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## **Connecting Foreign-Born Women and the State**

The Role of Civil Society-Municipal Partnerships in Labor Market Integration

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## **Abstract**

Among foreign-born women there is a significant employment gap compared to native women as well as foreign-born men. At the same time public institutions have been deemed as unable to deliver labor market integration efforts that are adapted to the needs of foreign-born women, which has been pointed out as a necessity. In this context, civil society-municipal partnerships have been recognized as a possible way to address the issue. Yet, these types of partnerships have been questioned. The aim of this thesis has therefore been to illuminate the dynamics of top-down policies and frontline practices of state-civil partnerships, and examine how they respond to the needs of target groups. The labor market project Framtidsprogrammet has been used as a case study, drawing upon empirical data in the form of interviews and project applications and evaluations. For the analysis a theoretical framework consisting of social action theory, open systems theory and co-production have been employed. Nya Kompisbyrå has through its operating role been found to involve a hard-to-reach heterogeneous group of foreign-born women with diverse needs in Framtidsprogrammet. It has been achieved through a co-delivered personal outreach work strengthened by collaboration; by providing an arena for socializing and practicing Swedish and getting closer to work or studies; and through a welcoming atmosphere with target group adapted services and structures. The project has also promoted a more effective communication and cooperation between the target group and the municipalities through participatory processes. Altogether making a case for Nya Kompisbyrå being able to include foreign-born women in Framtidsprogrammet and connecting them with the state.

*Search words: state-civil partnerships, civil society-municipal partnerships, civil society organizations, labor market integration, foreign-born women, co-production,*

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## **List of Abbreviations**

CSO Civil society organization

LMI Labor market integration

PES Public Employment Service

## 1. Introduction

In 1998, integration became its own policy area in Sweden and a more individual approach was employed in order to increase new arrivals' chances to become self-sufficient and partake in Swedish society (Brännström, 2018). The means for achieving it is officially viewed to be through labor market integration (LMI) (EU, 2020) and in 2010 the responsibility for integration was transferred from the municipalities to the state with the Public Employment Service (PES) charged to take the lead (Irastorza & Bevelander, 2017). As part of the Establishment Reform the Establishment Program was created. The program is supposed to be tailored according to the individual's needs and qualifications in order to smooth the transition into the Swedish labor market (Arbetsförmedlingen, n.d.).

Part of the reason for implementing the reform also came from a gender equality perspective with the goal of speeding up the LMI process for immigrant women (Larsson, 2015), for whom there is a significant employment gap compared to native women as well as foreign-born men (SCB, 2023; Wikström Östervall, 2017). However, the capacity and the flexibility of the Establishment Program has been questioned with too few employees in the PES resulting in procedures that are time-consuming and challenging, leaving little possibilities for individually tailored solutions (Cetrez et al. 2020; Schuster et al. 2022). This is of particular concern for foreign-born women considering recent calls for authorities to adapt their labor market initiatives according to their needs (Jämställdhetsmyndigheten, 2022).

In this context, civil society is raised as an innovative, flexible and inclusive actor working with bottom-up practices and participatory approaches who can complement the state by taking actions where the system may be strained or have reached its limit (Hansen, 2018; Galera et al. 2018; Numerato et al. 2019). This is also recognized by the Swedish government who encourages collaboration between municipalities and civil society organizations (CSO) by funding projects that help to establish new arrivals in Sweden (Länsstyrelsen, 2023). In fact, many labor market oriented measures for foreign-born women are financed and run in this way (Lönnsroos & Gustafsson, 2018). It is a form of co-production where the state together with the people, via CSOs, provides services (Brandsen & Pestoff, 2006). As such, it is a transition from the traditional approach of delivering public services to the public, to an approach that involves the active participation of the public in providing these services

(Bovaird & Loeffler, 2012). Yet, others argue that state-civil partnerships jeopardizes CSOs capacity to serve as advocates for local communities or catalysts for community-driven transformation (Cairns, 2006). Instead they are seen to serve as a shadow state (Wolch, 1990).

A reason for that is the dependence on government funding which has been found to pressure CSOs to professionalize and disregard participatory processes (Alexander et al.1999), as well as turning them into poor service deliverers (Aiken & Bode, 2009). However, studies have also revealed how state-civil collaborations have been beneficial for the target group and supplemented rather than replaced existing services (Butler et al. 2019; Bontenbal & Lillie, 2022). Others have found that partnerships did introduce more inclusive perspectives but questioned the short-termism in many projects (Fry & Islar, 2021). Partnerships have also been recognised as a site of struggle (Kim, 2013). Emphasizing how CSOs can exert a fair amount of autonomy on the frontline bridging the gap between the state and its welfare recipients. Yet, denoting how state-civil partnerships also can expand the hierarchical gap between organizations and the community they serve as participatory processes is recognized to not occur automatically. Thus, it necessitates the empirical inquiry into top-down policies and street-level activities in order to identify the specific characteristics of a partnership (Ellis, 2011).

Altogether, it showcases a need to extend the understanding of how state-civil partnerships affects the relationship between people and the state. Yet, little attention has also been given to labor market projects implemented by CSOs in collaboration with local public authorities (Galera et al. 2018; Numerato et al. 2019; Bontenbal & Lillie, 2022), in a Swedish context (Engstrand, 2010; Diedrich & Hellgren, 2018) for foreign-born women (Lönnroos & Gustafsson, 2018).

### **1.1 Aim, Research Questions & Delimitations**

The purpose of this thesis is to illuminate the dynamics of top-down policies and frontline practices of state-civil partnerships, and examine how they respond to the needs of target groups. The focus on CSOs role as a mediator between young foreign-born women and municipalities, and the notion of co-production arise out of a wider concern for how the relationship between people and the state are affected by state-civil partnerships. Are CSOs able to draw upon its strengths and include its people in the partnership, or is the partnership distancing them from its people. The study will use the labor market project

Framtidsprogrammet as a case study, drawing upon empirical data in the form of interviews with the project manager and participants, as well as from project applications and evaluations, in order to answer the following questions:

*How, if at all, has Framtidsprogrammet been able to reach the target group?*

*How, if at all, has Framtidsprogrammet been able to attract women from the target group to participate?*

*In what ways, if any, have Framtidsprogrammet been adapted to make it accessible for the target group?*

A theoretical framework consisting of social action theory, open systems theory and co-production will together with the literature review guide the analysis of the study.

## **1.2 Disposition**

The following second section provides background information about foreign-born women and CSOs, and their situation in regards to LMI in Sweden. A brief description of the case studied, Framtidsprogrammet, is also included. In the third section previous studies in regards to CSOs and LMI, state-civil partnerships, Nordic LMI initiatives for foreign-born women and migrant womens' experiences from partaking in Swedish LMI efforts are reviewed. The fourth section describes the theories constituting the theoretical framework and how they are employed for analyzing the empirical data. It is followed by the fifth section explaining and critically reflecting upon the research design and methods used for sampling, collecting and analyzing the data. The sixth section presents and analyzes the findings from the gathered data, which is followed by the seventh section that summarizes the paper with some concluding remarks.

## **2. Background**

### **2.1 Foreign-Born Women & LMI**

Since the early 2000s family immigration has been the main reason for women migrating to Sweden from outside Europe. As they have no or few contacts with authorities these migrants have been deemed to run the risk of long standing exclusion (Jämställdhetsmyndigheten,



2022). Scholars have identified a number of different factors working as barriers to LMI for foreign-born women in general, such as culture, reasons for migrating, lack of human and social capital, structural changes in the economy, discrimination, insufficient language skills, health issues and not having one's educational and professional career being recognized and valued properly (Bevelander, 2005; Sansonetti, 2016; Liebig & Tronstad, 2018; Lönnroos & Gustafsson, 2018; Neuman, 2018). Among foreign-born women in the ages 15-24 the unemployment rate for 2022 was 35,5 percent, which can be compared to 27,4 percent of foreign-born men and 20,2 percent of native women in the same ages (SCB, 2023). Besides the above-mentioned factors serving as barriers to LMI, young foreign-born women in the ages 16-29 are much more likely to be on parental leave compared to other young groups of people. Making it harder for them to work and delaying their establishment in the labor market (MUCF, 2021). Moreover, people with extensive care responsibilities for children run a larger risk of missing out on establishment initiatives from the government (Lönnroos & Gustafsson, 2018).

## **2.2 Civil Society & LMI**

Civil society is defined by the Swedish government in the sense of an arena where people or groups act together out of shared interests, separate from the state, market and the individual household (Regeringen, n.d.). The role of CSOs needs to be understood in relation to the Swedish welfare state where a strong public sector traditionally has taken extensive social responsibility in providing its citizens with welfare services. CSOs on the other hand have chiefly been involved with recreational activities, such as sports, politics and culture (Törngren et al. 2018). However, already in 2009 CSOs active within the field of immigrant integration were invited by the Swedish government to discuss how the relationship between state and civil society could develop and support the emergence of a more diverse set of integration service providers (Regeringen, 2009). A relationship that would become more comprehensive in 2015 when refugee migration to Sweden increased substantially and municipalities started to regard collaboration with civil society actors in a more long-term and strategic fashion (Törngren et al. 2018). In the Swedish budget proposition for 2018 (prop. 2017/18:1 Utgiftsområde 13) it is also stated that cooperation among the public and private sector as well as civil society is essential for integration and one way of encouraging state-civil partnerships is by financing integration projects through the County Administration (Länsstyrelsen, 2023). The funding is used to encourage CSOs in activities facilitating LMI,

improved health, and Swedish language and civic orientation knowledge (Törngren et al. 2018).

### **2.3 Framtidsprogrammet**

Framtidsprogrammet is a labor market project in collaboration between Stockholm Municipality who owns it, the CSO Nya Kompisbyrån who operates it and Järfälla Municipality who is an additional partner. It is financed by the government through the Stockholm County Administrative Board and after having started up in 2022 it has also received funding for 2023. The project targets newly arrived women in the ages 18-29, living in Stockholm or Järfälla Municipality, who have been in Sweden for a maximum of six years. By offering a program based on educational meetings and a broadened social network the project aims to facilitate LMI of the target group. During the first three weeks the participants attend four two-hour educational meetings and one two-hour start-up meeting for the following six month mentorship program. In the mentorship program the mentor pairs are expected to meet at least 6 times. The participants are expected to search for a job or apply for studies in accordance with their goals and the mentor is expected to support with knowledge, advice and if bettlingly sharing its own network. The program also arranges visits to job fairs where the participants are invited to join the project manager and assistant. Additionally, participants also become part of a women's network – Future Women, consisting of previous participants and mentors (NKB, n.d.)

## **3. Previous Research**

### **3.1 The Ambiguity of State-Civil Partnerships**

As CSOs increasingly have become involved in public policy as service providers it has raised an ongoing debate in academia of its perks and pitfalls. On the one hand, state-civil partnerships are seen to complement each other's weaknesses by playing to their strengths. The state possesses the necessary legitimacy, means and power to ensure that labor market programs are available to everyone, while CSOs can engage more naturally with the communities they serve (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2012). In a European context, it can be connected with studies on LMI showing how CSOs are more flexible and less bureaucratic than public administrations which enables them to address the distinct requirements, aspirations, and experiences of individual migrants. Furthermore, they have been found to create opportunities for migrants to actively participate in the organization, promoting their

agency (Numerato et al. 2019). Other scholars have also emphasized CSOs ability to employ a more holistic approach to integration recognizing the importance of social, structural and cultural aspects for inclusion. Moreover, a bottom-up approach that mobilizes the engagement of volunteers and the larger community has been recognized as a major determinant explaining the inventive reach of CSOs (Galera et al. 2018).

However, CSOs that participate in partnerships have been identified to be at risk of becoming subservient to the government, which can undermine their ability to act as advocates for local people or agents of community change (Cairns et al. 2006). In doing so they have been argued to turn CSOs into a shadow state (Wolch, 1990). Conclusions drawn from a study on community based organizations in Ohio, US, is that dependence on government funding reduced their ability to make independent decisions. As a result, they tended to shape their development efforts according to the demands set by the government rather than prioritizing the community's actual needs. It was also found to pressure organizations into professionalizing and in doing so disregarding the experiences of community members as technical expertise was premiered. Thus equating participatory processes as a waste of time (Alexander et al. 1999). These types of managerialist partnerships have in Germany and the UK been found to turn CSOs into deliverers of poor back-to-work programs and to undermine their unique ability to offer more than just mere LMI (Aiken & Bode, 2009). Yet, overlooked aspects in many of these studies are resistance and autonomy. Kim's (2013) ethnographic analysis of a welfare-to-work collaboration between Korean community organizations and the state showcases that partnerships are sites of struggle. The study reveals how the former have reestablished inclusive and democratic settings in a specific policy context by arranging non-work-related activities and delegating administrative power to service recipients. Furthermore, in a more recent study from Northern Ireland on the commissioning of CSOs, the working practices and culture of the service provider was discovered to be of greater importance for shaping outcomes and experiences of the programs than the type of service provider (Butler et al. 2019).

If we zoom in on the Nordic context, CSOs have been found to make up for gaps and inflexibility that emerges within the system, in regard to migrants' situations, as they have been discovered to adapt their services faster to the context of the migrants and are able to work more directly towards them (Häikiö & Hvinden, 2012). Likewise, a Finnish study found that CSOs who collaborated in producing integration services together with comprehensive

government-led integration programs made up for deficiencies and insufficiencies in these services. Three particular gaps were identified in which CSOs stepped in: 1) limited availability in terms of target group and time, 2) absence of direct connection to the labor market, and 3) inadequate ability to cater to individual needs (Bontenbal & Lillie, 2022). However, a Swedish study on civil society-municipal partnerships related to refugee reception argues that if this “filling the gap” occurs through short-term projects it might not create the fundamental changes that are required (Fry & Islar, 2021). Yet, the collaborations were recognized to be a way for CSOs to introduce more inclusive perspectives by mediating the experiences of refugees into the development of local policies. Therefore the study emphasized a need for more long-term partnerships with the objective of integrating socially inclusive practices of civil society into policy formulation, rather than simply using it as a means to outsource welfare services.

In sum, the discrepancies in findings indicate the necessity of broadening the understanding of CSOs’ role as intermediaries between people and the state when entering into partnerships with the latter. The literature review also showcases that there are not many studies specifically addressing state-civil partnerships involved in migrant labor integration projects for women in Sweden. A gap this study aims to shed some light on. Thus, it requires an investigation into the policies and on-the-ground activities (Ellis, 2011) of Framtidsprogrammet in order to pinpoint how, if at all, the project has been able to connect the collaborating municipalities with the target group. Moreover it also necessitates an understanding of how, if at all, the project has responded to the needs of the target group. Therefore, the next section will review previous research on Nordic LMI efforts for foreign-born women and studies regarding migrant women’s experiences of participating in labor market initiatives in Sweden.

### **3.2 Nordic LMI Efforts & Migrant Women’s Perceptions**

Lönnroos and Gustafsson (2018) have in their comparative case study of LMI initiatives for foreign-born women in the Nordic countries concluded that outreach work is essential for engaging newly arrived women in labor market programs. In Sweden the municipalities are responsible for the outreach work but according to the authors it is not very widespread. Furthermore, it is concluded that the access to alternative integration paths are pivotal for those who are not at the disposal of the labor market upon arrival. The provision of childcare and information in the newly arrived languages are other services that are emphasized as well

as activities with mentors serving as bridges between the immigrants and the wider community. Especially for reaching women who have become isolated even though they have been in the country for several years.

In the Danish project “44 points”, gendered groups have been pointed out as vital for the ability to receive the support from the women and their husbands. Other key aspects were municipal support together with engaged project managers keeping a close daily contact with participants and showcasing a commitment which at times were far beyond what was expected. In the Finnish KYKY-project one of the biggest successes was to just have reached the target group. Besides already mentioned services and activities, networking and the staff's competencies, where most of them had immigrated and gone through the integration process themselves, were highlighted. In Iceland the voluntary organization W.O.M.E.N. provides activities for foreign-born women based on networking, social activities, counseling and the dissemination of information. Two important components for recruiting participants are to create a safe environment, with only women and without authorities, and to identify key persons within different groups who can forward information to their networks. For some women it is necessary to create a relationship and trust before they are ready to partake in efforts or receive counseling. Therefore the organization arranges cooking sessions or story telling circles, where information about W.O.M.E.N. is also provided. The Swedish project Mirjam was based on vocational guidance and mentorship. Its primary advantage appears to have been that, for those involved, it was more than solely a labor-market-focused project. The project also served as a means for socializing and personal growth.

In regards to foreign-born women and their perceptions of labor market initiatives in Sweden, Thomsson and Hoflund (2000) have interviewed 151 women with an immigrant background about their experiences. They report about women perceiving it hard for their ideas to be heard and to make demands which is related to a sense of inferiority. An inferiority sprung out of facing the unknown and not speaking the language properly. On a similar note, Spehar (2021), after interviewing 26 refugees having taken part in labor market programs in Sweden, also reported about migrants perceiving themselves in inferior positions. Both studies also emphasized how perceived prejudice and stereotyping contributed to devaluing their skills and forming assumptions about what they are like, how they live their life and what they are suited for. Yet, the most commonly and clearly articulated concern of the women was a perceived deficiency in institutional assistance. Refugee women did not consider the

integration institutions and organizations in Sweden to be sufficiently prompt or receptive to their requirements (Spehar, 2021). Furthermore, upon completing the Establishment Program, which typically spanned 24 months, multiple interviewees conveyed a sense of being unsure where to seek guidance and assistance. It was experienced by several respondents with diverse backgrounds and amplified by a perceived scarcity of social capital in Sweden (Spehar, 2021). This relates to earlier findings from women reporting how they wished they had a native Swede supporting them by listening and assisting them in the job application process (Thomsson & Hoflund, 2000). The fact that a large portion of the respondents also stated that they did not have a single “Swedish” friend, but wished they did, is also underlined. Another important theme that emerged is the trouble to combine family life with labor market initiatives (Thomsson & Hoflund, 2000). Most women expressed a desire to get out and not sit at home. Even the women who preferred to stay at home with their children clearly voiced that they wanted to be part of a social context and meet people (Thomsson & Hoflund, 2000).

Overall, the previous research showcases empirical findings of key-aspects for engaging hard-to-reach groups of foreign-born women in Nordic LMI projects. Moreover, migrant women’s needs and perceptions of partaking in Swedish LMI initiatives have been reviewed. Lönnroos and Gustafsson’s (2018) comparative study is based on only five projects, of which one is in Sweden, necessitating the need to extend the understanding about what policies and practices can be employed to allure foreign-born women to take part in Swedish labor market projects. In regards to Thomsson and Hoflund’s (2000) study it provides ample reports about women’s perceptions of LMI programs and their needs. Critique could be directed to the fact that the study is over 20 years old questioning if the findings still hold true. However, many of the findings are confirmed by Spehar (2021), and can be connected to contemporary factors working as barriers to LMI that were presented in the previous background section of this paper. Yet, the limited amount of studies on the matter demands further examinations. Especially, with the perspective of how state-civil partnerships are addressing the topic.

## **4. Theoretical Framework**

### **4.1 Social Action Theory**

The sociological investigation has been defined by Max Weber (1947: 80) as a “science which attempts interpretive understanding of social action”. Against this backdrop, he

expounded on three basic types of doing. The basic types of doing are behavior, action and social action (Prosch, 2004). According to Weber every form of doing is behavior, which becomes action when the performing individual ascribes a subjective meaning to it. Furthermore, it becomes social when the individual considers the behavior of others (Trigg, 2001: 49). In doing so the meaning of an individual's actions are connected with the actions of other individuals (Prosch, 2004).

However, the differentiation between behavior, action, and social action signifies that it is not feasible to classify any form of doing undertaken by an individual without first understanding their motives and objectives. Consequently, the study of social phenomena necessitates sociologists to empathize with the actors involved, comprehending their motivations, intentions, and goals (Prosch, 2004). Thus, the role of individual action and agency in shaping social structures and processes is deemed to be pivotal in social action theory. Therefore, collectivities, such a project, is regarded solely as the outcomes and organizational forms of the specific actions performed by individuals. It is only these individuals who can be considered as agents engaging in a course of action that can be subjectively comprehended (Weber, 1947: 92). As such, the empirical examinations should be concerned with the underlying motives that influence and guide the individual members to act in the way they do (Weber, 1947: 97).

#### **4.2 Open Systems Theory**

The systems theory approach emphasizes the understanding of organizations as open social systems that necessitate active engagement with their environments in order to sustain their existence. As such, it is a theoretical framework that examines social phenomena holistically rather than merely as the sum of its individual components. Its emphasis lies on understanding the organization, functioning, and outcomes of an entity by studying the interactions and relationships between its various parts (Katz and Kahn, 1966). Rooted in General System Theory (Bertalanffy, 1951) it was adapted by Katz and Kahn (1966) to suit the study of organizational behavior. A behavior that is identified by charting the recurring patterns of *input*, *throughput*, *output*, and *feedback* that transpire between an organization and its external *environment*. Systems receive input from the environment, which can be in the form of information or resources. These inputs are then internally processed, known as throughput, which then is released back into the environment as outputs with the aim of

restoring equilibrium. The system subsequently seeks feedback to evaluate the effectiveness of its outputs in achieving the desired equilibrium restoration (Katz and Kahn, 1966).

According to Pfeffer and Salancik (1978), effectiveness is defined as the extent to which an organization successfully fulfills the expectations and requirements of the diverse groups and entities that are involved or interested in its activities. Open systems theory suggests that the most effective organizations are those that demonstrate the ability to adapt to their environments (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978). In this context, the environment is everything external to the system that has the ability to impact either the entire system or a portion of it (Katz and Kahn, 1966). It requires open systems to track its environment and gather information about its deviations, which then becomes input. Thus, input in this case is a form of feedback. Furthermore, open systems rely on information to effectively respond to changes in their environment and make appropriate adjustments (Cutlip et al. 2006).

#### **4.3 Co-Production**

Co-production deviates from the conventional model of public service production, wherein public officials alone are tasked with the responsibility of designing and delivering services to citizens. In contrast, *co-production* involves citizens actively participating in the process by not only demanding, consuming, and evaluating services but also contributing to their design and provision, referred to as *co-designing* and *co-delivering* services (Pestoff, 2006). As such, it serves as a conceptual framework to comprehend the involvement of citizens at the individual level or within the context of welfare service provision. The notion originally emerged in the 1970s and was developed by Elinor Ostrom together with the Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis at Indiana University. They coined the term co-production to depict the possible connection between the conventional service provider and the clients who seek to be positively impacted and transformed by the service (Ostrom, 1996).

However, considering that the definition was grounded in an economic perspective and centered exclusively on the collaboration between public employees and welfare service users (Parks et al. 1981), this paper will define co-production in a broader way. The definition encompasses not only individual citizens or service users but also civil society organizations and local communities, and considers both the input and output aspects of the policy process (Tortzen, 2015). Lastly, co-production is also recognized as a significant innovation in public



services, fostering enhanced collaboration between governments, citizens, and civil society organizations to achieve better outcomes in the delivery of public services (OECD, 2011). As such the thesis concentrates on the concept of co-production as a form of social innovation within public services, specifically highlighting its role in revitalizing the social relationships between social service providers and clients (Pestoff, 2015).

#### **4.4 Synthesis**

Social action theory and open systems theory will together with the concept of co-production be used to analyze Framtidsprogrammet from the perspective of the project owners and operators. Specifically, it will examine project policies and how the owners and operators create and enact strategies to reach, attract and make the project accessible for young foreign-born women so that they can partake in the program. The framework will also analyze how the owners and operators interpret and respond to the actions and reactions of the target group. Furthermore, it will be employed to study the individual agency and decision-making processes of young foreign-born women in regards to their participation in Framtidsprogrammet, as well as their involvement in planning, delivery, evaluation and decision-making processes of the project. The framework will also consider the social and cultural context in which Framtidsprogrammet is taking place and how it shapes the actions of the different actors in the project.

### **5. Methods & Data**

#### **5.1 Research Design**

The approach of a qualitative case study is applied in order to gain a more holistic and in-depth understanding (Punch, 2014: 120) of the particular case of Framtidsprogrammet in terms of its policies and activities and how they respond to the needs of the target group. The primary method for data collection are semi-structured interviews as they have proven to be a powerful tool for accessing the subjective perceptions and meanings people assign to various situations and their understanding of the world around them (Punch, 2014: 144). Data has also been gathered from secondary sources in the form of project applications, evaluations and in-depth interviews. Thus, a strategy of data triangulation is employed to strengthen the validity (Robson & McCartan, 2016: 171). Finally, the collected data will be examined using thematic coding analysis, which involves systematically coding the data in multiple stages to identify patterns and variations in the data (Robson & McCartan, 2016: 463).

## 5.2 Sampling

Framtidsprogrammet have been chosen as a typical case (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 28, cited in Punch, 2014: 162) of a collaborative project between CSOs and municipalities.

Furthermore, it is also a case of a project that targets a group of foreign-born women. In this regard, the CSO Nya Kompisbyrån who operates the project could be seen as a purposive sample as they have previous experience from working with LMI projects for foreign-born women (Punch, 2014: 161). In 2022 there were five groups with a total of 93 women participating in Framtidsprogrammet. 80 of them attended in at least three meetings. Data also reveals that a heterogeneous group of young women, in regards to age, time spent in Sweden, and educational level (see Appendix), have been able to partake in the project, making it into a suitable case of inquiry. The average age of the participants were 24 years and the average time having lived in Sweden were 2 years.

As for the project manager she was purposefully chosen to be interviewed since she is responsible for the overall project management, work management, planning and implementation, and for recruiting participants to the project. She is 27 years old, born in Sweden and employed full time by Nya Kompisbyrån. Regarding the interviewed participants, convenience sampling was used in order to be granted access to the interviewees in a quicker way or even at all (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 28, cited in Punch, 2014: 162). The project manager sent out a request to 9 previous participants she thought could be helpful in answering my questions, which raises concern that those she reached out to could be more biased in a positive way to the project. However, since the research is not interested in evaluating the project goals but rather looking at factors that enabled participants to take part in it, the interviewees' possibly biased relationship to the project manager is not deemed to threaten the credibility of the study. Yet, when touching upon matters related to their perceptions of the project manager, the convenience sampling should be kept in mind.

Considering the target group of Framtidsprogrammet, the sampling strategy was also seen as a way to gain access to the participants since being a 30+ native Swedish man was recognized to be potentially troubling when contacting possible interviewees. However, after the project manager had sent out a request that I had written about being interviewed for the thesis, she forwarded names and numbers to me of those who had responded so that I could contact them personally and decide upon when and where to meet for the interviews.

However, it does entail the possibility of participants having felt more restricted in their responses as they were aware that the project manager knew who was being interviewed. From now on the interviewed participants will be referred to as “Victoria”, Maryam”, and “Rahel”.

The small sample of three participants restricts the ability to draw conclusions that are representative of the participants in general (Stewart-Withers et al. 2014: 77). However, the insights provided in regards to their reasons for joining the program and how Framtidsprogrammet has been able to respond to their needs will be triangulated with findings from the secondary data as in the project evaluations and the in-depth interviews, as well as with findings from the literature review. The limited ability to make general claims goes also for the case of Framtidsprogrammet in general, as it is a fairly small project. However, given the inadequate attention devoted to the dynamics of project policies and frontline practices of state-civil partnerships, and how they respond to the needs of target groups, the study can still offer valuable insights and provide suggestive evidence regarding generalizability, which can be further explored and tested through additional research (Punch, 2014: 123).

### **5.3 Data Collection**

The in-depth semi-structured interview with the project manager was held on the 28th of April at the co-working space The Park Södra in Stockholm where Nya Kompisbyrån is situated. It lasted for 2 hours and covered topics such as Framtidsprogrammet’s work with understanding the needs of the target group and how the project has been adapted according to their needs, the projects outreach and recruitment work, and what the project is providing the target group with contentwise. Prior to the interview, an unstructured pre-interview was conducted on the 23rd of March with the purpose of getting to know the project and getting some initial insight into Framtidsprogrammet’s policies and activities for involving the target group. It lasted for around 30 minutes. The findings in the pre-interview did together with the findings in the literature review guide the in-depth interview in terms of the questions and themes that were covered.

Furthermore, the data generated from the interview with the project manager together with findings in the literature review were used to guide the questions and themes covered in the semi-structured interviews with the three participants. All interviews lasted around 30

minutes and covered topics such as reasons for joining the project and how they found out about it, as well as their perceptions of the content, structure, and involvement in Framtidsprogrammet. Maryam was also asked questions in regards to the work carried out in her role as an ambassador. Victoria and Maryam were interviewed on the 2nd of May at the co-working space The Park Södra in Stockholm where Nya Kompisbyrån is situated. The project manager had booked a room for me where I could hold the interviews without being interrupted and thus avoiding disturbing surroundings. Moreover, the interviewees only met with me and not the project manager or any other staff from Nya Kompisbyrån. The location was chosen due to its central location in Stockholm and since at least one participant had been there before, possibly allowing her to feel more relaxed and safe. Rahel had fallen ill so we had to reschedule and when given the option to do it digitally she accepted and we met for a Zoom-meeting on the 4th of May.

The online format is beneficial as it saves expenses and time associated with travel. Technically there were no troubles related to poor sound quality or internet connectivity, which could potentially be an issue (Denscombe, 2010: 178). Furthermore, the interview was conducted using webcams, which helps to establish a sense of closeness and foster trust. Being able to see each other facilitates a more intimate conversation compared to relying solely on audio connections (McLennan & Prinsen, 2014: 98). Moreover, the visual connection in all interviews allowed for the interpretation of non-verbal cues, which can provide valuable insights and implications for understanding the interviewees verbal responses (Robson & McCartan, 2016: 286).

During all the four interviews an audio recorder was also used, with the consent from the interviewees. Even though the act of recording can feel constraining (Denscombe, 2010: 187) the respondents seemed to be at ease with it. For the researcher it yields several advantages given the inherent fallibility of human memory. The recordings provided a permanent reference to rely on and allowed me to fully focus on what was being shared by the interviewee as well to take notes of interesting leads to follow up on during the interview (Denscombe, 2010: 187). It highlights how semi-structured interviews serve as a highly adaptable research method. Allowing researchers to modify their line of questioning in real-time depending on what is being revealed during the course of the interview (Robson & McCartan, 2016: 286). Nevertheless, despite the advantages of interviews, it is important to acknowledge their limitations and the challenges they present. While interviews offer a direct

means of accessing factual perceptions and given meanings through participant responses, they can be highly time-consuming. Additionally, the accuracy of interview data may be compromised due to factors such as interviewees recalling information incorrectly or the influence of biases on their responses (Robson & McCartan, 2016: 286). Another possible barrier is language. The former participants of Framtidsprogrammet did not communicate in their native language. In an ideal interview scenario, they would be able to express their thoughts in their mother tongue. Using a second language can lead to the loss of nuances and complexities, potentially limiting the collection of comprehensive and detailed data (McLennan et al. 2014: 156). However, to enhance the validity of the data, I allowed participants sufficient time to repeat themselves and further develop their thoughts, aiming to capture a more accurate representation of their experiences and perspectives.

These factors highlight the need for cautious interpretation and corroborating interview findings with additional sources of evidence to ensure the validity of the collected data. More empirical material is gathered from secondary data in the form of project applications and evaluations, as well as previous in-depth interviews. They have been shared by the project manager. There are two project applications, one for 2022 and one for 2023. The applicant is the Labor Market Administration in Stockholm Municipality and the addressee is the Stockholm County Administrative Board. It is a so-called §37 contribution type, which is a “compensation for developing capacity and preparedness in the reception of newly arrived persons and unaccompanied minors and children, and to develop cooperation between municipalities and between municipalities and other actors with the aim of facilitating establishment in society”.

The project evaluation is based on the five groups and 93 participants who partook in the project during 2022 and 48 participants have responded. Lastly, there are five in-depth interviews carried out with five participants from 2022. They were conducted by the project assistant through telephone and covered themes such as reasons for joining and how they found out about the project, perceptions of the meetings, the mentorship, content provided, and what they have or have not gained from participating, as well as their engagement in different activities. From now on, they will be referred to as “Imani”, “Dara”, “Kamala”, “Munira”, and “Zuzanna”.

Concerning the secondary sources a number of issues have been identified to be reflected upon while drawing empirical data from them. In regards to the project evaluations 52 percent have responded. It makes one wonder if those answering are those who were more appreciative of the project, or felt to have benefited from it. However, it could also be a chance for those who are unhappy with the initiative to voice their opinions. The same goes for the in-depth interviews. Yet, it is not the specific percentages in the evaluations that are interesting. The evaluation and in-depth interviews tells us something about the ways Framtidsprogrammet has been perceived to respond to the needs of the women. The data is also combined and triangulated with the findings from the interviews conducted in this study and the literature review.

It is also important to remember that the secondary data initially have been gathered or provided for a different purpose than for the purpose of this thesis (Punch, 2014: 245). In regards to the applications they are meant to generate funding which of course is a motive for the applicant to present the project in a positive manner. However, they still serve a purpose for this study as they reveal policies and activities of Framtidsprogrammet, as well as showcasing changes from the first to the second year. The findings are also confirmed from other sources. As such triangulation is recognized to be crucial for enhancing the validity of the research but also presents both logical and practical challenges. For instance, the use of multiple methods may yield findings that differ to such an extent that direct comparison becomes problematic (Robson & McCartan, 2016: 171). This discrepancy can create complexities when attempting to integrate the diverse perspectives obtained through various research approaches. Yet, therein also lies its strength as the incorporation of multiple sources of perspectives enhances the trustworthiness of the findings, providing a more complete picture of the case at hand.

#### **5.4 Data Analysis**

All interviews were transcribed in their entirety shortly after their completion. This timely transcription process ensured the preservation of the interviews' content and allowed for subsequent analysis and interpretation. Considering the amount of data collected, session summary sheets have been useful in summarizing the first impressions of the gathered data. It has also been helpful in noting down initial ideas to be elaborated upon in later stages (Robson & McCartan, 2016: 467). Consequently, the initial stages of the analysis commenced concurrently with the data collection phase, highlighting the iterative nature commonly

associated with qualitative research (Denscombe, 2010: 272). By intertwining analysis with data collection, the thesis could refine its research questions, developing emerging themes, and iteratively deepen the understanding of the phenomena under investigation. Yet, even though the analysis process does not adhere to a strictly linear path, a thematic coding analysis was applied to convey the meanings individuals attach to their social world and how it influences their actions within that context (Robson & McCartan, 2016: 467). Given the extensive volume of data obtained, it becomes necessary to engage in data reduction and selectively choose specific pieces of data during the qualitative data analysis process. This practice involves prioritizing certain portions of data over others, guided by analytical decisions. It is important to note that thematic coding analysis is not a neutral tool but rather influenced by the researcher's perspectives and choices, shaping the interpretation and meaning attributed to the data (Robson & McCartan, 2016: 466). An inductive approach was used to guide the choices of theories constituting the theoretical framework. However, once the framework was set in place, it was used to deductively analyze all the gathered data more thoroughly. As such it has allowed for the data collection process to be more open, possibly covering topics that otherwise would have been missed. However it has also posed limitations during the analysis since some aspects could not be examined as they were not considered during the data collection process.

The applied thematic coding analysis consists of five phases. The first is data familiarization which relates to the already described phase of transcribing, becoming acquainted with the data and recording preliminary thoughts (Robson & McCartan, 2016: 469). Next comes the phase of generating initial codes, meaning that data extracts are systematically assigned codes throughout the entire dataset, ensuring that extracts with similar characteristics are assigned the same code (Robson & McCartan, 2016: 471). This leads us to the next step of identifying themes (Robson & McCartan, 2016: 474). The process involves consolidating the codes into potential themes by bringing together all the data that relates to each theme (Robson & McCartan, 2016: 469) If needed, the initial codes and themes are revised to ensure their accuracy and coherence. During the fourth phase, thematic networks were developed as a way to organize identified themes into main themes and sub-themes (Robson & McCartan, 2016: 476). Finally, in the fifth stage of integrating and interpreting the data the task was to delve into the themes both individually and collectively, aiming to comprehend the insights conveyed by the data (Robson & McCartan, 2016: 476). This entails examining the data within each theme to uncover patterns, connections, and nuances. Additionally, it involves

exploring the relations between the themes to gain a comprehensive understanding of the overall message portrayed by the data.

### **5.5 Ethical Considerations & Positionality**

Several different ethical considerations have been weighed during the study. Prior to conducting the interviews, all participants were informed about the study's purpose, the measures taken to protect their identities, and the strict confidentiality of their responses. They were assured that the interview transcriptions would be used solely for academic purposes. Respondents were also informed of their right to decline answering specific questions and the option to withdraw from participation at any point (Banks & Scheyvens, 2014: 164-165). Furthermore, the interview situation requires careful consideration of positionality and reflexivity. Being a native Swede with a middle-class background, I am an outsider to the lived experience of partaking in LMI projects which may pose limitations in terms of comprehending the intricacies and nuances that are more readily accessible to individuals with firsthand experience (Scheyvens and McLennan, 2014: 6-7). However, it can also offer a certain level of objectivity and detachment when examining the phenomena.

My background and language proficiency variations might also have influenced the power dynamics within the interviews. Being a man might also have affected the interviews negatively as scholars have indicated a tendency for female participants to express themselves more openly and comfortably when interacting with female researchers (Scheyvens et al., 2014: 194). However, a feminist perspective towards the interviews was applied where a non-hierarchical relationship was desired and a greater emphasis was placed on fostering active participation from the interviewee (Punch, 2013: 148). I also strived to take the perspective of a learner, listening and gaining insights from the women who were interviewed, ensuring that their experiences, knowledge and skills were treated with respect and appreciation (Scheyvens et al., 2014: 201). However, it is important to recognize that the findings are, to some degree, generated by my own subjective lens. My personal identity, background, and beliefs shape my understanding of the world and consequently impact the interpretation of the data (Steward-Withers et al., 2014: 62). Moreover, it should also be noted that the translations of interview extracts from Swedish to English were carried out by me, emphasizing my role in shaping the perceived reality of the situation and highlighting the potential challenges and risks associated with interpretation and misinterpretation (Punch, 2005: 176).



Having interned at Nya Kompisbyrån is also worth reflecting upon as it influences my positionality. Being an intern provided me with valuable insights into the organization's working procedures and facilitated a deeper understanding of the contextual factors influencing the research findings. Yet, it also could also serve to produce a confirmatory bias having appreciated my time there. In regards to the interviews with previous participants, they were informed about my independence from the organization. There is still, however, a possibility that they may have presented their experience of the project in a more positive manner than they truly felt. In regards to all the gathered data it is pivotal to recognize the context in which it was originally provided as it is my responsibility to not apply it in a totally different context and in doing so risking to give it a totally different meaning.

## **6. Result & Analysis**

Three overarching themes have been identified regarding the research questions of how and in what ways Framtidsprogrammet have been able to reach, attract and make the project accessible for the target group. The three themes are: *A co-delivered personal outreach work strengthened by collaboration*; *An arena for socializing and practicing Swedish and getting closer to work or studies*; and *A welcoming atmosphere with target group adapted services and structures*. They will now be expanded upon in the following subsections.

### **6.1 A Co-Delivered Personal Outreach Work Strengthened by Collaboration**

*How, if at all, has Framtidsprogrammet been able to reach the target group?*

In the project application för 2023, Stockholm Municipality states that during the first year Framtidsprogrammet had connected the municipalities (Stockholm and Järfälla) with a target group they earlier had a hard time to reach. The outreach work in Framtidsprogrammet is based on the strategy of meeting people in their daily environment.

I believe that if I meet people where they feel safe, they will be more open to something that is new to them. I could just visit a SFI-school [Swedish for foreigners] and let them know that we are going to have an information meeting but then it will serve as an additional step to obtain the information. Instead I provide the information to them where they feel safe and open. Then maybe they dare to ask more questions and feel that we have made an effort in reaching them. (Project manager)

The quote showcases that a more personal approach is employed, where the target group is actively sought after in an environment that they are more acquainted with. In previous research, this type of outreach work has been found to be essential for actually coming into contact with the target group (Lönnroos & Gustafsson, 2018) and relates to CSOs' more flexible and individual approach as their strengths (Numerato et al. 2019). Four out of eight participants also report having first found out about the project through visits from the project manager and/or assistant to their schools.

Drawing from the data in the project applications it is also clear that the project assistant is seen to have a central role in recruiting participants. It is a stated strategy that the assistant is herself from the target group as it is perceived to be helpful in the recruitment of young foreign-born women. In part due to her knowledge about the target group, but also due to the belief that her mere appearance will make it easier to establish the initial contact with the target group. The ability to communicate in at least two other languages, Dari and Persian, is also recognized as a valuable resource in the outreach work. Moreover, in Framtidsprogrammet the assistant is in charge of the initial contact with the participants, conducting a pre-interview with those who are interested before inviting them to the first meeting.

The project assistant could therefore be seen as an *input* in the form of a resource, such as manpower, to the project that makes use of her knowledge, skills and characteristics in the *throughput*, resulting in the *output* in the form of an outreach work that is better adapted to the *environment*, which consists of possible participants from the target group. This relates to Lönnroos and Gustafsson's (2018) findings from the Finnish KYKY project, where staff who themselves had gone through the integration process was underlined as part of the reasons for successfully being able to have reached the target group. Numerato et al. (2019) have also pointed out that the involvement of migrants in the organization are part of CSOs strengths. However, when visiting different *environments* an ambiguity in the reception of the project assistant has been recognized.

It is great meeting the target group with someone they can more relate to. /.../ It can be a way of adapting the outreach work, to recruit someone from the target group, so that they [the target group] can feel more safe. Because for some that I meet it is the first

time they meet an established Swede who they get to know a little better, except maybe for a teacher they have met. But what my project assistant has experienced is that in some SFI-classes they do not listen to her. It has made her sad, and she feels that when I am with her people have shown more respect. At the same time there are some people who do not dare to talk to me. (Project manager)

The quotes illustrate that depending on the *environment*, in terms of the context and who they meet, the project manager and assistant, as a combined *input*, can in the *throughput* complement each other skills and personalities, which in the *output* results in the outreach work being better adapted to the *environment*. Therefore it can reach a broader range of people with different preferences and perceptions. Furthermore, the strategy of involving the target group has become more pronounced as the project has proceeded.

In order to reach the right target group ten ambassadors from different parts of Stockholm and Järfälla Municipality will be trained and become a big part of the outreach work. Ambassadors are participants and mentors from the first year. (Project application for 2023)

The quote indicates how involving the target group in the outreach work is deemed to make it more effective, as it is more adapted to its *environment* (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978). Maryam was herself recruited to Framtidsprogrammet through a friend who was an ambassador. Now she herself has been involved as an ambassador, doing presentations at different schools and venues, such as activity centers or social housing complexes and distributing flyers and putting up posters. She felt she had learned a lot and appreciated taking part in the project and therefore wanted to help out as an ambassador. She also experience that being from the target group and having herself been a participant is an advantage when doing outreach work:

I can speak other languages. If I only speak Swedish or look like a Swede they think I want to sell something. But if I speak in their language then maybe they feel it is something interesting. I feel that they trust me more. /.../ I know how it [Framtidsprogrammet] works and I know how it is without it, I have seen how it can help. (Maryam)

The quote demonstrates how the involvement of the target group is also a form of *co-deliverance* of the outreach work between the target group and the municipalities,

facilitated by Nya kompisbyrån. In doing so Framtidsprogrammet organizes and mobilizes a hard-to-reach group of women who in this case is the *input*, and by making use of their experiences and qualities in the *throughput*, it results in the *output* of promoting a more effective communication and cooperation between the project, and in the extension the municipalities providing the service, and its *environment* as in the target group. It correlates to findings that underline CSOs ability to mobilize engagement through volunteers as a significant factor of their outreach work (Galera et al. 2018).

Another strategy for reaching the target group through former participants is via the Future Women network meetings. Before it was only for women who had participated in the program, but now participants or previous participants can bring their friends and in doing so it opens up a new way for the target group to get to know about Framtidsprogrammet. It resembles the line of thinking in the Icelandic organization W.O.M.E.N. who have recognized that in some cases it is essential to first establish a bond with the women and to be entrusted before they are willing to partake in any projects (Lönnsroos & Gustafsson, 2018). As such the network meetings is the *throughput*, drawing in participants and their friends as *input*, which results in the *output* of having been able to establish further contacts with the target group.

Additional factors identified for Framtidsprogrammet being able to reach the target group is collaboration and networking. The work is mainly focused on informing other institutions, venues, organizations, agencies, and counselors that work with the target group about Framtidsprogrammet. Examples are civic offices, labor market initiatives such as Jobbtorg, and other types of municipal outreach efforts such as Stadsdelsmammorna and Mammaambassadörerna. Two participants report having heard about the project through people working within other programs or institutions.

It is a huge asset to have a collaboration with Stockholm Municipality. It creates surfaces and an obviousness in certain forums that you as a civil society organization have to fight for otherwise. (Project manager)

The quote shows how the outreach efforts of Framtidsprogrammet benefits from having Stockholm Municipality as its owner. It serves as an example of how CSOs and municipalities can complement each other when co-producing a service such as

Framtidsprogrammet. Nya Kompisbyrån is able to in a more personal manner approach the target group, involving them as *co-deliverers* in the outreach work, making it more adapted to its *environment*, which improves the collaboration and communication between the target group and the municipalities. In turn, the municipalities can be used as an *input* that in the *throughput* is able to make use of their legitimacy and power, resulting in the *output* of opening up spaces which extends the reach of Nya Kompisbyrån's outreach work. Thus, enabling the *environment* as in young foreign-born women to provide more *input* as in participants partaking in Framtidsprogrammet. It pertains to the findings from the Danish project "44 points" where municipal support was presented as a key aspect for its success (Lönnroos & Gustafsson, 2018).

On a final note, it should be stated that information about the project on distributed leaflets and the website is available in 5 languages besides Swedish; Tigrinya, Persian, Arabic, English, and Somali. In prior Nordic LMI initiatives it has been emphasized as an important feature for reaching the target group (Lönnroos & Gustafsson, 2018). The project manager also explains how a reference group (*input*) has been involved in going through the information on the website (*throughput*), making sure it is clear what the project is about (*output*), which again is another example of how the communication between service providers and target group benefits from participatory processes related to the outreach work.

## **6.2 An Arena for Socializing, Practicing Swedish & Getting Closer to Work or Studies**

*How, if at all, has Framtidsprogrammet been able to attract women from the target group to participate?*

Framtidsprogrammet have been able to attract young foreign-born women to the project by providing an arena responding to several needs of the target group. The main purpose according to the project applications is to support the target group in getting closer to work and/or studies. Three out of eight participants also state it as their reason for joining the program, which corresponds to previous studies where foreign-born women have expressed an insecurity in regards to where to seek guidance and assistance in the job application process (Spehar, 2021). One way of addressing the issue in Framtidsprogrammet is to provide educational meetings with different themes related to the Swedish labor market, job application process and computer skills.

A reference group consisting of young foreign-born women have participated in different ways of planning the effort. The reference group has among other things had a workshop about which themes should be included in the different educational meetings. /.../ Experiences from Nya Kompisbyrån's project Kv(in)na have also been used [in planning the effort]. (Project application for 2022)

The quote indicates how the target group has also been involved in *co-designing* the project in terms of what should be covered in the educational meetings. Thus, by using a reference group as *input*, allowing them to decide upon what themes to be covered in the *throughput*, the *output* should be an adaptation of the content in accordance with the needs of the *environment*, as in the target group. The quote also illustrates how Nya Kompisbyrån as an organization (*input*) has able to use their experience from previous projects with the target group (*throughput*) and thus introduce more inclusive perspectives into the development of new programs (*output*), which correlates to previous findings related to civil society-municipal partnerships in Sweden (Fry and Islar, 2021). However, the process of planning a project for a heterogeneous group of women poses challenges even though the target group has been involved. Some have expressed their appreciation for the provided knowledge, such as:

During the meetings I have learned a lot about applying for jobs and computer skills.  
(Imani)

While others, perceived that they had benefited less from the education:

I think a lot of the information was pretty basic /.../ most of it I already knew.  
(Victoria)

There are also those preferring some parts over others:

I think the part about computers was very easy /.../ I have learned a lot of things such as writing a cover letter, how you apply for a job, how an interview is conducted.  
(Dara)

In the three quotes, the challenge of finding a common ground in terms of skills taught and information provided is highlighted. It is also recognized by the project manager who has been trying to address the issue along the way.

Before it was more of a lecturing format, now it is more of a workshop. For example, if we talk about educational paths we start off by having the participants tell each other about their background, how they plan to proceed, about their dreams and so on. We also let the participants take a stand on different claims that I present and then we can have a discussion around that and learn from each other. /.../ We have also employed a quiz format instead of me just standing up there and telling the group about, for example, deficit professions. (Project manager)

It is half as much information and more about creating a group feeling and a sense of safety because if people get to know each other they will be able to get more out of it as they dare to ask questions then. In the beginning we put a lot of effort in getting them to talk in front of the group by doing some funny and a bit crazy exercises which helps you to let go a little. (Project manager)

The two quotes show how a more interactive approach has been adopted, in the *throughput*, in order to deal with the recognized challenge, the *input*, of providing the same information and skills training for a heterogeneous group. It has been welcomed by several participants.

It feels like we sometimes have stupid opinions just because we do not know. Or not stupid, but uninformed opinions about the labor market or such. But she [the project manager] encouraged us to speak anyways and it felt like she was interested in hearing our opinions. It felt good. It was not like she just wanted to teach us, but also learn something from us. That was the most important for me. (Victoria)

The quotes reveal the significance of feeling seen and valued, which could be argued to be the *output* of the interactive approach as a *throughput*. It is connected with previous studies pertaining to foreign-born women and a sense of inferiority and their perceptions of being stereotyped and not listened to (Thomsson & Hoflund, 2000; Spehar, 2021). In the final evaluation 86 percent answered that after having participated in the Framtidsprogrammet they know more about what they are good at and 93 percent know more about what they want to do in the future and that they have a plan. Furthermore, the interactive approach of

Framtidsprogrammet also addresses, and thereby adapts the project, to other needs of the participants. Four out of eight participants stated that they joined the project because they wanted to meet new people and three of them also had the outspoken goal of speaking more Swedish. Exemplified by the ensuing account:

I wanted to get to know other women and speak Swedish in order to develop my language skills. /—/ Since I did not work, I only practiced Swedish in school and there was only one teacher and women from other countries. In Framtidsprogrammet you have a mentor and the project manager who are Swedish and who you can practice with. There are also other women who are not Swedish but who you can practice with. Especially if you do not live with other people that speak Swedish. We usually do not speak Swedish at home so I felt I needed to talk Swedish and not just listen. (Rahel)

The quote illustrates how Framtidsprogrammet has provided an arena for participants who want to meet friends and speak Swedish. It relates to previous research proclaiming a desire of foreign-born women to be part of a social context (Thomsson & Hoflund, 2000). In the final evaluation 98 percent stated that they have gotten to know new people at the meetings, and 70 percent that they have gotten to practice Swedish during the meetings. The mentorship has a part in that as mentioned in the quote above. Previous research has also shown that mentors can act as intermediaries between immigrants and the broader community in a Nordic context (Lönroos & Gustafsson, 2018). Migrant womens' wishes of having a "Swedish" friend and a native Swede that can guide them in the job application process has also previously been disclosed (Thomsson & Hoflund, 2000). As such, the mentorship as a *throughput*, from the *input* of the participant and mentor, partially also addresses the challenge earlier mentioned of finding a common ground in the provided training and information of the program. This is because the mentorship is adapted to the objectives and needs of the participant.

We had set a goal to meet five times and every time we had a goal to reach. The first was to practice Swedish and then writing CV and a cover letter as well as going through common interview questions. Another time we met and talked and had a coffee in Medborgarplatsen. /.../ I have good contact with her and it feels so natural. I would really like to keep in touch with her. (Zuzanna)



We went to Skansen [a zoo] together with my children, where we also had a meal. We went to the Old Town and walked around, it was a fantastic experience. We have also read the driving license book together and she helped me prepare for the theory test.  
(Kamala)

The quotes showcase how the mentorship could be argued to serve various functions in attracting participants to the project by responding to different needs, which becomes the *output* of the mentorship. However, several participants do express that they would have wanted to meet the mentor more often, or had a hard time finding a suitable time to meet. Yet, it confirms the appreciation for it as an intervention. A perception that is further strengthened by the final evaluation where 92 percent state that they have gotten help from their mentor in getting closer to work, internship or studies, 90 percent that they have practiced Swedish with their mentor, and 97 percent that they want to stay in contact with their mentor. The mentorship also showcases the strength of civil society organizations' ability to respond to the individual needs of participants (Numerato et al. 2019) and to mobilize the wider community (Galera et al. 2018). Moreover, it relates to the role of social networks and the importance of community engagement when shaping service provisions (Tortzen, 2015), which Nya Kompisbyrån in this case have been able to make use of when implementing Framtidsprogrammet. Turning the mentors into both *co-deliverers* of the project as well as *co-producers* in regards to the content provided.

Other on-the-ground activities and services that Framtidsprogrammet provide to attract participants who primarily want to find a job or start studying is a field trip to a job fair and study counseling. Half of the participants responded that they have joined the project manager and assistant to the job fair.

They knew which types of jobs we wanted and could tell us where to go. Then we went in small groups. It helped to be a group of women who knew each other compared to going alone. We could be braver in taking the initial contact. (Maryam)

In regards to the study counseling the same number of participants answered having benefited from it.

During the meeting with the study counselor I got information about what I can study in order to work with what I am interested in, which is fashion and design. First I thought it would take a long time but the study counselor inspired me and helped me to choose a path. I had asked the study counselor at my school before but did not get the help I needed then. (Munira)

The two quotes illustrate different ways that Framtidsprogrammet is able to respond to various needs of its participants. The two activities serve as an example of how the civil society-municipal partnership complement each other in the *co-production* of the project. On the one hand you have Nya Kompisbyrån's flexible and individual approach, significant for civil society organizations (Numerato et al. 2019), as participants at the job fair are assisted in where to go depending on their specific interests, and how they gather strength from the group and from themselves, which is another featured arguably fostered in the project through its interactive approach. On the other hand, you have the municipality's ability to provide expertise in the case of study counseling. Together, they generate an initiative that is able to respond to the individual's needs, which the Public Employment Service have been criticized for not doing (Cetrez et al. 2020; Spehar, 2021; Schuster et al. 2022) and the Swedish Gender Equality Agency have requested for foreign-born women (Jämställdhetsmyndigheten, 2022). The final evaluations also reveals that after having participated in Framtidsprogrammet 88 percent knows more about applying for jobs, 90 percent know more about what they can study, 83 percent know more about how to write a CV and cover letter, and 79 percent know more about how to do a job interview. Moreover, 38 percent have gotten a job (52 percent have applied for a job), 17 percent have gotten an internship, and 71 percent have started a new education.

However, considering that many participants emphasize their participation in Framtidsprogrammet due to seeing it as an arena for socializing and practicing Swedish one could argue that Framtidsprogrammet is providing an alternative pathway for integration. It resembles the Swedish LMI project Mirjam which also focused on socializing and personal development (Lönnsroos & Gustafsson, 2018). Therefore, even though both Framtidsprogrammet and Mirjam are LMI initiatives, these more holistic approaches could be seen to challenge the official view of integration as they also acknowledge social aspects of integration. Such alternative paths have been determined to be crucial for women who do not have immediate access to the labor market upon their arrival (Lönnsroos & Gustafsson, 2018).

It is also recognized by Stockholm Municipality who together with Nya Kompisbyrån conducted a focus group based on former participants as a preparation for 2023 years project application. In the group previous participants could voice their opinions in regards to the different meetings, mentorship, and the job fair visits.

All had wished that there were more meetings to get to know more women and to learn more about the Swedish labor market. A greater focus on the social aspects of all the meetings was important according to the group as they felt that the reason for their participation was as much about having fun as learning something new. (Project application 2023)

The citation displays the *input* of a focus group, sharing their concerns as the *throughput*, resulting in the *output* of an approach for Framtidsprogrammet emphasizing that it is just as important to have fun as to learn something new. Due to this the project application for 2023 and the project manager describes that changes have been made. Besides the already mentioned interactive approach which has developed along the way as part of ongoing evaluations, more visits to job fairs and five instead of three Future Women network meetings was decided upon. There will also be five different themes for the network meetings which the reference group, consisting of new and old participants in 2023, will help decide upon. It serves as a way to broaden the information provided in Framtidsprogrammet. The theme of the latest network meeting was women's rights.

The focus of the project is on work and studies. We cannot change that foundation. /.../  
But we are noticing that there is a need to talk about a lot of other things. (Project manager)

The quote reveals how Framtidsprogrammet's dependence on state funding shapes the development effort in accordance with the demands set by the government, as we have seen in previous studies (Alexander et al. 1999). Yet, the way that Framtidsprogrammet has been able to utilize their Future Women network meetings for addressing other issues than work and studies showcases the projects resistance and autonomy in relation to the government. Thus, it differs from Kim's (2013) emphasis on partnerships as sites of struggle in the sense that it is not a struggle within the partnership, between Nya Kompisbyrån and Stockholm municipality, but rather a struggle between them and the government who funds the project.

Through the mentorship program and the Future Women network, Framtidsprogrammet is attracting women from the target group who want to extend their social network. It relates to previous findings where a lack of social capital has been perceived by foreign-born women to enhance their feeling of not knowing where to turn for labor market counseling (Spehar, 2021). Through the network meetings (*throughput*), Framtidsprogrammet is also able to provide an arena where other topics that have been identified to be important by the target group, besides work and studies, can be discussed (*output*). Thus arguably adapting the project according to the target group (*environment*), based on the *input* from the reference group, which is a way of *co-designing* the network meetings. Thus, through the municipal partnership, Nya Kompisbyrån is able to create inclusive and participatory practices, which also Korean community organizations have been found to do by, among other things, organizing non-work activities in a welfare-to-work collaboration with the state (Kim, 2013). However, involving the target group in planning and decision-making processes, as well as in evaluations poses some difficulties worth reflecting upon.

The question is how do you set up a focus group for people who do not really know what opportunities there are? We have learned that you might need to come up with some suggestions that they can look at. (Project manager)

It is a tough target group to receive feedback from as they might not always feel comfortable with writing. /.../ I have been trying to emphasize “take your time, we want to know what you have to say” as I believe that some are also afraid that they are not anonymous when they write something. /.../ It is also hard to get all your thoughts across if you cannot express it in Swedish or English. (Project manager)

In the two quotes the project manager reflects upon the challenges of including women from the target group in co-productive spaces such as focus groups, or to collect feedback from the participants. Challenges that are illustrated by the mixed responses in the following statements in regards to participants’ perceptions of being able to affect the content or structure of Framtidsprogrammet.

I do not know if it is possible. I do not think so. (Rahel)

I think that everybody writes that everything is good because they are so grateful that someone is helping them. That someone is considering them. So I do not think that

many people are writing “this can be improved”. They are too grateful for that so it [the evaluations] does not change much. (Victoria)

Yes, every meeting we have a survey we fill in afterwards. “What did you like, what do you want to change?”, and the things we did not like did not come the next time. Or they could explain why they did it like that and then you understood /.../ Or if they liked the idea we came up with they also changed it. (Maryam)

The three quotes serve to problematize the involvement of the target group in processes of planning, delivering, evaluation and decision-making. For instance, it could be argued that if participants lack certain skills, such as language, or knowledge, such as what opportunities there are, or if they have certain characteristics, such as being too grateful or feeling inferior, it affects their contribution in these participatory processes. Thus, it could be that only certain types of participants are actually taking part in the target or reference groups, or voicing their opinion in the evaluations. Turning it into an issue of representation that questions how representative the women in the focus or reference groups actually are of the target group (*the environment*). In doing so it also risks hurting the project's effectiveness, in terms of fulfilling the requirements and expectations (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978) of the target group. However, as this subsection has shown, Framtidsprogrammet has been able to respond to a heterogeneous group of women with diverse needs. The other way around, projects like Framtidsprogrammet could also be argued to provide skills and knowledge, as well as build certain characteristics that participants can make use of in participatory processes.

### **6.3 A Welcoming Atmosphere with Target Group Adapted Services & Structures**

*In what ways, if any, have Framtidsprogrammet been adapted to make it accessible for the target group?*

The ways in which Framtidsprogrammet has been adapted to make it accessible for the target group can be sorted into two different categories. One relates to how the project has been structured and the other to what services have been provided. Both with the motive of making it increasingly accessible for young foreign-born women. The project manager explains that the work of adapting the structure and services provided is underpinned by an overarching strategy of creating a welcoming atmosphere. Based on the participant interviews the strategy seems to have been successful. The interviewed participants describe the atmosphere at the

meetings as friendly, calm, good and welcoming. All of them also point to the role of the project manager as part of the explanation.

She is there for everybody, anytime, anywhere. When I need to ask her something I can text, I can call her, and she answers quickly. She gives me the help I need. At the meetings she is very nice and very kind. She tries to make sure that everybody achieves their purpose for joining Framtidsprogrammet. (Rahel)

The quote emphasizes how essential the project manager has been for the participants to feel welcomed and that Framtidsprogrammet is for them. This type of committed and engaged project manager who keeps close contact with participants has also been recognized as a key-aspect in a Danish LMI-project (Lönnroos & Gustafsson, 2018). It also highlights the personal approach of Framtidsprogrammet, which is significant for CSOs (Numerato et al. 2019). A further example of the individual approach is the pre-interviews conducted by the project assistant.

We can inform them [the participants] about the project, but at least as important is that we can build a relationship with them /.../ We always ask if they can get to the place [of the meeting] and if they know their way there. Then you pretty quickly get a feel for the person. Some are like “Yes, what do you mean? Of course I know my way there”, while others are more like “I have never taken the subway to that part of town”.  
(Project manager)

The quote underlines how the pre-interview serves the strategy of creating a welcoming atmosphere by bonding with and getting to know the participants. Moreover, for those who are unable to get to the meeting and/or do not know their way there, a subway card and an instructional video of how to walk from the subway to the premises of the meetings is provided. Both services fall into the category of providing services that are adapted to make the project accessible for its conceived participants. Another service is providing sandwiches, fruit, tea and coffee, considering that many participants are coming to the meeting after having been to school or other activities during the day. A babysitter is also provided for those women who need to bring their children with them.

One thing that helped me to be in the program is that they have a babysitter. Because I have a child and my husband works at night, so if they did not have a babysitter it would not have been possible. (Maryam)

I do not have children, but other women did and they have a babysitter there so you can leave your child there. It is a good thing, they made it convenient for the mothers. (Rahel)

The quotes confirm what has been found in previous research, namely that childcare has been crucial for involving newly arrived women in LMI initiatives (Lönnroos & Gustafsson, 2018). From previous investigations we also know that young foreign-born are more prone to be on parental leave compared to other young cohorts, delaying their entry into the labor market, as well as increasing the risk of missing out on LMI efforts from the government (Lönnroos & Gustafsson, 2018; MUCF, 2021). Furthermore, foreign-born women who stay at home with their children have reported a longing to still be part of a social context (Thomsson & Hoflund, 2000).

It also serves as another example for how Nya Kompisbyrån and Stockholm Municipality are complementing each other in their partnership when *co-producing* the project. Nya Kompisbyrån can draw upon its strength as a CSO in mobilizing the wider community (Galera et al. 2018) as *input*, considering that the babysitter (*throughput*) is a volunteer, which the municipality is not allowed to employ within their own operations. Thus providing an adapted LMI initiative where women with care responsibilities still can join as the *output*. Stockholm Municipality (*input*) provides the premises (*throughput*), which functions as a meeting place during the project where participants can come whenever they like on the days of the meetings and study or just hangout before they start (*output*). As such, it serves the strategy of creating a welcoming atmosphere, which would not have been possible if the meetings were at Nya Kompisbyrån's coworking space. The time of the meetings is another aspect, leading us into how the structure of the project has been adapted, where Nya Kompisbyrån complements the municipality who cannot work in the evening in the same way as a civil society organization can. Moreover, cultural aspects have also been considered in regards to the structure.

We did not have any meetings during Ramadan as we noticed last year that people were not coming or were completely exhausted. /.../ I have also noticed how some go away to pray and they might not dare to tell me so all of a sudden they are gone from the meeting. /.../ So now, in the first meeting I start off by saying that if you are hungry you can go and take a fruit, and if you need to go to the bathroom you find it over there, and if someone needs to pray there are rooms you can use. (Project manager)

The quote indicates that the project has been adapted in accordance with religious aspects to make it more accessible for some women in the target group. Another aspect related to the structure is that the project is for women only.

I appreciated that only females were there, as then I didn't have to think about being possibly hit on. If it wasn't female-only I would have still taken part in it, as I felt like I needed any help that I could get. (Victoria)

It made a difference to me that it is only for women. As a woman it feels better and I feel more free. I would not have declined if it was not only for women, but I would not have chosen to be an ambassador or kept coming to the network meetings as I do now. (Maryam)

The quotes denote that gendered groups have been valued, even though not vital for the participation of the respondents, which was the case in a Danish LMI project (Lönnroos & Hoflund, 2018). In terms of the structure of the project and services provided for making it accessible the target group have contributed in providing insights about the time of the program and having a babysitter. The latter was an idea that the project team already had but which was confirmed by the reference group, while the time changed from the initial idea.

From the start we were thinking of having day time meetings. It was decided upon in the application last year. But then we talked to the reference group and received very mixed responses. However, when we started calling people to get them to come to the meetings it was just a few who could during the day. (Project manager)

The quote acts as an demonstration of how service users (*input*) possess valuable knowledge and expertise (Pestoff, 2006) that have been utilized (*throughput*) in Fritidsprogrammet to make it more accessible in the ways it is structured or through services provided (*output*).



Furthermore, this section has shown how the project has been able to draw upon the holistic approaches of civil society organizations (Galera et al. 2018) in making it accessible for the target group. Cultural aspects related to Ramadan and praying have been considered and adapted along the way when structuring the program, and structural aspects have been considered when providing services in the form of childcare and subway cards.

## **7. Concluding Remarks**

This study has examined top-down policies and frontline practices of Framtidsprogrammet and how they have responded to the needs of the target group in young foreign-born women. It was done out of a border concern for how the relationship between the target group and the state would be affected by the collaboration between Stockholm and Järfälla Municipality and the CSO Nya Kompisbyrån. The aim was to answer the following questions:

*How, if at all, has Framtidsprogrammet been able to reach the target group?*

*How, if at all, has Framtidsprogrammet been able to attract women from the target group to participate?*

*In what ways, if any, have Framtidsprogrammet been adapted to make it accessible for the target group?*

Concerning the first question it has been found that Framtidsprogrammet has been able to reach a group of foreign-born women which the municipalities previously had a hard time to reach. The outreach work has been based on a strategy of meeting the target group in their daily environment. Furthermore, it builds on the idea of involving the target group as co-deliverers as they are seen as a valuable resource facilitating the initial contact. Nya Kompisbyrån and the municipalities have also been found to complement each other, where Nya Kompisbyrån's more flexible and individual approach is combined with the municipalities power and legitimacy which opens up spaces through which the outreach work can expand. In regards to the second question Framtidsprogrammet has been found to attract young foreign-born women by providing an arena responding to their needs of finding work or studies, socializing and practicing Swedish. The target group has been involved in co-designing the network and educational meetings. Yet, challenges have been revealed in

finding a common ground in terms of skills taught and information provided. Therefore a more interactive approach has been adopted making participants feel valued and seen. The mentorship has also been found to serve various functions within the project by responding to different needs of the participants. Lastly, Framtidsprogrammet has been found to make the project accessible for the target group by adapting the structure and providing certain services. The structure has been adapted in regards to the time, gendered groups and considering religious aspects. Services provided to make Framtidsprogrammet accessible includes a babysitter, subway cards and meals. Moreover, the work of adapting the structure and services provided in the project is underpinned by an overarching strategy of creating a welcoming atmosphere, where the role of the project manager has been emphasized.

Although the empirical scope is restricted, the findings corroborate previous studies related to how CSOs in co-production with extensive Nordic government-led integration programs have compensated for deficiencies and rigidity that arise within the system by better accommodating individuals needs (Häikiö & Hvinden, 2012; Bontenbal & Lillie, 2022). Participatory processes of planning and delivering services have also been identified in the project supporting a Swedish study on civil society-municipal partnerships that concluded that CSOs are able to promote greater inclusivity by incorporating the firsthand experiences of the target group when developing local policies (Fry & Islar, 2021). The study did, however, also highlight the shortsightedness of the projects questioning its ability to generate structural change, which is a highly relevant line of inquiry in regards to Framtidsprogrammet as well. It provides an interesting topic to be examined by future studies. Moreover, it relates to the issue of funding, which in the case of Framtidsprogrammet has been found, and thus confirming previous research (Alexander et al. 1999), to shape the effort in terms of its outspoken purpose of LMI. Yet, through its interactive, flexible and individual approach and by utilizing the Future Women network and mentorship program, Framtidsprogrammet has been able to address other needs and aspirations from its participants. Considering that many participants emphasize their participation in Framtidsprogrammet due to the social dimension one could argue that Framtidsprogrammet is providing an alternative pathway for integration, which confirms previous findings of CSOs employing more holistic approaches to integration (Galera et al. 2018). It is further strengthened by the fact that the project also has considered cultural and structural aspects when adapting the structure of and services provided within the program. The collaboration between Nya Kompisbyrån and Stockholm Municipality has also been found to complement each other in ways that has enabled Framtidsprogrammet to reach,

attract and make the project accessible for the target group, confirming the viewpoint that state-civil partnerships can complement each other weaknesses by playing to their strengths (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2012). The paper has also touched upon the challenge of representativeness in participatory processes within the civil society-municipal partnership, which is also a subject for future studies to delve deeper within.

Ultimately, Nya Kompisbyrån has through its operating role been able to involve a hard-to-reach heterogeneous group of foreign-born women with diverse needs in Framtidsprogrammet. The project has also promoted a more effective communication and cooperation between the target group and the municipalities through participatory processes. Altogether making a case for Nya Kompisbyrån being able to include foreign-born women in Framtidsprogrammet and connecting them with the state. Furthermore, it showcases the necessity to study working practices, policies and organizational culture in order to assess the characteristics of a state-civil partnership and the experiences of them as service providers (Ellis, 2011; Butler et al. 2019).

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## **Appendix**

### **Background Information of Participants in Framtidsprogrammet 2022**

Time in Sweden when joining Framtidsprogrammet: 18,4 percent had only been in Sweden for six months when starting the program, 21,4 percent one year, 28,6 percent two years, 11,2 percent three years, 7,1 percent 4 years, 7,1 percent 5 years, and 6,1 percent 6 years.

Educational background: 3 percent were lacking education, 35 percent had a pre-secondary education shorter than nine years, 5 percent a pre-secondary education of nine years, 26 percent a secondary education, 2 percent a post-secondary education shorter than two years, and 29 percent a post-secondary education of two years or longer.

Education in Sweden: 3 percent studied or had studied up until SFI B, 42 percent SFI C, 23 percent SFI D, 23 percent SVA grund, 6 percent Swedish language introduction at secondary level, and three percent miscellaneous.