

How Do Key Facilitators in Malmö Perceive and Address Barriers to Labor Integration among Ukrainian refugees?

A qualitative case study of labor integration challenges for
Ukrainian refugees under TPD

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Abstract

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, millions of displaced Ukrainians fled to EU Member States. The activation of the TPD allowed Ukrainians to enter the labor market immediately. This thesis addresses the barriers to labor integration faced by Ukrainian refugees with temporary protection in Malmö. Based on previous literature, Ukrainian refugees were expected to face labor integration barriers on three different levels: institutional constraints related to welfare provisions and access to social services; structural constraints related to employment and educational opportunities in Malmö; and individual constraints related to motivation, level of education, and gender. Focusing on the aspect of gender was highlighted, as the majority of Ukrainian refugees were women. The research took a quantitative approach where data was collected through semi-structured interviews with key facilitators in Malmö. The results found that language barriers and the lack of a social security number have been the biggest constraints for Ukrainian refugees in Malmö. Surprisingly, facilitators in Malmö did not recognize gender as a constraint despite theoretical expectations indicating that female refugees have a harder time finding employment.

Key words: Ukraine, labor integration, refugees, temporary protection directive, street-level bureaucrats

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1 Introduction

On February 24th, 2022, the Russian Federation launched a military invasion of Ukraine. It resulted in millions of displaced Ukrainians crossing the border to seek refuge in EU countries. As a response, the EU decided to invoke the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD). The TPD is a mechanism allowing Ukrainian refugees to receive immediate temporary protection in all EU Member States (but Denmark) in order to alleviate national asylum systems and facilitate integration. Whereas the TPD aims to ease the resettlement of displaced Ukrainians in host countries, integration is still challenging for refugees, particularly in the labor market.

1.1 Research aim

This research aims to address how effective the provisions of the TPD are for labor integration. By identifying the barriers to labor integration among Ukrainian refugees with temporary protection, one can uncover where the Directive might fall short in its effort to alleviate integration in host countries. The thesis will investigate how local actors facilitating labor integration for Ukrainian refugees in Malmö perceive and address the barriers to employment. The research aims to answer what institutional constraints affect Ukrainian refugees in the context of Sweden, the structural constraints present in the context of Malmö, and the individual constraints related to the characteristics of this refugee group. Additional provisions provided by key facilitators, and proposed solutions for facilitating labor integration will also be addressed.

1.2 Thesis structure

The structure of this thesis begins with a short introduction of the topic, and the aim of the research. Following is the background section providing information about the TPD, Ukrainian refugees in Sweden, and the local context of employment in Malmö. Next is

the theoretical expectations based on previous literature and academic debates. The theoretical framework presents the importance of interviewing facilitators for labor integration based on the theory of street-level bureaucracy. This is followed by the methodological section, presenting the details of the research approach. Following this is the analysis, where the results from the data collection are conferred. Lastly is the discussion and conclusion, the implications of the data are covered, and the thesis as a whole is summed up.

2 Background

2.1 Temporary Protection Directive

The TPD is a mechanism to alleviate pressure on EU Member States national asylum systems in cases of mass influx of displaced persons. It was activated for the first time in 2022 for Ukrainian refugees as a result of the Russian invasion. The TPD will be active from the 4th of March 2022, until the 4th of March 2025 (Commission, 2022). Besides granting immediate temporary protection in EU Member States, TPD also guarantees refugees access to several provisions, including a residence permit, access to the labor market, access to accommodation, access to some welfare benefits, and access to education for children on the same terms as nationals in the host countries (Commission, 2022).

2.1.1 TPD provisions in Sweden

While the TPD establishes a common framework for EU Member States to follow, the practical implementation and specific arrangements for Ukrainian refugees are determined at the national level. The specific provisions in Sweden will be presented in this section. Ukrainian refugees under TPD are granted temporary residency permits valid until March 2025 (Migration Agency, n.d.). The status and future of Ukrainian refugees residing in Sweden after the end of the TPD is still undecided.

Regarding social welfare, Ukrainian refugees under temporary protection receive a daily allowance, with adults entitled to 71 SEK, and children receiving 50 SEK or lower per day (Nordic Council, 2022). The daily allowance is only provided if refugees lack the means to support themselves through employment, and the allowance is intended to cover basic expenses such as food and clothing (Migration Agency, 2024). Ukrainian refugees under temporary protection are not entitled to a Swedish social security number due to their status as temporary residents (Migration Agency, n.d.). This limits

them from taking part in welfare benefits to the same extent as people nationally registered in Sweden.

To facilitate labor integration, Ukrainian refugees are allowed to work without requiring separate work permits (Commission, 2022). In terms of education, there are local differences in the additional services and provisions offered to Ukrainian refugees (IOM, 2023). Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) is an example of such a service. SFI is a municipal education course to provide basic proficiency in Swedish for immigrants. However, Ukrainians under the TPD were not entitled to any municipal education, including SFI (National Agency for Education, 2024). The Swedish government did not offer any free language courses, and Ukrainians who wanted to learn Swedish had to turn to civil organization initiatives (Nordic Council, 2022).

2.2 Ukrainian refugees in Sweden

As of April 2024, about 42,000 Ukrainian refugees have fled to Sweden (UNHCR, n.d.). In Malmö, there were on average 1050 individuals with temporary protection according to the Directive enrolled in the Migration Agency reception system in Malmö each month (Malmö stad, 2024). Ukrainian refugees have mainly been women, or female-led households, due to martial law in Ukraine preventing most men between the ages 18 to 60 from leaving the country (OECD, 2023a). In Sweden, 47% of refugees arriving were women (Samzelius, 2024). In 2023, 69% of men but only 50% of women were either employed or looking actively for jobs in Sweden (IOM, 2023).

2.3 Labor integration in Malmö

In Sweden, the key actors for labor integration at the local level are the municipalities. Compared to other EU countries, Sweden has fairly high employment rates (Eurostat, 2024). However, the city of Malmö sticks out from the national trend with the second highest number of unemployment in Sweden. In March 2024, 12,3% were unemployed in Malmö, compared to the Swedish average of 6,7% (SPES, 2024). Since the 1990s, Malmö has had a much higher unemployment rate than the rest of Sweden (Nordin,

2022). Municipalities with a higher number of immigrants will generally have higher unemployment, as socioeconomic segregation is commonly connected with ethnic segregation. A third of the population is foreign-born in Malmö, and a majority of the residents in the most socioeconomically challenging areas of the city are immigrants (Malmö Tillväxtkommission, 2023, p.17; Region Skåne, 2023). Another factor for the high unemployment in Malmö is a mismatch of people's qualifications and the jobs available (Nordin, 2022).

Research shows that Malmö also belongs to the top 10% of Sweden's municipalities where the establishment process takes the longest time (Engdahl & Liljeberg, 2022, p.45). The same study found that it takes longer for refugees to become employed in Malmö compared to the rest of the country. Explanations for regional differences are speculated to be local market policies and municipal adult education, but the authors emphasize the need for in-depth studies on the topic to find appropriate measures for the situation in Malmö. Thus, there is an incentive to study the labor integration of Ukrainians in the context of Malmö, as when and where refugees arrive could have long-term effects on employment (Rooth & Åslund, 2007a).

2.3.1 Facilitators of Ukrainian labor integration in Malmö

While the TPD provides a core framework, there have been additional provisions and support measures for Ukrainian refugees residing in Sweden. This is on the initiative of the municipality, civil society, and local organizations. Organizations in Malmö have offered free supplementary Swedish language classes specifically for Ukrainians. There has been employment support with employment programs, job fairs, matchmaking, and subsidized employment pathways. There have also been several civil society-organized community organizations where Ukrainian diaspora groups can provide cultural connections and assist with navigating Swedish society.

3 Theoretical expectations

The nature of the TPD aims for swift labor integration of Ukrainian refugees in host countries. The rate of occupation for Ukrainians will not be identical in all EU countries nor in each local context. It will depend on the characteristics of Ukrainian refugees as a group, the provisions provided by the host government and NGOs, and the local situation of labor integration and employment, as both pre-migration and post-migration factors are argued to affect refugee integration (Bakker, Dagevos & Engbersen, 2013).

Theoretical expectations on the constraints of labor integration among Ukrainian refugees in Malmö have been constructed based on previous literature. Reports, articles, and case studies on Ukrainian refugee integration in the EU, labor integration of refugees in Sweden, and female refugee integration in Europe have provided the basis for the expected barriers. Furthermore, these expectations have been grouped into three broader categories: institutional constraints; structural constraints; and individual constraints.

3.1 Institutional constraints

Institutional constraints for labor integration are barriers created by policies and systems that control the labor market. These include policies that require specific credentials or certificates to take certain jobs, discriminatory policies, or limited support services that can make it difficult to find employment.

Ukrainian refugees are entitled to the daily allowance provided by the Swedish Migration Agency. The daily allowance provided for adult refugees is the lowest among the Nordic countries (Nordic Council, 2022). Additionally, families with more than two children only get a full daily allowance for the two eldest children (Samzelius, 2024). The amount is much lower than the Swedish national standard benefit and is too low to cover public transport, childcare products, clothes, and other necessary everyday

products for Ukrainian refugees (Socialstyrelsen, 2024). Additionally, UNHCR has warned about the Swedish daily allowance being too low for an “adequate standard of living” and sees a risk that Ukrainian refugees encompassed by the TPD face increased risks of abuse and exploitation in Sweden (UNHCR, 2023). By Swedish standards, the ones subsiding on the daily allowance live in absolute poverty.

A significant obstacle for refugees integrating into Swedish society is the absence of a Swedish social security number and Bank-ID. In Sweden, most access to social services is digitalized, and individuals need a Bank-ID for identification. Navigating the system of Bank-ID and other formalities can be challenging for foreigners without extra help from support services. While lacking a social security number does not completely prevent refugees from finding employment or starting businesses, it does deter entrepreneurship and complicates the process of registering with the Swedish Public Employment Services (SPES) services for Ukrainian refugees. Both public and private sector actors are essential in developing strategies to facilitate the integration of Ukrainian refugees by ensuring they have access to services such as the SPES job bank and the ability to open their own bank accounts in Sweden (Klink & Mundt, 2023).

Without Swedish registration, Ukrainian refugees are not entitled to municipal adult education either. Ukrainian refugees are free to apply to programs at folk high schools and universities, but they do not have the right to receive study grants. Ukrainian refugees are limited from most of the same welfare benefits as individuals registered in Sweden. They are not entitled to an allowance for the care of children, which is a barrier for parents who are at times forced to stay home to take care of their children without receiving compensation.

3.1.1 Feminist policy

The labor market integration of female migrants has also been reported as more challenging than the integration of male refugees in the EU (EMN, 2022; OECD 2023a). This is not only the case for Ukrainian refugees, female refugees are generally less likely than men to find employment in the host country (Commission & OECD, 2016). The previously mentioned employment gap among Ukrainian refugees in Sweden can be attributed to factors such as household stereotypes and care obligations

for women. Ensuring access to sufficient childcare facilities is essential for the socio-economic integration of refugee mothers (OECD, 2023a). In a survey on displaced Ukrainians in the EU, limited access to childcare facilities was commonly reported as a barrier to female labor integration (FRA, 2023). Women, particularly single mothers, face constraints in seeking employment when they must stay home to care for their children due to a lack of adequate child care facilities (Rasche, 2022; Samzelius, 2024). Considering that most refugees are women and children, children's access to childcare and education is crucial for women's opportunity to employ themselves (Samzelius, 2024). The large engagement of civil society and the need for many refugees in Sweden to rely on the support of natives also comes with increased risks of exploitation and abuse (OECD, 2023a). Female refugees as a group are extra vulnerable (Carrera et al., 2022; Liebig & Tronstad, 2018).

Sweden has a gender mainstreaming approach in integration policies to achieve gender equality objectives. Labor market integration and gender equality for female migrants is a prioritized national policy (EMN, 2022). Although migrant women typically face greater challenges in integrating into labor markets, Sweden's feminist policy may mitigate these difficulties for Ukrainian refugees in Malmö.

3.2 Structural constraints

Structural constraints to labor integration include barriers rooted in the economic and social structures of the local context that affect access to employment. Constraints related to high unemployment, lack of job opportunities, unequal access to education, and high costs of living in the local area.

Where one as a refugee arrives and seeks their initial job matters for labor integration. Meeting a bad local labor market in Sweden leaves traces of wages and labor market integration for a long time, as local factors have a more pronounced and enduring impact on individuals compared to broader national trends (Rooth & Åslund, 2007a). Part of the effects is due to 'scarring', where high unemployment in the local area could scare off newcomers due to the poor prospects of securing a job. Additionally, immigrants initially arriving in a poor region are less likely to find employment (Åslund

& Rooth, 2007a). As the local context of Malmö is characterized by high unemployment, this could impact Ukrainian refugees' integration into the labor market.

The uncertain length of the Ukrainians' duration in host countries could decrease private sector actors' incentives to offer employment (Klink & Mundt, 2023). Hiring and upskilling refugees who potentially are returning to their home country can be seen as a disinvestment. For similar reasons, employers might be less motivated to provide training or invest in methods to help Ukrainian refugee labor integration. It is anticipated that the Ukrainian refugees will secure employment in jobs that are likely to be low-skilled and temporary (OECD, 2023b). The undetermined future for Ukrainian refugees in Sweden could thus pose a barrier to labor integration.

3.3 Individual constraints

Individual constraints to labor integration include barriers connected to characteristics of the group, such skills, experiences and personal state of life.

3.3.1 Highly educated

The Ukrainian refugees are characterized by a high level of education. In Sweden, 65% of female and 48% of male Ukrainian refugees have completed higher education (IOM, 2023). This advanced educational background is anticipated to aid their rapid integration into the labor market, especially given the widespread labor shortages in many host countries (OECD, 2023b). Although a highly educated population benefits the host country, many Ukrainian refugees in the Swedish labor market have reported being overqualified for the jobs they have secured (IOM, 2023). The education, skills, and experiences obtained in Ukraine might not offer the same opportunities in Sweden as they would have back home (Tibajev, 2023).

3.3.2 Language proficiency

Language is reported by a fourth of European refugees to be the biggest obstacle to employment (Fasani, Frattini, & Minale, 2018). In a report by IOM, 80% of

unemployed Ukrainian refugees report lack of language to be their biggest barrier to labor integration (2023). The lack of rights to language courses in Swedish impedes the work opportunities for Ukrainians and interferes with integration in most parts of society. Whereas some municipalities offer SFI and other forms of language classes, access to Swedish education has not been equally distributed in Sweden. The unequal access to language training could impede labor integration for refugees in municipalities where there are no language courses offered, as better language skills give a return in the form of a higher chance of employment (Rooth & Åslund, 2007b).

3.3.3 Female led households

The Ukrainian refugees are characterized by the large number of female-led households. Female migration and male migration are not the same thing, where women as a group are more vulnerable, and also face different needs, challenges, and stereotypes than men in host countries (Andrews et al, 2023). In the Ukrainian case, the lack of partner support, combined with stress and trauma from displacement, is likely to increase the mental burden associated with women's family responsibilities. This includes the emotional and cognitive labor involved in managing family life, such as planning, organizing, scheduling, caring for, and being responsible for family members.

The involvement of private citizens and initiatives in aiding Ukrainian refugees also comes with an increased risk of gender-based violence and exploitation (OECD, 2023a). The vulnerable position of Ukrainian refugees has resulted in informal employers employing Ukrainians for undeclared and exploitative work. This is not necessarily a risk for women exclusively, however, female refugees face higher risks of exploitation by host-country higher-ups due to their vulnerability. Experiencing exploitation can hinder migrants' ability to integrate, making it challenging for them to participate in work or education (Phillimore et al., 2022). Thus, literature proposes that women may face a "triple disadvantage" in integration, as barriers related to gender, refugee status, and forced migration interact and reinforce one another (Liebig & Tronstad, 2018).

3.3.4 Temporariness

Ukrainian refugees encompassed by the TPD in Sweden have a temporary residence permit during the Directives endurance. However, the status and future of Ukrainian refugees residing in Sweden after the end of the TPD is still undecided. The uncertainty for many about their future after its end on the 4th of March 2025 can affect one's incentive to integrate into host countries' labor markets.

Refugees might want to return to Ukraine when the situation is secure enough. But it is uncertain when a safe return will be possible. Concerns about one's status in the host country and length of stay are argued to decrease refugees' incentives to invest in skills needed for labor integration (Brell, Dustmann & Preston, 2020). On one hand, the payoff of learning skills needed for the Swedish labor market, such as learning Swedish or completing education to receive an approved certificate (e.g. a refugee with a Ukrainian teaching certificate needs to receive a Swedish teaching certificate before being able to work with education in Sweden), might not seem profitable if the individual is set on returning to the home country soon. On the other hand, the stress of one's future in the host country due to the temporariness of their assured stay can have psychologically negative effects and lead to a lack of integration incentives due to poor mental health (Brell, Dustmann & Preston, 2020; Bakker, Dagevos & Engbersen, 2013). When the certainty of refugees' length of stay and future is certain fosters labor integration, as individuals are more willing to give their time and energy to host country-specific skills fostering labor integration when they are aware that it will benefit them (Dustmann et al., 2017).

4 Theoretical framework

The research addresses the barriers faced by Ukrainian refugees seeking employment in Malmö. I think a fitting way to solve this is through interviewing actors actively facilitating labor integration for the group in question in the local context of Malmö. There is empirical evidence that civil society organizations have been important enablers of labor market integration for Ukrainian refugees in other European countries (Numerato, Čada & Hoření, 2023). They play an important role in providing administrative and social guidance and are also key providers of language training. The latter is of particular significance considering that Ukrainian refugees are not entitled to language courses in Sweden. Additionally, in Sweden, political parties widely support incorporating gender equality into all integration policies, particularly emphasizing the need to improve migrant women's access to the labor market (EMN, 2022). The importance of involving municipalities and local civil organizations in the implementation of integration policies is thus emphasized.

In street-level bureaucracy theory, the importance of civil servants is highlighted in policy implementation (Lipsky, 1980). Street-level bureaucrats, or civil servants, are the actors in society who have direct contact with citizens, and who are responsible for implementing policies constructed by higher-ups. Examples of street-level bureaucrats include social workers, public workers, and employment officers. They are argued to essentially be the absolute policymakers, serving both as the final policy implementers, and also ensuring that policies work on the ground, and not just on paper (Maynard-Moody & Portillo, 2010). They have to exercise autonomy, as street-level bureaucrats' work can not be completely predicted or controlled by rules and laws. Actors need to use their own intuition and experience to make decisions because each case is unique. Autonomy makes interactions between street-level bureaucrats and citizens more meaningful as it allows adjustments in decisions and procedures to match each case's unique situation. This way, workers can use their own judgment to better meet the specific desires and requirements of the people they serve (Tummers & Bekkers, 2013). The tension between the difficult conditions, resources, and structures

of the civil servant organizations, and the needs of civilians characterizes street-level bureaucracy (Eriksson & Johansson, 2021; Lipsky, 1980).

In Sweden, government institutions are responsible for migrant integration, and the interactions between actors on the ground and refugees are thus essential for carrying out the TPD (Spehar, 2023). Actors in Malmö are the ones who need to adapt TPD provisions so they fit the situation of Ukrainian refugees in the local context. Considering that the Directive covers all EU Member States, understanding how street-level bureaucrats of Malmö implement TPD and address labor integration for Ukrainians has the potential to disclose innovative solutions and practices.

Interviewing street-level bureaucrats in Malmö is significant for addressing the labor market barriers faced by Ukrainians. For one, the actors have interacted directly with Ukrainian refugees. They are the ones providing meetings, guidance, classes, and other forms of helpful services to facilitate labor integration. As the implementers of facilitating practices, they are also aware of the shortcomings and barriers to labor integration, particularly in the local context. They are the key players on the ground and can provide useful information about which parts of implemented policies work, and which parts fail. The experiences of street-level bureaucrats make them appropriate actors to interview for the purpose of my thesis. Interviewing several different actors is also important, as their work has a degree of unpredictability, and thus, each interaction with Ukrainians is unique.

5 Methodology

5.1 Research design

My research design aims to give insight into the experiences and provisions of local actors who facilitate labor integration among Ukrainian refugees in Malmö. This will be addressed through a small case study. There are expected constraints for labor integration based on the institutional structures of Sweden, the local context of Malmö, and the characteristics and experiences of Ukrainian refugees as a group. The research aims to uncover any additional barriers emerging considering that the majority of refugees are women, often accompanied by children. Migrant women are a more vulnerable group than migrant men, as females face a higher risk of exploitation, and migrant mothers require additional needs in host countries on account of the presence of children (Andrews et al. 2023; Carrera & Ineli-Ciger, 2023; p.305; Samzelius, 2024).

5.2 Research method

The research process takes a qualitative approach in the form of semi-structured interviews, as the aim is to gain an in-depth understanding of the actor's thoughts and experiences (Robson & McCartan, 2026, p.242). The usage of semi-structured interviews is promoted when an interview aims to take a feminist approach, as it allows for increased transparency and understanding, a broader spectrum of responses, and consequently more comprehensive data (Punch, 1998, pp.178-179). The interviews were open-ended, as this structure allows unique topics to emerge during the interview (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p.289).

5.3 Data collection

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The interviewees were five deliberately sampled actors in Malmö working directly with Ukrainian refugees under the TPD and their labor integration. The data collection took place between April and May 2024. The interviews followed a guide with pre-decided questions, but left room for open answers and discussion. The questions touched upon the organization's experience of barriers to Ukrainian refugee labor integration on institutional, structural, and individual levels. All interviews were conducted digitally. The interviews were recorded for transcription purposes.

All contact with the interviewed actors was achieved through mail correspondence. All interviewees, except the Recruitment Team Leader from the Ukrainian Professional Support Center, were based and active in Malmö and had worked directly with Ukrainian refugees encompassed by the TPD. The interviews were conducted in Swedish, and their length ranged from 15 to 40 minutes. Before each interview, the purpose of the interviews and the aim of my research were explained to the participants. The data collection followed LUMID ethical guidelines to ensure that participants were well-informed on the aim of the research and gave consent to participation (LUMID, 2013).

Interview Organisation	Role of participant	Date
Kvarnby Folk High School	Coordinator Ukraine-project ambassador	24/4 - 2024
Hyllie Park Folk High School	Language teacher	25/4 - 2024
Swedish Public Employment Services	Employment officer	26/4 - 2024
Ukrainian Professional Support Center	Recruiter	26/4 - 2024
At Work Nordic	Project leader	13/5 - 2024

Figure 1: Interview information

5.3.1 Participants

Kvarnby Folk High School is an institution for adult education owned by an economic association in Malmö. Their main services are language courses and SFI. Ukrainian refugees residing in Malmö have been able to participate in SFI classes at Kvarnby since the implementation of the TPD. English language courses and online courses in SFI are also offered. They have a project offering a social space for Ukrainians in need of counseling, where information about opportunities and the functioning of services in Malmö works. Networking opportunities are also provided by inviting organizations to inform their participants about social services and assistance in different sectors.

Hyllie Park Folk High School is a non-profit voluntary institution for adult education in Malmö. Hyllie Park offered an EU-financed project specifically aimed at bringing Ukrainian refugees closer to the labor market or studies through job matchmaking, social activities, and language courses in Swedish and English. The project started in September 2022 and ended in March 2024. Participants in the project have mainly been from Malmö, but individuals from neighboring municipalities have also partaken.

The SPES is a government body aimed at helping individuals to find employment. The agency offers employment support, translation of educational credentials, and unemployment benefit schemes for those enrolled. The agency does not offer specific programs for refugees encompassed by the TPD.

Ukrainian Professional Support Center (UPSC) is an EU-funded project driven within the framework of a larger Swedish non-profit recruitment organization. The project operates similarly to a recruitment company, by finding Swedish employees wanting to hire Ukrainian refugees and then matching them with appropriate candidates searching for jobs. The UPSC is based in Stockholm but operates all over Sweden. The project has been active since the spring of 2022.

At Work Nordic (AWN) is an organization commissioned by the SPES that matches unemployed individuals with employers. They had an EU-funded project aimed at employing Ukrainian refugees in Malmö.

5.4 Data analysis

To analyze the collected data, I used thematic coding analysis. This method is effective when qualitative approaches, and particularly open-ended interviews, have been the source of data collection (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p.468). The answers were individual for each respondent, requiring coding to identify themes and commonalities between respondents' answers. The data was manually coded.

I familiarized myself with the data, first through transcription, and then through re-reading the data to identify themes and patterns. Prior engagement with literature made me more aware of aspects of the data that otherwise could have been missed (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p.469). Some codes and themes had been predetermined in alignment with the theoretical expectations before the data collection. The themes were identified after applying codes to the respondents' answers.

Sometimes, actors provided different answers to the same question, but through in-depth familiarization and analysis of the data, it became apparent that they had the same experience, and thus, their answers shared a code. This was particularly important because the actors worked in different fields of profession, and thus commonly used different figures of speech. For example, the participants from folk high schools expressed themselves in different phrases compared to the participants working with networking and recruitment, despite implying the same thing. Coding the data made it much more simple to interpret and find bigger themes. It also allowed me to more easily find connections and patterns in the data. During the analysis process, I constantly back and forth between the data and the analysis, as more themes were identified, and patterns emerged. The themes were mapped out using tables in order to easier analyze the data provided by the different actors.

5.5 Limitations and ethical considerations

This research only provides the perspective of a handful of actors working with refugees, and not the perspective of refugees themselves. Thus, the research will not

present a perfectly accurate image of the current situation of Ukrainian labor migration in Malmö. Rather, it will provide insight into Malmö-based actors' facilitation of labor integration for Ukrainian refugees.

5.5.1 Methodological limitations

Using case studies for research has its limitations, particularly small cases, as it only addresses the situation in Malmö. One can not legitimately use the research to generalize barriers to labor market integration everywhere, as it is very specific to the context of Malmö. Additionally, whereas the majority of actors active in labor market integration for Ukrainians were contacted, only a handful were willing to participate in interviews for this research project. Thus, the data collected and presented is not representative of the experiences of every actor in Malmö. This needs to be considered when concluding. However, the actors participating in the interviews have worked differently on their individual projects, and also work differently as an organization, and thus provide diverse perspectives relatively reflective of labor market integration and Ukrainian refugees in Malmö.

There are also certain limitations and risks with thematic coding. The very flexible nature of analyzing data sometimes makes it hard to decide on what parts to focus on, and the method is sometimes restricted to description rather than deeper interpretation (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p.470). There is thus a risk that thematic coding only explains the data. The method of open-ended interviews also comes with the risk that the interview might lose its main focus and drift away toward other topics, and this also makes it more difficult to analyze later (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p.289).

5.5.2 Actors' limitations

This research takes a top-down approach by addressing what actors believe to be refugees' biggest constraints. Swedish actors, who work and live here, identify barriers differently from the Ukrainians affected by them. Most of the actors are accustomed to Swedish norms and expectations and construct their perspectives based on that. They can have a picture of what they believe to be constraints, but it is presumptuous to believe that they completely grasp the experience of Ukrainian refugees who are the

ones encountering the barriers to the labor market on the ground. The autonomy of street-level bureaucrats could also lead to unequal and substandard services provided to refugees if organizations receive inadequate resources from the municipality, government, or the EU (Numerato, Čada & Hoření, 2023; Eriksson & Johansson, 2021).

Additionally, the actors interviewed have only dealt with Ukrainian refugees who actively made an effort to integrate by signing up for programs or searching for jobs. The experiences with Ukrainian refugees and their constraints of actors are thus limited to the most ambitious and motivated individuals of the refugee group. There are most likely hidden statistics of individuals who are not engaging in labor integrating measures, and thus face additional or different barriers than those mentioned. There is also a risk of generalization when describing the constraints of the refugee group, as the actor's perspective is built on their personal experience with a limited number of individuals in a small context (Numerato, Čada & Hoření, 2023).

5.5.3 Personal limitations

There is a risk that I as a researcher might overlook important features of the data as a result of the predetermined expectations on the barriers to labor integration. Particularly since I have familiarized myself with literature before initiating data collection. On purpose or not, I was probably likely to easily identify and go in-depth with themes of barriers that I had already familiarized myself with and that confirmed my expectations. Unfamiliar barriers provided in the data collection were thus harder to identify and grasp. Despite this, I attempted to keep the risks with my own expectations in mind during the data analysis in order to broaden the scope of the research.

5.5.4 Ethical considerations

The research followed LUMIDs guidelines to ensure that ethical principles were withheld and that the integrity of participants was protected (LUMID, 2013). Before each interview, the participants were informed on how the data would be used and each participant had to give consent to be recorded. The participants were made aware that the interview was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. The participants were informed that their identities would remain anonymous for the entirety of the

research process and that all provided data would exclusively be used for the purpose of this thesis. After transcription, the audio recordings were deleted.

6 Analysis

This part presents and analyzes the data collected through the interviews with actors facilitating labor integration for Ukrainians in Malmö. The presented data is structured around the theoretical expectations already specified. This section also highlights additional provisions and adjustments by the actors, as well as their proposed solutions for smoother labor integration.

6.1 Institutional barriers

6.1.1 Swedish bureaucracy

Navigating Swedish bureaucracy has been reported by Kvarnby, USPC, and AWN to hinder easy labor integration. There is ambiguity surrounding how Swedish agencies operate. Queries on when one is entitled to benefits, what rules one is required to follow for such benefits, what are the obligations, and when does one receive benefits and wages?

“One thing that many have mentioned is the lack of clarity regarding different types of rules. Sweden is a bureaucratic country, and many people have had to realize that”
(Coordinator, Kvarnby)

“They don't know how everything works here. The labor market, and how you can receive help if you need it. You may also need help with the authorities if you don't understand how they operate...” (Recruiter, UPSC)

According to some of the actors, Swedish agencies fail to provide comprehensible information on this to Ukrainian refugees. A consequence of misunderstanding could be less incentive to search jobs, or falling into the informal work sector. The latter is of particular risk considering the low daily allowance provided by the Swedish state for Ukrainian refugees. Whereas it creates a greater motive for the groups to find employment, actors have also identified the low daily allowance as an incentive for taking illegal jobs.

6.1.2 Social security number

Ukrainian refugees with temporary protection in Sweden are not nationally registered and do not receive a social security number. The lack of social security numbers has been reported by all actors to be a barrier for Ukrainian refugees aiming to integrate into the labor market.

For one, the job searching process through the SPES is more difficult without a social security number. They cannot enroll in SPES digitally but instead need to visit a State service office. Additionally, people without social security numbers are not entitled to enroll in employment programs provided by the SPES.

“...people covered by the TPD cannot take part in current solutions and insurance coverage, because you need to be registered in Sweden... ..Otherwise, there are various efforts and programs for people who register with the SPES” (Employment officer, SPES)

“...You can hardly apply for a job. You can't really register at the SPES. You can hardly do anything. Ukrainian refugees have had to queue at service offices. They have spent their days standing in lines for stamps. It feels very inflexible. Without a Bank-ID it is very difficult for Ukrainians to move forward faster...” (Project leader, AWN)

Furthermore, issues with Swedish bureaucracy become much slower to navigate. Opening up bank accounts, issues with taxes, and so on. Every issue with Swedish agencies requires individuals to queue outside of agency service offices, as refugees are unable to solve these kinds of issues easily digitally with a Bank-ID. Instead, Ukrainian refugees need to spend a lot of time queuing and moving between different Swedish agencies.

“My Ukrainian friend was at the bank. She can't get a tax refund... ..because her bank cannot be linked to the Swedish Tax Agency. And she went to the bank. Then to the Tax Agency. Then again to the bank. Then again to the Tax Agency” (Project ambassador, Kvarnby).

6.1.3 Educational opportunities

Several interviewed actors noted that Ukrainian certifications for employment are not always recognized as valid in Sweden. Swedish regulations mandate specific

certifications for entry into certain sectors of the labor market, particularly in education, caregiving, and healthcare. Consequently, although refugees may possess the necessary educational qualifications from Ukraine for such positions, they must supplement their education with certifications recognized in Sweden.

“To be able to supplement their knowledge, or to validate it. It is an obstacle for those who come here and already have competence” (Teacher, Hyllie Park)

“If a Ukrainian person who used to work in the medical field in Ukraine wants to work as a nurse in Sweden, they cannot do so without a Swedish certificate, which they cannot get if they don't have a sufficient level of Swedish, and if they cannot study at a municipal adult education” (Recruiter, UPSC)

The primary challenge identified by the actors regarding education is the limited opportunities for Ukrainian refugees to validate their educational credentials in Sweden. Vocational education for Ukrainian refugees is not uniformly provided at the national level; instead, its provision is determined by individual municipalities. A similar issue arises with the provision of Swedish language education or SFI. Another constraint is that Ukrainian refugees are not eligible for student loans, which could make it more difficult for them to enroll in education.

6.2 Structural barriers

6.2.1 Educational provisions in Malmö

As mentioned in the section on institutional constraints, the municipality decides whether to provide SFI and vocational education for Ukrainian refugees. Most actors have identified that there are currently favorable opportunities for Ukrainians to learn the language through SFI in Malmö. However, they are not entitled to enroll in vocational training or municipal adult education without being nationally registered. It limits their opportunities to work within a field they already have a lot of experience due to the lack of opportunity to complement their education to be valid in Sweden.

“...Ukrainians who are covered by TPD are not allowed to study vocational training in Malmö. Even now, you cannot study to be preschool staff or a nurse” (Project ambassador, Kvarnby)

Both folk high schools identified that the issue with educational provisions was greater for those living in smaller municipalities, where education and SFI were completely out of reach. Ukrainian refugees in such municipalities could apply for classes, such as SFI, in Malmö, but it had to be approved by the municipality they lived in.

“It is not guaranteed that you can study with us at Kvarnby if you live in another municipality. You have to go through the bureaucracy's meat grinders before that can happen. And it might not even work out in the end” (Coordinator, Kvarnby)

A big issue with being denied the opportunity to complement one's education is that you have to take jobs you might be overqualified for. Even if you overcome other issues, such as the language barrier. Although, the interviewed actors believed it to be easier to find jobs without proficiency in Swedish in larger cities than in more rural municipalities.

6.2.2 Unserious employers

Malmö is a large city, with many unemployed people. There is thus a higher risk of exploitative work and informal employers. The teacher at Hyllie Park identified that there are a lot of unserious actors in the labor market in Malmö. Employers who are aware of the precarious situation of Ukrainian refugees, and use it to their own advantage by recruiting them for informal work. Such work is characterized by black pay, no rest days, no contracts, and no security. At the same time, they rarely require proficiency in Swedish or higher education. Employers can entice with tax-free wages. Unemployed Ukrainian refugees living on a very low daily allowance, without the ability to learn Swedish or English, or to improve their prospects of finding employment, are at great risk of illegal employment.

“I know those who are aware that it's not the right thing to do, but have taken such jobs anyway. They see no other way out” (Teacher, Hyllie Park)

Whereas the risk of exploiting refugees for labor is not exclusive to Malmö, the teacher believes that this is rarer in smaller municipalities. They also believe that the low daily allowance provided by the Migration Agency increases the risk of illegal employment.

6.2.3 Transportation

Some of the actors identified transportation as a constraint. Those who are unable to travel by an accessible vehicle or with public transportation are limited from taking jobs in places too far away, but also from partaking in classes to facilitate labor integration, such as Swedish language lessons. It can also limit one from going to interviews and finding employment opportunities in neighboring municipalities or counties.

*“Being able to get around is important for feeling like you are a part of society...
...there have definitely been limitations for those without access to public transport.”*
(Teacher, Hyllie Park)

However, the actors in Malmö also seemed to agree that Ukrainian refugees within Malmö should, and did, walk or bike to work interviews and studies. Providing transportation in the form of public transportation tickets mainly seemed to be a barrier for those traveling to, or from, Malmö.

6.2.4 Age

Facilitators identified an additional barrier for elderly Ukrainian refugees who wish to find employment. Employers are less likely to hire elders, and those of retirement age are also less likely to find guidance from the SPES, as they are too old to partake in their various labor integration programs. Those individuals become more dependent on services by non-public actors for labor integration.

6.3 Individual barriers

6.3.1 Language

All interviewed actors have identified language as the greatest barrier to labor integration among Ukrainian refugees. Without proficiency in Swedish, it was hard to find jobs. For individuals who spoke neither Swedish nor English, it was harder. Many of the actors believe that the lack of opportunities to learn Swedish is hindering Ukrainians from entering the Swedish labor market.

A large proportion of the Ukrainian refugees have high education and used to have advanced occupations. However, many of these works require knowledge of the native language of the country to be performed. Jobs in Sweden requiring direct contact commonly require a high level of proficiency in Swedish. Thus, a lot of individuals with previously advanced occupations in Ukraine had to seek jobs they were overqualified for due to the language barrier.

“We had some child psychologists, urban planners. People who have worked in fairly advanced positions in Ukraine, who have the knowledge and a fairly qualified education, but don't have the language proficiency to be able to do that work here...” (Teacher, Hyllie Park)

Requiring Swedish is not always reported as a barrier. In occupations where direct contact is not required, lacking knowledge of Swedish is not necessarily a problem for labor integration if you are proficient in English.

“There are professions where it is somehow easier. If you work as an architect, graphic designer, things like that. Then it is easier to do your job because you may not need to have direct contact” (Teacher, Hyllie Park)

The participant from AWN also identified that men sometimes had a harder time finding the motivation to learn Swedish. Particularly if they were older, and had a low level of education. The risk identified here was that they would risk finding illegal employment, or jobs with bad terms.

“...they were not so willing to learn the language, and instead wanted to go out and work and earn money immediately. They did not think that Swedish would be needed in the type of work they would do” (Project leader, AWN)

6.3.2 Temporariness

The temporary status of Ukrainian refugees was expected to cause a barrier to labor integration. Most actors have identified that it has been a hindrance to labor integration, but mainly during the initial year in Sweden. During that first year a lot of Ukrainians were set to return home as soon as possible, and thus, were lacking the incentive to invest in skills, such as language, required for a job that fitted their expertise. It was better to find a temporary, low-skilled job to make ends meet during their short-term

stay. As time has progressed, and the Directive has been prolonged due to the continuation of the Russo-Ukrainian war, refugees are changing their mindset surrounding their length of stay in the host country. More and more, are adjusted to staying in Sweden for the foreseeable future and thus are inclined to learn Swedish and find more appropriately-skilled occupations.

6.3.3 Age

The interviewed actors report that elderly Ukrainians are less inclined to find employment and integrate in Malmö. Particularly those in, or close to, retirement. They have lived their whole lives in Ukraine and were set to live the rest of their days comfortably in their home country. The idea of learning new languages, finding a new job, and integrating into a new society becomes much harder to accept in the latter stages of life. The efforts required to find a job in Sweden put a lot of elders off, and thus make it more difficult for them to integrate into the labor market.

6.3.4 Culturally different workplaces

A barrier to labor integration also identified was cultural differences surrounding the workplace. Partly because the job searching process in Sweden is quite different from the one in Ukraine, and both SPES and AWN identified that Ukrainians sometimes needed assistance in employment seeking. Assistance included networking, and formulating CVs and personal letters for Swedish employers. Another constraint for labor integration identified by AWN was gender stereotypical ideas about different occupations. They found that men were unmotivated to apply for jobs they deemed to be feminine.

“They didn't want to discuss ‘women's jobs’ at all, it wasn't interesting to them... ...It was probably important for them to have some kind of prestige in their masculinity, which they very much connected to what you did at work” (Project leader, AWN)

6.3.5 Gender and parental obligations

Most facilitators did not identify the fact that most refugees were women as a barrier. Rather, a bigger constraint identified by the interviewed actors was being a single parent.

“We haven’t adapted in any special way, other than observing that some have children... It would have been the same if they were men actually. If men came alone and had children with them” (Coordinator, Kvarnby)

One of the folk high schools had even identified it as a strength in certain instances. Ukrainian women who had lived lives characterized by struggles, abuse, and worry caused by their male partners, saw an opportunity for a new life in Sweden and were more motivated to partake in their project. Particularly mothers, who want to create a safe and inspiring environment for their children to grow up in. In the image presented by the folk high school, it appears that refugee households used to struggle with violent and abusive men before coming to Sweden.

“Here they [the women] can build a life for themselves. They take care of their children themselves. They have rid themselves of their family's matter of concern [the men].” (Teacher, Hyllie Park)

Those with children seem to be more inclined to find permanent employment. Greatly because children quickly learned Swedish and adapted to life in the host country. Parents are adjusted to building up a new life in Sweden and are willing to put in the effort required.

One of the barriers identified for labor integration was regarding opportunities for child care. Refugee mothers (and other single parents) are very limited from finding employment if they are not enrolled in preschool or other forms of child care, or if no one in the household can take care of young children. One of Malmö's folk high schools experiences that most children in preschool age are enrolled. On the other hand, the recruiter at UPSC implies that absences among preschool personnel in Sweden cause long queues for enrollment. Being a single parent is a barrier, as they face more limitations in the kind of jobs they can take.

“...there are many single mothers who practically might not have the ability to apply for different types of jobs. Even if there are jobs” (Coordinator, Kvarnby)

“It becomes hard to find employment in hospitality. In breakfasts or housekeeping, jobs where you might need to work during the morning or the night” (Recruiter, UPSC)

6.4 Additional provisions and adjustments

The interviewed actors have provided additional provisions and adjustments to facilitate labor integration for Ukrainian refugees in Malmö. The language, or at least cultural knowledge seems to be an advantage in facilitating labor integration for Ukrainian refugees and understanding their needs better. One of the participants from Kvarnby was a Ukrainian refugee who went through the organization's language courses and then received an employment opportunity. They have an important role in conveying information and responding to project participants, as they share similar personal experiences, and also face much smaller cultural and language barriers. Similarly, one of the project leaders from AWN had Lithuanian descent and spoke Russian, which the interviewee believed benefited their work.

“One of our project leaders who worked entirely on the project speaks Russian and comes from Lithuania, and has a lot of understanding of that culture. And I think that was actually a success factor for us. Partly because she knew Russian. Russian is the common language in that part of the world... ...That was how she could help them, because many of them had very poor language skills.” (Project leader, AWN)

Many actors in Malmö seem to find assisting with transportation as an important factor for labor integration. If you are seeking a job through the SPES, you will be compensated for travel and accommodation if a job interview is in another municipality with the condition that there is a summoning for an interview by the employer. Such compensation opens up a lot of opportunities for Ukrainian refugees with limited prospects of finding employment in Malmö. Similarly, Hyllie Park offered compensation for collective transposition to their participants.

“Everyone who did not live close, but who participated in the project, got a bus ticket. There were also many who joined the project because they received bus tickets”
(Teacher, Hyllie Park)

SPES reported that they provide translations of grades and academic certifications received in Ukraine, which can facilitate the validation process for searching for work or studies in Sweden. They also provide help with navigating Swedish bureaucracy, how to find jobs, and how to complement education.

Both interviewed folk high schools provided SFI for Ukrainian refugees, as well as classes in English language. Additionally, Kvarnby also offers SFI courses online which facilitates access for those with limited opportunities to get to location.

6.5 Proposed solutions by actors

Given that language was perceived as the biggest barrier to labor integration for Ukrainian refugees, almost all actors believe that SFI should have been provided nationally without delay. Providing equal opportunities to improve language skills would have facilitated employment for the group. Prioritizing language education for refugees before they enter the workforce has also been a suggested solution, as it helps prevent them from becoming trapped in jobs for which they are overqualified. Increased, and facilitated, access to educational opportunities is also suggested to promote labor integration. Most actors think that there should also be a more flexible solution for people residing in Sweden without a social security number, as refugees are very limited due to the lack of BankID. Information on how authorities operate and the rules in Sweden should also be made more available to the refugees.

7 Discussion

Despite the TPD's provisions aiming to facilitate labor integration, theoretical expectations suggested that Ukrainian refugees would face greater challenges in securing employment, particularly in the city of Malmö. Many of these theoretical expectations were confirmed by the perceptions of local actors regarding barriers to labor integration in Malmö. However, unanticipated barriers also emerged, such as age, which was not recognized as a constraint within the reviewed literature.

A notable finding was the identification of age as a barrier to labor integration for Ukrainian refugees, as it was overlooked in the reviewed literature. Facilitators in Malmö found that motivating elderly refugees to build new lives in Sweden, learn the language, and find jobs was at times challenging. This lack of acknowledgment in academic discourse could lead to missed opportunities for developing tailored interventions to support elderly refugees' labor integration. Bridging the gap between theory and practical realities is crucial to inform inclusive strategies for diverse refugee populations.

An important factor to keep in mind is that all the interviewed facilitators have based most of their experiences on the refugees they have met and helped through their organizations. Most of these individuals are Ukrainian refugees who actively sought out measures to find employment, and with the assistance of the facilitators, were quite successful in doing so. I think it would be naive to believe that there are not a lot of hidden statistics, particularly related to expected barriers to gender. The women who faced the most constraints in finding employment due to factors related to their gender probably did not have the means to enroll in SFI classes or partake in labor integration projects. As mentioned, IOM reports that among Ukrainian refugees in Sweden, 69% of men but only 50% of women were either employed or actively looking for employment (IOM, 2023). With the picture provided by the interviewed actors, where close to no gender barriers were identified, the statistics for men and women should be roughly the same.

There are potential risks with the disconnect between literature and local actors in Malmö's perception of identifying gender as a barrier. If street-level bureaucrats fail to identify existing gender disparities, there will be a lack of initiatives or policies aimed at addressing issues of discrimination. Opportunities for empowering women and promoting their labor integration might be overlooked by facilitators if they disregard gender disparities. For the purpose of my thesis, facilitators' lack of recognition of gender as a barrier may lead to insufficient data collection and analysis on gender-specific issues related to labor integration. This, in turn, can have a hindering effect on the development of evidence-based policies and interventions to address such problems effectively.

The reviewed literature and interviews with the employment officer corroborate the potential benefits of the SPES in providing valuable information, guidance, and opportunities to facilitate labor integration for Ukrainian refugees. However, the practical experience suggests that locating and accessing SPES services can be a significant challenge for this population. Due to the lack of social security numbers, Ukrainian refugees often face extended queues at service offices, prolonged waiting times, and potential confusion throughout the process. While SPES is intended to serve as a facilitator for employment, the reality for Ukrainian refugees suggests that accessing its services is considerably more arduous than initially portrayed.

The expectation that the context of Malmö would prove to be a barrier to labor integration was not confirmed by the facilitators. Rather, the wide variety of opportunities for Ukrainians provided in Malmö appeared to facilitate labor integration.

“There are many places that offer different classes or activities or different projects, and that makes it easier for people to find a place to study and to get help. It can be more difficult for those who live in smaller municipalities, because there is perhaps nothing. No place where you can study Swedish for example... ..So if it's a big city with more opportunities than a small municipality, it becomes easier to integrate and find employment.” (Project ambassador, Kvarnby)

The interviewed facilitators mostly compared the context of Malmö to other, smaller municipalities within the county, rather than to other big cities in Sweden. Thus, finding employment in Malmö could be more difficult than finding jobs in other large Swedish cities.

8 Conclusions

To conclude, this thesis has addressed how key facilitators in Malmö perceive the barriers to labor market entry for Ukrainian refugees. Theoretical expectations of the anticipated constraints were constructed based on previous literature. Data was subsequently collected through interviews with these key facilitators.

The interviews revealed that language proficiency was the primary obstacle for Ukrainian refugees under the TPD in Malmö when seeking employment. The limited provision of SFI negatively impacted refugees' ability to learn Swedish, thereby hindering labor integration. Furthermore, the lack of a personal identity number emerged as the second most significant barrier, as individuals without this number face considerable limitations in accessing services and enrolling in educational and employment programs.

Additional challenges included constraints related to parental responsibilities, age, local context, cultural differences, and prior educational backgrounds. Contrary to initial propositions, the interviewed facilitators did not find evidence suggesting women faced greater struggles with labor integration. Moreover, the context of Malmö itself did not appear to pose a barrier. The main risk was the potential for informal employment, though this was considered as relatively small according to the organizations.

The additional provisions offered by local organizations, such as language classes and employment matching services, seemed to facilitate labor integration. However, the facilitators proposed solutions for easier access to language learning, municipal and vocational education, and services requiring a personal identity number. These proposed solutions primarily addressed institutional constraints, indicating a need to reassess the provisions of the TPD to better support labor integration.

While the perspectives of these street-level bureaucrats provided valuable insights into barriers and potential solutions, further research is warranted. This thesis only captured

the views of a few actors within a small local context. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the TPD's real-world implementation and the barriers faced by Ukrainian refugees, additional research should explore labor integration challenges from the beneficiaries' perspectives and across various locations.

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