2.1 Partial conclusion of Danish and Swedish discourses***

Everyone expresses themselves differently, which of course makes it impossible to generalize, but from the collected material it can be argued that the Danish caseworkers use some discursive structures that implies a critique and mistrust of the integration process, whereas the Swedish caseworkers use discursive structures with more positivity and trust for the system. If there are problems, it should be found within the different people (Daniel’s example) rather than within the integration process. Now, as I have previously reflected on my own position as half Dane, half Swede, I cannot deny that this conclusion is influenced by the critical approach represented in Danishness, and that it might have looked different from a ‘Swedishness’ perspective. Furthermore, it could also be stated that the discursive structures of the two sides are influenced by the differences in the political views on immigration and integration in the two countries, rather than on the national identities. However, since the interviews does not offer a lot of direct reflections on the political decisions or the national opinions towards immigration and integration in the two countries, I find it unethical to imply the interviewees’ political stance.

### **5.3 System flaws?**

Several of the interviewees indicate that it is the knowledge and the perspectives and intellect that comes with an academical education, that is the advantage, when asked whether or not an academical education is an advantage to have, when arriving in Denmark and Sweden as a

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refugee. The actual diploma is not per se an advantage. Marie even implies that registering an academical education may be a disadvantage, as it may lock some opportunities in the Danish system, as mentioned earlier with the expensive Danish courses (Interview with Marie, 2022). Likewise, Henok has experienced having to pay extra for a truckdriver license, due to him being academically educated, (Interview with Henok, 2022). These examples indicate flaws in the system, which unintendedly affects the wrong people. Therefore, I will not categorize it as discrimination. But, as Henok and Marie both implies, the academically skilled refugees get stuck in the system, due to these flaws. Henok expresses that he feels stuck between skilled jobs and unskilled jobs, as his academical background is often an obstacle for him even in getting an unskilled job (Interview with Henok, 2022).

Moreover, the education is such a big part of their identity, which is clearly expressed by Ingrid. She argues that the mentor program she is working within, often results in very existential conversations and considerations between the academically skilled refugees and their mentors. The realization of the need to commit to some unexpected efforts and extra work, in order to stay in the country, while understanding that their human capital, which they identify with, may not be acknowledged (Interview with Ingrid, 2022). They want to highlight their skills and they seem eager to share this with the Danish and Swedish societies. Therefore, for them, being identified as an academically educated person is important, and the lack of attention to that is significant to notice (Interview with Henok, 2022), (Interview with Yousef, 2022). Even if it can be justified that refugees should not get a specific job, just because they have an academical background, as others may be more suitable for the job, these experiences show that some academically skilled refugees reflect on whether or not they should actually declare their academical background. They mention that they might have better chances of getting an (unskilled) job, if they do not write their master's degree or Ph.D. on their resume. Fawaz also mentions how the integration process focus more on getting people into the labor market, than integrating them culturally or linguistically, suggesting that the human capital is not the main focus, as self-sufficiency is prioritized higher in the integration process (Interview with Fawaz, 2022).

Furthermore, both Henok and Yousef states that the fear of not receiving permanent residency affects their choices. As Henok says, in Denmark you need to work almost four years, in order

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to receive permanent residency<sup>4</sup>. Since he chose to finish his education in Denmark, he has still not been able to achieve that. He even suggests that many academically skilled refugees choose to just find any kind of job, when they arrive in Denmark, as they cannot risk not getting the permanent residency (Interview with Henok, 2022). Additionally, Yousef mentions how he constantly worries about if the Swedish political conditions will change, like in Denmark, and if he will suddenly be sent back, which affects him a lot. Therefore, to both increase his chances of getting a job and to practice Swedish, Yousef decided to change his academical direction, and became an assistant nurse in Sweden (Interview with Yousef, 2022).

### ***5.3.1 Partial conclusion of System flaws?***

The human capital that people invest in, will inevitably become a great part of their identity; they get educated and formed through their choice of education, job, hobbies, activities etc. When the academically skilled refugees experience that avoiding declaring their academical background could increase their chances of getting a job, due to flaws or ‘holes’ in the integration process, it can be argued that their identity is not being acknowledged or understood. With these flaws in the system, I will not say that the system is discriminating, but the lack of understanding or attention to this, puts the academically skilled refugees in an unequal position. As mentioned earlier, the welfare states are dependent on human capital, they are built on the human capital that the people invest in, and it could be advocated that the details of one’s human capital is always beneficial to mention when searching for jobs. Furthermore, the requirements to achieve permanent residency, in Denmark at least, creates an uncertainty that can affect whether or not the academically skilled refugees will apply for competence-matching jobs.

### **5.4 Paradox – the importance of human capital theory**

Throughout the interviews, I asked the interviewees to reflect on whether or not they would say that the academical skills and competences that ‘arrive with’ the refugees – the human capital – is being utilized properly in the Danish and Swedish societies. Several of the

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<sup>4</sup> One of the criteria to achieve permanent residency in Denmark, states that a person must have been working for at least three years and six months within the last four years (LegalDesk, 2022). In Sweden you need to have a permanent employment, or a fixed-term employment of at least eighteen months from the day on which your permanent residency application is examined (Migrationsverket, 2021).

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interviewees immediately answered no. They do not think that the human capital of the refugees is well utilized. They each gave arguments as to why:

Yousef suggests that it could be related to the different academical sectors. Some professions do not require a fluent Swedish, as the common language in the labor environment is English. Therefore, he argued that academically skilled refugees in the IT, communication or engineering field might have easier access to the labor market, than for example the humanitarian skilled refugees (Interview with Yousef, 2022). Marie, the Danish caseworker, backs up Yousef's argument about the different sectors. She says that some sectors are very closed to foreigners, whereas others are better at "seizing these qualifications of people" (Interview with Marie, 2022). Her argument shows a bit more of a specific willingness to use the human capital of academically skilled refugees, whereas Yousef implies a need-based explanation. Daniel's argument is a bit more critical, and actually politically embossed; he states quite clearly that the specific focus group is not very prioritized neither by the government nor by Arbetsförmedlingen, resulting in "even more competences disappearing" (Interview with Daniel, 2022). Again, a similar perspective from the Danish side can be found, when Ingrid suggests that a better utilization of the competences, would require "an effort from our (the Danes) side (...) which we are not very good at" (Interview with Ingrid, 2022), leaving the responsibility to all Danes.

The perspective of Henok is a bit different as he transferred the question to his own situation, saying that he was eager to finish his education, to learn Danish and to enter the Danish labor market, as he understands that it can be hard to accept people from a different country. However, it has not helped him much, which is why he has started to apply for unskilled jobs, in order to find a job (Interview with Henok, 2022).

#### ***5.4.1 Partial conclusion of Paradox – the importance of human capital theory***

The paradox, as I see it, is that some refugees arrive with human capital, both in education and work experience, but these competences are not well utilized. Naturally, it is not possible to just 'jump' right into the labor market, as a refugee, due to cultural, linguistic, and bureaucratic differences and challenges (to name a few). This is why, both Denmark and Sweden have created systems that investigate and validate the diplomas and transcripts. They offer different courses, language educations and training programmes, which are necessary for the refugees,

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when integrating into the Danish and Swedish labor markets. However, even with these actions to optimize or supplement the human capital that the academically skilled refugees offer, both interview categories argue that getting a job equivalent to the academically skilled refugees' formal competences is difficult. They state that a lot of competences – human capital – are lost or not utilized properly, which creates inequalities in the society.

There will always be differences; different social and political systems to account for, different languages, names and narratives, different law systems, ideologies etc. So, to some extent, ingroups and outgroups, dominating or dominated people, seems inevitable in societies with immigration. The division into these groups do not necessarily include discriminatory treatments or prejudices, but it cannot be questioned that the people of the two groups are different in many ways and perspectives.



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## 6 Conclusion

The different examples of experiences related to job searching, by the academically skilled refugees, could suggest some discursive structures in the labor market, that is influenced by a variety of subtle and automatic prejudices together with a statistical type of discrimination based on generalizing characteristics of specific minority groups. This is what the interviewees express. However, as discussed, the feeling of being discriminated is very individual and different factors like language-requirements, networking, or more qualified candidates, can also affect the opportunities in the labor market. Therefore, any discriminatory treatment in the labor market, will be very difficult to detect and identify. From the interviews, there is no question that some of the interviewees have felt discriminated, but the findings do not suggest any overwhelming discriminating discursive structures in the Danish and Swedish labor market. Cultural differences, language barriers or other non-discriminating factors does also affect the opportunities in the labor market.

The discursive structures presented by the Danish and Swedish caseworkers, show some interesting critical reflections, both on the integration process, the political priorities, the recruitment processes, the social openness, and the labor market's approach towards foreigners. From the two interviewed Swedish caseworkers, the national identity, Swedishness, is represented in the positivity, naivety or uncritical perspective, humility, and trust. The two Danish caseworkers represent Danishness through their critical, direct, and honest reflections on the society needing to improve in their approach towards foreigners. In relation to the academically skilled refugees' experiences of discrimination, it could be argued that the Danish discursive structures gives a more realistic or relatable picture of any discrimination in the integration process, whereas the Swedish discursive structures seems to conceal or tone-down any discrimination.

From the answers of the interviewees, the human capital of the academically skilled refugees is not utilized appropriately in the Danish and Swedish labor markets. A lot of factors are suggested to be the cause: Both cultural, social, linguistic, and political issues and differences can affect the possibilities of the refugees and lets a lot of competences and skills "go to waste". But different discriminating prejudices and negative profiling and generalizing of refugees are also given as reasons. The less prioritized utilization of the academically skilled refugees'

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human capital will inevitably affect their existential self-perception and may also create inequalities in the labor market.

It can be argued that the different flaws of the system create some discursive structures that leads to less opportunities for academically skilled refugees compared to natives. From these probably unintended holes in the integration process, that affects the academically skilled refugees' possibilities in the labor market, a discourse of accepting inequality is made. We acknowledge that these decisions are made to prevent wealthy, successful academics from using offers made for unskilled laborers. However, at the same time, we accept that unemployed academics with a refugee background gets affected and finds themselves stuck in the system. This can cause them to 'hide' their academical backgrounds, in order to find employment. Furthermore, the pressure of achieving permanent residency forces them to choose between utilizing their human capital or positioning themselves in the lower paid, unskilled jobs, creating social inequality. One of the interviewees mentions that this focus group is not prioritized, which may also affect the acceptance of these flaws. If there is no focus, in the integration process, on the specific focus group, and their opportunities, competences get wasted, and people feel discriminated.

Lastly, it cannot be questioned that a lot of factors create differences between the ingroup and the outgroup in the Danish and Swedish societies, which does not necessarily equal discriminatory treatments. However, the paradox of the two welfare states not utilizing the human capital of academically skilled refugees, does unavoidably show some priorities that could appear discriminating: A successful integration in Denmark and Sweden is defined through the number of refugees being self-sufficient and how fast they receive employment. The type of job or the value of their human capital is less important. Somehow it seems more appropriate to let academically skilled refugees take unskilled jobs, than to encourage them to seek competence-matching jobs, equal to academically skilled native Danes or Swedes.

To finally conclude on the research definition: *To what extent is discriminatory treatment expressed through discursive structures in the Danish and Swedish integration and immigration system, represented by academically skilled refugees' access to the labor market?* the findings show subtle automatic and generalizing discrimination to some extent, through discursive structures in different parts of the integration process. Caseworkers, employers and

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in the end the criteria of the integration policies are in different ways and through various offers and decisions creating discursive structures resulting in some discriminatory treatments and unequal opportunities in the labor market. Yet, discrimination can definitely not be presented as the only reason to any disadvantages or dominating factors, which may affect the academically skilled refugees' opportunities. It is also central to remember the importance of network, social knowledge, cultural understanding, and language use, nuancing the debate and highlighting the limits of discrimination theory.

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## **7 Contribution of the thesis**

This thesis has touched down on a well-known and well-discussed issue in the Danish and Swedish society, and probably many other societies as well. Immigration and integration are becoming more and more familiar and ‘normal’ in our globalized world, as mentioned already. Therefore, the thesis has not offered insight into an untouched area. However, the contribution of this thesis is in the understanding of the academically skilled refugees and their process to integrate. Through the interviews, it is clear that this specific focus group is motivated, ambitious, and eager to both be acknowledged for their competences, the human capital they represent, but also to become a part of the society in Denmark or Sweden. Their experiences show societies and integration processes that might have the right intentions, but they lack a better understanding of, and communication with the focus group in question.

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## 9 Appendixes

### *Appendix 1, Interview guide for category 1*

Interview guide	
<p><b>Introduction:</b> This interview is focusing on your experiences as an academically skilled refugee, with experience on the Danish or Swedish labor market.</p> <p><b>Anonymity:</b> Your name will be anonymous</p> <p><b>Recording:</b> This interview will be recorded and transcribed. If requested, the transcription can be sent to you for approval.</p> <p><b>Time:</b> The interview will last a max. of 45min.</p>	
Research questions	Interview questions
<p><b>Clarifying background information</b></p>	<p>Which university degree do you have?</p> <p>Which kind of work experience do you have?</p>
<p><b>How does an academically skilled refugee experience being or becoming a part of the Danish or Swedish labor market?</b></p>	<p>Can you tell me about your experience with the Danish or Swedish labor market?</p> <p>How do you feel your university degree has been received in the labor market?</p> <p>How do you think that your university degree matches the work opportunities you have received in Denmark or Sweden?</p> <p>Have you experienced any problems in connection to finding a job?</p> <p>Have you experienced that the workplaces are finding your degree relevant?</p> <p>Have you found your degree to be an advantage?</p> <p>Do you think the academical competences from academically skilled refugees are being utilized properly in the Danish or Swedish labor market?</p>

*Appendix 2, Interview guide for category 2*

<b>Interview guide</b>	
<p><b>Introduction:</b> This interview is focusing on your experiences as a caseworker, helping refugees, who arrive with academical skills, into the Danish or Swedish labor market</p> <p><b>Anonymity:</b> Your name will be anonymous</p> <p><b>Recording:</b> This interview will be recorded and transcribed. If requested, the transcription can be sent to you for approval.</p> <p><b>Time:</b> The interview will last a max. of 30min.</p>	
<b>Research questions</b>	<b>Interview questions</b>
<b>Clarifying background information</b>	<p>How long have you been working with refugees?</p> <p>Do you meet a lot of academically skilled refugees?</p>
<b>How does a caseworker experience helping academically skilled refugees into the Danish or Swedish labor market?</b>	<p>Can you tell me about your experience with helping refugees into the labor market?</p> <p>What is the procedure for helping refugees, who arrives with a university degree when they are entering the Danish or Swedish labor market?</p> <p>How do you experience that academically skilled refugees are being received in the labor market?</p> <p>Do you think that a university degree from the country of origin is an advantage for refugees, when entering the Danish or Swedish labor market?</p> <p>Do you think the academical competences from academically skilled refugees are being utilized properly in the Danish or Swedish labor market?</p>

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**Appendix 3, Consent-form for interview****Samtykkeerklæring Masterspeciale**

Specialets formål er at undersøge akademiske flygtninges vilkår på det danske og svenske arbejdsmarked. Jeg er specielt interesseret i, hvordan flygtninge med akademiske uddannelser samt sagsbehandlere oplever at førstnævnte modtages på arbejdsmarkedet. Specialet vil bestå af forskellige væsentlige politikker, interviews af relevante aktører, teoretiske overvejelser, analyse og diskussion af emnet. Interviewmaterialet vil fungere som den gennemgående empiri for analysen.

Din deltagelse er frivillig og du kan når som helst afbryde interviewet og dermed afstå fra at deltage. Denne ret gælder frem til publicering i begyndelsen af juni 2022. Interviewmaterialet håndteres fortroligt og kun af specialeforfatteren, Sandra Fröberg, samt vejleder Niklas Bernsand. Dine svar vil udelukkende blive brugt i forskningøjemed og du vil fremgå anonymt. Din stilling samt erhvervsmæssige baggrund og uddannelse vil blive oplyst, hvis dette findes relevant for specialet.

Med din godkendelse bliver interviewet optaget. Du vil modtage alle citater som eventuelt bruges i specialet, til godkendelse inden publicering, samt noter fra interviewet, hvis ønsket.

Ved spørgsmål om specialet, håndtering af materialet, denne aftale eller andet, kontakt mig gerne på [sandra\\_fro@hotmail.com](mailto:sandra_fro@hotmail.com).

**Samtykke til at deltage i masterspeciale**

Jeg har læst og forstået ovenstående information. Jeg har fået mulighed for at stille og få besvaret eventuelle spørgsmål.

- Jeg giver samtykke til at medvirke i specialet omhandlende akademiske flygtninge på det danske og svenske arbejdsmarked.
- Jeg giver samtykke til at mine personoplysninger behandles som beskrevet ovenfor.
- Jeg giver samtykke til at interviewet optages og transskriberes
- Jeg ønsker at modtage noter fra interviewet inden publicering

Interviewee:

Dato &amp; navn

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Underskrift

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Specialeforfatter:

Dato &amp; navn

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Underskrift

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