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Ioanna Blasko

Making Expensive Decisions

The Workplace and Labour Market Integration of Highly Skilled Refugees in Sweden

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Abstract
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This thesis is an exploration of the labour market and workplace integration of highly skilled refugees in Sweden. Through semi-structured, qualitative interviews with 37 labour market integration actors and 20 highly skilled refugee engineers, two workplace observations, and analyses of written material, the thesis explores how integration processes can be conceptually and theoretically understood. In addition, it examines the characteristics of labour market and workplace integration and the emergence of opportunities and constraints to integration. By utilising a critical realist approach, the integration process is conceptualised as structural and agential change toward relations of equality, which provides a useful lens for examining labour market and workplace relations as they occur in interactions between agents and the social structures which may constrain or enable them.

The thesis consists of three research articles, focusing on the labour market integration paths of highly skilled refugees, the opportunities and constraints they encounter when trying to obtain employment in Sweden, and their experiences of workplace integration. **Article I** provides insights into the structural landscape highly skilled refugees may have to navigate on their path to employment. Moreover, it showcases how refugees can exercise agency on their path to employment, but that it also is difficult to acquire the *knowledgeable* agency needed for making informed decisions. **Article II** explores the labour market experiences of Syrian refugee engineers. They are found to experience difficulties due to discrimination, individual and structural language constraints, the lack of guidance, and inadequate structural help for their level of education and skill. In addition, the constraints were found to be intersectional, geographically and temporally contingent, and connected to neoliberal reforms. **Article III** examines the workplace integration processes of refugee engineers. The findings show that they often adapt and are expected to adapt to engineering and workplace norms in Sweden, despite interactions with colleagues at times creating opportunities for relational workplace integration. Opportunities and constraints can emerge because of normative social practices at the workplace as well as specific workplace geographies which create possibilities for interaction. Furthermore, a larger societal discourse portraying integration as a one-way adaptation process helps to contextualise these findings.

Keywords: Labour Market Integration, Workplace Integration, Highly Skilled Refugees, Morphogenesis, Relational Integration, Engineers, Sweden

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Uppsala, September 2025

List of Papers

This thesis is based on the following papers, which are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals.

I. Blasko, I. (2023) 'One Step Forward, Two Steps Back.' Labour Market Integration Paths of Highly-Skilled Refugees in Sweden. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 23(3):669-682.

II. Blasko, I. Nuancing the Refugee Gap. The Labour Market Integration of Syrian Engineers in Sweden. *Unpublished manuscript*.

III. Blasko, I. Norm Circles and the Geography of Workplace Integration. Workplace Experiences of Refugee Engineers in Sweden. *Unpublished manuscript*.

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Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction 13
Aim and research questions 15
Categorisations and definitions: “highly”, “skilled”, “refugee”, “engineers” 18
Thesis disposition 21

Chapter 2: Integration 22

PART 1: CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF INTEGRATION 24
Brief overview of concepts 24
Societal or individual integration? 25
Four conceptualisations of integration in migration studies 27

PART 2: CRITICALLY EXAMINING INTEGRATION 35
Difficulties and critiques: issues with “integration” 35
Additional difficulties 36
The undefined and unclear relationship between structure and agency in relation to integration 43
Chapter conclusion 45

Chapter 3: Structure, Agency, Morphogenesis 47
Individual agency 48
Social structures 49
Normative social institutions and norm circles 52
Integration as morphogenesis 55
Integration on the labour market and at the workplace 56
Labour markets and workplaces 58
Labour markets, workplaces, and space 59
Integration, labour market integration, workplace integration: three levels of abstraction 61
Analytical dualism and perspectives on time 63
Change and stasis 65
The advantages of a morphogenetic notion of integration 65

Chapter 4: The Swedish Context of Integration 71
Shifts in immigration 71
Changes in the labour market and workplaces 73

Shifts in "integration" policy and welfare ideology 75
The 1960s 75
The 1970s 77
The 1980s 77
The 1990s–2020s 78
Currently available aid for (highly skilled) refugees 81
The right-wing political shift and migration discourse today 82
The shift toward civic integrationism 85

Chapter 5: Previous Research on Labour Market and Workplace Integration 88

PART 1: RESEARCH ON LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION 89
The meaning of labour market integration in previous studies 89
Refugees in comparison to other groups 90
A segmented labour market 91
Refugees as a heterogenous group 92
Agency, structure, opportunities and constraints: Individual and structural factors affecting labour market integration 94
Discrimination and racism on the labour market 98
Comparing the results of labour market integration research 100

PART 2: RESEARCH ON WORKPLACE INTEGRATION 102
The meaning of workplace integration in previous studies 102
Workplace segregation 104
Agency, structure, opportunities and constraints: Individual and structural factors affecting workplace integration 105
Discrimination and racism at the workplace 107

PART 3: INTERSECTIONALITY, STRUCTURE AND AGENCY 110
Intersectional factors and categorisations 110
Previous research and frameworks of interrelated structure and agency 112
Conclusion and takeaways 119

Chapter 6: Methodology and Methods 121
A critical realist ontology and epistemology 121
A critical realist researcher 125
Qualitative methods and critical realism 126
Semi-structured interviews 127
Observations 129
Desk research 130
Collection and sampling 131
Analysis guided by critical realism 133
Analysing morphogenetic integration 137

Ethics, researching “vulnerable groups”, and unequal power relations . 137
Reflections on positionality 139
Empirical material 142

Chapter 7: Article Summaries 146
Article I: ‘One Step Forward, Two Steps Back’. Labour Market Integration Paths of Highly-Skilled Refugees in Sweden 146
Article II: Nuancing the Refugee Gap. The Labour Market Integration of Syrian Engineers in Sweden. 147
Article III: Norm Circles and the Geography of Workplace Integration. Workplace Experiences of Refugee Engineers in Sweden. 149

Chapter 8: Discussion, Contributions and Conclusions 151

References 156

Chapter 1: Introduction

> I have to make many decisions, but they are expensive decisions.
>
> Abdel, economist[1]

Visiting a job fair in 2022 was, at first glance, like experiencing a landscape of infinite employment opportunities. In a Swedish city park, on a sunny day, stall upon stall had been erected offering information about various job vacancies, labour market training courses, and organisations. The visitors passing around me spoke Arabic, Dari, Russian, Swedish, and English, and the information pamphlets being handed out were translated into the largest minority and refugee languages in Sweden. Stalls set up by remote municipalities were offering relocation programmes to fill labour shortages, and a plethora of seemingly similar job training programmes were fighting for the visitors' attention and handing out free merchandise. The job fair had a focus on integration, and it touched on themes regarding language acquisition and labour market discrimination. Panels were held throughout the day with employers, labour market programmes, and politicians, and they echoed the same sentiment throughout the day: we need to fill shortages, and we have many qualified people seeking employment. Why is the matching process not working?

I began this study in 2020, approximately five years after the peak of asylum-seeker entry into Sweden, which was one of the highest per capita in Europe at the time (Eurostat 2016). What I saw around me at the job fair, along with the previous ones I had attended, seemed to be a reflection of the new labour market situation, where labour shortages (Annetorp Hörnsten and Olofsson 2020; Swedish Public Employment Service 2020) and the consequences of ageing populations (Olsson 2024; Ekerlid 2025) were tackled through a focus on hiring new arrivals to Sweden. However, the perception—not only at the job fair panels, but also in previous research—seemed to be that this approach had shortcomings and needed to be improved.

In the case of refugees, it has been shown that they face greater difficulties with obtaining employment than both majority populations and other migrant groups (Bevelander 2011; Bevelander 2020; Brell, Dustmann and Preston 2020). After seeking asylum, applicants need to wait for approval, residence permits, usually take language courses, and begin looking for jobs (cf. Blasko

[1] Paraphrased from the original conversation in English. All names of respondents in the thesis are pseudonyms.

2023). They then enter a workplace, which, although considered to be a setting where integration processes occur (Friesen 2009; Ramji, Etowa and St-Pierre 2019), has been shown to also be a place of exclusion for refugees, who often must accept jobs lower than their qualifications (see Knappert, Kornau and Figengül 2018; Knappert, van Dijk and Ross 2020). Included in this group are those who arrive with a tertiary degree, and at times years of professional experience, but need to enter a labour market in a new country and use their skill sets in a new context. These individuals have received less attention in prior migration research than other migrants (van Riemsdijk and Wang 2016:2). As a backdrop to these processes, the current political situation in Sweden is characterised by a call for stricter border control, higher requirements for residency, and more restrictive asylum policies (see e.g. Tidö Agreement 2022, discussed in Chapter 4).

The job fair, suspended in time and space against this background, feels like an illustration of what I had been studying so far—a landscape of opportunities and constraints through which jobseekers move when trying to obtain employment. The options available seemed boundless. When I tried to navigate the space myself, trying to understand which organisation was which and how two seemingly identical labour market initiatives were different from each other, I felt that it would be easy to get lost among the multitude of options. What would be the advantage of choosing one option and not the other? What would be best for one's career? How could I possibly make a choice?

Abdel, who had come from Syria with a degree in economics, was one of the first research participants with whom I spoke. Although the thesis topic eventually shifted, focusing on engineers rather than economists, his apt summary of the manifold choices and constraints that existed side-by-side stayed with me throughout the entire research process in the form of a Post-it on my computer screen. "Expensive decisions", he had called them, the decisions he has to make towards employment; "I can't afford to make mistakes or fail". Rather than referring to economic factors, his metaphor captured the feeling of having agency to make choices, but always having something to lose. The decisions are difficult, constrained by the fact that making a mistake can come with challenging consequences. As I went on to study the employment journeys of participants, this imagery stayed with me as a representation of the opportunities and constraints that simultaneously exist in the employment process. People make decisions all the time, but the stakes are high and making informed decisions is not always easy.

These factors—both opportunities and constraints concerning the employment of highly skilled refugees such as Abdel, navigating their way through a labour market and workplace landscape reminiscent of a confusing job fair—are at the core of this thesis. The dissertation examines the labour market and workplace integration of highly skilled refugees in Sweden, and it seeks to understand how and why integration processes occur. This is examined through the perspectives of labour market integration actors, such as the ones

at the job fair stalls as well as highly skilled refugees seeking employment and entering new workplaces.

Aim and research questions

This thesis is an inquiry into the labour market and workplace integration of highly skilled refugees[2] in Sweden. This question is explored with a particular focus on opportunities and constraints in respect to labour market and workplace integration, including how social structures can constrain or enable individual agency. The analysis takes into account the perspectives of labour market integration actors as well as highly skilled refugee engineers, and it critically examines the concept of integration itself. The study provides answers to the following research questions:

1. How can integration processes be conceptually and theoretically understood?
2. What characterises the labour market and workplace integration of highly skilled refugees?
3. How can opportunities and constraints regarding labour market and workplace integration be understood, and why do they emerge?

These overarching questions are explored in the comprehensive summary of this thesis and the three empirical thesis articles. All articles' corresponding research questions and methods and material are displayed in Table 1. The types of methods employed are explained in greater detail in Chapter 6.

[2] Highly skilled refugees are here defined as people who have completed a tertiary education or have equivalent skills, and who have had their asylum or family reunification application granted.

Table 1: Overview of research conducted in the comprehensive summary and thesis articles I, II and III, with the corresponding research questions, material and methods.

Part of thesis	**Overarching research question(s)**	**Primary methods and material**
Comprehensive summary	How can integration processes be conceptually and theoretically understood?	Review and analysis of previous research concerning integration and critical realist approaches.
Article I	What characterises the labour market integration of highly skilled refugees? How can the opportunities and constraints regarding labour market integration be understood?	33 interviews with labour market integration initiatives; observations at three job fairs; one information day; informational webinars and events; desk research.
Article II	What characterises the labour market integration of highly skilled refugees? How can the opportunities and constraints regarding labour market integration be understood, and why do they emerge?	18 interviews with Syrian refugee engineers; desk research.
Article III	What characterises the workplace integration of highly skilled refugees? How can the opportunities and constraints regarding workplace integration be understood, and why do they emerge?	20 interviews with refugee engineers; desk research; observations at two mentorship and internship events for foreign engineers. Observations with two refugee engineers at their workplaces.

This thesis is part of a now completed larger research project entitled *Social Integration of Highly Skilled Refugees in Sweden* [Forte 2019-01220], led by Micheline van Riemsdijk. The project, which was funded by Forte, the Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare, aimed to provide an empirically grounded analysis of the social integration of highly skilled refugees in the workplace. It focused both on the workplace experiences of highly skilled refugees and their employers, and on the national and local-level policies and initiatives that affect and govern the integration process. As part of this three-year Forte-funded project, the thesis contributes to the goal of filling the knowledge gap concerning highly skilled refugees in Sweden. In addition, it contributes to the more general project goals by

researching workplaces and providing information that may help increase the inclusion of under-represented groups in the labour market.

My thesis project has its own focus and theoretical starting points within the Forte-funded project. In particular, my project focuses on opportunities and constraints in respect to structure and agency, and it presents refugee engineers as a particular case. Furthermore, it methodologically includes observations at engineering workplaces and adopts a critical realist approach in respect to both methodology and my conceptualisation of integration.

The empirical contributions of the thesis include the provision of more detailed understandings of the experiences of refugee engineers on the labour market and at the workplace in Sweden (Articles II, III), along with the insights of providers of integration initiatives (Article I). Results are also presented concerning how particular workplace geographies can influence integration processes (Article III). In addition, the focus on understanding the integration process and conceptualisations of integration in terms of critical realism leads to insights into *why* integration processes occur, not just how (Articles II and III). This also provides novel theoretical contributions to existing migration and integration research which can be built upon in the future and posits that integration can be understood as a process of structural and agential change, and that refugee agency can be constrained or enabled during this process (Chapters 2 and 3).

The thesis examines questions of labour market and workplaces integration through an interdisciplinary lens, focusing mostly on previous migration and integration research. It brings together scholarship on critical realism and structure-agency with empirical and conceptual studies of integration. This focus on structure-agency is initially inspired by labour geography's understanding of constrained agency (cf. Coe and Jordhus-Lier 2011**).** Its focus on workers as "proactive agents of change" who exercise varying degrees of agency depending on context and the structural constraints imposed on them has guided my initial inquiries into the thesis topic (Lier 2007:821; Herod 2001; Coe and Jordhus-Lier 2011; Knutsen et al. 2015; see also Massey 1984). However, while these notions have informed the focus on how agency can be enabled or constrained, I see the primary contributions of the thesis as being within the field of migration studies, as various integration processes are untangled with regards to highly skilled individual agency.

This thesis can be of interest to structure-agency theorists more broadly, including labour geographers, but also contributes to scholarship that examines inclusion, exclusion, and relational (in)equality processes. Moreover, the results of the study are valuable not only for social scientists who employ the concept of integration, but also for scholars who are ambivalent or disapproving of it insofar as I critically examine how it is used in integration research and suggest a way forward for future theorisations. As a geographical lens is added with regards to highly skilled refugee workplaces, the results of this thesis could also be fruitfully built upon to develop a more elaborate

understanding of how agency is exercised in workplaces and in everyday life (cf. Hastings and MacKinnon 2016). In addition, the thesis can be applicable in non-academic contexts in that its results can be useful in efforts to improve labour market and workplace equality.

Categorisations and definitions: "highly", "skilled", "refugee", "engineers"

I employ several terms throughout this thesis that must be problematised and critically examined in order to better understand the underlying assumptions that they invoke. "Refugees" and "highly skilled" are some of the most frequently used categories. Moreover, these terms are at times uncritically used in both societal discourse and research, and it is important to reflect upon what they mean and what their use implies.

The widely accepted definition of "refugee" is specified in the 1951 Refugee Convention as a person who

> owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his [sic] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees 1951).

When I speak of "refugees" in this thesis, I choose to include people with subsidiary protection status and those who have followed a spouse with refugee or subsidiary protection status—so-called family reunification migrants. In Sweden, subsidiary protection status is provided to foreign nationals who have a well-founded fear of being killed, subjected to torture, or risk being wounded because of armed conflict upon return to their home country as well as those who are unable or unwilling to return for these reasons. These types of protection are both defined in the Swedish Aliens Act (SFS 2005:716, Utlänningslag) and they are often used interchangeably in public discourse.

Employing this widely accepted definition is useful insofar as it highlights the fact that people with such a status have specific rights that should be upheld. For example, the 1951 Refugee Convention specifies that the receiving state

> shall accord to refugees lawfully staying in their territory the most favourable treatment accorded to nationals of a foreign country in the same circumstances, as regards the right to engage in wage-earning employment (Article 17)

The receiving state should also provide as favourable conditions as possible for those "who hold diplomas recognized by the competent authorities of that

State" (Article 19). States also have responsibilities vis-à-vis refugees regarding access to housing, public education, administrative assistance (Article 21 and 22; Article 25), and naturalization (Article 34). While those with "subsidiary protection" possess particular rights in respect to receiving some form of residence permit (SFS 2005:716), I intentionally chose to employ all of the above definitions of refugee in order to avoid having to ask detailed and potentially traumatic questions about a research participant's precise history and their reasons for fleeing their home countries since doing so could risk causing distress in interview situations.

Although categorisations are useful for highlighting the obligations states have concerning the refugees they host, they have also been critically discussed. For example, migration scholars have studied such categorisations and dichotomies as "refugees" versus "migrants", "highly skilled" versus "low skilled", and those "inside" and "outside" society (citizens/us versus migrants/them). They have also examined how such notions are created in media discourse (see e.g. Goodman, Sirriyeh and McMahon 2017; Goodman and Speer 2007; Arcimaviciene and Baglama 2018); through legislation in relation to the social and political world (see e.g. Hamlin 2021); and in migration research itself (see e.g. Schrover and Schinkel 2013; Schinkel 2018). Such constructed dichotomies can give rise to Othering and to perceived differences between "voluntary" and "forced" migrants. These types of simplifications can lead to the idea that there are only "two distinct and distinguishable motivations for border crossing" (Abdelaaty and Hamlin 2022:234, see also Hamlin 2021; Mozetič 2018), even though the distinction between a "migrant" and "refugee" can, in reality, be unclear. For example, multiple factors can contribute to one's decision to leave their country—such as simultaneously moving due to fleeing from conflict, employment prospects, and having family in the host country.

Similarly, the difference between the terms "highly skilled" and "low skilled" must also be problematised, since the terms seem to suggest that there is a hierarchy of skill levels. It is also important to note that legally categorising migrants as "high" or "low" skilled can create actual effects and "become hard realities, facts that constrain us, not merely norms that guide our autonomous judgment" (MacCormick 2007:33). For example, such categorisations in legislation can divide migrant populations and affect the opportunities they have – "low skilled" migrants are more likely to be pushed into seasonal work, which is regulated by the EU Seasonal Workers Directive (Paul 2018:66; Directive 2014/36/EU).

Furthermore, these terms can have underlying valuations insofar as "highly skilled" migrants can be deemed more desirable by host populations than those considered "low skilled" (Bulat 2019; Neumann, Stoetzer and Pietrantuono 2018). I have nonetheless employed "highly skilled" in this thesis not to suggest that someone may be more or less desirable, or in order to suggest some form of hierarchy, but rather to signify that the participants in the study, aside

from "higher" education in the form of a tertiary degree, also have abilities or skills that go beyond academic diplomas, such as skills in software engineering or construction techniques that are relevant for employment.

Migrants and refugees are not homogenous groups, but are heterogenous individuals in their own right—as is the case with any other individuals. I hope it becomes clear through the selections from the interviews that I use in the articles that each interviewee has their own background, work situation, and personality. What they share is their reason for entering the country, which is associated with the 1951 Refugee Convention's definitions of refugees, those who have subsidiary protection status, or those who have moved after a spouse with one of these statuses. In Articles II and III, they also have a tertiary degree and possess skills within a specific field. The terms and categories I have used are not meant to imply that these comprise a given individual's primary form of identification since a person's complexities cannot be reduced to one of the categories specified. The same may also be said for other categories used in this thesis, such as "engineer", which simply reflects one of the tertiary degrees—and at times more than one—that respondents have earned. Individuals in actuality have multifaceted, intersecting identities (Kynsilehto 2011, Anthias 2012), and this thesis does not capture the full scope of these identities.

It is also worth questioning why we continue to define certain people as "refugees" even after years of living in a given country—instead of, for example, referring to them as holders of residence permits or some other form of identity. This is not least the case insofar as refugee status has significant connotations in respect to rights and legislation regarding residence.

Choosing to use certain categories has been done in light of the effect of doing so. On the one hand, using categories can recreate certain simplified boundaries between people in society that must not be taken for granted. On the other, it defines the group being studied on the basis of a few common factors, which can be illuminating when analysing and drawing conclusions based upon the material gathered. In addition, particular categories have been chosen in order to highlight issues faced by people coming from abroad who have refugee status and a tertiary degree. This is not to say that they are the only ones who face these issues, but it has become clear from previous studies that coming to a country in Europe as a "refugee" appears to have an effect on, among other things, employment opportunities insofar as it takes longer for refugees to obtain employment than for other migrant groups and the majority population (cf. Bevelander 2011; Bevelander 2020; Brell, Dustmann and Preston 2020; van Riemsdijk 2025). In addition, even though not using categorisations is less likely to reproduce perceived divisions between people in society, it also renders it more difficult to examine how certain people can be excluded or discriminated against precisely because of perceived constructions, already existing in society, of groups perceived as "Others". If one does not examine "refugees", for example, it becomes difficult to study how

people perceived and categorised as such could be excluded because of this categorisation.

The categories employed in this thesis are not meant to be viewed as objective ontological categories per se, but rather as dependent on subjective realities, context, and social worlds. It is important to keep in mind the particular context in which everything that we have defined exists. Even if we accept that the "biophysical world exists, regardless of our ideas about it," as critical realism posits, this position nonetheless maintains that human beings constitute their own social worlds, which researchers study (Rogers et al. 2013). While "the things we have made up" are the only things about which humans can have "absolute and comprehensive knowledge" (Graeber 2015:24), it is nevertheless important to also question this knowledge, unpack our assumptions, and, as researchers, seek to dig deeper than what we can empirically observe in the social world. This includes categorisations that we hear about or witness being utilised—which we might take for granted.

Thesis disposition

The thesis is structured into 8 chapters, followed by Articles I, II and III. Following this Introduction, Chapter 2 provides a review of the overarching concept of "integration", how it has been understood in previous scholarship, and how I suggest moving forward with the concept. I also define the ways in which I understand labour market and workplace integration specifically, within the overarching umbrella term of "integration". Chapter 3 builds on Chapter 2, delving into my understanding of integration using critical realist notions of structure, agency, and morphogenesis and defining how these concepts are employed in the thesis. Chapter 4 provides an overview of the Swedish integration context, including general shifts that have occurred with respect to, for example, immigration, welfare policy, and political discourse. Chapter 5 delves into previous research on labour market and workplace integration, while Chapter 6 outlines the methodology, methods, and material used in the dissertation. Chapter 7 comprises an overview and summary of the three research articles. Finally, Chapter 8 presents a discussion of the results and the overall conclusions of the thesis.

Chapter 2: Integration

One of the central themes of this thesis is integration, which therefore needs to be defined. However, it is difficult to find uniform definitions of processes such as integration in past research. This concept has not had one clear definition throughout the literature and has instead consisted of a variety of different meanings (Castles, Korac, Vasta and Vertovec 2002:12; Ager and Strang 2008). Moreover, in much empirical research, it is used but never clearly defined, with researchers seeming to rely upon the reader's innate understanding of the term while leaving it under-theorised (Rauhut and Laine 2023). This speaks to the necessity of clearly defining and giving consideration to the concept, especially since its nebulous meaning and multitude of uses does not make for any deep theoretical understanding of the processes that have been termed "integration".

Integration processes can be difficult to discuss, however, due to the loaded connotations associated with them. For example, integration and its related concepts are intertwined with political and ideological notions. Discussions therefore easily veer into the normative sphere, where research as well as public discourse make overt or covert assumptions about the desirability of being "integrated", who exactly needs to be integrated, and what it means to be integrated. Often the concept seems to apply only to foreigners, migrants, or the descendants of migrants, while white native populations are apparently exempt from such needs (Schinkel 2018). The backlash against the term in recent years[3] has culminated in discussions about the "normative expectation that 'immigrants' *ought to* adjust to 'non-immigrants' after their arrival in a country, such that live up to the standards set by 'the majority population'" (Klarenbeek 2023). This has led to some scholarship shifting focus to other terms such as inclusion—arguably still avoiding deeper theorisations of the process while continuing to study similar processes previously covered under the label of integration research. Although the terms chosen can be debated, such research may well avoid the issue at hand—that there needs to be more rigorous understanding and discussion of the process that has been termed "integration" in migration research.

[3] For example, the largest European scholarly network regarding migration is IMISCOE—an acronym that has stood for "International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion". Currently, IMISCOE is instead known as the "International Migration Research Network", mirroring a clear shift away from being associated with integration and cohesion processes (see IMISCOE.org).

I will therefore provide a conceptual review in this chapter of how "integration" has been understood previuosly, with a focus on four particular conceptualisations within the field of migration studies: "civic integrationism", "measurable, domain-related integration", "relational integration", and, as I have termed it, "broad integration". In addition, I address some of the major criticisms of the concept and further discuss labour market and workplace integration processes. Through engaging with more recent critical integration scholarship as well as critical realist ideas of structure and agency, I finally propose that "integration" can fruitfully be understood as a process of change that involves interaction between individual agents and social structures—in ways which I tie to critical realist notions of morphogenesis in Chapter 3.

The chapter begins with an overview of various example definitions of integration in order to provide a brief initial understanding of some ways in which integration has been approached in the past. This is followed by a deeper elaboration of the distinction between two perspectives on integration—the societal and individual—and a description of four main integration perspectives in integration research. The second part of the chapter discusses four core difficulties of the conceptualisations of integration, which is followed by a section on structure and agency in integration processes.

PART 1: CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF INTEGRATION

Brief overview of concepts

"Integration" has been considered to be a "hot topic" not only in academic discussions, but also in public and political debate (Grunow, Sachweh, Schimank and Traunmüller 2023:2). Before beginning to discuss the detailed conceptualisation of integration, it can therefore be useful to take into consideration some common definitions of the term as well as how it may be understood in different contexts. Since the concept of "integration" is often taken for granted, with assumptions made concerning what it entails, it seems fitting to begin with a brief overview of various definitions of the term.

Conducting a definition search for "integration" in a dictionary, in informational material from organisations working in some way with integration, and in research encyclopedias[4] gives us a range of issues associated with it. These are presented in Table 1, which showcases some examples of how integration has been discussed. These examples are not intended to be fully representative, but rather display some of the different perspectives brought up within these different media. I have done this in order to provide an overview of some common ways in which integration is discussed and understood, which can be helpful when first grappling with the concept. This shines light on some factors that are usually connected to the integration concept in common discourse, providing a relevant backdrop for the more in-depth discussion of its academic meanings, and shortcomings, further on in this chapter.

While these definitions are varied, they share some commonalities. For example, "integration", in all of them, is conceptualised in terms of a relation between people, often as incorporation into a group or social unit. However, while UN and EU examples stress the two-way aspects of this process, some definitions are less clear about whether the process involves mutual or one-way adaptation. In addition, the process is addressed in reference to a variety of domains, such as socio-economic, legal, and cultural domains (UNHCR), or in relations to multiple social roles and individual possesses (Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research). While some instances obviously

[4] This selection was based on providing a variety of different types of sources—ones that any person might use if unsure about the term (dictionary); practitioners' perspectives (organisations utilising the term); and academics attempting to find a concise definition (research encyclopaedias).

refer to migrants, foreigners, and even their descendants, the dictionary definitions do not specify what types of "people" are mixing together and could thus be interpreted more broadly. While these definitions are not representative, as mentioned above, they highlight some of the commonalities as well as the conceptual variances that exist within the field of integration, which is discussed further on in this chapter.

Table 2: Conceptualisations of integration

Sources	Integration is conceptualised in terms of:
Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary and Thesaurus	"[T]he action or process of successfully joining or mixing with a different group of people" (Cambridge University Press [d] n.d.)".
UNHCR (United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees)	"Integration is a mutual, gradual and multi-faceted process, with inter-related legal, socio-economic and cultural dimensions" (UNHCR 2024).
European Commission	"In the *EU context*, a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of EU Member States" (European Commission n.d.).
Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences	"Social integration refers, in the first instance, to the extent and intensity of the interlinkages among the constituent parts of a social unit [---]" (Münch 2015:243).
Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research	"Social integration is the degree to which individuals participate in a wide range of social roles and relationships [---]" (Crittenden and Cohen 2014:6104, see also Brisette, Cohen and Seeman 2000).

Societal or individual integration?

The previous definitions have set the stage for some of the existing conceptualisations of integration, although they only partially show the intricacies of how the term has been employed in research. Reviewing the concept also entails grappling with two main understandings of integration in the literature—one that addresses it on an individual level, and one that does so on a societal level. Some of the definitions above conceive of integration as something individuals do in order to join other individuals or a group with certain legal and socioeconomic structural dimensions. "Social integration" has, however, initially been theorised in sociology in reference to integration within a society as a whole, traces of which can be seen in some of the other definitions. Such

theorisations focus on the cohesiveness of all members of society rather than on something that pertains to specific individuals.

Social integration in reference to society as a whole can be traced to the infancy of sociology, especially Durkheim's work in the late 19th century on social cohesion and social integration. Integration is there tied to a society characterised by so-called social solidarity, although this is not given a distinct definition. It also does not focus particularly on migrants or newcomers but takes all members of a group (society) into account. Individuals of a group are tied together and regulated by shared cultural symbols, rituals, and political and legal structures and norms, with inequalities seen as something caused by and reflecting the diversity of individuals' abilities and talents (Turner 1981:385, see Durkheim 1997 [1893] and 2005 [1897]). In other words, under conditions of equality, certain individuals could have less access to certain types of employment because they have less relevant education, not because of other irrelevant factors**.** Being an "integrated" society thus hinges on similarity in norms and on everyone's role reflecting their abilities. Following this, an "unintegrated" society is a society with many different views and norms, no unifying political and legal structures, no factors unifying the population of a community, and inequality based on something other than differences in individual abilities and talents. This take on social integration has implications regarding adaptation—while it is not explicitly stated that newcomers must adapt, society seemingly benefits from cohesion, similarity and unity. While this could mean that newcomers help create shared new rituals, it also means that non-conformers could be viewed as problematic.

Whereas societal integration regards society and its cohesion as its subject area, focusing more on systems and structures, individual conceptualisations of integration instead focus on (often migrant) individuals and their ability to take part in domains of "society". Migration research, for example, tends to focus on the individual who "integrates" into a society rather than examine society as a whole. Instead of measuring integration based on the sameness of an entire group, it examines an individual's "journey" "into" a new group—or, in other terms, examines the "outsider" adapting into an already existing entity. This view can also lead to the "outsider" who does not conform being viewed as "un-integrated" or problematic, since integration then entails adapting to the perceived "majority". Such individual integration is often what is thought of in public discourse, and it can be seen in some of the definitions highlighted in the previous section as well.

While Durkheimian society can be criticised for being perceived as an ideally homogenous entity in which, for its best interest, non-conformers do not belong, this focus on individuals integrating into "society" can, in a similar way, also reify categories of "insider" and "outsider" through concentrating on interactions not between all members of a group, but only focusing on those perceived as different. "Integration" thereby becomes something that "insiders", such as societal members, do not need to or even cannot do, as they are already

taken-for-granted to be a part of an, often national, imagined whole (cf. Schinkel 2017).

The focus of the present discussion is on migration scholarship, but it can be useful to keep in mind the Durkheimian initial view concerning social integration insofar as it has influenced most of today's understanding of the term. Although migration research tends to focus on the individual who *integrates*, the notion of societal cohesion and uniformity as presented in Durkheim is still also to an extent present in today's migration scholarship and iterations of the integration concept. This is evident, for example, in the way that those who are conceptualised as "un-integrated" are also perceived to be outside a uniform majority group, or outside "society" (cf. Schinkel 2017).

In simplified terms, individual integration often *focuses* on the individual and their agency when they join a society, even if it also acknowledges that individuals come into contact with social structures in "society" that can ether aid or hinder their integration. Societal integration, on the other hand, takes a more systemic approach, acknowledging more clearly the importance of cohesion between all people in a "society". However, while both notions of integration share an acknowledgement of agency and structure, focusing more on a micro or macro perspective respectively, the relation between structure and agency is often not clearly elaborated. Moreover, migration literature often has given little consideration to the perspective of societal integration, having almost solely and uncritically focused on integration as a process that occurs with regards to individuals—namely, migrants.

Four conceptualisations of integration in migration studies

Migration literature has, as noted above, traditionally focused on integration as something that affects and is carried out by migrant individuals. Even when host society institutions are acknowledged as important for individuals' integration, the perspective taken is not societal according to the Durkheimian understanding. The focus is also on migrant individuals specifically, over other individuals, making integration a concept that does not equally apply to all types of individuals.

There are, however, many different iterations of integration in migration research, some of which have begun to depart from this notion. In the past few decades since the turn of the 21st century, in what may be termed a reflexive turn in migration studies, underlying assumptions of the concepts used in the discipline are being increasingly problematised (Dahinden 2016; Amelina 2021). In integration scholarship, the term has been conceptually unpacked at a deeper level than previously, and new definitions have been developed that seek to deal with problems identified with the concepts.

In the next section I will address four different understandings of integration in migration literature—"civic integrationism"; what I refer to as "measurable, domain-related integration"; "relational integration"; and what I term "broad integration". These have been chosen in order to encapsulate some of the most common conceptualisations of integration (civic integrationism and domain-related integration) as well as the types of definitions that have been developed in later years in response to the criticism to which the term has previously been subjected (relational integration and broad integration). The four conceptualisations as a whole are therefore not chosen on the basis of what is most common, but rather on four different distinct types of ways in which integration has been discussed in prior research. These categorisations are not meant to represent ontological categories in conceptualisations of integration, nor do they attempt to encompass all of the varieties and nuances within integration research. The categorisations may indeed not even coincide with a given researcher's understanding of their own research. They are instead meant to highlight certain trends within this very broad field and thereby set the scene for the following overview of conceptual critiques of social integration more generally.

1) Civic integrationism and policy-related integration

The conceptualisation of integration that is perhaps most known, and very commonly implemented in policy, has often been referred to as "civic integrationism" or "civic integration" (see e.g. Fogelman 2020; Meer et al. 2015; Mouritsen, Jensen and Larin 2019; Borevi, Jensen and Mouritsen 2017). This comprises a policy-oriented shift, often evident in European integration politics, whereby newcomer migrants are subject to civic requirements. This involves various "integration" efforts and discourses centred on, in essence, making migrants "good" members of society, which is to be achieved by "integration contracts, classes, tests and ceremonies" (Goodman 2010:754). In addition, the notion of membership, which is increasingly tied to citizenship, can be attained through "programmes addressing employability, language proficiency, civic and cultural knowledge, screening of radical elements and fast tracks for immigrants with 'active citizenship' records" (Mouritsen 2012:87). Government integration programmes in Europe have thus increasingly framed integration in terms of formally established programmes and as an achievable end-state—people can and even *should* become "integrated" through such efforts. This conceptualisation of integration does not shy away from being normative—generally, integration is viewed as something desirable, and it is achievable through various policy measures aimed at resolving perceived problems, such as exclusion of migrants from labour markets. We can also see the presence of a Durkhemian notion of societal integration in this perspective concerning integration—social cohesion is created through newcomers becoming like the perceived majority.

Civic integrationism has seemingly eclipsed many of the other conceptualisations of integration because of its prevalence in public discourse. It has, however, been heavily criticised, especially in scholarship. While civic integrationism has become the taken-for-granted perspective in policy, it is not necessarily the only possible option, however. A government report about integration policy in Sweden, for example, criticises civic integrationist notions while referring to a possible, albeit now absent, redistributive conceptualisation. Although it still takes on a perspective of social cohesion, desirable integration is nonetheless regarded as an equal distribution of resources amongst all. Integration measures focusing solely on migrants, rather than on equal redistribution of resources between all, are criticised for leading to segregation instead:

> Integration as a general policy based on an active redistribution of resources in order to create social cohesion in society has been reduced to becoming a special policy for "the others". The distinctive character of policy and integration conceptualisations has contributed to increased segregation and disintegration in society (SOU 2006:73, translated by I.B.).

This text highlights the difference between "integration" conceptualised, on the one hand, as a process by which people have equal access to resources and opportunities and, on the other, common civic integrationist policy frameworks, where integration efforts consist of educating migrants to become a "part" of a perceived homogenous majority in which they are not included by default.

While civic integrationist notions of integration are heavily criticised in academia, they are used frequently by practitioners, who conceivably find them easier to apply in practical measures such as fast-track programmes for migrants, where the aim is to "teach" migrants the ways of the "receiving society". However, I would argue that this conceptualisation is not discussed at a sufficiently deep theoretical and conceptual level to serve as a rigorous framework for social science research. More importantly, the underlying assumptions about "insiders" and "outsiders", and the power hierarchies thereby implied, would arguably need to be dealt with and discussed in depth before continuing its usage in integration policy and research.

2) Measurable, domain-related integration

While civic integrationism is largely associated with policy and practitioners rather than research, it would be inaccurate to say that migration research has not made use of similar conceptualisations. Perhaps the most common and widely used iterations of integration in migration research are policy related, which I here employ as a very broad category. Even if this research does not explicitly provide policy-related suggestions, the conceptualisation apparent in such research is one that quite pragmatically deals with (measurable) issues

that arise when migrants enter a new country—such as whether they have obtained or not obtained employment or housing.

This perspective concerning integration is especially evident in empirical research, quantitative research, and research associated with "successful" integration practices. Moreover, integration is often examined within a national context, and as something performed by migrants, with help from the "receiving society", in what is often described as a two-way and multi-dimensional process (e.g. Ager and Strang 2008). Outside of migration research the term is utilised in similar ways while referring to people deemed "outside" of society, such as ex-convicts or previously unhoused people (see e.g. Marshall et al. 2020; McKeever 2007).

This measurable view of integration is also often applied in reference to various integration "domains". These include, for example, having access to employment, housing, education, and healthcare and having social relationships in the community, which are often said to be facilitated by such things as language-competence (Ager and Strang 2008). They are also addressed in many quantitative articles that examine immigrant labour market integration (e.g Bevelander 2011: 2016; 2017). This conceptualisation is often normative in character—"successful integration" is viewed as a possible and desirable state that can be attained and measured in respect to criteria such as housing or employment acquisition.

While a large number of studies focus on so-called labour market integration—or the ability of migrants to obtain employment (see chapter 3 for an elaboration of labour market and workplace integration), others focus more on social networks, relationships (e.g. Wessendorf and Phillimore 2019), or a combination of socio-economic factors (e.g. Lin, Wu and Li 2020). However, although integration is often viewed in measurable terms, it expands beyond civic integrationism to also take into consideration people's individual sense of community, belonging, or trust (Kearns and Whitley 2015). While this refocuses integration as something individually experienced, the latter is nonetheless still viewed in terms of something that migrants, not others, feel.

This emphasis on individual integration associated with domain-related conceptualisations has been questioned. Phillimore (2021) has noted that integration research, empirically, focuses on migrants and refugees rather than on the "role and impact of host societies in supporting and providing the context for integration". She calls for a shift in focus—from an individual focus to a focus on the "opportunity structures" that shape the integration of migrants. However, although this structural focus can be added to the body of already existing individual studies on integration in order to "bring together opportunity structures with individual factors" (Phillimore 2021:1960), the perspective it provides still does not allow for a deeper conceptualisation that more closely takes into account the relationship between agency and structure, especially how integration takes place in respect to *both*.

3) Relational integration and equal opportunities

Both domain-related integration and civic integrationism in particular have been strongly criticised (see part 2 of this chapter), and new perspectives concerning integration have been developed in response. One of these perspectives focuses on integration as a multi-directional process instead of the one-way process, or unequal two-way process that civic integrationism often entails, whereby most of the focus is on migrants integrating, rather than the efforts of the "receiving society". "Relational integration"—a term coined by Klarenbeek (2019, 2021. 2023) that is increasingly referred to and utilised in scholarship (see e.g. Polynin 2024; Takševa 2024; Löthman and Puskás 2024; Caputo, Bianchi and Baglioni 2023)—emphasises that integration is a process which all of the actors involved conduct together. All actors must participate equally for integration to occur, and everyone should have equal access to social domains. Integration is therefore seen as *relational* between all people, not just between migrants and the "receiving society"—rather than focusing on migrants being incorporated into a majority, this perspective shifts the focus to relations between everyone. This perspective thus relates to the equal opportunities between all within a group.

Other related perspectives include those that focus also on non-migrants instead of migrants alone (see Kraus, Keskiner and Crul 2024; Crul and Leslie 2021; Lazëri, Keskiner and Crul 2024). In processes of integration viewed from this type of position, people "increasingly recognise their fellow members as equals, such that hierarchies decrease" (Klarenbeek 2023:12). In its move away from prior conceptualisations, this approach continues to employ the term "integration," but takes existing criticisms into account.

Relational integration goes beyond the notion of a two-way process in which the "receiving society" bears the responsibility to facilitate access to certain rights for newcomers (Klarenbeek 2023), focusing instead on equal relations between all, in an effort to avoid the unequal power-dynamics of previous conceptualisations. This reconceptualises integration "such that it is useful for the purposes of investigating inequalities and social boundaries in contexts of immigration" (Klarenbeek 2023:2). While stating this point so clearly is somewhat uncommon, it would be unfair to say that relational considerations have not been present in other iterations of the concept of integration. For example, while "civic" integration has not always been successful in (the design of) empirical studies that showcase relationality, it also usually emphasises that integration is a two-way or multi-dimensional process in which both the so-called "receiving" society and the newcomers need to adapt to each other. Relational integration, however, emphasises that this is a process that takes place not only between two preconceived (outside/inside) entities, but is much more complex and involves everyone.

From this perspective, the opposite of integration is considered to be *inequality* rather than a situation in which migrants either have not sufficiently

learned about the receiving society (civic integrationism) or *lack* something, such as employment (measurable, domain-related integration). This type of inequality—or lack of integration—"emerges where inegalitarian relations constitute superior and inferior social positions, while also providing a justification for these inequalities" (Klarenbeek 2023:6, see also Anderson 1999:312 and Tilly 2005). While this view is still normative insofar as equality is an end goal, it is a normative assumption that many may feel more comfortable with as opposed to a type of normativity that involves one group adapting to fit into another in order to be perceived as belonging (civic integrationism).

A relational understanding of integration has less in common with previous perspectives and could instead be regarded as closer to research about discrimination, racism, or inequality in general. However, it can still be categorised under what has been previously understood as an integration process in broad terms—relations between people as well as incorporation in and access to social life and domains, but on *equal* terms. It is noteworthy that this connection between discrimination, racism, inequality and integration has been little discussed in theoretical articles on integration, even though discriminatory processes have been observed in several empirical studies that address refugee and migrant inclusion (against this background of a very limited number of attempts to bridge these fields, see Safi [2024] for an exception).

While this approach regards the integration process as "a relational process of mutual, reciprocal change" (Klarenbeek 2023:3) that focuses on all people instead of just migrants, it still largely considers people (agents) and the relations between them rather than taking into consideration how people *and* structures mutually change during integration processes. Nonetheless, zooming out from a specific set of individuals (migrants) to all people in society also relates in some ways to a societal understanding of integration in which individuals are parts of a larger set of structures.

4) Broad integration

I use "broad integration", for lack of an existing term, to refer to another recent perspective on integration that, similarly to relational integration, has been developed in response to criticisms of the notion of civic integration. Broad integration has been conceptualised by Spencer and Charsley (2021), who put forward a new, further nuanced and modified, definition of integration, that takes into account the core criticism and pitfalls encountered in past integration studies (see also Spencer and Charlsey 2016; Charsley, Bolognani and Spencer 2017). Their discussions, culminating in a new definition of "integration", leave room for individual differences in society; broaden the research subject beyond national borders to include non-migrants, migrants and people in general; avoid objectifying an "other"; do not depict society as a cohesive homogenous whole; and make it possible to investigate the transnational and global processes that can also shape individual experiences.

Spencer and Charsley (2021:16) maintain that "integration" may be described as

> Processes of interaction, personal and social *change among individuals and institutions* across *structural*, social, cultural and civic spheres and in relation to identity; processes which are multi-directional and have spatial, transnational and temporal dimensions (emphasis added by I.B.).

In a manner similar to relational integration, this definition addresses integration as a process that occurs among all people, not merely as something specific to migrants. It is also regarded, similar to relational integration, as a process of *change* among individuals, but also among institutions. This process is not seen to have an end state and is not normative insofar as it is neither desirable nor undesirable. In addition to taking place on individual and structural levels, this perspective emphasises that the processes take place across time and space as well, adding a more geographical perspective. This definition, which comprises one of the few attempts to conceptualise integration while dealing with multiple specific critiques of integration, is broad, complex, and multi-faceted.

As is the case with domain-related integration, the process of integration is here viewed as operating within numerous domains. The latter include

> *Structural*—as in participation in the labour and housing market, education and health systems; *Social*—as in social interaction, relationships and networks; *Cultural*—changing values, attitudes, behaviour and lifestyle (of *all* residents in this two way process); *Civic and political participation*—in community life and the democratic process; and *Identity*—the process through which individuals of differing backgrounds may develop a shared identity and a sense of belonging with the place, nation, communities and people among whom they live (Spencer and Charsley 2021:16).

This approach may be viewed as closely related to the previous domain-related approaches upon which it is built. In addition to the indicators of integration found in earlier conceptualisations, however, this version of integration takes identity more clearly into account. It also acknowledges *change* processes on both structural and individual levels, even though this point is not explicitly stated in terms of a structure-agency framework. These are more clearly discussed in terms of their interrelatedness insofar as "[e]xperiences in one domain may affect those in another" (Spencer and Charlsey 2016:3).

While the broad scope of this conceptualisation appears to avoid the pitfalls of earlier iterations, it might also constitute one of its greatest difficulties since it includes a wide variety of processes at several different levels. Its strength resides in the fact that it acknowledges differing, but interlinked facets of integration—external, internal, structural and individual. As is also the case with relational integration, this approach broadens the scope of "integration"

research beyond migration studies, although migrants could still comprise a core field of study as long as other groups are also taken into account.

Moreover, it showcases how individuals are embedded in structures because they are "embedded in social contexts". As Spencer and Charlsey remark,

> [m]ultiple factors relating to individuals, families and communities, to society and transnational engagement, impact on those processes: so that it is not credible to study individuals in isolation and suggest that it is solely the human and social capital they bring to the table that have shaped the processes in which they are engaged (Spencer and Charlsey 2021:20).

PART 2: CRITICALLY EXAMINING INTEGRATION

Difficulties and critiques: issues with "integration"

As discussed above, "integration" has been highly debated and criticised for being under-theorised (Rauhut and Laine 2023), and it has been highlighted as an empirically difficult term to grasp as a variable for study (Grunow et al. 2023:14). One of the most severe criticisms of integration in recent years in fact calls for the end of migration and integration research, even going so far as to provocatively compare migration scholars to parasites for their participation in a field with so many problematic assumptions (Schinkel 2023:1605; see also Schinkel 2018, 2019, 2017; see also Favell 2019). Schinkel claims, for example, that the use of "integration" in migration research is problematic since it has ceased "to be a property of a social whole", instead becoming an individualised concept—something that "migrants, their children, unemployed persons, or convicted criminals" must do (Schinkel 2018:3). Furthermore, those granted "dispensation of integration" are white, native citizens who are not studied at all because they are "considered to make up 'society'" and stand in juxtaposition to those "who do not and who thus need to further 'integrate'" (Schinkel 2018:4).

This can have connotations of "others" who need to integrate into that which is perceived as "good" or "modern" (cf. Schinkel 2018, 2019)—a notion connected to Eurocentric norms and values when applied within a European context. Criticism of this point often centres around the creation of a natural "us" and an othered "them" who must undergo specific tasks in order to become like the "majority". This is especially problematic in Euro-centric post-colonial contexts in which newcomers are regarded as having to adapt to European norms because of their perceived difference (cf. Schinkel 2018, Favell 2019). This juxtaposition between "us" and "them" arguably becomes

> the imagined project of 'us,' the civilized, secular, liberal, liberated who have the courtesy to take up the burden of bringing 'them' up to speed, of including 'them' in what is inevitable anyway (Schinkel 2019:1).

This is a view of integration that coincides with much political discourse, including a "nativist political project used by governments for managing and subduing diversity", that easily becomes "a euphemism for xenophobic and

racist ideals" (Klarenbeek 2023:3)—in other words, integration as discussed under civic integrationism.

These types of critiques have themselves been subject to criticism, however, for offering no real resolution of the need for continued studies of important social questions (Phillimore, Morrice and Strang 2024:4946; Goodman 2023). In addition, they are said to paint an overly one-sided picture of how the concept of integration has been utilised in research that does not take into account the much more nuanced existing research concerning integration (Statham 2023), such as the debates addressed above in respect to "relational" or "broad" conceptions of integration.

A good summary of the main critiques of the integration concept in general can be found in Spencer and Charsley (2021), who have identified five main points in the academic debate. These lines of criticism, given below, apply to civic integrationist perspectives as well as most measurable, domain-related variants (Spencer and Charsley 2021:5–6).

1) The normativity of the concept of "integration"
2) How this concept can generate objectification of the "other" who needs to do the "integrating"
3) An outdated imagery of a cohesive, non-diverse society
4) The methodological nationalism that does not take the transnational or the global into account
5) A narrow focus solely on migrants as those shaping integration processes, instead of taking other factors and actors into account as well

These criticisms are in part dealt with within the concepts of relational integration and broad integration. In addition to these core points, however, I would like to make four additional statements about conceptualisations of integration as a whole and the difficulties that arise from their usage. Subsequently, I will offer a suggestion for further theorising that takes its inspiration from relational and broad integration and is conceptualised in dialogue with these criticisms.

Additional difficulties

1) Variety of meanings, domains, and undefined concepts

As can be seen from the discussion above, and from the definitions given at the beginning of this chapter, there is no uniform definition of integration. This creates difficulties in fully implementing the concept in research. This is perhaps not unusual for academic concepts overall, which are subject to scrutiny

and re-theorisation by generations of scholars. Moreover, it is also not a new criticism of this particular concept. Decades ago, it was already acknowledged that social integration was viewed in a variety of ways, with a variety of connotations:

> There are at least three different ways of understanding the concept of social integration. For some, it is an inclusionary goal, implying equal opportunities and rights for all human beings. In this case, becoming 'more integrated' implies improving life chances. To others, however, increasing integration has a negative connotation, conjuring up the image of an unwanted imposition of uniformity. And, to still others, the term does not necessarily imply either a positive or a negative state. It is simply a way of describing the established pattern of human relations in any given society (de Alcántara 1995:61).

These three distinct conceptualisations of (social) integration remain evident in the integration debate today as well.

Having different conceptualisations is not necessarily avoidable or undesirable since theorisation is often ongoing and a work in progress. However, this can become problematic when debates take place between differing camps with no clear statement regarding what version of integration is meant. While Klarenbeek's (2023) relational integration can be tied to the first understanding of integration in the above quote, critiques such as Schinkel's (2018) and Favell's (2019) veer more towards a criticism of the second. Other perspectives, such as that of Crul and Schneider (2010:1265), who call for studying integration as a process rather than as a normative policy-goal, fall into the third category.

Not elaborating the concept of integration in depth and not clearly defining it can lead authors to rely upon the reader's understanding of what is meant by integration, as they elaborate what is wrong with the concept but do not define it. This leads to reiterations of one of its very criticisms in the first place—that it is nebulous and often undefined. Even when individuals enter into dialogue with each other, the variation in its usage creates the risk of unfocused debates in both public discourse and research, especially when "integration"—along with inclusion, multiculturalism, and diversity, a term more frequently employed in recent years—remains undefined, leaving its meaning to be interpreted through subtext and context. This is also the case with critiques of "integration". Much can therefore be gained from more clearly defining the concept one is using, even in order to criticise it, and not simply letting others presume what is actually meant. One result is that arguments for equal opportunities for all appear to be juxtaposed with arguments against an imposition of societal uniformity.

Similarly, beyond the variety of conceptual meanings, there are a wide range of topics and domains of study that fall under the umbrella of integration research. These different domains cover a broad range of contexts, which can compound analytical diversity and confusion. For example, a large part of the

research on integration has addressed the labour market, focusing on employment outcomes specifically—so-called labour market integration. What is commonly meant by integration in this context, although it is not always defined, is "being established on the labour market" (Diedrich 2020:2), that is, whether a migrant has been able to obtain (any type of) employment. In such studies, integration can often be treated as an end state—one is employed or not employed—rather than a process, especially in quantitative studies. While these studies can provide us with important insights into the employment status of migrants, it is difficult to make comparisons with other studies on integration that define the latter in terms of consensus or mutual trust, conformity or social cooperation (Grunow et al. 2023:14–16). While comparisons are not always necessary, the same concept is here used for two distinct processes, the relation of which should be elaborated in order to truly understand the meaning of "integration".

Even when these different domains can be interconnected, the separate topics may require different approaches. The large variety of processes included under integration can consequentially make it difficult in practical terms to conduct studies in dialogue with other integration scholars. Moreover, if one is to adopt a broad definition, it becomes very difficult to include all the types of interconnecting processes that comprise "integration" in one study. For this reason, it becomes increasingly important to consider each process within its specific context and not make sweeping assumptions about integration as a whole—labour market integration, integration in the sense of feelings of belonging, and equal access to societal benefits can be interconnected, but they may be difficult to compare.

2) Mismatch between theory and practice

Building upon the criticism already mentioned above, together with the differing conceptualisations of integration, another issue that arises is the mismatch between both policy practice and (some) academic debate as well as that between academic theory and academic practice.

The former comprises a mismatch between, on the one hand, pragmatic and practical initiatives and, on the other, academic theorising, with little interlinkage between the two. This arises when it is not acknowledged that the integration concept "has a different function and meaning in research and in policymaking" (Pennix 2019:3). This can subsequently create difficulties when debating the concept.

However, another nuance of the varied understandings of integration occurs within academic research itself. While non-civic forms of integration point to the importance of focusing on not just migrants when studying integration (Spencer and Charsley 2021; Klarenbeek 2023), this can become problematic when "integration" is conceptualised as a multi-directional process that pertains to everyone, even though it is methodologically studied as if it

were not. Research designs in such a case do not match the concept chosen. This can be seen when, even if the focus is on integration as a two-way or multi-directional process; studies do not examine all types of people equally, but focus only on newcomers and their inclusion instead of also making the people migrants meet and interact with subjects of study. A study of only "natives" and their integration would be equally valuable if integration is viewed as a multi-directional process without "insiders" and "outsiders".

Academic scholarship itself is also divided between, on the one hand, more practical, policy-related research that does not delve deeply into the meaning of the concepts used, but instead identifies issues and discusses how these can be resolved and, on the other, the more theoretical critiques of concepts that are far removed from empirical studies and people's everyday real experiences of being included or excluded. As a result, resolving the issues connected with the notion of "integration" entails not only clearly defining the concepts one is using, but also conducting empirical studies that engage with the meaning of concepts and carefully consider whether the study design follows from the concepts chosen. Perhaps also needed are empirical studies that do both—deal with the issues found empirically, but also examine the terms and presuppositions underlying the study design and the concepts chosen.

3) Relation to the broader critique

One important point to be made regarding the critique of integration concerns the relation between it and a possible broader critique of social science. The criticism of integration, in respect to European knowledge production and the categorisation of insiders and outsiders, is clearly applicable beyond the concept of "integration". This argumentation is relevant to most, if not all, societal categorisations conducted within social science as a whole.

The argument that "insiders" and "outsiders" are categories reified through the research conducted is also apparent in other categorisations in social science. For example, while conducting research about differences or unequal relations between the gender categories "women" and "men", there is a discussion to be had about how the research in itself may (re)construct binary gender categories. While it is important to acknowledge such possible effects, categorisations in general continue to be employed in social scientific research, such as for highlighting inequalities. This is typically done, however, through acknowledging that the categories in themselves are not ontological in character, but rather social or analytical categories. The same must be said for integration—although "newcomers" and "established" groups of people do not reflect ontological categories as such, they can nonetheless be utilised to highlight specific inequalities between minorities and other groups.

Moreover, criticisms of (civic) integrationism do not seem to connect it clearly to wider notions of the problematic production of Eurocentric knowledge in social science as a whole, where ideals, norms and values are

connected to perceived Western norms. Integration policy as a European political project, whereby those from outside Europe are viewed as excluded or in need of undergoing certain tests in order to "fit in", is an issue within integration research. However, it is also an issue in much of European social science production in general, in which the dominance of European norms and values are taken for granted. It is important to debate these issues, but it is also important to frame the debate within a broader criticism and a larger frame regarding knowledge production.

Similarly, the problematic notion of a uniform "society" in social integration research (cf. Schinkel 2018; Dodevska 2023) can also be connected to a broader criticism of social science. The "container" notion of society (Dodevska 2023) entails that much social science research—including research on "integration", especially policy-related discourse and research—can be connected to a view of society that was laid out by Durkheim (1997 [1893] and 2005 [1897]). Critics argue that migrant integration research views society as a "social utopia" in which people may indeed have different ethnic, cultural, religious or racial backgrounds, but nonetheless "are 'united in diversity' (to use the EU's motto) through a universal acceptance of 'common' (Eurocentric) values" (Dodevska 2023:9). It follows from such criticism that immigrant integration scholarship subscribes to an oppressive notion of a harmonious society, where those who do not subscribe to the perceived shared goals are deemed unfitting and naturally occurring disorder and conflict have no place (Dodevska 2023:9).

In addition, this societal container often overlaps with the nation state, which is conceptualised as a united whole with insiders and outsiders (Dodevska 2023:3). In migration research, this can introduce connotations of migrants being perceived as less a part of a given society than others and in need of being incorporated into the norm to be regarded as part of it (cf. Schinkel 2018). These underlying and taken-for-granted uniting factors are usually left unexamined in migration research.

I would argue, however, that much of the criticism that the concept of integration has received in migration studies may be rooted in the definition of society in social science as a whole—it is not specific to integration research and policy debate. I would add that a related issue concerns how defining integration, and with it society, is connected with the difficulty of defining and understanding the relation between society and its individuals—between structures and agents. Integration is, in essence, a process of change—but what decides whether or not a process is taking place? The critical realist notion of morphogenesis helps us address such matters, as will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Although issues with defining society, identifying who is perceived as being inside it, and reifying categories through research are not unique to "integration", they must nevertheless be dealt with and considered when conducting such studies. If they are not given careful consideration, "society" in integration research simply becomes a euphemism for "nation state". Much can

be gained from connecting this criticism to a larger framework of criticism within social science, rather than discarding "integration" due to problems that persist in much research overall.

Arguably, these types of question are also not resolved by changing out concepts while studying similar processes, such as has been happening with research that now avoids the term "integration" while instead studying similar processes using "inclusion" terminology, for example. It would instead be fruitful to deal with these discussions by means of a deeper theorisation of the processes under study and a clear understanding of the assumptions being made when using a given concept, regardless of which concept we utilise. Categorisations and understandings of society in social science must be rigorously theorised in all fields of social scientific research. Moreover, in respect to societal conceptualisations, what may still be lacking in integration research is an understanding of what the connection is between the individuals under study and the nebulous notion of "society" that is being employed. This may be restated as the connection between societal and individual integration.

4) Conceptual confusions and intersecting terms

In addition to the conceptual confusion associated with "integration", there is also conceptual confusion in respect to related terminology. This is not necessarily unique to the concept of integration, but it can be important to take it into consideration when trying to obtain an overview of how these processes have been conceptualised in the past. Also worth noting in this respect is the overlap between the concept "integration" and such terms as "inclusion", "diversity" and "assimilation", all of which include definitions of being incorporated into a group. Their definitions are, in fact, remarkably similar to one another (see Table 2), which is interesting to consider when unpacking how "integration" is related to other concepts. Table 2 showcases this, once again using media that is available to most, not just academics, in order to provide an insight into common discourse.

There are differences between the definitions of these terms, but the conceptual similarities between them are clearly noticeable—even though terms such as "integration" and "assimilation" are often juxtaposed, they are rooted in examinations of similar processes, such as people "joining" or becoming a "part" of another group (Cambridge University Press [d,a] n.d.). Although they are often taken as almost opposites in European public discourse—assimilation being perceived mostly as a one-way process, while integration involves the adaptation of both the receiving society and newcomers—a perusal of the literature on assimilation shows that the distinction between integration and assimilation is not very clear, particularly when one takes into account more recent scholarship regarding assimilation (Spencer and Charsley 2021). The divide between scholarship on assimilation and that concerning

integration also marks a divide in traditions between North American scholarship (assimilation) and European scholarship (integration) (Dodevska 2023).

As has been pointed out, assimilation research has varied historically, and it is now less extreme in its definition after some decades of theorising insofar as it has become more nuanced and no longer denotes groups as completely losing their specific characteristics when becoming part of the more dominant group. What this implies—other than the interlinkage of much conceptual terminology—is that there may be a tendency to shift terminology without first having done the theoretical work necessary to understand the given process under study at a deeper level. Many of the issues raised in respect to "integration" can in fact also be applied to other concepts, such as "inclusion". For example, the latter concept still raises questions about what is that into which a person (usually a migrant) is being "included". In addition, a notion of inclusion may create perceived differences between those who are already "included" and those who "need" to be. Once again, this points to the importance of narrowly defining the processes under study before switching terminology. It may also be useful to consider integration within a larger framework of scholarship when trying to conceptually understand how such processes have been studied in the past. Integration can fruitfully be examined, for example, within a broader context of research, both in terms of criticisms of categorisation and society, and in respect to interconnected terms that are conceptualised in similar ways.

Table 3: Overlap in definitions of integration, assimilation, inclusion and diversity

Concept	Dictionary definition
Integration	"[T]he action or process of successfully *joining or mixing* with a different *group of people*" (Cambridge University Press [d] n.d., emphasis added).
Assimilation	"[T]he process of *becoming a part,* or making someone become a part, *of a group*, country, society, etc." (Cambridge University Press [a] n.d., emphasis added).
Inclusion	"[T]he act of *including* someone or something as *a part of a group*, list, etc., or a person or thing that is included" (Cambridge University Press [c] n.d., emphasis added).
Diversity	"[T]he fact of many different types of things or people being *included* in *something*" (Cambridge University Press [b] n.d., emphasis added)

The undefined and unclear relationship between structure and agency in relation to integration

Several main points stand out throughout this conceptual review of integration. While integration has shifted from being societal to individual in character, and many approaches touch upon the importance of both social structures and individual factors, few attempts have been made to conceptually understand integration in relation to how and why structure and agency are *interlinked* in greater detail. Furthermore, although integration has been conceptualised as something that occurs within two separate dimensions—an individual "socio-cultural" dimension, that includes feelings of belongingness or the existence of social networks, as well as a structural dimension that includes incorporation into the labour market (Erdal and Oeppen 2013)—these are commonly not explained in terms of how they are interrelated.

This criticism has also been observed in a growing but yet small number of studies of (labour market) integration, specifically in management and organisational studies (e.g. Bešić, Fóti and Vasileva 2022:209; Bešić, Diedrich and Aigner 2021). Such studies note that analyses focusing on the interrelations between macro, meso and micro levels—institutional or national levels, organisational levels, and individual levels—have seldom been attempted, if at all, in prior research. They showcase, however, how obstacles to employment are interrelated on all of these levels (e.g. Bešić, Diedrich and Aigner 2021; Bešić, Fóti and Vasileva 2022; Knappert, van Dijk and Ross 2020; see also Chapter 5 for further discussion of these studies). These studies thus comprise an exception in their acknowledgement of the interrelation between structural and individual *obstacles* to labour market integration. Nonetheless, they do not frame their discussion in structure-agency terms and do not explicitly addres the interrelation between structure and agency within the conceptualisations of *integration* processes themselves.

Furthermore, labour market integration is conceptualised within this research—which encompasses the workplace as well—in terms of "a dynamic process in which refugees gain access to the labour market and subsequent employment" (Bešić, Fóti and Vasileva 2022:207-208). This approach therefore leans toward a domain-related notion of integration, viewing the latter as obtaining employment, rather than toward relational, broad and morphogenic approaches. In addition, rather than focusing on how integration can be understood as a process that involves both structural and agentic change (see Chapter 3), these studies instead focus on how obstacles to obtaining employment are created due to, for example, the way in which organisational and individual constraints have an effect upon each other. However, these types of studies provide an important initial understanding of how integration research could comprise a multi-level analysis, thereby highlighting what is arguably missing from much current integration research.

In respect to other research on integration mentioned above, some of the perspectives presented focus more on the need for individuals themselves to integrate (civic integrationism) or emphasise their individual perceptions and feelings of belongingness (types of domain-related integration). Others focus on relations between people (relational integration), with some consideration given to the structural factors that may make integration more challenging. Yet others focus to a greater extent on the structural aspects of integration, shifting the focus away from the individuals involved (e.g. Phillimore's [2021] opportunity structures) However, it is rare to come across any clear acknowledgement, or in-depth analysis, of the interplay between structure and agency among the conceptualisations that refer more clearly to both structures and individual agents (such as broad integration). Integration theorising might acknowledge, for example, that both individuals and institutions are parts of integration processes, but the discussion of relations between these structures and agents seldom goes beyond recognising this fact or acknowledging that the "institutional structure", among other facets of the "receiving society", plays a decisive role for integration in comparison to "immigrants themselves" (Pennix 2019:5).

In addition, while a combination of individual and structural factors is often highlighted in empirical studies on integration, how the combination functions is seldom explicated. This is surprising in light of how most studies of so-called integration processes focus somehow on both of these implicitly by their acknowledgement that individual actions as well as structural obstacles affect integration processes. Even in (some) civic integrationism approaches, efforts are made to create programmes and receiving structures that would make it easier for individual agents to "integrate". Consequently, in a manner similar to arguments concerning migration theorising in general, I argue that integration research approaches "have tended to skirt around the problem of structure and agency" (Bakewell 2010:1690, on migration research generally).

Moreover, although integration has often been defined in relation to a process of change (e.g. broad integration and relational integration), this has not been theorised within an explicit framework of *individual* and *structural change.* The next step that naturally follows, as it seeks to deal with all of the weaknesses noted above and builds upon previous theorising, is to theorise integration as a process of individual *and* structural change, building upon notions of broad integration while specifying how these change processes occur in greater detail. This presents a blueprint for more rigorous social theorising about integration as a process of change that is connected to both structure and agency. In the next chapter I will therefore suggest a way forward—using a critical realist framework of morphogenesis—that more clearly understands integration within a framework of structure, agency and change.

Chapter conclusion

This chapter has provided new insights regarding previous theorising concerning integration. It has also elaborated various criticisms and difficulties with using the concept and defined the concepts of labour market and workplace integration. In addition, it has proposed a new way forward for theorising the concept of integration, with a heightened focus on structure, agency and processes of change. This will be further developed in the next chapter.

Several points can be made that follow from the criticisms of integration. First of all, it remains important to continue theorising integration and its related processes while continuing to clearly define the types of integration processes to which they refer, even when criticising the concept. Moreover, it is important to match conceptualisation with method—a relational approach, for example, requires empirical studies focusing on non-migrants. Critically examining the term also remains important, but this should be carried out while considering the broader social scientific critique that has already been conducted, including the relation to already existing similar concepts, instead of studying similar processes and merely changing names. In addition, since integration includes many different domains and studies within different contexts, it is important to take into consideration the temporal and spatial setting for each particular study before making generalising claims about integration as a whole. In building upon work already done that deals with the critique and consequent development of the notions of relational and broad integration, further theorising would benefit from a clearer understanding of the relations between structure, agency and integration as processes of change.

Through this conceptual review, I have highlighted the need to take into account the concepts we use, their relations to similar concepts, and the importance of examining the underlying assumptions behind terms describing social processes. This is true not only for "integration", but also for other concepts in social scientific research. Reflecting upon our own theorising and our own past conceptual differences and mistakes will only lead to a more rigorous use of concepts such as "integration" in the future. Furthermore, much can be learned from interdisciplinary theorising insofar as integration is not solely used in migration literature and has been theorised in a variety of ways in the past.

Much can also be learned from the discussions of previous scholars regarding why they keep utilising the concept of "integration" despite its evident weaknesses and the problems it entails. Arguments for continuing to employ the notion of "integration", rather than coining a "less politically loaded term" (Klarenbeek 2023:235), reside upon its usefulness above other terms, such as incorporation or inclusion, that do not as clearly allow for conceptualising a process of "mutual, reciprocal change" that involves an interrelation between *all parts* (Klarenbeek 2023: 235)—not to mention the fact that adding more terms to the already existing plethora of concepts would contribute to further semantic confusion. Pragmatically, this also fosters dialogue with the policy

spheres outside of academia that have been subject to criticism (Klarenbeek 2023: 235–236). In addition, an existing tendency has been to shift terms while continuing to study similar processes, which perhaps avoids the theoretically rigorous work needed to develop and further improve already existing terms. Furthermore, acknowledging that integration as a concept is ambiguous, ever evolving, and multidimensional does not necessarily mean that it is irrelevant. Its usage can, among other things, provide the possibility for dialogue between different research disciplines that study "integration", which can, in turn, be employed to conduct increasingly critical research (Kutor, Arku and Bandauko 2023).

Hopefully, there will be further rigorous theorising of integration in terms of structure and agency, eventually leading to change being addressed within integration research. This could shift the meaning of integration toward a more complex and broader concept of continuous change, specific to different times and places, that goes beyond the under-theorised one-way process that comprises civic requirements for migrants.

Chapter 3: Structure, Agency, Morphogenesis

This chapter builds upon Chapter 2 by dealing with one of the identified criticisms of the integration concept—the lack of more in-depth structure and agency theorisations. Stated in other terms, it deals with how structure and agency interact and how the distinctions between them can be bridged in research. In general, it has been noted that social science, for example sociology, has been affected by a split between individual-focused and structural-focused research (Johnson 2008:8). In some instances, labour market integration research has attempted to overcome this gap through spanning micro and macro levels of analysis (cf. Nohl et al. 2006:16), but this is generally not very common. It is more common in migration research to discuss structure and agency with regards to migrating and the reasons for migration (e.g. Squire 2017; Bakewell 2010)—for example, in terms of push and pull factors that cause migration to occur and drive people to migrate (see Van Hear, Bakewell and Long 2018; for a study focusing on a specific geographic context see Alahmad 2021). This has traditionally been discussed in terms of labour markets, where strong labour market conditions in one country "pull" migrants from countries with more difficult conditions (Lee 1966; Harris and Todaro 1970).

However, focusing on structure and agency *after* migration, and in reference to integration processes in labour markets or workplaces, is far less common. It has instead been more common to investigate structural obstacles to integration, and there has been an increasing focus on migrant agency in this respect. For example, labour market integration has been addressed as something that "should be understood as an outcome of [migrant] agency" (Triandafyllidou, Isaakyan and Baglioni 2023:5). Nonetheless, these studies do not necessarily theorise the *interrelation* between structure and agency.

This thesis seeks to contribute to the field of integration research by more concretely theorising the interrelation between structure and agency and building naturally upon past research (see Chapter 5 for previous research on labour market and workplace integration). This concrete structure and agency theorisation is, in my view, a necessary step further towards gaining a deeper understanding of *how* and *why* integration processes occur. In doing so, I have taken inspiration from several critical realist thinkers – most notably from Margaret Archer's perspective on morphogenesis (1995, explained further on). In this chapter, I posit that integration, labour market integration, and workplace integration, can fruitfully be understood as a process of structural

and individual change, and that this also further explains the interrelations between structure and agency. Moreover, I build upon past research on integration which deals with its criticisms by conceptualising integration as a relational process of equality between all people, not just as something which migrants must do. This chapter also elaborates on how labour market and workplace integration can be understood within the broader umbrella term of "integration".

The chapter begins with a necessary elaboration of agency, social structures, and normative social institutions, based largely on the critical realist thinkers Dave Elder-Vass (2010) and Roy Bhaskar (1983; 1995). This is followed by a section that articulates Margaret Archer's (1995) morphogenetic approach, which I use in novel ways to provide a view of integration, including labour market and workplace integration, as a process of change relating to both social structures and individual agency.

Individual agency

Before elaborating on the relations between structure and agency in greater detail, it is important to first define its two main components—social structures and individual agency. In respect to agency, this thesis is focused on the agency of individuals, that is, *individual agency*. I would like to emphasise that this is distinct from other forms of agency found in various research, such as collective agency—the focus of labour geography's interest in agency, which is often concerned with "collective strategic action, such as trade unionism" (Jordhus-Lier, Underthun and Zampoukos 2019:71)—or political agency, which is concerned with bringing about change in collective life (Coole 2005; cf. Elder-Vass 2010:88)[5]. Individual agency is taken in this thesis as meaning the *causal powers of* individuals, that is, their power to affect the world in some way (Elder-Vass 2010).

In addition, I speak at one and the same time in this thesis of "individual" factors, "agents" and "agency". One could also speak of micro perspectives versus macro perspectives, where micro is more closely related to individuals. Such usage is not intended to be imprecise but is instead employed because of the very close relations between all of these terms. *Agency* is something that *individuals* possess, and individuals with agency are *agents*. Furthermore, human entities who possess causal powers, or have agency, may be referred to as both agents and individuals. Human agency is viewed here as related to making "decisions and actions in life" (Goller and Harteis 2017:85,87), and as having the capacity to "have an impact on your surroundings" (Cloke, Crang, and Goodwin 2013:919). Humans, in accordance with this view, have

[5] The question concerning how groups of individuals can exert an influence upon the world through their actions will be addressed in the section on norm circles below.

the power to act, and they make choices in any given situation that can affect their surroundings.

However, as will become clearer in the following sections, agency is very closely related to social structures. Even though we as humans have the capacity to act, the agency of human individuals is also both constrained and enabled by outside forces—such as by so-called social structures and norms. Social structures can have an impact on our agency insofar as they possess causal powers, two of the most important being "those of constraints and enablements" (Archer and Elder-Vass 2012:96). Bhaskar (1983) argues—in a manner similar to how Giddens (1984) presents the notion of the "duality of structure"—that social structures are capable of enabling and constraining agency and social action (Banai 1995:567). But although humans are "causally influenced by external factors", human action "may be affected by social causes without being *fully determined* by them" (Elder-Vass 2010:87). Such influences on agency in critical realist terms are not considered to be "determinants of action", but rather "conditional influences" (Archer 1995:130) that "constitute reasons for action, yet have to be weighed by actors" (Archer 1995:130). That is to say that this perspective on agency acknowledges that humans have the ability to reflect on their choices, and that structural influences do not completely decide the outcome of our actions. Moreover, different agents may experience significantly different levels of structural constraints to agency, even when in the same locality, which can be of either greater or lesser degrees of severity, and this impacts and shapes the opportunities they have to influence their situation. People working at the same workplace, for example, may be able to exercise agency to differing degrees (cf. Hastings and MacKinnon 2017). Each agent thus operates in a different "landscape" of opportunity and constraint (cf. Coe and Jordhus-Lier 2011:229; Coe and Jordhus-Lier 2023; Article I).

We, as humans with agency, are thus not *solely* controlled through outside factors, but have the ability to affect the surrounding world as well. I thus employ a perspective concerning agency similar to that of Elder-Vass (2010:108ff), where we clearly are affected, or conditioned, by our social environment (cf. Bourdieu 1990), but also have the power to reflect and deliberate on our choices to a certain extent (cf. Archer 2000).

Social structures

Although the term "social structure" has been introduced in the previous section in respect to how it constrains or enables agency, it is important to more specifically define its meaning. As is the case with the concept of "integration", social structures have been spoken of in previous scholarly work as a "nebulous" concept that is difficult to grapple with and define (Lopez and Scott 2000:1; Elder-Vass 2010:77). In this thesis I adopt a critical realist

perspective concerning social structures from which such structures are viewed as involving individuals who comprise a social group. What makes such a group a social structure is the group's causal powers insofar as social structures are regarded as consisting of "*the causal powers of specific social groups*" (Elder-Vass 2010:66, emphasis in original). Furthermore, causal powers can be understood in terms of the influence or effect that an entity or a number of people have on the world. While social structures predominantly consist of human individuals, they often are also comprised of both human entities and non-human material entities that together make up "socio-technical entities". Representative examples of such entities are the computers required to run a specific organisation and the instruments in a string orchestra, without which it would not be possible for the musicians to play music (Elder-Vass 2017).

What makes social structures different from simply any random group of people, however, is that the effect they have on the world—their causal powers—is greater and different than the sum of their parts, that is, the separate effects that the different individuals whom they include would be able to have on the world (Elder-Vass 2010). Stated briefly, the social group making up a social structure has a different and greater effect on the world than would be possible for a random assortment of individuals who happen to be together. Moreover, it is in the relationship between people that this causal power is created.

This is because a social structure—such as states, companies, universities, normative institutions, and organisations (Wahlberg 2014:774; see also Elder-Vass 2010)—possesses *emergent powers and properties* that comprise "properties or capabilities that are not possessed by its parts" (Elder-Vass 2010:4). While this has been illustrated by such recent figures as Elder-Vass (2010:5), it has often been discussed previously by such thinkers as John Stuart Mill (1900:243, example also referred to in Elder-Vass 2010:5) who provides a helpful example in the property of water. Water has emergent properties because its properties are not the same as the properties of its separate molecules. The properties of oxygen and hydrogen are different from those they produce together when combined to make up water. For instance, although water freezes at zero degrees centigrade, both hydrogen and oxygen separately remain gases at this temperature (Elder-Vass 2010:5). This simile can be used in the example of social structures—although individuals separately have certain causal properties, or effects on the world, these properties are different than the power that can be exercised when individuals combine to create social structures.

Social structures have causal effects on us—"causal impacts on the world" (Elder-Vass 2010:5)—by influencing, for example, the choices we may make at a given moment, but the causal effects and powers they exert on us cannot be reduced simply to the actions of individuals. While this thesis does not go into greater detail concerning the theory of emergence, the main takeaway from the definition of social structure is that although it consists of groups of

people, it has causal properties beyond those of separate human beings and their agency – beyond the sum of its parts. However, social structures can simultaneously be affected by the individuals with agency who comprise them. The critical realist Elder-Vass' (2010) maintains from his perspective that:

> [I]nstead of ascribing causal significance to an abstract notion of social structure or a monolithic concept of society, we must recognise that it is specific groups of people that have social structural power. As I understand it, the social world is composed of many overlapping and intersecting groups, each of which has the causal power to influence human individuals. But in each case these powers depend on interactions between individual members of the group, and this argument thus depends in turn on the claim that human individuals themselves also possess causal powers—human agency. Social events, then, are produced by the interaction of both structural and agential causal powers (Elder-Vass 2010:4).

Integration, as I will further outline below, is precisely one of these social events that consist of the interaction of social structure and agency, or the causal powers that individuals as well as groups of individuals possess.

The connection between structure and agency becomes clear even in these initial definitions insofar as it is impossible to speak of the one without the other. Ontologically, I consider social structures to be "irreducible to people and their practices" (Lewis 2000:249), but do not regard them as existing independently "of the activities they govern" (Bhaskar 1978:14). Social structures are not independent from human agents (Bhaskar 1978:14), for the two are mutually constituted—both human agents and social structures create conditions for, and exist as a consequence of, one another (Lewis 2000:250; cf. Giddens 1984 and Archer 1995). Critical realism, in particular, maintains that social structures ontologically exist, but that they are (re)produced and transformed "through our decisions and actions (human agency)" (Banai 1995:567).

A critical realist view of social structure and agency accounts for human agency and the capacity to act while acknowledging how structures can affect it, either enabling or constraining it. This allows for examining both agency and structure, and how they relate to integration processes, without having to focus solely on one or the other and thereby risk not seeing the causal effects associated with the individual agents and the organisations and social institutions with which they come into contact. For example, this allows for a study which recognises that highly skilled refugees make decisions in order to obtain employment, but are also affected by structures on the labour market, such as the Swedish Public Employment Service, as well as legislation concerning residence permits. Moreover, acknowledging that both structures and agents have causal properties makes it possible to investigate causal effects and the extent to which integration occurs, instead of addressing only "how" this comes about (cf. Tran, Cameron, Montague, Nuenjohn and Fan 2022). Critical

realist philosophy of science intends, among other things, "to connect abstract (structures) to empirical (events) and to (agents') experience of them" (Banai 1995:564). This accords well with the key aspects of this thesis—to study how agents and structures are connected in real-life labour market and workplace situations.

In this thesis, social structures are considered as comprising, for example, employers (companies and organisations that hire workers), universities (which offer complementary educational programmes), government agencies, such as the Swedish Public Employment Service (offering introduction programmes), and legal institutions (responsible for regulations concerning residence permits and the labour market). Social structures are also taken to include organisations, both formal and voluntary (Mackinnon 2020:349), various labour market training initiatives, and companies that hire highly skilled workers. Within these structures, as well as outside them, there are agents—such as the highly skilled refugees and the integration initiative representatives who have been interviewed in this study.

Normative social institutions and norm circles

Social structures and agency are also tightly interwoven through the influence that normative social institutions have upon agents and agency. *Normative social institutions* are a type of existing social structure which is associated with social practices that influence agents through norms(Elder-Vass 2010:115ff). We should note that while including social institutions under the umbrella of social structures accords with the view of such critical realists as Elder-Vass (2010), it does not coincide with the definitions of others such as Archer, who instead view social institutions as comprising elements of culture, instead of as social structures (Elder-Vass 2010:117, referencing personal communication with Archer). Although one could, in this light, argue that normative social institutions should be termed something other than social structures, clearly defining what is being analysed in this thesis can help avoid larger conceptual confusion. Moreover, regardless of these differing views, my research remains focused on agents and on how they are affected by social structures as well as the social "institutions/norms/culture" that have existed prior to the agents' present realities and affect their present and future behaviour.

Normative social institutions are here viewed as social structures that involve the communication of norms (Elder-Vass 2010). Social institutions comprise another nebulous concept that has been used in many different ways in previous research, in geography as well as in social science in general (Ocasio 2023:2). It has often been conceptualised as involving people acting in accordance with certain norms that pertain to, for example, family, gender, language practices, and so forth (see e.g. Fleetwood 2008). So-called *norm circles* – conceptualised by Elder-Vass (2010) – are entities that help explain

the existence of these phenomena, while still keeping to the social structure framework. From this perspective, the Catholic Church—an example taken from Archer and Elder Vass 2012—is a normative social institution, while the norms followed in different religious circles (in some research understood with respect to so-called "social institutions") are the result of (differing) norm circles.

Norm circles consist of a group of members who share "a similar understanding of the norm concerned" (Elder-Vass 2010:123, emphasis added), with norms regarded as providing the "habits, rules and values that structure people's actions" (Mackinnon 2020:349). Norms, or normative social practices, are here understood as "regularised practices encouraged by dispositions or beliefs about appropriate ways of behaving that are shared by a group of people" (Elder-Vass 2010:116). These are very closely connected to the notion of "culture" in previous research (Archer and Elder-Vass 2012). I consider normative social institutions to include, for example, employers, who set rules regarding how to apply for a job through various platforms, references, CVs, and job interviews; workplaces, which are associated with behavioural norms; and structures, which in some way have norms regarding language, family roles, and gender roles, among others.

Furthermore, normative social institutions are created by norm circles, with such institutions comprising the causal powers of the norm circles (Elder-Vass 2010:122). Norm circles constitute a "specific type of social group" (Elder-Vass 2010:115) or social circle that is "concerned with specifically normative questions", and they possess "causal powers to influence their members", which is to say that *norm circles consist of individuals enacting specific normative practices* (Elder-Vass 2010:122). For example, the norms associated with waiting in a queue are upheld by people who adhere to such norms, while the norms associated with crossing a border are upheld by border police and those who are crossing the border. This does not mean that all people who conform to a norm agree with it on a moral level, but the norm may still influence one's behaviour. It can be enough to know that one is supposed to adhere to it to enjoy positive consequences, and that not adhering to it will cause negative ones (Elder-Vass 2010:122–123).

This also leaves space for recognising that power relations can be involved (Elder-Vass 2010:126). For instance, certain agents may face greater negative consequences than others if they break the norm and may therefore have a greater incentive to follow it. Norm circles also possess more and different causal powers than a group of random individuals because of their commitment "to *endorse and enforce* the practice with each other" (Elder-Vass 2010:123). Once again, it is not necessary for this commitment to be a deep-rooted belief. Elder-Vass argues in this respect that individuals may

> support the norm by advocating the practice, by praising or rewarding those who enact it, by criticising or punishing those who fail to enact it, or even just by ostentatiously enacting it themselves (Elder-Vass 2010:124).

As is the case with social structures, the causal power of a norm circle is different from the causal power of each of its parts, or the individuals who constitute it. That is to say that it is the interaction of the agents and individuals in the norm circle which enforces a particular norm, and this influence cannot be equated with the influence that the individuals in a norm circle would have if they were simply added together (Elder-Vass 2010:122). Moreover, norms are constantly negotiated and teased out within an individual and within the group, and they can also intersect with other norms.

Although certain scholars have previously posited that normativity is created by "society" (Elder-Vass 2010:116)—which once again leads us to the problematic notion of "society" that has also been debated in integration research (see Chapter 2)—the norm circle theorisation circumvents this issue by aiming to "identify the precise social entities responsible for the causal influence of normative institutions and the mechanisms by which they acquire these powers" (Elder-Vass 2010:116). Critical realist notions of social structure and norm circles are therefore very useful when employed in the study of integration. In addition, norm circles provide "an explanation of the *mechanism* by which the interactions between people *produce* the power of the whole" (Elder-Vass 2010:127).

Furthermore, norm circles help explain how so-called cultural norms come into existence, highlighting that "culture" is something that occurs within the mind of humans and through the medium of people (Archer and Elder-Vass 2012). Normative institutions thus consist of the agents who create and constitute them, but who also are influenced by them, just as do other social structures. In a manner similar to social structures, norms are created through a morphogenetic process whereby individuals are born into a context with pre-existing norms that affect and influence them. However, they can also exert agency that may lead to these norms being either upheld, or eventually changed (known as morphogenesis or morphostasis, explained below) (see Archer and Elder-Vass 2012). That is to say that norms are reproduced and transformed in cycles, where "[i]n each cycle, subjects are influenced by existing culture, which is not of their making, and through their subsequent actions they help reconstitute or elaborate the objective features of culture" (Archer and Elder-Vass 2012:94).

We should note that the cultural morphogenetic cycle consists of both objective and subjective instances. The objective instance refers to the part of the cycle in which agents are "influenced by the existing cultural context", while the subjective instance, which is associated with human agency, refers to the part of the cycle when agents, "as knowing subjects", decide on what action to take regarding the norms around them (Archer and Elder-Vass 2012:99).

This comprises a process of either morphogenesis or morphostasis, which will be further discussed in the following section.

Integration as morphogenesis

In my consideration of integration as a process of structural and individual change (as mentioned in Chapter 2), I take inspiration from Archer's critical realist work on morphogenesis. *Morphogenesis* is a process of change or re-shaping of a state or structure (Archer 1995:75, also referring to Buckley 1967). It is a term employed to capture "both the possibility of radical and unpredictable re-shaping (…) and the fact that the genesis of this re-shaping lies in the interplay between structure and agency". *Morphostasis*, in contrast, refers to the opposite type of process, namely, a process that preserves states or structures (Archer 1995:75). In essence, morphogenesis explains how social structures are created and are comprised by agents, but that agents simultaneously are conditioned by the structures they are part of. Morphogenesis can therefore occur when agents change their behaviour, as this eventually can lead to structural change. In accordance with this framework—and building upon the perspectives developed by Spencer and Charlsey (2021) and Klarenbeek (2023)—*integration may be conceptualised as a morphogenetic (change) process. It involves relational interaction between all agents within a perceived group as well as relations between agents and structures, and is a process of change within interconnected structures, agents, and domains.* In other words, integration, seen from a morphogenetic perspective, occurs within an interplay of structure and agency.

Morphogenesis as an explanatory framework aids in understanding how structures change (or do not change) through agency and therefore contributes to a better understanding of how the structure-agency interplay takes place. Archer explains the phases of the morphogenetic process in respect to the terms structural/cultural/sociocultural conditioning (the pre-existing situation before a change); social/socio-cultural/group interaction (interaction between structures, agents and groups); and structural/cultural/group elaboration (the change itself) (Archer 1995:193–194).

As noted, a morphogenetic perspective acknowledges that humans have agency, but are born into pre-existing structures that are themselves created by human agency. As an example, the legal frameworks in which we as humans come into contact control the possibilities that exist for us and affect our lives. At the same time, we could educate ourselves in the field of law, become legislators, and conceivably change existing laws. Similarly, we are born into a particular linguistic context which affects us upon birth, but could also become involved in introducing new slang into the language, leading to an eventual change of the linguistic context. This process of agency affecting structures and the converse is shown in simplified terms in Table 4 below, which

is based on Archer (1995). Structures being changed constitutes *morphogenesis*, while structures remaining the same and being upheld as they were constitutes *morphostasis*.

Table 4: Simplified order of events in morphogenesis and morphostasis

1. Structure exists 2. Agents are influenced by structure 3. Structure is influenced by agents 4. Structure is reaffirmed (morphostasis) or changed (morphogenesis)

Agency can be constrained or enabled by structural factors that surround a given person (cf. Lier 2007:821; Herod 2001; Coe and Jordhus-Lier 2011; Knutsen et al. 2015 Massey 1984), but, at the same time, social structures are created and reinforced by agents. As was discussed above in the section on norm circles, the creation of *norms*—or culture in Archer's terms—is a morphogenetic process. Integration—taken as broad, relational, and involving all people becoming increasingly equal—similarly occurs across and between structures, agents, and the norms they create and are affected by in turn. That is to say that morphogenetic integration is a process that has an effect on and can change structures, agents and norms, and vice versa.

Importantly, for integration processes to occur, individuals must act in specific ways and structures must operate in specific ways, whereby—in the case being examined in this thesis—the labour market and workplace become increasingly equal. Equality in this sense means that all people are hired on the basis of their skills and qualifications rather than any other factors, and that people at the workplace are treated equally in respect to their role at work rather than any other factors. Labour market and workplace integration are, like the overarching integration concept, in this thesis seen as a process of individual and structural change refracted through the lens of morphogenesis. This will be discussed in further detail in the following section.

Integration on the labour market and at the workplace

As was discussed in the conceptual overview of integration in chapter 2, one of the weaknesses of the concept of integration is that it is very broad and includes a variety of different domains and processes. Some of these domains and processes pertain to the labour market and the workplace, with these comprising domains within domain-related integration. While the previous chapter focused on integration as a concept more broadly, which is necessary for gaining a deeper understanding of the general processes of which it consists, this thesis is predominantly focused on integration processes in connection with the labour market and the workplace.

While integration can generally be viewed as a process of change, it is also important to define the particular context of this study and the specific processes that I am analysing—namely, the integration processes that take place on the labour market and in workplaces. This allows me to go deeper into specific phenomena that comprise integration, which is a broad umbrella term that incorporates a variety of processes. It is thus crucial to examine integration within differing temporal and spatial contexts and to examine how and why integration processes take place within a specific set of circumstances. As described in further detail in chapter 6, this thesis employs a critical realist approach that acknowledges the importance of understanding empirical events within specific contexts. This thesis has therefore chosen to focus on some of these specific contexts—labour market and workplace integration in respect to highly skilled refugees in Sweden, with a particular focus on engineers (articles II, III).

Some of the criticisms that have been raised concerning the concept of integration in general can also be applied in research to conceptualisations of both labour market and workplace integration. For example, Spencer and Charsley's criticisms (2021:5–6) largely hold for the domain of the labour market as well—labour market and workplace integration is normative, can conceivably objectify the "other" who needs to integrate, and is often narrowly focused on migrants. Moreover, there is also a tendency for the concepts employed to remain undefined in general. I would also argue that there clearly is a lack of conceptualisations that address these processes in relation to change and to the interrelation of structure and agency.

Specifying the type of integration under study can also, to an extent, help avoid the pitfalls encountered when using the broader concept of integration. For example, a focus on labour markets and workplaces, including entrance into these specific contexts, does not need to make assumptions about a nebulous notion of a homogenous "society". Being "outside of the labour market", as it is sometimes termed—that is, not having a job or not working at a particular workplace—is not limited to those who are viewed as not belonging in the country. One can then more easily avoid the container notion of society since the "container" becomes smaller or is seen to be one of many—such as an engineer having multiple engineering workplaces. It is noteworthy that labour markets are also increasingly understood as global and transnational in nature (e.g. Castles 2011; Mense-Petermann 2020), which allows for a clearer consideration of transnational and global processes (cf. the critique in Spencer and Charsley 2021 concerning methodological nationalism).

Within labour market and workplace contexts, it becomes important to focus on issues more specific than those described under the umbrella term of integration. We should note at this point that both labour market and workplace integration, at their core, are elements of integration processes in which individuals and structures interact relationally to create structural and individual change. Furthermore, while labour market and workplace integration are

here used as analytical categories, they are in actuality overlapping and closely intertwined. One of the advantages of focusing on both labour market and workplace integration within the same thesis is to illustrate these interlinkages, including how the integration process in respect to employment does not end after having received a job. For example, Ortlieb and Knappert (2023:2) build on past research on labour market integration and the workplace experiences of refugees in postulating that "refugee labor market integration does not end when they enter gainful employment, but continues in the workplace". Long-term integration is instead seen as shaped by the possibility to retain employment, build a career, and feel a sense of belonging at the workplace (Ortlieb and Knappert 2023:2, in reference to Hirst et al. 2021 and Knappert et al. 2021).

Labour markets and workplaces

Before delving further into what labour market integration and workplace integration entail more precisely, I will begin by briefly defining what is meant by "labour market" and "workplace" since the meaning of these concepts should not be taken-for-granted either.

The labour market can be deceptively difficult to define in social science. In response to this problem, I will employ an abstract working definition in accordance with certain previous research (cf. Kalleberg and Sørensen 1979; Fevre 1992), whereby a process of buying and selling labour is at the core of what a "labour market" entails. Labour markets are thus abstractly denoted as "the arenas in which workers exchange their labor power in return for wages, status, and other job rewards" (Kalleberg and Sørensen 1979: 351), and they are often spoken of in terms of the "relationship between demand and supply of labor" (Scholliers, Burnette, Pierenkemper 2005, n.p.). The processes of buying and selling labour may be understood as consisting of instances of informing employers and workers of the availability of workers and the jobs available; offers to sell and buy labour; and screening workers and employers to see whether the job or the worker is an adequate fit (Fevre 1992:11–12).

Although the labour market has been often thought of as an "*arena*" (Kalleberg and Sørensen 1979: 351, emphasis added) or a "*place* where labor is traded" (Scholliers, Burnette, Pierenkemper 2005, n.p., emphasis added by I.B.), such definitions are abstract insofar as neither are exact geographical locations indicated, nor are explanation provided of where these processes actually occur. The process described above—the exchange of labour power—takes place among different social structures and places. It is also connected to "unions, collective bargaining, government regulations" (Freeman 2016), and specific "institutions and practices that govern the purchase, sale, and pricing of labor services" (Kalleberg and Sørensen 1979:351). Regulations and rules are also tied to particular normative institutions that, for example,

influence rules that govern employment, rules about how wage labour is sought, norms regarding whether CVs are required for hiring, how CVs should look, and how job interviews take place. What the term "labour markets" means is thus far from concrete, and it includes many different interwoven locations and processes. In accord with this understanding of labour markets, we may say that not only does the labour market involve many people in different places, it also consists of social, structural and material elements.

Workplaces can be viewed as part of this labour market (cf. Fevre 1992:12). I define workplaces as locations where wage work is being carried out—places where the exchange of labour power and wages occurs. Workplaces may be regarded as a particular facet of the labour market that is key to acquiring an understanding of the conditions of this exchange, which makes them worthy of study in their own right—as a sub-category, so to speak, of the labour market. While the labour market also includes processes of *seeking* employment and *looking for* workers (Feyre 1992:11–12), the workplace is a place where this exchange has already occurred and continues to occur.

Labour markets, workplaces, and space

While the *labour market* integration process can be tied to many different types of spaces—including, for example, workplaces, public employment service spaces, the home of a jobseeker, and classrooms where labour market training takes place—*workplace integration* is more clearly tied to one particular space, namely, the workplace itself. However, workplaces can be difficult and nebulous to define, much as are labour markets, since they are heterogenous. While often thought of as specific physical locations (such as an office), and as less abstract than labour markets, work can also take place (in part) outdoors (e.g. construction work, agricultural work); be ambulant (e.g. work on a ship, a consultant in different companies); or take place partially or entirely in the home (e.g. digitally working from home). It is important to note that wage work has become increasingly digital in character, with new types of gig work changing the spatial and temporal relations associated with traditional office or factory-based work (Butler, Zampoukos and Mitchell 2024).

This thesis, however, focuses less on digital or home spaces, where the home and workplace intermesh, and more on physical workplaces in which people go to conduct work. This is in part due to the focus on engineering since certain engineering professions must (primarily) be practiced while physically at a site, such as is the case with much construction engineering. While labour markets encompass a broad range of interwoven processes and places, these types of physical working environments more obviously possess material aspects. For this reason, it is possible to study workplaces in greater depth with regards to their actual sociomateriality, including the spatial

architecture, furniture, decorations, layout, and opportunities for socialising (Bouncken, Aslam and Qiu 2021).

Furthermore, both labour market integration and workplace integration are associated with particular *spaces* and also consequentially occur at specific *times.* This is an important issue to remember when moving from the theoretical level to the empirical level of studying integration processes. As a result, there is a "particular temporal and spatial distribution of relevant processes" regarding labour market and workplace integration; the environments in which they occur are both material and social; they exist in differing places and times (Sayer 1985:53); and specific spaces, such as workplaces, can change over time. This study thus examines integration processes in very particular spatial and temporal contexts.

Since I employ a critical realist notion of space in this thesis, I view spaces as more than merely the sum of their parts, which is to say that "while space is constituted by objects it is not reducible to them" (Sayer 1985:51). A workplace, for example, is not simply the sum of all the objects in it at a particular time—even though "*space can only exist in and through objects, it is independent of the particular* **types** *of object present*" (Sayer 1985: 52, emphasis in original). In other words, if we were to exchange all the objects in an office for other objects, it would still be a space.

A realist notion of space means that space is not a container to be filled—as would follow from absolute notions of space (Sayer 1985:51; Jones 2010:244). Moreover, even though space is "constituted by matter", as relativist concepts posit, realists argue that it is not reducible to the objects that comprise it, as noted above (Sayer 1985:57). In addition, while a critical realist notion of space departs somewhat from purely relational notions of space—whereby "objects can be understood only in relation to other objects" (Jones 2010:245, cf. Dainton 2001, Massey 2005, and Mol and Law 1994)—and regards objects as *real* in the ontological sense, it nonetheless views them as shaped by the minds and actions of human beings and thus existing in relation to other objects as well. In summary, this means that workplaces, whether they be employment offices or the home, consist of objects that exist in relation to other objects and spaces, but are not reducible to these objects or to the relations between them. Furthermore, objects possess causal power—that is, the ability to affect us (Sayer 1985:50)—which means that studying the physical aspects of and objects in particular places can give us an understanding of the (social) processes that take place within them. This is largely the reason why the third article of this thesis elaborates upon both the built and the social environments.

Integration, labour market integration, workplace integration: three levels of abstraction

Labour markets, and by extension workplaces, are "arenas" in which integration processes take place. The various integration processes that occur there are distinct from each other, but also interlinked, and this thesis analytically views them in terms of three levels of abstraction. For instance, "integration" encompasses all of the processes explained in broad and relational conceptualisations of integration. "Labour market integration" is a more specific process and a lower level of abstraction within the umbrella term of "integration". Below it exists "workplace integration"—a part of both labour market integration and integration itself. These levels move from broader to more specific, and each comprises its own specific set of processes. The three levels of abstraction employed in this thesis are illustrated in Figure 1.

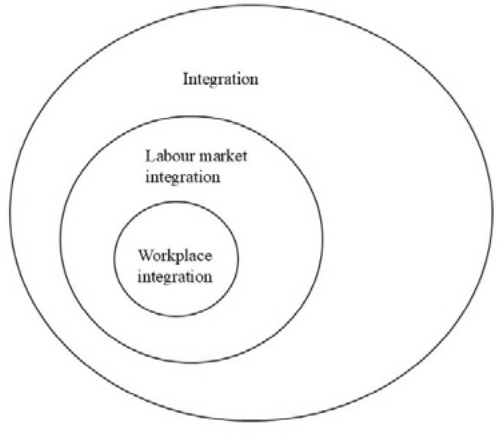

Figure 1: Levels of analytical abstraction regarding the concept of integration

Both labour market and workplace integration are broadly defined in the present discussion as a process concerning both individual and structural change, and in a relational manner that is associated with equal opportunities (cf. Spencer and Charsley 2021; Klarenbeek 2023). Whereas "integration" is more broad and may be conceptualised as the integration of *everything*—*so*-called "society", a larger social group, or the world—*labour market* integration is in this thesis specifically focused on the possibility of obtaining employment on equal terms with others, corresponding to one's experience and skills.

Labour market integration is thus a matter of labour market equality and a processes whereby equal access to the labour market with regards to one's skills and qualifications is increasingly achieved. This is not a binary category

(integrated/not integrated) with an end goal (integrated), but rather a continuum on which labour market opportunities can be both more and less equal. This can change over time, and different groups or individuals can be advantaged or disadvantaged at different times and in different contexts.

This understanding of labour market integration does not differ as greatly as may initially seem to be the case from previous labour market integration studies. Even if relationality is not explicitly stated, it is present when labour market outcomes are compared between refugees and other groups. For example, Triandafyllidou, Isaakyan and Baglioni (2023) describe labour market integration as mainly underpinned by "equality of opportunity on the workplace" and in connection with the concept of "decent work" (2023:3, see also Gallie 2007a, b, c). The latter includes enjoying appropriate employment in light of one's education, an adequate salary, and opportunities for professional development, along with the protection of one's human rights at the workplace, access to social benefits, and "equal treatment or equality of opportunity compared to other workers who are both local and foreign" (Triandafyllidou, Isaakyan and Baglioni 2023:3, see also Anxo et al. 2010, Berntsen 2016 and Gallie 2007). However, although this description acknowledges the relational aspect of equality, it still retains some of the language of measurable integration, where it is difficult to define what is an "adequate" versus an "underpaid" salary. This implies, nonetheless, that relational aspects are present in conceptualisations of labour market integration, even when there are no explicit references to relational and broad conceptualisations of integration.

Workplace integration must be defined in its own way due to the specifics and particularities of the workplace in relation to the more general labour market. *Workplace integration* specifically focuses on one's experiences after having obtained employment**.** A central element of the workplace integration process is that workers are treated equally and have equal opportunities at the workplace. This goes beyond having obtained employment, and it takes into account practices in the spaces of work itself that create inclusive or exclusionary environments—that is, equal or unequal workplace relations. For workplace integration to occur, factors that are not directly connected to a job—such as gender or a migration background—must not impact how people are treated. While job-seeking processes are at the forefront of labour market integration, workplace integration has a greater focus on the working conditions after labour power and wages have been exchanged.

In my study of labour market integration and workplace integration as two connected but separately defined types of integration, I contribute to previous theorisations of integration that either examine integration as something very broad and all-encompassing, and therefore nebulous, or strictly focus on processes of finding employment without considering what comes next. I regard labour market and workplace integration as distinct, but connected. This overall process consists of seeking employment, receiving employment, and the everyday life at a workplace that follows. Furthermore, the division between

the labour market and the workplace—and between labour market and workplace integration—should be viewed as analytical rather than ontological insofar as they are closely interwoven. In addition, the process linking labour market and workplace is not strictly linear insofar as people seek multiple jobs or internships and change multiple workplaces during their lifetime. The processes may, however, be seen as connected – enjoying equal opportunities on the labour market creates greater possibilities to obtain employment and enter a workplace, where workplace integration might then take place.

Analytical dualism and perspectives on time

The morphogenetic perspective on integration, labour market integration, and workplace integration described above, sees structure and agency as key components of these processes. Structure and agency are particularly used in reference to understanding labour market and workplace integration processes, which has led me to explore Archer's theoretical work in critical realism (1998). The first article (Article I) hints at a structure and agency approach while, however, citing Giddens (1979), instead of Archer. Giddens, briefly stated, also views structure and agency as constituting each other and being inseparable from one another. His position thus has much in common with Archer's theorisation of how agency and structure mutually create each other. However, although Giddens' theorisation is useful for gaining an understanding of the interlinkage of structure and agency, it is not easy to employ for analytical purposes and in helping us acquire a further understanding of structures or agents. While critical realist Bhaskar agrees in his earlier works (1978) with Giddens, Archer (e.g. 1995) therefore instead argues for a separation of structure and agency, but only on an analytical level, in order to facilitate research analysis.

Nonetheless, Archer draws this separation while still acknowledging that the two are intertwined—although she argues for analysing structure and agency separately, she continues to view them as intimately and ontologically connected (Archer 1995:190). She maintains that even though individuals and structures are thus analytically dual, they are tightly interconnected and affect each other in a constant process of either morphogenesis or morphostasis. Archer's call for analytical dualism thus assists us in moving further in our analysis insofar as it is difficult in Giddens' iteration to go beyond the statement that agents and social structures are intertwined. It is easier from a morphogenetic perspective to untangle how societal change processes actually take place.

In accordance with a critical realist view, human action in the present can both *reproduce* and *transform* structures, but it does not create new social structures entirely in the present. On the other hand, social structures are viewed as possessing causal properties, and they can affect human behaviour

more directly (Lewis 2000:249). Consequently, the differences between human agents and the social structures that they have created involves in part their temporality in that social structures are "historically and spatially contingent" (Banai 1995:567) and exist prior to people's actions in the present (Lewis 2000:250; Archer 1998:202). Social structures are, so to say, "inherited" from the past, and agents come into contact with them in their present realities (Lewis 2000:250–251).

This is one of the important contributions of Archer's theory of morphogenesis—it explains that structural and agentic changes occur at different paces and "operate over different time periods" (Archer 1995:76). This showcases how it is useful for them to be analytically dual—structures require a longer period of time to change than individual behaviour and thus need to be studied separately from the latter, despite their mutual ontological connection. This temporal perspective can help explain why integration processes may occur at different speeds and paces[6]. Individual change may thus occur much more rapidly than structural change, which appears to be more rigid in form—something that has not been acknowledged clearly in any of the previously mentioned integration frameworks.

To exemplify this, it may be useful to analytically separate large-scale structural discrimination—which would need longer-term strategies and efforts to remedy—from individual discrimination—which can be countered on a smaller scale through individuals receiving training at specific workplaces. Nevertheless, the two are intimately connected with each other. If integration or diversity training would become the norm—required at all places of work, for all managers, employees and organisations—this could comprise a structural change that both stems from and leads to individual changes whereby individuals no longer act in ways that are discriminatory or racist. Long periods of individual-focused measures could eventually also lead to larger scale structural and individual change.

Consequently, the provision of equal opportunities on the labour market (relational labour market integration) is a process that involves not only the individual adaptation of employers and hiring committees who are willing to hire people with both foreign and domestic education, but also a structural change of the entire labour market such that this would become the norm. One is not possible without the other insofar as individual actions and transformations are what lead to the structural changes necessary for integration processes to occur.

[6] An in-depth temporal perspective in integration approaches has not yet been conceptualised but has been argued for. See, for example, Spencer and Charsley 2021 (check).

Change and stasis

Morphogenesis theoretically explains how integration as a process of change relates to structure and agency over time. The understanding of integration that I employ—integration as *morphogenesis*—is so termed in order to highlight this view of integration as a process of individual and structural change, where both types of change are interconnected, with structural factors affecting agency and conversely. While integration has been framed as a process of change in this thesis, similarly to other integration research (cf. Klarenbeek 2923; Spencer and Charsley 2021), and Archer's framework is often simply referred to as morphogenesis, it is nonetheless important to take into consideration that morphostasis is also included in this framework. In other words, integration can also involve processes of morphostasis insofar as it consists of a complex network of transformations and *non*-transformations, of changing structures and structures being *upheld*—morphogenesis and morphostasis—that occur simultaneously. On the one hand, it is true that things constantly change, comprising morphogenesis—integration is a process in which new people are constantly introduced into given groups and new configurations occur. On the other, however, it is feasible that a context in which integration already takes place to a high degree requires morphostasis to remain in such a state. Moreover, due to the different rates of change that structures and agents undergo, it is also possible that morphogenesis occurs at such a slow pace that we as humans do not notice that it is changing at all. Although integration is primarily connected to morphogenesis, as is the case within Archer's framework, it may consequently also involve morphostasis.

The advantages of a morphogenetic notion of integration

This morphogenetic definition of integration is not intended to introduce a completely new conceptualisation, but rather follows from the identification of lacunae in previous conceptualisations, taking into account progress already made within those theorisations. I view this definition of integration as coming out of previous conceptualisations, which have noted both individual and structural factors, and out of broad and relational integration conceptualisations that have already dealt with much of the prior criticism of the integration concept.

While more theorising is necessary to further this idea of morphogenetic integration, a philosophical position that is both ontological and empirical, such as critical realism, together with an explicitly stated understanding of structure and agency, can add much greater depth to the already existing theorisations on integration. I welcome and hope that others continue to develop

and theorise these types of processes in order to develop the conceptualisations even further.

As is shown in Table 5, morphogenesis can help us deal with some of the weaknesses identified in previous conceptualisations of integration. It allows for studying integration as a process between all, not just between migrants, going beyond civic integrationist approaches. It is arguably more succinct than broad notions of integration, as many of its domains can be encompassed under just two categories of structure and agency, and their interrelation. This fact also has the potential to make it easier to utilise in empirical studies. Moreover, it allows for a clearer conceptualisation of the change processes described within broad integration, and can add a structural perspective to relational approaches.

Table 5: Characteristics of civic integrationism, domain-related integration, relational integration, broad integration, and morphogenetic integration conceptualisations

	Civic integrationism	**Domain-related integration**	**Relational integration**	**Broad integration**	**Morphogenetic integration**
Normativity	Often normative, i.e., migrants should be included in "society".	Often normative, i.e., obtaining employment is desirable.	Normative, i.e., equal opportunities are desirable.	Not described as a normative process, but rather conceptualised as a process which occurs that is neither good nor bad.	Not in itself described as a normative process, although normativity can be added to it.
Relations between outsiders and majority	Suggests that outsiders should adapt to the majority through, e.g., civics courses.	Suggests that newcomers adapt to the majority through, e.g., getting a job and having access to healthcare and accommodation.	Since everyone interacts relationally, there are no insiders and outsiders.	Since everyone interacts relationally, there are no insiders or outsiders. Moreover, this perspective aims for more of a transnational understanding of integration.	All agents interact with each other and with pre-existing structures to together form something new and ever-changing.
Process or state of being	Discussed both as an end state and a process.	Discussed both as an end state and a process.	A process achieving equal opportunities, may be viewed as an end state.	A process.	A process without an end state, repeating constantly.

Table 5 cont'd: Characteristics of civic integrationism, domain-related integration, relational integration, broad integration, and morphogenetic integration conceptualisations

	Civic integrationism	**Domain-related integration**	**Relational integration**	**Broad integration**	**Morphogenetic integration**
Who integrates?	Migrants, newcomers, people "outside" society.	Migrants, newcomers, people "outside" society.	Everyone can take part in the process, which is a relational process between all agents concerned.	Everyone can take part in the process, which takes place through interaction on both individual and structural levels.	Everyone takes part in integration, which is something done through interaction between agents and other agents and between agents and structures.
Explicated structure and agency	No, but the focus is mainly on individual action, with some acknowledgement that the "receiving society" has to welcome individuals.	No, but the focus is mainly on individual action, although there is also acknowledgement of and perspectives focusing on structures that can hinder or facilitate integration.	No, but the focus is mainly on relations between agents.	No, but both individual and structural domains are mentioned.	Yes, integration occurs as a dialogue between agents and the structures they are in, but which they also influence.

Instead of viewing integration as a process that simply *involves* structures and agents (cf. broad integration), without further theorising their connections with each other, morphogenesis marries the structural and individual aspects of integration and explains both the *relation* between them and how structural and individual changes occur. A morphogenetic perspective is capable of showcasing in greater detail how individual actions transform structures, while individuals are simultaneously also shaped, constrained or enabled (cf. Coe and Jordhus-Lier 2011; 2023) by the structures into which they are born—or migrate.

Bridging structure and agency is particularly pertinent for integration-related research insofar as many prior studies have shown how structural and individual factors affect integration (see Chapter 5 for a review of previous research), without, however, adequately theorising their connection. Even though integration conceptualisations have, often implicitly, brought up both structure and agency, employing the notion of morphogenesis would constitute a step further, building on these previous results and contributing to an understanding of how integration processes in fact operate. Morphogenesis shifts the focus away from solely individuals or solely structures in that it acknowledges that integration is a process of change which functions within both these domains, and that they constantly (re)constitute each other. Integration is thus neither solely the responsibility of the individual, as is implied from certain civic integrationist perspectives, nor strictly a question of structures adapting to take in individuals, but rather occurs in a mutual process of change within both.

Archer (1995:190) has conceptualised system and social integration as taking place in an interplay between structure (systems, institutions, roles, positions) and agency (populations, organised groups, individual actors and collectivities). Social integration in sociological terms has typically referred to relations between agents, as opposed to system integration, which pertains to "pre-existent institutional structures" (Archer 1995:189). Integration as discussed in migration theory, however, has increasingly dealt with both, blurring the lines between the two and broadening its scope. A deeper understanding of how structure and agency originate within and mutually influence each other (Archer 1995:192), and do so, I would add, at differing rates over time, would go beyond simply stating that both structural and individual factors exist, and instead also conceptualise how and why structure and agency are linked in integration processes.

This approach links societal and individual notions of integration, which previous integration research has addressed as nearly ontologically separate. More specifically, morphogenesis may provide a fruitful way forward in integration research because of the persistent seesawing between focusing on structural or individual perspectives that has marked such research—from Durkheimian societal integration (Durkheim 1997 (1893); 2005 [1897]), to

individual migrant-focused integration (civic integrationism, domain-related integration), to criticism of the individual focus and calls for structural theorisations (cf. Phillimore 2021). Allowing analytical space for both structural and individual factors to affect integration processes will help bridge the gap between these schools of thought.

Lastly, Archer's critical realist theorising, on the basis of its ontology and methodology (as discussed in Chapter 6), aims to uncover the core generative mechanisms of events, which involves a more thorough examination of *why,* not just *how,* integration processes occur. Although important progress has been made on this front through studies showcasing the types of issues that hinder or help integration process (see Chapter 5), contributions often remain on an empirical level and do not connect results with larger societal structures, as critical realist methodology aims to do. Critical realism can thus be a useful tool in overcoming this obstacle. This is especially the case since integration research has focused on "measuring" in various ways—such as in terms of the number of migrants who are unemployed in comparison with other groups—rather than focusing on gaining an understanding of how social integration is generated, and what the underlying generative and causal mechanisms are that create the prerequisites for integration processes (Grunow et al. 2023:18). Taking critical realism and morphogenesis into consideration—including a more explicit understanding of structure and agency—can thus be a useful next step in deepening integration research while building upon the conceptual work that has already been done through the use of relational and broad integration frameworks.

Chapter 4: The Swedish Context of Integration

After having gone through the theoretical starting points of this thesis with regards to integration, labour market integration, and workplace integration, this chapter will ground the discussion once again in empirical reality. In order to situate the current study, this chapter will broadly describe the Swedish background context in which the empirical case studies in articles I, II and III are situated. In order to understand the context in which they take place, this chapter will provide a brief overview of the Swedish integration context in recent years, including the broad general shifts in immigration, welfare, migration and integration policy, political discourse, and the labour market. Furthermore, the overview will be discussed in relation to the conceptualisations of integration noted in Chapter 2 in order to showcase how integration has been conceptualised in Swedish policy and general discourse over the years.

This overview does not seek to be all-encompassing, but is rather intended to provide a general backdrop for understanding the context in which refugees find themselves when they arrive in Sweden and, in addition, cast light on a number of the broad structural and ideological shifts that have taken place within the Swedish context. While the migrants interviewed in this dissertation have all come to Sweden within the past decade and a half, Sweden's longer migration history can provide an important historical context for understanding the current Swedish integration landscape and the already existing structural landscapes in the empirical study. Understanding this historical context and the changes that have occurred—and are still occurring—is important for a study of morphogenesis insofar as it assists in gaining an understanding of the changes that have already occurred as well as the context that sets the scene for any future changes[7]. Moreover, it is crucial to have an insight into how things were *before* and *after* a change in order to identify whether a change is occurring and how it is taking shape.

Shifts in immigration

Sweden has been chosen as a case in this study due in part to the relatively large number of people in the country—277,726 in 2022—who have a refugee

[7] This is related to Archer's (1995) articulation of the morphogenetic phase of structural, cultural and/or socio-cultural conditioning.

background (UNHCR and UNRWA, n.d.). This is roughly 2.6% of the total population. In addition, over 200,000 refugees, as well as persons in need of subsidiary protection and their relatives, had completed a post-secondary education in 2022 (Statistics Sweden 2022). Such a significant proportion of people with a refugee background reflects a migration trend that has appeared within the last fifty years, particularly since the turn of the 21st century.

Sweden has gone through what can be roughly understood as five phases of migration over the past one hundred years. Prior to the 1930s, Sweden was a net emigration country, with more people leaving than arriving (Statistics Sweden 2023). This was followed by a shift to a period of labour migration (Statistics Sweden 2023), with an exception during the Second World War when immigration comprised refugee immigration from neighbouring Nordic and Baltic countries (Westin 2001:310). In contrast, the last five decades have been characterised by immigration due to people fleeing war and conflict from different regions of the world (Statistics Sweden 2023; Westin 2001:310–314).

Sweden has thus undergone both a shift from net emigration to net immigration in the past century, but also changes in the causes or reasons for migration. Briefly stated, Sweden's immigration over the second half of the 20th century can be divided into distinct stages according to the most prevalent form of immigration (Westin 2001:310–314):

i. 1940–1948: Immigrant refugees from neighbouring Nordic and Baltic countries.
ii. 1949–1971: Labour immigrants arriving from Finland and from countries in southern Europe such as Greece, Yugoslavia, and Türkiye.
iii. 1972–1989: Immigrant refugees and family reunification migrants from countries outside of Europe, such as Uganda and Chile. The late 1980s were also characterised by refugee immigration from Iran (Statistics Sweden, n.d.).
iv. 1990s: Asylum-seekers arriving from countries in south-eastern Europe, such as the former Yugoslavia, as well as EU-migration.

The historical shift from a labour immigration country to a refugee immigration country that took place after the Second World War has continued after the turn of the century. This can comprise a fifth period, from the 1990s onward, when immigration to Sweden has increased even more, most notably due to the arrival of asylum seekers. This led to a 2016 historical peak of immigration to Sweden, when over 163,000 people arrived (Statistics Sweden 2023). This peak was associated with asylum seekers from Syria, among other countries, due to the ongoing civil war there. In fact, Syria was the most common country of birth for immigrants between the years 2017–2024 (Statistics Sweden *Befolkning, antal personer efter födelseland och år*), although the total number of immigrants has decreased since 2016 (Statistics Sweden 2023b). A

notable increase took place after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 (Ekonomifakta 2024) and due to the Temporary Protection Directive, which offers temporary protection for people arriving specifically from Ukraine (Swedish Migration Agency 2023).

This migration context has meant that the makeup of Sweden's population has shifted over the past century from one with very few citizens born abroad, with a limited diversity in national or ethnic backgrounds (Eriksson 2013:97), to one with about 20% (over 2 million people) born abroad in 2023 (Statistics Sweden 2024) and a more diverse population. This has also led to a more diverse labour market, with an increasing number of people with a foreign background, foreign education, and/or work experience from outside the country.

Changes in the labour market and workplaces

The increasing immigration in the middle of the last century gave rise to explicit migration and integration policies. In general, there have been structural changes (morphogenesis) in the Swedish economy that have affected the labour market in particular. Since the 1970s, the Swedish labour market has supplanted its previous industrial sector-domination with a service sector orientation, with increasing levels of production tied to workers' competences than to the existence of sufficient raw materials for production (SOU 2020:30, p.87). Labour market mobility has increased and employment duration has decreased (SOU 2020:30, p.21).

The composition of the labour force itself has undergone a "growing heterogeneity (…) in terms of gender, ethnicity, age and disability" (de los Reyes 2000:253). These changes are due in part to the rise in female labour participation in the past century, demographic changes, and immigration. Furthermore, the labour market in Sweden is also "differentiated along lines of gender, ethnicity, education and age" (de los Reyes 2000:253).

Because of demographic changes, such as an aging population, there has also been a growing need for labour, specifically highly skilled labour (SOU 2020:30, pp. 21, 85), and the skills needed are increasingly digital and technology-based in nature (Swedish Public Employment Service 2019). This development is expected to continue, leading to a gap between the needed technological and digital skills and the actual skills of current jobseekers (Ibid.). The current labour shortages in Sweden include electrical engineers and technicians, doctors, nurses, and teachers (Swedish Public Employment Service 2024, *Hitta framtidsjobbet i våra yrkesprognoser*). In addition, there are increased labour shortages in specific geographical areas, such as northern Sweden in particular (Swedish Public Employment Service n.d., *Jobba i norra Sverige*.).

The general tendency when it comes to immigrant employment in Sweden is that there has been a worsening labour market situation for immigrants both

overall and in comparison with the rest of the population from the 1950s onward (Tibajev 2016:4). In 2020, there was an estimated 20% difference between the average employment levels of people born in Sweden and those born outside the country (SOU 2020:30, p.89). Currently, while long-term unemployment rates affect immigrants disproportionately in most OECD countries, Sweden in recent years has had the largest gap between native-born and immigrant employment levels among all OECD countries (OECD 2023:55).

This has been tied to the changes in types of migration, namely, from labour migration to asylum migration (Tibajev 2016:4), with asylum-seekers having weaker labour market ties and less time to prepare for employment before arrival. In addition, three structural changes have been identified that could have contributed to this process (Tibajev 2016:4). The first of these is the worsening economic situation in Sweden in general during the 1990s, which took place during an increase in migration. This affected the employment of immigrants to a higher degree than those born in Sweden (Tibajev 2016:4; Soininen 2010:681). More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has also had an effect on the economy and the labour market, leading to layoffs during the time of the pandemic (SOU 2020:309, p. 22).

The higher level of immigrant unemployment can also be partially explained by the rules concerning termination of employment during economic slowdowns due to labour shortages (Tibajev 2016:4) insofar as the general legal regulation since 1974 (SFS 1974:12, replaced by SFS 1982:80) (with some exceptions) is that those who have worked the longest at a given workplace take precedence over people who have less total working time. This can obviously affect immigrants more than others due to their shorter period of time in the country. However, many studies have also shown that immigrants in general are ethnically discriminated against on the labour market, which could impact their ability to obtain employment (Carlsoon and Rooth 2007; Ahmed, Andersson and Hammarstedt 2012; Bursell 2014, in SOU 1996:55).

The second structural change has involved a change in working life in general (Tibajev 2016:4; Bevelander 2005; Rosholm, Scott and Husted 2006). For example, it has been argued that the shift toward an ICT-based labour market has changed workplace requirements to include more technological and informal competence, due to the increase in interpersonal communication at work in comparison to previous forms of mass production (Ibid.). Rosholm et al. (2006) have argued that this shift toward ICT-based jobs favours people born in Sweden due to them having more country-specific skills and the types of informal skills desired by employers.

The rise of ICT and digitalisation is one of the more notable and observable shifts that have occurred at workplaces, increasing the demands for labour force flexibility and adaptability (de los Reyes 2000). The digitalisation of workplaces has been connected, on the one hand, to an increase in autonomy for workers and, on the other, an increasingly unclear work-life balance (Cijan, Jenič and Lamovšek 2019). The line between "work" and "leisure" has

been blurred through technological innovations, especially for workers within knowledge-based fields (Lewis 2010; Cole, Oliver and Blaviesciunaite 2014). ICT provides flexibility, but it also functions as an extension of work into the private realm, and vice versa (Cole, Oliver and Blaviesciunaite 2014; Bittman, Brown and Wajcman 2009). It has also made possible home office work, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic and in more recent years. These developments, together with demographic and other labour market changes, can conceivably have had an impact on workplace configuration as well—not just what jobs exist, but who works where. Each workplace has a very specific context, however, and it is difficult to make more general comments in this respect.

The third structural change on the labour market that has impacted immigrant integration is associated with the integration and labour market policy shifts that will be described in further detail in the next section. Labour market opportunities have also been affected by the settlement policy, which stipulates that newcomers are settled on the basis of where housing is available rather than jobs (Edin, Fredrirsson and Åslund 2004).

Shifts in "integration" policy and welfare ideology

Changes to policy are also relevant to consider with regards to integration. Not all of the policies discussed below are termed "integration" policies, however. Welfare policies, for example, do not specify that they concern "integration" or migrants. An overview has been conducted, however, on the basis of previous literature that classifies these policy changes as integration-related, with relational and broad integration in mind. According to these conceptualisations of integration, "integration" is something that concerns everybody in the population, not just immigrants. When these types of integration policies would focus on immigrants, they would focus on creating access equal with what others in the population enjoyed.

The 1960s

During the 1960s, Sweden underwent changes with regards to the character and existence of immigration and integration policies. This happened in relation to the increasing change in the type of immigration from predominantly labour migrants to asylum-seekers. Coinciding with the arrival of a greater number of migrants, it was only in the latter half of the 20th century that Sweden first had an official immigration policy. In addition, the focus of such policies has shifted and transformed over a period of decades from a more general universalist position to one that is more restrictive. These changes in policy models have roughly been categorised as proceeding between the 1960s and late 1990s from an initially universalist position, to multicultural and selective

positions, prior to readopting a universal character, with multicultural ideologies being increasingly abandoned beginning at the turn of the century (Dahlström 2004; Grip 2020).

The first of these phases in the 1960s—the universalist policy model—was characterised by a perspective whereby welfare was regarded as universal and therefore "intended for the whole population" (Grip 2020:864; Dahlström 2004). Aspects of the Swedish welfare state model, such as the basic principles of universalism—everyone is entitled to benefits and all who are able are expected to work (Brochmann and Hagelund 2012:7)—comprised the prerequisites for newcomers to be able to take advantage of unemployment benefits, labour market programmes, and free education. Scholars have argued that the social inclusion of immigrants in Sweden has been aided by this tradition of a universalist "principle of equality":

> The principle of equality has also enhanced the extension of immigrants' social rights and militated against differences between, first, the rights of newcomers and citizens and, secondly, among immigrants, weakening stratifying effects (Sainsbury 2006:240).

In accord with the universal model of the 1960s, there were no officially expressed policy views on "how to develop good ethnic relations in the country" (Valenta and Bunar 2010:468). The period was instead characterised by a general ideology of equal access to welfare. In essence, there was no explicit immigrant integration policy at the time (Valenta and Bunar 2010; SOU 1996:55)—welfare was to be accessible to all, no matter whom.

Although some have interpreted this view of universal welfare as a one-way ("assimilationist") process due to its lack of a specifically migrant focus (Valenta and Bunar 2010:468; Ödalen 2000:40), I would argue that is could instead be compared to a relational view of integration (cf. Klarenbeek 2023) insofar as the entire population, with no regard for who is and is not an immigrant, was to have access to welfare measures. This perspective can also be compared to a societal view of integration (cf. Durkheim 1997 (1893); 2005 [1897]) in the sense that the focus is not on how specific groups or individuals "integrate", but rather on everyone in Sweden having equal access to social welfare in relation to everyone else. This is not to say, however, that one-way processes and perspectives were not present—Sweden has a notable history with these types of one-way, controlling measures with regards to the indigenous Sámi population. The Sámi were subject to a "very harsh assimilation policy" that has had a notable effect on the Sámi culture, language, and the number of language speakers (Aikio-Puoskari 2009:218; Aikio-Puoskari 2018).

The 1970s

In the 1970s, a multicultural policy focus was added to the universal welfare goals that was considered to be quite radical for its time (Borevi 2014:711), making Sweden appear as a pioneer with regards to the development of early integration policy (Kaczmarczyk et al. 2015, see Grip 2020). Instead of immigrants being treated as indistinguishable from other individuals residing in Sweden, the multiculturalist perspective aimed to avoid "previous forms of ethnic 'Swedifying' (directed in particular at the Sámi minority)" by focusing on helping to preserve the ethnic identities of minorities and immigrants (Borevi 2014:711). A specific minority and migrant focus that had not been previously present was thus added.

This may be regarded as a time when more explicit goals were developed in respect to integration, immigrants and minorities. A new immigration policy was adopted in 1975 that still followed a universal ideal based on principles of equal access for the entire population—whether foreign-born, born in Sweden, or indigenous—including "freedom of choice by the individual (whether someone wishes to adopt the Swedish culture or not); and cooperation, meaning the importance of (…) social bridges and social links" (Valenta and Bunar 2010:468; see also Westin 2001). Although the core ideal continued to be that welfare measures were available to all, the new policy focused particularly on immigrant groups and their ethnic identity and led to the adoption of measures specifically aimed at minority groups, a term which at the time referred to immigrants as well as indigenous populations. This support included, for example, financial support for ethnic organisations, newspapers, and mother tongue teaching in schools (Borevi 2014:711).

While the universalist principle can still be compared to relational integration perspectives, this period of integration policy focused on minority groups that had the right to specific "compensatory measures" (Borevi 2014:711). A shift can therefore be seen here toward focusing on those considered to be "non-majority" or "other" in respect to the majority. This is in accordance with conceptualisations of integration that focus only on migrants (cf. domain-related integration or civic integrationism) rather than entire populations.

The 1980s

In contrast, the 1980s introduced more selective measures based on what can be termed a selective policy model (Dahlström 2004; Grip 2020). The multicultural model had been criticised for provisioning immigrants with "too much right to choose between 'their own culture' and 'the Swedish culture'" (Grip 2020:864). This was discussed, for example, in respect to Swedish norms of gender equality, which were regarded as something that immigrants with more patriarchal world views needed to learn (Dahlström 2004; Grip 2020). It was similarly considered to be unacceptable that immigrants did not adjust

to Swedish norms about school curricula, children's rights, or democracy (Soininen 2010.690).

During the 1980s, the policies that had focused on multiculturalism were criticised on the grounds that collectively supporting immigrant's "ethno-cultural identities" could hinder their rapid or timely incorporation into the country (Borevi 2014:713–714; SOU 1984:55). Subsequently, there was a clear move away from promoting immigrant *groups* and *collective* identity to focusing on measures for *individual* immigrants. This was connected to the fact that a decision had been made to no longer regard immigrants as comprising "ethnic minority" groups since this term had been re-evaluated as referring strictly to indigenous populations or people who had resided in the country for much longer periods of time (Soininen 2010; Borevi 2014:714; Government Bill 1985/86:98). Immigrants therefore no longer had the right to access special measures aimed at minority groups, and the bill that supported their right to preserve their collective cultural and ethnic identity was withdrawn (Grip 2020; Borevi 2014; Government Bill 1985/86:98).

This shift comprises a step away from a focus on multiculturalism and the promotion of an individual perspective focusing on individual measures in Swedish policy. Moreover, this "'downscaling' of multiculturalism" (Grip 2020:864) can also be viewed as a "dismantling of cultural rights" that has also taken place in other European countries in recent years (Soininen 2010:691). The growing number of (refugee) immigrants was perceived as leading to threats regarding Swedish norms of equal rights and democracy and, consequently, the rights of immigrants to preserve their cultural individuality were legally restricted. In terms of conceptualisations of integration, this policy shift may be viewed as heightening a civic integrationist perspective—citizens are increasingly perceived as needing to adapt to specific requirements if they reside in the country, which has led to a strengthened notion of "us" and "them".

The 1990s–2020s

The 1990s and afterwards comprise a continuation of the dismantling of multiculturalist ideals, an increased focus on labour market policy, individualism, and a further strengthening of civic integrationism. The step away from multiculturalist policies that began in the 1980s was furthered and reaffirmed insofar as measures strictly geared toward immigrants were viewed as counterproductive, leading to divisions in society between "us" and "them" (Borevi 2014:714; Government Bill 1997/98:16). Some have viewed this policy approach as a return to universalism (Dahlström 2004; Grip 2020) since fewer efforts are specifically tailored for immigrants, with policy being more broadly concerned with labour market outcomes. In essence, however, policy during the 1990s can be considered to be a continuation of the previous decade since it

"constituted little more than a confirmation of the change in course that had already been made in the 1980s" (Borevi 2014:714, see also Borevi 2012).

On the other hand, the restrictive measures of the previous decade were criticised for not having the desired outcome, particularly in regard to employment. At that time there were high levels of unemployment in Sweden generally, not least because of the economic recession that followed the collapse of the Swedish currency in 1992 (Schierup 2010; Kiander and Vartia 2011), but they were particularly high in respect to immigrants (Soininen 2010). A concern arose that the labour market gap between immigrants and the rest of the population would "risk the emergence of an ethnically and socially segregated labour market" (Soininen 2010:681), which led to a focus on trying to bridge this gap. An even stronger focus on labour market measures was implemented that continued into the early 21st century, with an integration reform in 2010 intended to support expanded employment (Grip 2020:865). This reform was further changed in 2018, making it increasingly similar to legal frameworks concerning non-migrant job attainment and blurring the lines between immigrant-specific policy and policy for all jobseekers (Grip 2020:865). This development has cemented a focus on one domain of integration above others—the focus on labour market integration—as well as more universal labour market goals that leave the "multicultural" policy focus behind.

In the late 1990s, one of the main goals introduced was to make immigrants self-sufficient and quickly educate them concerning the "tools" required for living in Swedish society (Soininen 2010; SOU 1996:55). This has arguably continued into the 2020s. An individual focus has also increasingly been added, where the responsibility for (labour market) "integration" in the last few decades has been shifting from the state to the individual. Beginning in the 1960s, there has been a tendency to shift from a perspective of rights to that of responsibility (Dahlstedt and Neergard 2019), which has brought with it "[i]ncreased levels of responsibility and more demands" on individuals. The state is thus regarded as having less responsibility for immigrant integration, and it has "increasingly disclaimed responsibility for the outcomes of the labour market policy" (Dahlstedt and Neergard 2019:126). This has also entailed a focus on making the unemployed employable through "activation" instead of letting people be "passively" dependant on social benefits (Dahlstedt and Neergard 2019:125). An example can be seen in the focus on immigrants' starting their own business (Soininen 2010:691; SOU 1995[76]), which accords with the "activation" rhetoric.

This shift in responsibility—with immigrants themselves becoming responsible for their own integration—is also in line with a general neo-liberal ideological shift (Soininen 2010), where "economic policy is given precedence over social policy" (Dahlstedt and Neergard 2019:125). The policy shifts noted above are thus tied to broader changes. For example, there has been a tendency since the 1990s toward welfare and citizenship reforms, both in Sweden and internationally, that aim to resolve the problems of social

exclusion and dependency on welfare through "neo-liberal workfare reforms emphasising active citizenship" (Jansson 2024:3105; see also Goodman 2012; Schierup 2010). Rather than focusing on equal measures for all and "strong collective identities", this change comprises a greater focus on individualism and an "individualistic life style" (Soininen 2010:700). This goes hand in hand with a general trend within integration policy across Europe—steps are taken away from a multiculturalist ideal toward civic integrationism (Borevi 2014), where immigrants increasingly are perceived as having to meet specific requirements in order to be considered a part of "society" and residency rights are connected to "good" conduct (Jansson 2024).

All of the above changes are intertwined not only with neo-liberal trends, but also with a dismantling of the traditional universalist welfare tradition in Sweden that began occurring in the previous century. These radical welfare policy transformations amount to the "welfare of citizens" being ever more determined by "the market value of work" (Dahlstedt and Neergaard 2019:125). This move away from universalist welfare policy is clear, with the welfare regime seemingly "shaped less by social democratic and more by neoliberal features" (Dahlstedt and Neergaard 2019:125).

The changes in immigration, integration policy, and conceptualisations of integration have also been accompanied by changes in legislation. More recently, the past decade has seen several notable changes in asylum policies that have an impact on the ability to enter and reside in Sweden. Although Sweden has historically been known as having generous refugee policies, it now has put in place much more restrictive policies, as have its Nordic neighbours and many other European countries as well (Hernes 2018). This has occurred after the peak in forced migration during the 2010s.

Under the minority left-wing government at the time, temporary changes were made, for example, to the Swedish Aliens Act (SFS 2005:716). In its present form, the Aliens Act dictates that refugees and those with subsidiary protection status (excluding quota refugees) have the right to temporary residence permits of three years and thirteen months, respectively. These permits can be renewed every two years, and permanent residency can be applied for after a minimum of three years on the premise that the person is self-subsistent. The stipulation of self-subsistence and the temporary nature of residency permits are quite recent changes to the legislation, however (SFS 2005:716; European Commission 2021), being incorporated in 2016 into a temporary law (SFS 2016:752) that was permanently incorporated into the Aliens Act of 2021. This change has had important implications for refugees arriving in Sweden insofar as it has affected, among other things, the importance of having employment for permanent residency. In addition, the current rules for permanent residence include the demand that the applicant live an "orderly life" (Swedish Migration Agency, Permanent residence permit). This adds further to a civic integrationist discourse, where "good conduct" or being a "good

citizen" are required for being judged deserving of protection and permission to remain in the country.

Other notable changes include a restriction of social benefits, reducing the amount of paid parental leave for immigrants, and changes with regards to mainstreaming measures concerning refugee integration and employment into standard employment programs. The latter, although not directly impacting refugee's social benefits, "made it easier to sanction financially participants who did not participate in agreed upon activities, but only to the same extent as other unemployed persons could be sanctioned" (Hernes 2018:1313).

Currently available aid for (highly skilled) refugees

Even though a shift has been identified in Sweden away from the universalist welfare tradition, a complete welfare regime change has arguably not yet taken place. Remnants of the traditional model still remain (Dahlstedt and Neergaard 2019:125), and there continues to be a framework of support for refugees. After a refugee has received a residence permit, they have access to the same welfare services as the rest of the population, even though they must meet more strict criteria in order to obtain permanent residency.

There still are a considerable number of state-funded programs and other means to aid "integration" in various domains. One can apply, for example, for financial aid from the Swedish Migration Agency, which provides daily allowances for those waiting for asylum. However, the levels of financial allowances, which have not changed for a significant number of years, range from a meagre 19 to 71 SEK (approx. 1.6–6.19 euros) per day for adults (Swedish Migration Agency 2022, Financial support for asylum seekers). After one receives a residence permit and refugee status, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency can then provide individuals with financial support on the condition that they participate in the Swedish Public Employment Service's Establishment Programme.

This so-called Establishment Programme (or Introduction Programme) is one of the measures targeted to immigrants with regards to employment. In addition to the usual help offered by the Swedish Public Employment Service for people outside of the labour market, this programme is especially offered to people between 20–65 years of age who have "recently received a residence permit as a refugee, person in need of protection, or (…) are a relative to a refugee or person in need of protection" (Swedish Public Employment Service, *Etableringsprogrammet*, translated by I.B.). This programme has as its aim that the participant "as quickly as possible learn Swedish, find a job and manage to support yourself". It also provides help with accessing measures such as language courses, civic orientation, internships, support in starting one's own business, and support when applying for jobs (Swedish Public Employment Service, *Etableringsprogrammet*, translated by I.B.).

Other forms of assistance available to refugees include temporary housing while waiting for asylum, although there is no possibility to choose and one must be prepared to move to where there is availability (Swedish Migration Agency, *Accommodation with the Migration Agency*). Also provided are assistance in finding housing after receiving a residence permit (Information Sverige 2025); access to emergency dental and healthcare while waiting for asylum (Information Sverige 2023a); and the right to schooling for all minors (Information Sverige 2023b).

Although such initiatives can potentially provide important possibilities for various types of integration, many of the existing efforts have focused on so-called "low skilled" newcomers and those found to be furthest from the labour market (see e.g. The Swedish Government Offices 2020a and 2020b; Forte 2020; see also Dahlberg et al. 2020 for a report on one of these programs). This follows a focus in the late 1990s on "unskilled work for unskilled jobseekers" (Soininen 2010:692, discussing Ura 1998:1). Soininen argues that this suggestion

> marks a radical ideological departure from the traditional Swedish labour market principle of equality and solidarity expressed in the improvement of skills and education for all workers, in that it accepts that certain categories of people will be confined to unskilled, low-status jobs (Soininen 2010:692).

This can have implications for highly skilled refugees insofar as there is less funding and attention regarding highly skilled people born abroad, notably refugees who have come from Syria, Iraq and Iran in recent years (Arrius 2018). It should be noted that highly skilled refugees and migrants have not received as much attention in traditional migration theories and research as other migrants (van Riemsdijk and Wang 2016:2), which makes studying refugees with a higher education a very pertinent issue. Moreover, even though the current government's migration page mentions, among other things, less strict rules for the "highly skilled" than for the "low skilled", it discusses this only in relation to labour migrants and not asylum-seekers (Swedish government offices, *Highly skilled*).

The right-wing political shift and migration discourse today

In addition to the Swedish political landscape, these shifts in integration policy are also mirrored in political shifts and increased right-wing sentiment in the other Nordic countries (Kuisma and Ryner 2012). The "rise of the radical right" (Elgenius and Wennerhag 2018:146) has, among other things, affected political discourse concerning integration and is associated with increasingly more restrictive immigration sentiments. While this follows a general trend in

many other countries in the past few decades, it was only in 2010 that the radical right-wing party the Sweden Democrats first entered the Swedish Parliament (Elgenius and Wennerhag 2018:146). This shift is very noticeable in, for example, the media, which display a discursive change whereby xenophobic and racist sentiments on the topic of immigration and integration have increased since 2015, becoming more and more normalised in the two largest Swedish daily newspapers (Ekman and Krzyżanowski 2021). Furthermore, observable shifts have taken place in media and policy debates—from a positive view and endorsement of "multilingualism" and "cultural dialogue" to a unilingual perspective where Swedish, along with Sweden's perceived uniform culture and values, must be adopted by immigrants (Milani, Bauer, Carlson and Spehar 2021). This is evident in civic orientation courses, where immigrants learn about Swedish society (Ibid.). Such discourse shifts go hand in hand with the turn toward civic integrationism, and they display how this trend is observable not only in policy focus, but in the media, specific courses, and policy debates.

This shift in political discourse has been summarised and well-illustrated by the ruling right-wing Swedish coalition government, elected in 2022. The trend toward an increasingly restrictive refugee, immigration, and integration policy has not only continued under this government, but has even become amplified. The discourse concerning restricting refugee migration, integration and rights is articulated in the Tidö Agreement (Tidö Agreement 2022), which is a highly debated political agreement among the right-wing ruling bloc following the general election in 2022 that aims at clearly increased restrictions upon migration and integration and expresses one-way integration or assimilationist ideals, i.e. ideals whereby migrants should conform to what is perceived as the Swedish majority. Its various goals for the future that have been put to paper include the following:

- The goal of integration politics should be "reformed to more clearly include social, cultural, economic, linguistic and democratic integration and adaptation" (Tidö Agreement 2022:45; all translations from the original Swedish done by I.B). Moreover, "those who are in Sweden long-term should accept responsibility to become a part of what is Swedish" (p. 29) and a duty to "show respect in relation to basic Swedish values" (p. 37).
- A priority is placed on temporary protection and return migration (p. 29) rather than permanent residence (p. 44).
- The Agreement provides for restricted humanitarian protection and asylum policies that correspond to the minimum level required by the EU. This includes placing a higher responsibility on migrants and refugees to prove their eligibility (p. 34).

- It discusses the possibility of placing a greater financial responsibility upon asylum-seekers, such as paying a fee for receiving asylum (p. 38).
- The Agreement proposes that there should be stricter parameters for receiving residency, such as an increased number of years in the country, financial self-sufficiency, and a declaration of loyalty (p. 38).
- It also raises the possibility of revoking valid residence permits that have been given in the past (p. 39).

Although the Tidö Agreement is not legally binding and does not comprise any change in legislation, it clearly shows a more restrictive political orientation in respect to immigration, integration, and asylum. These sentiments are mirrored on Sweden's government website, which states that "Sweden's migration policy is undergoing a paradigm shift" (Government Offices Sweden, *Sweden's new migration policy*). It also states that the focus areas of the new migration policy involve stricter rules for residency and citizenship and increased repatriation and deportation efforts. Moreover, in accordance with a shift toward individual responsibility, it states that "[p]eople who come to Sweden will have to qualify for welfare through their own efforts, not merely by taking up residence" (Government Offices Sweden, *Integration requirements*). Moreover, it draws a difference between "people who have lived in Sweden a long time" and more recent immigrants in respect to being deserving of aid since the "introduction benefit will also be reviewed and will be lower than the public benefits and allowances available" to the former group (Government Offices Sweden, *Integration requirements*). Being deserving of aid is also tied to education—the intention is that lower-skilled labour immigration should be subject to stricter conditions than "highly skilled foreign workers", which, moreover, are not to include "foreign researchers and foreign doctoral students" (Government Offices of Sweden 2023). A dichotomy is thus assumed between highly skilled and low-skilled migrants, and between labour migrants and asylum migrants, even though the lines are much more blurred in reality.

Such rhetoric also indicates a clear increased discourse of xenophobia, racism, and exclusionary immigration and integration politics, and it has little in common with the relational universalist policy goals of the previous century. The Tidö Agreement has created increased worry among, for example, NGOs concerning the future of universal human rights:

> If the agreement's proposed measures become a reality, we will have a society that no longer respects the fundamental rule of law nor the principle of equality for all before the law. Rights will not be based on people's needs but on their group affiliation and legal status. This will create a hierarchy between people in Sweden, placing people with citizenship at the top and vulnerable groups, as well as people who are racialised at the bottom (Civil Rights Defenders 2022:3).

Moreover, these discourses have conceptualised integration as something done specifically by migrants, something they *should* do, and as comprising one-way adaptation. The relational aspects of integration are absent, and there is no clear understanding of the structural and individual changes of which integration consists.

Furthermore, there are clear shifts from a universal welfare-policy for all, as discussed above, to discourses about an immigrant's responsibility to integrate and respect "Swedish values", which nonetheless remain nebulous and undefined. This responsibility is discussed with regards to becoming "Swedish", proving one's right and eligibility to receive aid, meeting financial goals, a focus on temporary protection, and the potential removal of previously obtained rights, rather than long-term goals. This accords with the neo-liberal turn noted above and a move toward civic integrationism. In addition, it appears that "integration" is discussed solely in regard to short-term processes, not as a longer process of morphogenesis that takes into account the entire population in terms of its structural and individual aspects.

It is important to keep in mind this rift between integration policy—civic integrationism—and theory, such as relational integration, when conducting studies of integration. Even if integration is socially constructed as something different from the conceptualisation used in this thesis and viewed as a one-way process in which people adapt to a given country's values and must perform as "good" citizens to be accepted, it is still highly important to keep this notion of integration in mind insofar as socially constructed ideas can produce real effects. Moreover, it is likely that the people interviewed in my study have come into contact with such discourses when they negotiate and navigate on the labour market and workplace, or take part in integration initiatives.

The shift toward civic integrationism

Although the above overview is not all-encompassing, it nonetheless indicates certain broad shifts which have taken place in Sweden that have affected the integration and labour market contexts. The increase in (asylum) immigration, together with the move away from universalist policy ideals and the shift to the political right, has led to a turn toward civic integration policies and discourse, an increasing focus on short term integration measures, and a nationalist discourse that juxtaposes "us" and "them". Moreover, growing neo-liberal sentiments have also shifted the responsibility of integration from the state to the migrant individual in contrast to previous universalist policies whereby the state bore the responsibility to ensure basic access to welfare for all. This can also be interpreted as a shift from a broader focus on structural measures for ensuring welfare to measures focused on migrants' own willingness and responsibility to achieve certain goals—in other words, an increased focus on migrants' agency with respect to integration. This is not to say that both

structure and agency are not present throughout the policy shifts—after all, policies concern both structures and agents within their scope—but the discourse has increasingly shifted its focus to the individual. In addition, integration is increasingly framed in respect to labour market goals and the individual's ability to obtain employment.

These changes—in conjunction with periods of economic recession, an ageing population, and a shift to digitalisation—have created a situation in which larger numbers of qualified workers are needed, especially those with up-to-date technological skills appropriate for increasingly digital workplaces where work is also conducted remotely. Although this could create prerequisites for hiring qualified immigrants, at the same time we see that immigrants have a higher level of unemployment than others residing in Sweden. This leads to many questions about why this is the case, and what labour market and workplace integration looks like for this group, insofar as there are particularly large knowledge gaps regarding how specific workplaces are affected by these broader changes.

Generally, the changes outlined above indicate that, since the 2010s, Swedish asylum policy and integration measures have been marked by a shift towards increasingly restrictive policy models (Garvik and Valenta 2021:11–12; Soininen 2010; Grip 2020:865). As highlighted above, this has consisted of shifts between periods dominated by universalist, multicultural, and restrictive principles. Furthermore, such changes coincide with a broader shift in Europe toward language and civic knowledge tests being regarded as "conditions for naturalization" that are also linked to the right for residence permits. This has been termed a

> fundamental transformation of European nation-states from passive labor importers (in other words, countries that merely receive immigrants) into countries of immigration (Goodman 2012:659).

The latter denotes countries with clear "criteria for national membership and belonging" that are created against a backdrop of growing immigrant populations (Goodman 2012:659).

Contemporary Swedish policy has become bound to conceptualisations of civic integrationism due to an increased association between integration and good conduct, for example, where incentives are put into place to ensure that immigrants meet certain requirements, such as having stable employment, in order to be able to remain in the country (cf. Jansson 2024). Requiring that immigrants, such as refugees, fulfil *different* requirements than people born in Sweden in order to receive protection or be provided aid moves away from a universal, societal, relational idea of integration. Instead of a conceptualisation where both immigrants and non-immigrants have equal rights, this aligns more closely with one where the difference between immigrants and other population groups are maintained, strengthened, and highlighted.

This brief overview of some of the main integration policy trends within the Swedish context provides an important backdrop for understanding how the conceptualisations of integration addressed in the previous chapter take form, evolve, and come into dialogue with actual policy and discourse. Swedish integration policy has roughly shifted from a universalist, relational, and societal notion of integration that does not focus on particular groups or individuals, to one focusing on migrant-specific integration measures and the introduction of stricter civic integrationist measures. These shifts, moreover, provide a backdrop for the empirical articles in my thesis, and they have created the prerequisites for integration as it has been viewed and experienced within the context of my study. In addition, this overview reveals how notions of relational integration (during universalist policies), domain-related integration (with regards to the focus on obtaining employment), and civic integrationism can be traced within the official policy goals in the country.

Furthermore, this overview of changes that began in the last century indicates that a process of morphogenesis with regards to conceptualisations of integration—involving structural and individual changes—has already been initiated. These changes, which are still ongoing, provide the context for the current integration processes that are taking place. In light of the historical shift we have addressed, it is very important and most timely to study the integration of those refugees already present in Sweden who have been affected by this shift. Moreover, these shifts beg the question of how specific people, at specific times and places, actually experience labour market and workplace integration in light of this historical trend.

This overview has provided a number of insights concerning general trends, but it has not sought to highlight all of the nuances of each period. For example, while the official rhetoric has changed throughout the decades, the *practice* has arguably been more varied, based on the types of efforts that have been implemented (Dahlström 2004). The political programmes during each period have comprised a mix of multicultural, universalist and selective policies, while the official narratives have suggested greater cohesion (Dahlström 2004). Broadly speaking, however, a shift can still be seen from more universalist policies and relational views in previous decades regarding integration, including its implementation, to an orientation during the last twenty years more toward civic integrationism and individualism (Jansson 2024). In order to understand how integration processes occur within specific contexts at specific times, it is vital to combine the knowledge concerning the previous periods with empirically collected material such as that provided in Articles I, II and III of this thesis. Although such shifts in integration policy and ideology create a backdrop for the labour market and workplace integration processes that I study, they have less to say concerning the particular nuances and specificities of each case.

Chapter 5: Previous Research on Labour Market and Workplace Integration

Following the more general picture presented in Chapter 4, this chapter presents a more specific overview concerning what is currently known about labour market and workplace integration from previous studies. In addition, it indicates the areas that require further research**.** While previous chapters have discussed the concept of "integration" and integration policies more broadly, this chapter focuses specifically on labour market and workplace integration processes. While it focuses on studies that address highly skilled migrants and refugees, it is important to keep in mind that "integration" is a broader issue which comprises a process that occurs between all people. On the one hand, this chapter examines how previous studies utilising such concepts as labour market and workplace integration have used and defined these ideas in the past. At times, since such research is limited, the conceptualisations of integration they have employed do not coincide with my own conceptualisation of integration as a broad, relational, and changing process. On the other hand, this overview also provides results that help contextualise my own study, including the broad and relational notions of integration that I utilise. Insofar as there is only a limited amount of literature available that specifically addresses highly skilled refugee integration, particularly at the workplace, this chapter also examines this issue as an interdisciplinary question, combining literature concerning a number of related research topics from several research fields.

The first part of this chapter outlines previous research on labour market integration and specific factors that have been found to affect labour market integration. This is followed by a focus on prior research on workplace integration, including the factors found to affect workplace integration. The chapter concludes with a discussion of intersectional factors affecting integration in which I tie the results of previous studies to structure and agency perspectives. I have organised the previous study results according to the types of structural and individual factors that have been found to affect labour market and workplace integration processes, even though this is not necessarily how previous scholars frame their results. Other than delving into what has already been found about labour market and workplace integration, this chapter also aims to show how these results can be understood in respect to a morphogenetic, structure-agency approach and to various conceptualisations of integration, thus tying these studies more clearly to my own research.

PART 1: RESEARCH ON LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION

The meaning of labour market integration in previous studies

Refugee integration in relation to employment—so-called labour market integration (Ager and Strang 2008:170; Castles, Korac, Vasta and Vertovec 2002, Diedrich, Bergström and Simonsson 2020)—is a well-established, and growing, field of research. Studies focusing specifically on *highly skilled* refugees, however, are more difficult to find than studies that focus on "refugees" or "migrants" as an overarching category. Moreover, the meaning of labour market integration in previous studies can vary, even though they are brought together under the umbrella of "labour market integration research".

In general, such studies focus on integration by taking an approach where successful labour market integration is viewed as meaning acquiring employment, which accords primarily with domain-related conceptualisations of integration. In the Swedish context, labour market integration has been described as "a measurement of how well foreign-born [people] perform on the labour market in Sweden" (Tibjaev 2016:2).[8] These types of studies can be divided into two main categories. One is more classically domain-related in its view of integration, using absolute measurements to examine, for instance, the proportion of foreign-born people who are employed. This measurement is often compared with other countries in order to gauge whether the national levels are "better" or "worse" than those elsewhere. The second type of studies use relative measurements, which are slightly more relational in their take since they often compare migrants with other population groups that can be used to ascertain equal labour market access. For example, studies have compared the employment levels of foreign-born people with native-born populations (Tibajev 2016:2).

Labour market integration studies are often quantitative, mapping employment outcomes for refugees in the receiving country (see Ruiz and Vargas-Silva 2016; Ruiz and Vargas-Silva 2018). What it means to be established on the labour market differs, however, between studies—sometimes successful labour market integration is considered to entail a full-time job, with

[8] All translations from Swedish are by the author unless otherwise indicated.

subsidized jobs sometimes being included. Education that could lead to employment may also be taken into consideration (Diedrich et al. 2020:3). For this reason, it can be difficult to identify the quality of work that people have acquired, how many hours a week they work, how long-term a job is, or whether the job matches people's previous qualifications. Nevertheless, these studies provide important information about unequal labour market access between groups, although it remains important to consider the quality of employment to truly understand labour market integration (van Riemsdijk 2024:147) insofar as there still can be inequalities present in the employment conditions of different groups.

Conceptually, labour market integration is, as noted, often understood with regards to obtaining employment. One of the common ways of examining this, however, involves the use of human capital research paradigms (Kogan, Kalter, Liebau and Cohen 2011; see also Chiswick 1978, 1979, 2005 and Kalter 2003). Labour market studies that utilise human capital theories often focus on a given individual's assortment of social capital (such as social networks), cultural capital (such as language proficiency), and human capital (such as "host-country-specific education") (Kogan et al. 2011:91). This can also include the correlation between the capital an individual possesses and their access to the labour market. This approach thus adopts a more individual-focused view of integration rather than relational, broad, or morphogenetic views.

Refugees in comparison to other groups

Studies have shown that refugees experience many obstacles when seeking employment on the labour market. This can also be said for highly skilled foreign-born workers in Sweden. In 2018, for example, approximately 25% of this group had a job that required significantly lower qualifications than those which they in fact possessed. In comparison, this was the case with only 6% of Swedish-born highly skilled workers (Statistics Sweden 2019). In accordance with the relative labour market integration measurements mentioned above, studies of refugees often compare refugee employment outcomes with those of other types of migrants or people born within the country. There has also been a focus on how long it takes for refugees to enter the labour market after they arrive in the country. Most of these studies show that refugees, on average, have lower levels of employment than the groups they are compared with, that it takes longer for them to gain employment than other groups, and that they have lower wage levels. For example, refugee migrants have lower employment rates upon arrival and after arrival than other migrants—such as voluntary and labour migrants—and it takes several years—an estimated 10—for refugees to "catch up" with the employment rates of other migrants (Bevelander 2020; Brell, Dustmann and Preston 2020; Diedrich et al. 2020; Delmi 2018; Wikström and Sténs 2019; Irastorza and Bevelander 2017).

However, refugees never reach the same percentage levels of employment as economic migrants or people born in Sweden (Bevelander 2020; Lundborg 2013). Studies thus often showcase the differences between the various migrant groups. Family reunification migrants in Sweden, for instance, obtain employment more quickly than asylum claimants, who in turn do so more quickly than resettled refugees (Bevelander 2011).

Among quantitative studies, those which examine "ethnic penalties" (e.g. Midtbøen 2015) are particularly useful for acquiring a broad, relational, and morphogenetic understanding of immigrants' labour market integration insofar as they can reveal differences indicating unequal labour market access depending on such factors as one's ethnic background. Ethnic penalties are defined as "the differences in labour market outcomes between minorities and the majority that remain after controlling for human capital and social background" (Midtbøen 2015:185), including "all the sources of disadvantages" that lead to these differences (Heath and Cheung 2006:19). Such studies reveal that ethnic penalties can, on average, be seen in all OECD labour markets, particularly for people born outside Europe or whose parents are from outside Europe (Midtbøen 2015). Furthermore, they tend to be stronger for people with a Middle Eastern or North African background (Midtbøen 2015:190). While the notion of ethnic penalties includes disadvantages based on racism and discrimination (see following sections of this chapter) it is regarded as a broader term since it can also encapsulate other factors that cause labour market penalties, such as individual factors, the jobs available at one's location, and a lack of information (Heath and Cheung 2006:19).

However, although statistical studies of ethnic penalties can showcase inequality on the labour market, they cannot tell us as much about *why* these penalties exist (Heath and Cheung 2006; Midtbøen 2015). This indicates the importance of qualitatively examining specific labour market contexts in order to understand the causal mechanisms that lead to these results in specific contexts. Ethnic penalty studies nonetheless help to examine whether inequalities on the labour market exist regarding certain groups, and whether they can be contextualised together with other factors in order to illustrate how labour market integration processes are affected by a multitude of factors.

A segmented labour market

Other than comparisons between population groups, labour market studies have also highlighted general patterns on the labour market with regards to segmentation. On average, modern-day economies display a disproportionate number of migrants working in lower segments of the labour market in comparison to other population groups, and they disproportionately work in lower-paid jobs with lower status (Lusis and Bauder 2010:28–29, cf. Bauder 2006; Peck 1996; Dahlstedt and Emilsson 2023). This segmentation in respect to

migrants has been hypothesised to take place, at least in part, because of the devaluation of migrants' cultural capital on the labour market due to the geographic and historical specificity of human capital, including skills and education (Dahlstedt and Emilsson 2023:3; Erel 2010:643; Chiswick and Miller 2009), together with a dual labour market where well established citizens avoid low-wage jobs. Many resulting vacancies are then filled by migrants in vulnerable situations (Dahlstedt and Emilsson 2023:4). Furthermore, this process can become cyclical insofar as migrants' social capital, such as any networks they may have, may connect them "to occupation at the lower end of the labour market" in the destination country, perpetuating this pattern. In addition, their cultural capital may become most valuable in those segments of the labour market where their cultural background might be more valued (Lusis and Bauder 2010:38; Chiswick and Miller 2009). The fact that a labour market gap between migrants' and "native Swedes"' employment and wage levels may be reduced, but nonetheless remains even after accounting for education and time spent in Sweden (Rydgren 2004), indicates that more is probably at play than simply being unfamiliar with the (Swedish) labour market—such as discrimination.

Even though Sweden's labour market segmentation has been low in comparison to other countries, there are indications that segmentation levels have been rising in Sweden in recent years (Dahlstedt and Emilsson 2023; Plummer 2019). This background context makes it timely to study the Swedish labour market. Moreover, while labour market segmentation studies give us important clues regarding unequal labour market integration, discriminatory processes on the labour market, and how such processes function, there is less known about the individuals who comprise these statistics. Labour market segmentation approaches thus adopt less of an individual-focused view of integration. In particular, it would be helpful to know whether people's educational level and prior skills play a role is such segmentation, and whether these processes affect migrants in higher skilled professions as well.

Refugees as a heterogenous group

Quantitative methods, although often showcasing refugees as an overarching group, have also shown nuances within the group by revealing the heterogeneity of the refugee population who have been studied. Labour market integration and refugee family reunification migrants from Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and the former Yugoslavia have, for example, been compared in Sweden and Canada during 2007 (Bevelander and Pendakur 2014). Some of the findings indicate that the labour market outcomes vary depending on gender and country of birth, with people born in the former Yugoslavia having higher levels of employment than the other groups (Bevelander and Pendakur 2014).

This hints at the existence of contextual and intersectional differences that have been identified in other studies as well. For example, although the differences between refugees and other types of migrants when it comes to employment in the years immediately after arrival in the host country are quite high in most studies, some studies have found that refugee labour market integration is on the same level as that of other non-economic migrants (Connor 2010). Cortes (2004) demonstrates that refugees may perform even better in some cases in the United States, while DeVoretz, Pivenko and Beiser (2004) argue that there do not seem to be any substantial differences over time, which contrasts with studies showing that the gap between refugee and other migrants remains large (Aydemir 2011). While the reasons for these results are not clear, the differences in study results are hypothesised to be due to individual factors, such as mental and physical health issues tied to the asylum-process, language proficiency, level of education, and recognition of previously acquired skills and education (Bevelander 2020:7). Once again, this hints at the significance of individual (agentic) perspectives in these types of studies, context-specific research, and the importance of qualitative data.

The importance of contextualising quantitative data with qualitative data is evident in approaches that combine, for example, register data and interviews (see e.g. Kelly and Hedman 2015). Such studies make it possible to see, on the basis of quantitative data, that a given phenomenon has emerged but also to gain a better understanding, through the use of qualitative data, of why it has emerged. For example, Kelly and Hedman (2015), in their study of Iranian-born people who arrived in Sweden in the 1980s and 1990s and have since left the country, show that the majority of them moved to a third country (Kelly and Hedman 2015:650). Their findings reveal that the Iranian refugees, who on average were highly educated, encountered employment difficulties even after having lived in Sweden for a longer period of time, and that people with a higher level of education who experienced difficulties in finding employment were more likely to migrate onward. Kelly and Hedman were able to reveal the reasons for this move through a combination of registry and interview data—unemployment difficulties, among other factors, contributed to decisions to leave the country (Kelly and Hedman 2015).

These studies showcase the importance of context, particularly the use of qualitative approaches in order to contextualise statistical studies. They reveal not only that the country of origin, level of education, gender, and other factors can interact and create different prerequisites for labour market integration, but also that this can be the case to such an extent that it comprises a factor in people's decision to move to another country.

Agency, structure, opportunities and constraints: Individual and structural factors affecting labour market integration

The studies noted above have indicated not only that refugees on average have lower employment levels than other population groups, and that migrants generally have lower salaries and occupy lower segments of labour markets than other groups in comparisons, but also that context can be important for gaining an understanding of differences within the heterogenous group of "refugees". This section will provide additional detail regarding the results of previous studies in respect to opportunities for and obstacles to labour market integration, highlighting more qualitative results as well.

The unequal labour market levels indicated above have been explained and hypothesised in previous studies as being due to a variety of employment obstacles that exist for refugees in particular. On the one hand, studies have shown that *individual* factors may give rise to difficulties in accessing employment for refugees—including individual capabilities, experience, and psychological factors. This veers toward a perspective that focuses on the agency and responsibility of immigrants in respect to labour market integration. On the other, various results have instead highlighted *structural* barriers to and constraints upon agency, such as structural discrimination or obstacles related to legislation, that prevent refugees and other immigrants from being able to access employment.

From an individual-focused perspective, previous research has posited that it is important to take into account the fact that

> highly skilled refugees need time to become proficient in the receiving country's language, to familiarize themselves with the labour market and to search for employment in their field of expertise (van Riemsdijk and Axelsson 2021:10).

However, individual factors are also intertwined with structural factors—as was argued in Chapter 3, the division between structural and individual is for analytical, not ontological, purposes. The existence of supporting structures, which are not always directly associated with the labour market, is also important, such as the possibility for access to stable housing (van Riemsdijk 2024).

Economic factors as well as those associated with an individual's language abilities have also been addressed in previous research. For example, it has been found that the financial constraints which refugees face affect their ability to take part in language courses and professional re-training courses (Ganassin and Johnstone Young 2020). In addition, refugees can be pushed into taking jobs outside their field due to the need for financial independence after having received the right to work following long waiting times (Smyth and

Kum 2010:518). Gaps may also exist with regards to funding benefits during a given refugee's trajectory to employment (van Riemsdijk 2024).

An individual's language proficiency is one of the factors most frequently discussed in previous literature in terms of having an effect upon possibility that refugees and immigrants have for obtaining employment (see Cheung and Phillore 2014; Ganassin and Johnstone Young 2020; Auer 2018; Ghio, Bratti and Bignami 2023; Esser 2006). Not only is a higher level of language proficiency positively associated with labour market outcomes (Gazzola, Wickström and Templin 2019), it can also affect how one's professional qualifications are evaluated (Esser 2006). In addition, language-related factors are discussed in relation to both the individual and the structures with which they come into contact. However, Bucken-Knapp, Fakih and Spehar (2018) have found that refugees with a higher education were particularly critical of the Swedish language courses that are offered to immigrants. The latter complained of a

> perceived lack of actual teaching, the mixed skill level groups, and the sense that one's ability to progress through the courses levels is largely arbitrary and based on the whim of the teacher (2018:232).

This indicates that "the mere existence of policies, programmes and measures intended to eradicate migrant skill deficits do not imply that they will be successful" (2018:233).

I would also argue that such studies show that adding a structural perspective can highlight the barriers within structures and the importance of examining such important issues as the quality of language teaching that has been provided, including how such skills should be taught. However, insofar as individual-centred results can often focus on what refugees "lack"—such as language skills—they adopt a "deficit" perspective regarding refugees. This can come to be associated with a tendency to "*individualize* integration as a matter of their [migrant's] ability and *willingness* to engage in cultural and linguistic adaptation to the host country" (Omanović, Tarim and Holck 2022:175).

Other factors that arguably accord with the same "deficit" perspective also show that refugees may experience difficulties obtaining employment due to cultural differences (Vončina and Marin 2019) or because they "lack" perceived "Swedish" cultural capital (Abdelhady and Al Ariss 2023, Carlbaum 2022). "Cultural knowledge" and "social knowledge" are viewed as helpful for gaining employment (Kogan et al. 2011). However, the fact that "cultural capital" can possess a "different value in different geographical contexts" disadvantages migrants since their capital may be devalued on the labour market of the destination country (Lusis and Bauder 2010:37–38). While perspectives that articulate the cultural capital or knowledge which immigrants or refugees "lack" often have an individual focus, this point could instead be framed from a relational perspective in terms of the cultural differences that involve

refugees, the "receiving" country, as well as employers, which is seldom highlighted. Furthermore, a structural focus would make it possible to give consideration to a lack of diversity training for organisations and employers or a lack of preparation for organisations and hiring mechanisms regarding the various different types of employees with whom they will come into contact.

The same type of criticism—that institutions are not set up to deal with the differences that exist within society—can be directed to individual-centred results that focus on refugees' lack of social networks. Labour market integration is often shown to be more difficult for refugees due to the fact that they do not have the "correct"—or even any—social network in the new country (Cheung and Phillimore 2014; Diedrich et al. 2020, citing Bevelander 2011; Segendorf and Teljosuo 2011; Andersson and Hammarstedt 2015). This is particularly the case since hiring often occurs through professional networks. A lack of social networks and contacts is indeed often regarded as one of the main reasons why, on average, highly educated people born outside of Sweden encounter in obtaining employment and are not employed at the same level as highly educated people born in the country (Statistics Sweden 2019). While these are individual factors that affect people's experiences, they neither take structural factors into consideration, nor cast light on how hiring procedures—such as network-based hiring—can disadvantage some groups of qualified applicants more than others (see Rydgren 2004). This leaves important elements out of the picture.

Previous studies have also highlighted how geographical factors, such as local labour market contexts, can influence labour market integration (Hedberg and Tammaru 2013). In the Swedish case, refugees enjoy the most advantageous prospects in finding their first employment in the Stockholm region, but also at the opposite end of the population density scale—in rural regions and small cities (Vogiazides and Mondani 2020). The neighbourhood in which a given immigrant has settled (Hedberg and Tammaru 2013), or the area in which they have been placed, is thus important in defining the labour market integration context. Studies have also indicated that different migrant groups settle in different areas, which might hint at the importance of contextual factors in choosing where to live. For example, migrants with a higher education and those with lower education are generally found to settle in different areas in Sweden. The former are more likely to live in urban areas, whereas migrants with a lower education are more likely to settle in rural ones (Khaef and Haandrikman 2024).

While some of the above-mentioned factors influencing labour market integration can also affect individuals other than refugees, one factor that may be over-represented among refugees fleeing persecution concerns psychological issues due to previous trauma connected with the reasons for seeking asylum (Diedrich et al. 2020:5; SOU 2003:73; Bevelander 2011; Bevelander and Pendakur 2014; Delmi 2015; Åhs and Daryani 2018). These may lead to personal difficulties and make seeking employment or retaining employment

challenging. From a structural perspective, this can be tied either to inadequate psychological support having been provided to individuals who have sought protection from traumatic events, or to the need for certain areas within psychological healthcare in general requiring improvement.

Specifically in respect to refugees with a prior higher education, their labour market integration process can also be influenced by difficulties arising from the recognition process regarding their previous education and existing qualifications and skills (Vončina and Marin 2019; van Riemsdijk 2024). Another commonly discussed issue is the depreciation of human capital and existing credentials because of the asylum process and the need to re-accredit one's skills and education (Bevelander 2020:1). This ties into the notion of duration dependence in general—namely, that long-term unemployment has a negative effect on the ability to find work again (see Kroft, Lange and Notowidigdo 2013; National Institute of Economic Research 2014; Lyshol, Nenov and Wevelstad 2021).

However, this question can also be related to the character of legislation and to bureaucratic processes that take up time. These types of bureaucratic hurdles can arise in the organisation of integration initiatives, which do not always focus on the employment needs of the refugee participants (Diedrich et al. 2020; citing Diedrich and Styhre 2013 and Qvist 2017). Legislation and local bureaucracy have been found, for example, to have complicated the labour market integration process for five highly skilled refugees in different fields in the UK (civil engineer), in Scotland specifically (refugee teacher) (Smyth and Kum 2010), in the Netherlands, and in Austria (Ganassin and Johnstone Young 2020). In the Scottish case, which goes into profession-specific detail, a refugee teacher's employment integration was hindered due to legal structures that first treated them as asylum-seekers, not as a professional who sought to actively practice their profession (Smyth and Kum 2010:520).

Another structural factor that was found to create barriers toward teaching in Scotland was the wait needed to receive legal status, which made participants feel as if they were "in limbo" and not part of society (Smyth and Kum 2010:514). Furthermore, strict institutional requirements caused delays, such as needing police reports from their home countries in order to apply for a teaching license. This is a structural factor that creates great constraints specifically for refugees, who may not have access to these documents from the country they fled precisely because of their refugee situation (Smyth and Kum 2010:515, see also Kum, Menter and Smyth 2008). Legal status can thus not only lead to discrimination, but also exacerbate the discrimination refugees face on other levels (Smyth and Kum 2010:519).

Discrimination and racism on the labour market

Labour market discrimination and racism are one of the key factors shown to affect labour market integration. In the Swedish context, although wage gaps have been relatively small in comparison to other countries, they have been increasing since the 1990s (Boréus, Neergaard and Sohl 2021:14). It is worthy of note that Sweden's labour market inequalities have been growing at a faster pace than in other OECD countries, even if they began to do so from a comparatively low level of inequality (Boréus, Neergaard and Sohl 2021:19, see also OECD 2017 and Piketty 2020). This can be contextualised in part by previous studies that reveal discriminatory and racist practices that take place on the labour market. Labour market discrimination studies have been conducted in many OECD countries (for a list see Midtbøen 2015), and even though results are varied

> not a single study has concluded that discrimination is *not* a relevant factor in shaping access to employment for racial and ethnic minority groups (Midtbøen 2015:190).

Discrimination and racism are processes that can shape labour market integration due to their creation of unequal labour market opportunities, and they can be both individual, with given individuals discriminating against or racialising other individuals, and structural, with social structures being organised in specific ways that are more advantageous to certain people and not others.

Studies have shown how both structural and individual discrimination, along with racism and xenophobia, create obstacles to the labour market participation of certain individuals and groups (see Schwarz n.d.; Mesfin and Mamuye 2020; Eriksson 2019; de Alcantara Hamrin 2019; de los Reyes and Kamali 2005; Knocke 2000; Vončina and Marin 2019). In addition, exclusion processes are present in hiring procedures, which has been shown through studies that found managers to be less likely to hire workers with a different national origin than their own (Åslund, Hensvik and Skans 2014). Moreover, fictitious job application experiments have shown that applicants with foreign names, particularly Middle Eastern, Arabic, or North African sounding names, are less likely to be called to interviews than applicants with traditionally Swedish sounding names (see Bursell and Bygren (IFAU) 2023; Carlsson and Rooth 2007: Bursell 2014).

Other studies have highlighted the specifically racist element in such exclusion. It has been demonstrated, for example, that people in Sweden born in Sub-Saharan Africa or with a Sub-Saharan background have fewer opportunities on the Swedish labour market in the form of a

> glass ceiling that prevents Afro-Swedes from progressing in their career in competition with the rest of the population, even when Afro-Swedes possess the same or more qualifications as other candidates for a desired position (Wolgast, Molina and Gardell 2018:9).

Even when taking educational achievement into account, Afro-Swedes were found to have lower salary levels and less disposable income than the rest of the population. Moreover, they were under-represented in leadership and management positions and were on average unemployed for longer periods of time (Wolgast, Molina and Gardell 2018). While none of the interviewees in my study are of Sub-Saharan descent, these results help affirm the presence of discriminatory obstacles on the Swedish labour market in respect to "visible minorities" or visible and invisible migrants (cf. Leinonen and Toivanen 2014)—that is, people, often racialised, seemingly "distinguishable from most of the native population by physical appearance and by name" (Gustavsson, Katz and Österberg 2017:2).

These types of exclusionary factors can be due to individuals, such as employers, discriminating against specific ethnicities, genders, perceived races, age, or an intersection of these factors, but they have also been shown to be structural in many cases. Rydgren (2004), for example, has identified mechanisms of exclusion on the Swedish labour market such as stereotyped thinking, the effects of having separate and ethnically homogenous networks, and institutional discrimination. Whereas stereotyped thinking can be practised by individuals in hiring situations in respect to excluding ethnic minorities, institutional discrimination occurs, for example,

> When apparently neutral requirements or working practice affects certain ethnic groups more than others, or when certain rules, instructions or everyday practices within a social system have intended or unintended discrimination consequences (Rydgren 2004:711).

This could involve requiring "good" spoken and written Swedish regardless of the nature of the job, whether or not it is necessary for being understood on the job, or whether or not the job requires good "Swedish" social skills (Rydgren 2004; Höglund 2000). Racism and discrimination at Swedish workplaces and on the labour market can thus be found both in explicit racist, xenophobic, or discriminatory statements by key individuals (individual discrimination), and in structural organisation and the taken-for-granted labour market practices (structural discrimination).

Individual and structural discrimination and racism—the former pertaining to agency and the latter to social structures—can be fruitfully explored in terms of structure-and-agency paradigms insofar as they have been found to be interconnected. Even though Groglopo, Ahmadi and Munobwa (2023) do not employ a structure and agency framework in their study of structural racism in Sweden, the interlinkage between the two nonetheless becomes clear.

> [O]ur take is that prejudiced attitudes can contribute to structural racism by shaping individuals' beliefs and actions, which, in turn, can influence social norms, policies and practices within institutions. (…) Structural racism, in turn, perpetuates and reinforces prejudiced attitudes (Groglopo, Ahmadi and Munobwa 2023:16).

Comparing the results of labour market integration research

As was noted at the beginning of this chapter, labour market integration studies often focus on a conceptualisation of integration that is akin to domain-related integration (see Chapter 2), with the focus being on migrant individuals obtaining any form of employment. The conducted overview of labour market research has provided, however, much material to work with in future studies that conceptualise labour market integration as a broad relational morphogenesis process. The overview of the literature, for instance, reveals that the labour market, in many ways, does not provide equal access to everyone. These types of studies are useful for other notions of integration insofar as comparisons can reveal higher or lower levels of equal labour market relations between chosen groups.

Viewing labour market integration through the lens of morphogenetic, broad and relational integration, as I do in this thesis, can be compared to prior scholarship concerning employment and labour market (in)equality (cf. Sarter 2023). For example, although employment equality has often been left undefined or under-theorised, as has also been the case with labour market integration, it has nonetheless been studied in terms of unequal employment levels between men and women (Razzu 2014), low-skilled and high-skilled men (Wolcott 2021); women with and without children (Hook and Pettit 2016); and among members of migrant families (Shauman 2010), with migrant women being shown to be "less active" on the labour market than migrant men (Ala-Mantila and Fleischmann 2018).

Furthermore, previous studies on labour market integration which show that refugees have lower employment levels than other migrants as well as the majority population (cf. Bevelander 2011) can be taken as indicating a lack of employment opportunity *equality* among such groups. These types of results can also be compared with the research on labour market discrimination and racism highlighted above, which also reveal inequality in access to the labour market on the basis of perceived race or ethnicity instead of factors relevant to the job in question (cf. Rydgren 2004; de los Reyes and Kamali 2005; Diedrich et al. 2020; Knocke 2000; Mesfin and Mamuye 2020, citing Schwarz n.d.; see also Mestheneos and Ioannidi 2002). The results of studies concerning unequal access to jobs due to gender, migration status, racism or discrimination are thus very relevant for conceptualisations of

broad, relational, labour market integration insofar as they highlight the fact of unequal labour market access among various types of (heterogenous) people.

PART 2: RESEARCH ON WORKPLACE INTEGRATION

Studies focusing on workplace integration are less common than those that address labour market integration, although research has also examined the workplace under the label of "labour market integration" (see e.g. Khan-Gökkaya and Möskö 2021). This indicates that the one is sometimes regarded as an umbrella term for the other, and that the concept of integration in respect to the labour market is not always clearly delineated or defined.

However, there are only a minimal number of studies that focus on *refugee workplace* integration rather than migrant integration or integration on the labour market. Moreover, there is a lack of research concerning the workplace integration of *highly skilled refugees* and the workplace (and labour market) experiences of refugee engineers. The investigation of these questions constitutes one of the major empirical contributions of my thesis.

Workplace integration has been examined not only with regard to refugees and migrants (Yanar, Nasir, Massoud, Usmani, Premji and Smith 2022; Khan-Gökkaya and Mösko 2021; Glauninger 2020; Schmidt and Müller 2021; Hirst et al. 2021; Lai, Shankar and Khalema 2017), but also in respect regard to people who are not necessarily migrants, including people with disabilities (Ward and Baker 2005) as well as all workers at a given workplace (Moqbel and Nah 2017). The studies that focus on non-migrants are generally less common, however, perhaps because keywords such as "integration" have so strongly been associated with migrants in past research and public discourse.

The meaning of workplace integration in previous studies

While research concerning refugee workplace integration has been rather limited in the past, the number of studies has grown in recent years, notably in the fields of management and human relations. The definitions of workplace integration in such research are varied, but they are typically related to such social aspects of the issue as "onboarding/socialisation" at the workplace (Hirst et al. 2021:785); social belongingness to a group (Glauninger 2020:12); "practices, mechanisms and results of personal and group interaction" (Schmidt and Müller 2021:146); and "connectedness with the organization and their co-workers" (Moqbel and Nah 2017:265). In addition, since workplace integration involves an element of equality, it has been discussed in

terms of having "comparable opportunities for advancement and workplace outcomes as other workers" (Hirst et al. 2021:785, see also Lee et al. 2020 and Rajendran, Farquharson and Hewege 2017). It has also been addressed in such terms as "having equal rights and opportunities to participate in central spheres of organisation life as well as decision-making" concerning workplace norms and expectations (Glauninger 2020:11). It is important to note that this comprises a relational or "mutual" process (Schmidt and Müller 2021:147) performed by everyone together (Glauninger 2020:11), and that it applies to everyone at a workplace, not only migrants or refugees. Social connections also need to be established among employees and with management in order to achieve workplace integration (Moqbel and Nah 2017:265). These types of definitions are more closely connected to the understanding of integration that I employ in this thesis.

Theoretically, different studies address workplace integration in different ways. For example, although Ward and Baker do not explicitly conceptualise integration, they refer to social capital and discuss integration *into* a larger community and workplace (2005:145)—which means that integration is something that an outsider does in order to become part of something else. Similarly, Rajendran, Farquharson and Hewege (2017) do not discuss in detail how they conceptualise integration, but they clearly adopt a perspective rooted in workplace diversity management. In contrast, Lai et al (2017) utilise a conceptual framework that is based on group integration and Bourdieu's notion of institutional cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984, 1986). This approach regards workplace integration as, among other things, something that occurs through a "person's understanding and performance of group 'rules' and principles", coupled with "individual knowledge of workplace norms, conventions, and rules or expectations of behaviour and conduct" (Lai et al 2017: 941).

Other perspectives, such as that employed by Ghorashi (2021) in her study of Iranian women's integration on the labour market and broader inclusion in the Netherlands, distinguish between such concepts as "integration" and "inclusion". Integration is defined in its policy sense as "meant to enable a position for minorities within a certain context, be it an organization or a society", and as related to obtaining employment. Inclusion instead takes "a more comprehensive approach to participation in which spaces are created to value the presence and contribution of minorities" (Ghorashi 2021:88). Ghorashi demonstrates in her analysis that policy understandings of integration maintain the notion of "altering individuals" (the newcomers), focusing on their shortcomings, or victimising newcomers. Instead of leading to inclusion, this can serve to maintain hierarchical structures (Ghorashi 2021:99, see also Holvino and Kamp 2009 and Ghorashi 2014). This approach thus juxtaposes civic integrationist perspectives with a broader approach, although it remains focused on the evaluation of minorities rather than on comparisons between people's (un)equal workplace opportunities or a relational, morphogenetic process that applies to all.

Workplace segregation

While labour market studies have shown that the entire labour market is segmented, quantitative workplace studies have shown that workplaces are segregated as well. This indicates that segregation does not only occur between professions, but that workplaces themselves have a tendency to be homogenous—that is, even two similar workplaces can have different worker compositions. Swedish workplaces have been found to be segregated on the basis of ethnicity, for example, with studies showing that Swedish-born and foreign-born workers are segregated and overexposed to their own group. Åslund and Skans (2010), utilising data concerning the Swedish workforce between 1985–2002, found that Swedish-born employees, at their workplaces, on average have a higher degree of Swedish colleagues and a lower level of immigrant colleagues than would be expected, with immigrants similarly having a higher degree of immigrant colleagues and a lower degree of Swedish-born colleagues than would be anticipated. This holds true when level of education, gender, age, industry, and region are accounted for, with Åslund and Skans (2010) proposing that not only social networks, but also discrimination and ethnic labour market segmentation are contributing factors.

Moreover, even though workplace segregation is more commonly experienced by individuals who have recently arrived in Sweden, segregation "does not disappear as time in Sweden increases" (Åslund and Skans 2010:489). Workplace segregation is also correlated with low economic status and lower employment levels, which further suggests an ethnically segmented labour market where "certain groups are considered 'secondary' by some employers" (Åslund and Skans 2010:489). These results are also correlated with the historical contexts in which they occur. For example, the period that Åslund and Skans (2010) studied (1985–2002) saw a growth in segregation, and they hypothesised that this was affected by, among other things, structural changes in the Swedish labour market at that time, such as the decentralisation of wage bargaining and an increase in temporary contracts (Åslund and Skans 2010:489).

Segregation in workplaces along the lines of ethnicity and perceived race can be reinforced not only by discriminatory employers, but also by employee preferences—employees have been shown to favour having colleagues who belong to their own ethno-racial group. Secondary preferences have been shown to include people with high labour market status and, in addition, it was found in previous studies that immigrant women were preferred as colleagues over immigrant men, which revealed intersectionality regarding preferences (Bursell and Jansson 2018).

While the fact that people who had worked at workplaces "numerically dominated by minorities" showed "preferences for diversity" (Bursell and Jansson 2018:72:) to a higher degree could mean that people chose these workplace because of preference, it could also be due to the "contact

hypothesis" (Allport 1954)—"that is, that an increased frequency of positive and meaningful social interactions between groups improves attitudes toward out-groups" (Bursell and Jansson 2018:72).

Finally, although studies of workplace segregation often do not engage with conceptualisations of integration, they can still be useful for pointing out a lack of workplace integration insofar as they can indicate that employees are not valued as colleagues at the workplace first and foremost for their skills or experience, but rather for their ethnicity or race.

Agency, structure, opportunities and constraints: Individual and structural factors affecting workplace integration

Factors that affect workplace integration have been found to include a broad range of obstacles that are contextual and depend on people's employers and work environments (Khan-Gökkaya and Möskö 2021). Some results which are specifically tied to the workplace reveal that problems can arise for refugees by virtue of the working cultures at new workplaces that are different from those in their country of origin (Khan-Gökkaya and Mösko 2021; Diedrich et al. 2020; Graham and Soininen 1998; Lundh and Ohlsson 1999; Delmi 2015; Riksrevisionen 2015). Migrants have been found to experience difficulties in adapting to new workplace cultures and in workplace interaction (Lai, Shankar and Khalema 2017). This can be framed in terms of individual obstacles—for example, that it takes time for any newcomer at a given workplace to learn the way things are done there—but it can take even longer if they are also new to the country. This can also be tied to structural obstacles having to do with taken-for-granted and unstated rules whereby "Swedishness" is hierarchically perceived as dominant, with a hidden demand for a type of nebulous "Swedish social (and communicative) competence" (Höglund 2000:28, translated by I.B.).

This communicative competence is also related to language ability, which, in addition to shaping labour market experiences, has also been shown to shape integration processes at the workplace. A study of Iranian female refugees in the Netherlands, Ghorashi (2021) found, for example, that not only did research participants feel insecure about their language ability, their colleagues at certain workplaces viewed their language mistakes as a social weakness. The Iranian women in the study were active and willing to "integrate", but at the same time they consequently faced othering. Highly skilled refugees can also feel disadvantaged because of a lack of knowledge of specific types of languages used at their concrete workplace or in their particular field (see e.g. Khan-Gökkaya and Möskö 2021).

Workplace integration is also affected by challenges related to the recognition and validation of prior professional qualifications and experience, and by whether one is given the opportunity to use their previous skills at their new workplace (Khan-Gökkaya and Möskö 2021; Lai, Shankar and Khalema 2017; Hirst et al.2021). This can be associated with colleagues and managers not showing that they understand the previous qualifications of the new arrivals. Managers, colleagues, and administrators such as HR professionals have been shown to, overall, play an important role in workplace integration (Hirst et al. 2021). For example, workplace integration is affected by whether employers have cultural diversity management skills (Vončina and Marin 2019; Lai, Shankar and Khalema 2017), which can make them better equipped to understand the diverse backgrounds of employees and how this affects a workplace.

Positive effects on workplace integration processes have been found to involve both formal and informal strategies (Rajendran, Farquharson and Hewage 2017). More formal strategies include workplace training, onboarding and employee introduction programmes, internship programmes (Rajendran, Farquharson and Hewage 2017; Hirst et al. 2021), and the utilisation of "a diversity committee with policies regarding bullying, and a specific training for non-native English speakers" (Rajendran, Farquharson and Hewage 2017:449). We should note, however, that training for only non-native speakers does not necessarily conform with a relational idea of integration, which much more readily accords with training for all colleagues, not just the "out group". Access to professional mentors, and continuous access to education, learning opportunities, and professional development have also been viewed as advantageous for workplace integration (Lai, Shankar and Khalema 2017; Hirst et al. 2021).

Less formally, other important factors for workplace integration include

> having a good manager and supportive colleagues, being "lucky enough" to have an empathetic supervisor and helpful co-workers, and, in particular, having a supervisor who was also a migrant and altruistic in motivation and behaviour (Rajendran, Farquharson and Hewege 2017:450).

The above-mentioned factors that affect workplace integration can be framed as both individual and structural. For example, managers can individually shape people's workplace experiences in various ways, and being "lucky enough" to have a good, friendly and empathetic supervisor (Rajendran, Farquharson and Hewege 2017:450) can be tied to the individual personalities of managers and colleagues. Nonetheless, this is also a question of whether there are rules set in place for formalised programmes and workplace training, with onboarding programmes also being a matter of certain structures being in place at the workplaces.

Discrimination and racism at the workplace

Discrimination and racism have been highlighted not only in labour market studies, but also in studies focusing on the workplace. The increasing inequality evident on the labour market is a factor that undoubtedly also affects Swedish working life (Boréus, Neergaard and Sohl 2021:13–14; Dahlstedt and Neergaard 2019). For example, many scholars have revealed the racialisation processes taking place in Sweden—processes whereby conceptualisations of racial and ethnic categories take on certain meanings that affect people's lives and daily workplace experiences (Boréus, Neergaard and Sohl 2021:21; Miles 1993; also see Molina 1997 on racialisation). These may include categorisations that lead to the unequal treatment of people thus categorised as, on the one hand, "Swedes" and, on the other, people of colour, "immigrants", or "Muslims" (Boréus, Neergaard and Sohl 2021:21). From a critical realist perspective, these types of categories can have actual causal effects (Elder-Vass 2010) even though they are socially constructed, making them important topics of study. Furthermore, these tendencies can permeate all social spheres, including workplaces. In general, findings from workplace integration studies have revealed that workplace discrimination decreases both social cohesion and mutual benefits for workplace members (Ward and Baker 2005).

For example, results focusing on the workplace have shown that refugee teachers experience discrimination during school placements because of racism and prejudice associated with them being foreigners or people of colour (Smyth and Kum 2010:516). Discrimination and exploitation have also been identified in respect to refugee health professionals in Germany, who were paid below the minimum wage (Khan-Gökkaya and Möskö 2021). Discrimination at the workplace has been found to include both "subtle and less-than-subtle" racism (Rajendran, Farquharson and Hewege 2017:449) as well as the othering of perceived "out groups", which includes even white English-speakers from other than the host country (see Rajendran, Farquharson and Hewege 2017:449).

Although there are no studies of workplace discrimination in Sweden for many professions, a number of studies have focused on experiences of racism specifically at elderly care workplaces. This racism occurs in the form of Swedish workers preferring to work with other Swedish workers rather than their immigrant colleagues. It may involve ethnic stereotyping (Boréus, Behtoui, Mörkenstan, Neergaard and Yazdanpanah 2021), with immigrant workers being ignored by patients who prefer to pay attention only to Swedish or light-skinned workers; patients who do not want to be treated by people of colour or by people wearing religious head-coverings; or immigrant workers having to deal with patients who directly comment on their skin tone (Lill 2021; Selberg 2021). Despite this, immigrant workers have been shown to utilise strategies for handling these difficulties that include, for example, self-deprecating humour and irony (Lill 2021; Selberg 2021).

Other than discrimination based on ethnicity or race, other studies of industrial workers reveal how structural discrimination can occur in connection to gender roles. Mulinari, Räthzel and Tollefsen (2021) show that female industrial workers, for example, experience particular tensions between work and private life, especially when having to take care of young children and work at the same time.

Racism has also been identified at warehouse workplaces in Sweden, particularly with regards to workplace language policy. In a study of three warehouse workplaces, Rydström (2024) has found that the language management of the workplace, although not affecting actual language practices or done intentionally, reproduced "racialised divisions by assigning normalcy to Swedish language and strangeness to non-Swedish language". This was felt by workers with native languages other than Swedish (Rydström 2024:11, 13). Although the research participants who were interviewed (such as managers) claimed that enforcing a monolingual workplace policy was related to the need for inclusion in a diverse workplace, Swedish was treated in practice "as the only viable option" (Rydström 2024:8). This illustrates how racism can be both intentional and unintentional, existing in workplace structures and policies, and lead to a lack of equal workplace opportunities, with some workers seemingly valued more than others.

Moreover, ideas expressed among social service workers, as well as in Swedish civic orientation classes and media discourse, have been shown to reinforce stereotypical ideas and discourses about Sweden being more developed than immigrant countries. In addition, immigrants are juxtaposed as "other" to (white) "Swedes" who, as the core members of society, are the only ones who possess the "'right' language, culture, appearance, religion, history, and so on" (Eliassi 2017:28; Bauer, Milani, Brömssen and Spehar 2024). Such discourses—not unlike civic integrationist discourses—have been shown to reproduce ethnic hierarchies (Eliassi 2017). Hierarchies are also evident in initiatives aimed at helping asylum-seekers, which have been found to create unequal power hierarchies whereby the (often older female) volunteers exhibit caring, but also morally superior tendencies that (re)create differences between themselves and the perceived uneducated and infantilised other (Sluijs 2024).

Strategies that create equal workplaces, in contrast, have been found to be context-specific and without universal solutions. However, strategies for equality can include a willingness to create supportive and diverse work environments among people at the workplace, and they exhibit knowledge about inequality and the types of efforts for change that exist (Holgersson and Romani 2021).

As we see from the previous research on discrimination and racism in relation to workplaces, there has been somewhat of a lack of focus on "highly skilled" workplaces in the Swedish context. As a result, less is known about these workplaces, including the extent to which racism and discrimination

occur in these segments of the labour market, where highly skilled migrant minorities and refugees also work.

PART 3: INTERSECTIONALITY, STRUCTURE AND AGENCY

Intersectional factors and categorisations

Certain previous studies and theorising have highlighted the intersectional nature of the factors that affect both labour market and workplace integration, which is also important to take into account. Opportunities and obstacles at work are shaped, for example, by identities related to gender as well as "[a]ge, nationality, race, sexual preferences, bodily impairment, and class background" (de los Reyes 2017:14; see also de los Reyes and Mulinari 2005; Mulinari and Sellberg 2013).

The significance of intersectional factors and their effect on integration has been illustrated by labour market experimental studies. While both male and female immigrant names lead to disadvantages on the labour market in comparison to Swedish names, a person's gender can intersect with the category of ethnicity to create additional or fewer disadvantages and constraints upon agency. For instance, experimental studies have shown that *male* applicants with Middle Eastern or North African names experience stronger discrimination on the labour market than *female* applicants—which goes against common assumptions of how gender and ethnicity interact (for studies on Sweden and Denmark see Arai, Bursell and Nekby 2016; Dahl and Krog 2018; Bursell 2014; Bursell and Bygren 2023).

This is hypothesised as in part affected by negative male stereotypes for Arabic and North African men (Bursell 2014), which highlights how the intersection of gender and ethnicity can influence the process of labour market integration. Furthermore, while there is an ethnic penalty for female applicants with Arabic and North African names when they apply to female-dominated professions, this penalty is higher for African and North African male applicants in male-dominated occupations (Bursell 2014). This adds another layer to these results, revealing that the specific workplace and professional contexts are also important factors to take into consideration. The professional contexts are also important to take into account due to their effect on labour market discrimination results—ethnic discrimination appears more prevalent in occupations with lower levels of foreign-born workers, and it decreases in professions with higher levels of foreign-born workers (Bursell and Bygren 2023).

Another important intersection to keep in mind for this thesis is one that specifically involves migrants with a higher education, which can affect both their labour market and workplace experiences. For example, in a qualitative study of Iranian women in the Netherlands, the participants shared their reflections on how their education and work experience, rather than contributing to their inclusion, can create situations in which they are "being considered as a threat or as not fitting the image of the norm employee" (Ghorashi 2021:98). This highlights how being a refugee and being highly skilled are categories that can have different effects depending on the context. While being highly skilled in some instances brings privilege, it can conceivably be perceived as a threat in others or intersect with other factors that comprise a disadvantage.

Similarly, intersectionality becomes highly relevant in cases where the two categories of "refugee" and "highly skilled migrant" are combined (Mozetič 2018). For example, medical doctors with a refugee background in Sweden have been studied with regards to the intersection of their refugee and professional identities (Mozetič 2018). The refugee category was perceived as associated with "sitting around", having an inactive role, and spending time waiting to receive approval for asylum. This image was viewed as clashing with the respondents' identity as medical doctors, which, in contrast, was associated with being active in one's profession and having an active role in contributing to societal well-being (Mozetič 2018:248). Their intersecting identities caused disadvantages when they were working, taking the form of hospital guests not recognising them as doctors or making judgements about them based on their appearance and country of origin (Mozetič 2018: 249–250; 247–248).

Moreover, location arguably affects positionality. For example, although being a doctor can bring privileges in certain locations and outside professional contexts, being a *refugee* physician, especially after entering a workplace, makes refugee doctors experience disadvantages in comparison to Swedes and other migrants (Mozetič 2018). That is to say that being highly skilled, but also having a refugee background, can potentially create privileges in some senses, but not others. As Kynsilehto (2011) argues in her study of highly educated migrant women, these women can be considered partially privileged due to their education, but

> [w]ithin their trajectories in France and across the Mediterranean, these positionings vary depending, for example, on their positioning vis-a-vis the family, or on their placement in the labour market: whether or not their different skills are valued, and how skills are ethnicised (Kynsilehto 2011:1549).

On the basis of these intersectional factors, studying *highly skilled refugees* is significant since these intersecting categorisations and identities appear to create a labour market and workplace situation different from that of both "highly skilled" migrants and "low skilled" refugees. Furthermore, such intersectional results can also be useful when marrying individual and structural perspectives

insofar as they reveal that while each individual has their own individual identity/ies, the latter interact with various structures—such as discrimination on the labour market or a professional hierarchy—in various contexts and lead to disadvantages or privileges, to opportunities or constraints.

Previous research and frameworks of interrelated structure and agency

One important question that has not yet been discussed concerns how the different conceptualisations of integration discussed in Chapter 2 affect the ways in which structure and agency are dealt with in studies. I would argue that different conceptualisations also influence whether a given study focuses on individual factors, structural factors, or both. For example, studies that arguably lean more toward a civic integrationist perspective are more likely to fall into the individual responsibility discourse, whereby refugees and migrants are regarded as responsible for their own integration and are viewed as "lacking" certain things, such as language, social networks, finances, or a knowledge of Swedish working culture. They thus pay perhaps less explicit attention to the structural factors that affect their opportunities for integration. Conversely, if a study utilises a broad notion of integration, it is more likely that it will focus on at least some structural factors since they are embedded in the framework itself. For such reasons, it is of key importance to take into account the conceptualisation of integration that is employed in research.

Other tendencies from the previous research on integration can be associated with the traditions of certain research fields and methods insofar as particular fields and approaches are more likely to favour structure and/or agency. For example, positioning oneself within labour studies makes it more likely that one will focus on structural factors that can exploit workers and on collective agency, rather than individuals. Marxist approaches also tend to generally focus on structural rather than individual factors, as do approaches with a focus on structural discrimination and racialisation processes. Approaches utilising human capital theories, in contrast, focus mostly on individual-based factors affecting integration, and they need to be combined with other perspectives in order to also encompass, for example, the structural factors apparent on labour markets (Dahlstedt and Emilsson 2023:2). While migration studies often make mention of both structure and agency, this is less frequent in studies that utilise the "integration" concept. In addition, migration studies generally do not clearly discuss the relation between the two.

Management and organisational studies is one notable field in which the interrelation between structural and individual issues comes more obviously to the fore. Some recent research, while not framed in terms of "structure" and "agency", has discussed labour market and workplace integration in relation

to employment obstacles on the macro-level (such as larger structures or national levels of analysis), the meso-level (such as pertaining to organisations), and the micro-level (pertaining to the individual). This is not a frequently utilised approach, although its use is growing, and researchers using this perspective acknowledge that labour market and workplace integration across these levels "is usually only addressed implicitly (if at all)" in previous research (Bešić, Fóti and Vasileva 2022:209; see also Bešić, Diedrich and Aigner 2021). There is thus room for improvement in this regard. While these recent studies do not clearly theorise the *change* process of morphogenesis, they come a step closer in outlining relations between structural and individual factors.

For example, studies have viewed the labour market integration of refugees as pertaining to different interrelated levels, described in terms of "relational frameworks" (see Bešić, Diedrich and Aigner 2021; Bešić, Fóti and Vasileva 2022; Knappert, van Dijk and Ross 2020). This use of the term "relational" differs from the way in which "relational integration" in used this thesis, that is, not as equal opportunities between all, but rather as between different levels of analysis. While these levels can vary in such studies, they are often framed as "institutional" (obstacles to obtaining employment in relation to legislation and policy); "individual" (obstacles related to lack of knowledge about the new country of residence); and "organisational" (obstacles relating to initiatives and programmes that support refugees) levels (Bešić, Fóti and Vasileva 2022; see also Smith 2000 and Jones III et al. 2017 for an elaboration on scale). Both the institutional and organisational levels are included in the concept of social structure that I employ in my critical realist approach to structure and agency. In addition, a fourth level may be included at times, namely, the national or country level (Knappert, van Dijk and Ross 2020)

All of these levels are viewed as interrelated, and it is within their interplay that labour market integration occurs. This has implications for the challenges to refugee employment that emerge (Bešić, Fóti and Vasileva 2022). In certain instances, it is also acknowledged that these levels of analysis—structural, organisational and individual—influence and reconstitute each other:

> In other words, macro-national and meso-organisational phenomena are a result of—and are in turn influenced by—micro-individual activities with potentially important implications for individual-level opportunities and outcomes (Bešić, Diedrich and Aigner 2021:3–4).

More specifically, Bešić, Fóti and Vasileva (2022), for example, have studied public service organisations that organise initiatives for refugee labour market integration, and they have found that the challenges refugees face involve all three of these interrelated levels. The resulting problems can include the personal challenges refugees face, policy-related challenges, as well as organisational staffing issues. This interrelation is evident in the domain of health,

for instance—while health issues are considered to be an individual issue (individual level), public service organisations (organisational level) may not be able to provide adequate health support since they, in turn, can be affected by institutional funding constraints (institutional level) (Bešić, Fóti and Vasileva 2022:215).

Similarly, the labour market integration of refugees can be affected by matters within labour market integration organisations, such as furloughed employees and a lack of volunteers during the Covid-19 pandemic (Bešić, Diedrich and Aigner 2021). This reveals that the problems which refugees face when seeking employment cannot be framed solely in individual terms. Other ways in which the above noted levels were interrelated concerned, for example, how national-level media coverage influences individuals' awareness of the problems that refugees face, which could lead various organisations to becoming more involved in refugee integration measures. Similarly, while individual motivation has been found to be an important factor for workplace integration, it was itself influenced by the legislative hurdles that refugees face, which can affect their motivation (Knappert, van Dijk and Ross 2020).

These studies, while very limited in number, comprise a first step in showcasing the interrelatedness of structure and agency with regards to labour market and workplace integration, although they do not conceptualise it in specifically structure-agency terms. However, such studies do not necessarily focus on the concept and process of integration itself, but rather on how challenges to finding employment occur at different (interrelated) levels. Their approach to labour market integration is also quite pragmatic, focusing on the challenges and what can be done to ameliorate them. Moreover, the conceptualisation of integration employed within these studies is often not discussed with regards to equality, but rather in respect to obtaining employment (as discussed in Chapter 2).

Similarly, studies utilising broad conceptualisations of integration have highlighted the interrelated nature of integrational domains, not structure and agency. However, they can provide a useful starting point for illustrating how integrational change processes take place, simultaneously at different times and to different degrees. The few studies that utilise this framework have shown, for example, how integration processes in the field of the labour market can be coupled with constraints or opportunities in other domains. Examples provided include how some research participants who did not have employment and remained "inactive in the labour market" (Spencer and Charsley 2016:13), were at the same time very active in social life and in civic spheres. This illustrates how integration processes in different domains may not occur simultaneously or equal to one another. Other participants faced economic challenges in converting prior professional qualifications from abroad, which created obstacles to employment, but this also allowed for positive effects within family life and a growth in individual human capital. In other instances,

being employed affected other domains negatively, such as integration into social life (Spencer and Charsley 2016).

What previous studies have revealed—even those not highlighting this interplay—is that both structural and individual factors have been found to affect labour market and workplace integration. This makes it clear that both of these factors exist, which also makes obvious the importance of taking both into consideration when studying integration processes. Various previous studies have focused more on individual factors (such as an individual's language ability or personal networks); others more on structural factors (such as structural racism and discrimination or bureaucratic hurdles); while yet others include both. A morphogenetic approach to integration can provide a first step toward taking these results further by making us consider, more explicitly, how structure and agency interact in integration processes.

The list of factors found to influence integration in previous studies can provide a good basis for proceeding further in research insofar as they provide a good overview of the types of issues that have been shown to constrain or enable labour market and workplace integration. In addition, the results provided in a given study can be fruitfully compared to results from other populations in order to gain an understanding of them from a relational, broad, and morphogenetic perspective. Comparing different population groups to each other could thus reveal unequal processes of integration if some populations are found to be more disadvantaged than others on the labour market and at the workplace. Comparisons can thus be fruitful both between studies and within studies when they address, for example, the employment levels of the entire population in respect to particular groups. It can also be important to contextualise studies focusing on the obstacles to employment for refugees and immigrants with other groups that are found to be "far" from the labour market.

From a broader perspective, the factors found to affect integration in prior studies implicitly highlight the extent to which structural factors, individual factors, or a mixture of both have been previously taken to affect labour market and workplace integration processes—although most of these studies discuss it neither in these terms, nor in terms of the interrelation between structure and agency. Perhaps most importantly, the factors identified, although they pertain to both structure and agency, are often framed in a way that highlights either individual or structural issues, not both, in their explanations.

This is displayed in a simplified manner in Table 6**,** which provides examples of some of the factors found in previous research and illustrates how they can be framed as either structurally, or individually focused. This table is not intended to suggest that the perspectives are dichotomous, or that they are not deeply intertwined. They instead present an analytical duality and a simplified perspective of reality that highlights only some of the factors found in the literature. What is shown clearly is that both structural and individual perspectives are important for understanding both labour market and workplace

integration processes in terms of opportunities and constraints. This is why structure and agency comprises a fruitful perspective—aided by understanding integration as a morphogenetic process that highlights how structure and agency interact and (re)create each other. Using a morphogenetic structure and agency approach toward integration entails paying attention to both aspects and understanding how they interact—with the structural operating with a longer timeframe than the individual.

Table 6: Examples of individual, structural, and structure-agency focused explanations of factors affecting labour market and workplace integration

Example factor affecting integration	**Individual-focused explanations**	**Structural-focused explanations**	**Structure-agency-focused explanations**
Traumatic past events	If individuals have been traumatised, this may make it difficult for them to access employment and/or "integrate" at a workplace.	If structures, such as healthcare providers, are not set up to take into account the possibility of refugee trauma, this may make it difficult for integration to occur.	Individuals may be traumatised, which can affect their everyday actions and available choices. While still having agency to affect their labour market/workplace integration trajectories, structures may not be sufficient for providing support so that equal labour market and workplace opportunities can be available for all. Individuals who work in structures that provide healthcare are affected by practices within it concerning how healthcare is offered. Individuals working there have the agency to change their behaviour, which can contribute to practices either remaining the same or slowly changing over time.
Language proficiency	If individuals have high levels of language proficiency, they are more likely to find employment and do well in workplace situations. If they lack language skills, they may not be able to "integrate" as well.	Swedish workplaces/labour markets may have (discriminatory/racist) language hierarchies that do not coincide with the languages spoken in the country. Language requirements may be geared toward non-accented native speakers and/or may be too high for some of the positions offered. This can make it difficult for people with other native languages on the labour market and at the workplace.	Individuals have the capacity, through language-learning, to affect their labour market and workplace situations. However, their agency is also constrained by structural factors that may disadvantage and constrain some people more than others—such as people whose first language is not Swedish.

Table 6 cont'd: Examples of individual, structural, and structure-agency focused explanations of factors affecting labour market and workplace integration

Example factor affecting integration	Individual-focused explanations	Structural-focused explanations	Structure-agency-focused explanations
Workplace culture	If workplace culture differs significantly from the culture of the country of origin, this makes it difficult for foreigners to "integrate" at the workplace.	Rigidness around perceived explicit and implicit "Swedish" workplace norms make it difficult for people with diverse backgrounds at the workplace.	People's individual experiences of workplace culture affect their frames of reference and can affect their workplace experiences. At the same time, workplace structures could not be set up for relational integration, since they may value certain cultural norms more than others, even though these norms are not central for doing the work. Workplace culture affects the people who come into contact with it, who can either use their agency to help keep these structures the same or can contribute to the workplace norms being changed. Certain individuals can have more power to do so than others insofar as their agency can be less constrained.
Social networks	Individuals can lack the "correct" social networks in Sweden, which can make it difficult for people to "integrate".	If adequate networking efforts and initiatives for migrants and refugees do not exist, this can disadvantage them when seeking employment. The Swedish labour market can be set up in a way that is discriminatory towards migrants since networked employment is over-represented.	People can lack professional networks in the country, which affects the possibility for integration for (all) people. In addition, the way in which the Swedish labour market is structured, and the way in which initiatives for migrants are structured can lead to certain people being disadvantaged more than others, and this can constrain them. This, in turn, does not lead to equal opportunities for all on the labour market.

Conclusion and takeaways

We can draw a number of conclusions from this overview of the research regarding labour market and workplace integration. First, much research has shown that labour market and workplace integration processes are often unequal, and that refugees are disadvantaged when it comes to employment. Moreover, at workplaces, people with foreign backgrounds can experience racism and discrimination on the basis of their perceived foreignness. This chapter has also shown, among other things, that many obstacles can exist to labour market and workplace integration, and that these can be greater for refugees than other groups (highly skilled or otherwise).

The research overview has also provided results in respect to both individual and structural factors that affect labour market and workplace integration. These include a range of factors related to, for example, economic situation, language, workplace culture, discrimination, and racism. However, while previous studies have clearly shown that obstacles and opportunities can be both individual or structural in character, few focus explicitly on both, their relation to each other, and how they are intertwined. Highlighting both structural and agentic factors in a clearer way would allow research to acknowledge that they are two sides of the same coin.

This overview of previous research has also made clear how integration research could gain from further study. On the one hand, what emerges is a wide range of actual and potential research. On the other, the lack of a clearly delineated body of research can arguably reflect the lack of a clear understanding and definition of integration in previous research. Many of the studies mentioned above either do not define their usage of "integration", or do not discuss their labour market or workplace results in such terms. Moreover, these issues have been studied through the lenses of many different theoretical perspectives, with no theory being predominant. Labour market integration, integration as such, and inclusion have all been used to mean a variety of different things when they are employed. This makes clear the need not only for strictly defining what is meant when conducting research concerning "integration", but also for taking into consideration the importance of what is meant by the concept when researchers do utilise it.

Furthermore, the research overview has revealed that there is a lack of studies concerning *highly skilled refugees* in respect to both labour market and workplace integration. Workplace integration in particular is a smaller field of research overall, and it leaves space for seeking a deeper knowledge about what occurs *after* obtaining employment, not only what takes place up to that point. In addition, a number of the studies mentioned above do not focus on refugees, but migrants, and if they do focus on refugees, they do not necessarily focus on those who are highly skilled.

There is also space to seek for a deeper understanding of profession-specific labour market and workplace integration, which could help nuance the knowledge about labour market trajectories by highlighting specific contexts. Focusing a study on highly skilled refugees, and on a particular profession, accords with scholars who posit that it is important to investigate migrant workers as a heterogenous group, and that it is of key importance in this regard to broaden the focus of research beyond taking into consideration only the low-skilled sector (Zhang, Nardon and Sears 2022:267–268).

Chapter 6: Methodology and Methods

The current thesis is based upon empirical material consisting primarily of 53 semi-structured interviews, 16 observations, and complementary desk research. This chapter will outline how these methods were employed and present the empirical material that is used in the articles. It will also make explicit the ontological and epistemological underpinnings that have guided the thesis and the analysis of the empirical material. As has already been implied by the use of morphogenesis, and by a structure and agency perspective based on critical realist theorising, this thesis subscribes to a critical realist epistemology and ontology. This has consequences for the methodological approach and the methods employed in the research.

The chapter begins with an elaboration of the critical realist ontology and epistemology, including how critical realism and morphogenesis has guided the research and subsequent analysis. This is followed by overviews of the methods used in addition to ethical considerations, positionality, and power that pertain to conducting research. Finally, the empirical material utilised in the thesis is presented and described.

A critical realist ontology and epistemology

This thesis has been guided by a critical realist ontology and epistemology, including its stratified ontology. Critical realism, developed in large part by Bhaskar (2008 [1975]), has provided a response to both positivism and interpretivism while combining certain elements of each. It is useful as an approach insofar as it can provide resolutions for the difficulties associated with previous objectivist-subjectivist dichotomies in research (Vincent and O'Mahoney 2018:212). It does so by positing, on the one hand, that a real and objective world exists. On the other, however, we as humans can only experience it through our own senses and understanding, which, in addition to possibly being flawed, can give rise to socially constructed ideas and phenomena. Completely relying on our own understanding of events and presenting what we know as real is an epistemic fallacy (Bhaskar 2008:16). Stated otherwise, critical realism separates epistemology from ontology and makes a distinction between what we know and what is real. Furthermore, our human interpretations of the world may be closer to or farther away from an objective truth and

reality that researchers aim to uncover through scientific inquiry and building upon past knowledge.

The distinction in critical realist approaches between what is real and what we experience resides in part upon a "stratified ontology" that distinguishes between three distinct domains of reality, namely, the "real", "actual", and "empirical" levels of reality. The domain of *the real* is comprised of "generative mechanisms" that shape the other two domains and generate events. Examples of such mechanisms from the natural and the social sciences include, respectively, electromagnetism and racism. These mechanisms, or underlying phenomena, operate over time and, in certain circumstances, generate specific events that we as humans can observe—such as magnets being attracted to each other and foreign-born men finding it difficult to obtain employment (see Chapter 5 above).

The domain of *the actual* consists of these events and occurrences. They are, as noted, activated by generative mechanisms in the domain of the real that cause them to occur. However, it is important to understand that existing mechanisms neither *always* give rise to events, nor always give rise to the *same* events. Generative mechanisms *can* give rise to events, and this can involve multiple causal powers that interact, reinforce, or interfere with each other to make particular events occur (Elder-Vass 2010:8), but they do not always do so. Moreover, events occur regardless of whether we humans observe them or not. For example, magnets can be attracted to each other without any human observing them, and exclusion from the labour market based on racism can occur even if given individuals did not witness it in person or understood that it is happening.

The *empirical* domain of reality includes our own human experiences of events as well as our observations and perceptions of what is occurring (Bhaskar 2008; Maisuria and Banfield 2022; Hoddy 2019). As researchers, this comprises the empirical data that we collect. The empirical domain is perhaps the most intuitive for us to understand insofar as it comprises our everyday experiences and observations. It is also that upon which constructivists or interpretivists base much of their analyses. However, a critical realist approach aims to go beyond this level in order to see how all of the different domains of reality are connected.

Additional examples of each domain of reality may serve to heighten clarity. While the actual—or events that occur—and the empirical—or everything we as humans experience—are rather straightforward, the domain of the real and its generative mechanisms may require some further explanation. In a natural science context, this can be exemplified through a generative mechanism such as gravity, which is situated in the domain of the *real* and causes objects to be pulled toward the centre of the earth. The latter events—objects being pulled toward the centre of the earth—reside in the domain of the *actual*, and they occur regardless of whether or not we observe them. However, we as humans can observe the event when we see an object fall to the ground, in

which case it is encompassed within the domain of the *empirical*. Gravity (the real) exists independently of given objects falling to the ground as well as our perceptions of objects falling to the ground.

In respect to the social sciences, it may initially be more difficult to grasp the existence of generative mechanisms since it can be difficult to understand which generative mechanisms simultaneously interact, reinforce, and interfere with each other and make particular events occur (Elder-Vass 2010:8). A hypothetical illustration could include empirical observations of children with a certain ethnic background receiving lower grades than other ethnicities in a particular school (the empirical). This could be established though survey results, interviews, and grade report cards. The event that occurs could then be that children with foreign backgrounds are disadvantaged in this school in various ways (the actual). Such events include those that are observed, but they could also include disadvantages that a given researcher has not observed, reported, or necessarily noticed. For example, disadvantages could occur if teachers gave preferential treatment to students with a non-foreign background, but this tendency could go unnoticed by other students in the school or their parents. Finally, in the domain of the real, these events could be triggered by such mechanisms as (structural) racism, unconscious bias, social power structures, rigid norms concerning education and learning that are not easily changed (institutional inertia), and so on. These generative mechanisms or phenomena—such as racism—could exist even if they were not always visible for us in our empirical observations.

The three domains of reality are interlinked in something of a chain. For instance, a mechanism or phenomena that exists independently of our human perception of it (the real), can cause an event to occur (the actual). Furthermore, that event exists independently of our perception, regardless of whether or not we observe it. However, it can also be observed, experienced, and perceived through our human senses (the empirical). This chain aids the researcher in finding underlying mechanisms, beyond simply focusing on what people experience as true. It is important to keep in mind, however, that all of the domains are significant—what people experience is also considered to be real. Nonetheless, what people experience may not always tell us about the underlying mechanisms that exist regardless of whether or not we perceive them. This is exemplified in Figure 2, which illustrates how the three domains of the real, the actual, and the empirical overlap.

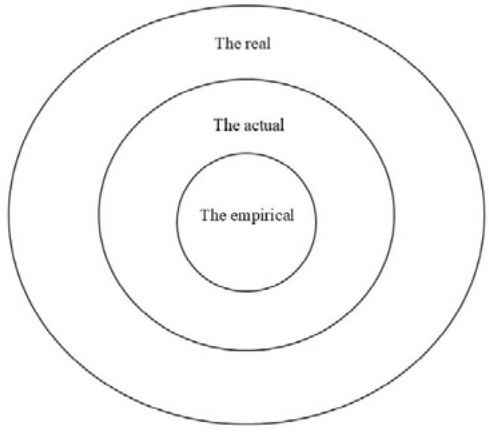

Figure 2: The critical realist stratified domains of reality (adapted from Bhaskar 2008[1975] and Hoddy 2019)

Critical realist ontology and epistemology are fruitful for a study of integration, particularly in support of the argument that we maintain use of the term "integration" and continue to study the processes that are termed "integration". Through a critical realist lens, integration as a concept can be employed in the effort to describe processes in the domain of the real, even though we may not fully understand the generative mechanisms that give rise to them insofar as we only have direct access to the empirical domain. This can lead us to form conceptualisations that are not true. However, merely changing the terminology while continuing to study similar processes does not actually change any of these processes in the domain of the real—it changes the terms we choose to use in the empirical domain. For example, the generative mechanisms that give rise to processes that have been termed "integration" and "inclusion" may in fact be the same. Consequently, changing the terminology does not affect the root of the problem—which involves trying to examine and identify what exists in the domain of the real. Changing terminology can instead lead to problems with drawing comparisons and building upon previous research insofar as it can be difficult to consolidate research and build upon past knowledge if the terminology is often changed.

Certain researchers have called for us to not conduct integration research at all (cf. Schinkel 2023). However, regardless of the terminology we employ, disregarding previous research because it is supposedly "erroneous" comes with the risk of epistemic fallacy—namely, disregarding research because it has supposedly been shown to be false or socially constructed in the empirical domain without taking into consideration the possibility that it could be our understanding of the concept that is wrong. Something that a given

terminology has sought to describe could still exist in the domain of the real, but as something else. We must therefore, as researchers, seek to approach its true form in the domain of the real more closely instead of simply disregarding it completely on the basis of what has been shown to us in the empirical domain.

Lastly, critical realism's stratified ontology indicates that what is in the domain of the empirical is also real, and that it can affect our lives and have causal effects. This also holds true for social constructions insofar as they exist in the empirical. It thus remains important to take into account the various conceptualisations of integration that have been described in Chapter 2, even if we do not agree with them, since they can nonetheless exert influence over individuals in the social world.

A critical realist researcher

A critical realist view of ontology and epistemology has implications for the research conducted in this thesis. The domain of *the real* constitutes the truths that I, and critical realist researchers in general, aim to unveil through scientific inquiry. The real is therefore a core aspect of the research—as a critical realist researcher, I aim to come closer to what is real through my research. This is to be done through empirical observations, examining information gathered from previous studies and literature, as well as logical reasoning and interpretation of the data collected.

On the basis of empirical material, previous research, and reasoning, a critical realist researcher hypothesises concerning the generative mechanisms in the domain of the real that operate to create specific outcomes in particular circumstances. Critical realist research as a whole is thus focused on finding underlying generative mechanisms and relationships that help explain the occurrence of social events (Fletcher 2017; Lawani 2021; Boost, Blom and Raeymaeckers 2022). Rather than merely describing events and empirical observations regarding the domains of the actual and the real, a critical realist ontology and epistemology aids in looking for wider reasons for specific occurrences in order to uncover not only *how* events occur, but *why* they occur, including the types of generative mechanisms that give rise to specific occurrences. Moreover, since generative mechanisms in the real do not *always* give rise to events, critical realism is also involved with investigating and hypothesising under what set of particular circumstances and contexts, and in relation to what generative mechanisms, certain events actually do occur (Blom and Morén 2011:63). In this way, a critical realist study such as mine is context specific, but it can also be utilised to make broader statements about how mechanisms operate on the basis of the research conducted. Coming closer to an understanding of reality, or the domain of the real, can be accomplished on the basis of empirical observations, but it must be aided by analysis (Blom and Morén 2011:63):

> By means of analytical work and the gradual building of theory that is firmly based on their manifestation empirically in events, it is possible to gain knowledge of underlying generative mechanisms (in the domain of the real) and conceptualize them (Blom and Morén 2011:62).

Critical realism maintains that acquiring knowledge is not done purely for the sake of knowledge, although this is, of course, also an important component. Underlying all critical realist research is an engagement in conducting research in order to be able to resolve social issues and propose methods for improvements. The goal is to produce *results* that can provide practical solutions, policies, and strategic recommendations (Lawani 2021; Fletcher 2017), even if the research itself offers no solutions per se. Through researchers working together with other researchers, knowledge is built upon knowledge in order to come closer to what is real and help solve problems that arise within our human realities. This approach has guided the current thesis, which is focused on exploring integration processes, in part to help identify areas for improvement.

Qualitative methods and critical realism

I employ a qualitative approach in my study of labour market and workplace integration that consists of semi-structured interviews, observations, and desk research. Qualitative methods are used to hypothesise about the domain of the *real*. Even though "[i]t is sometimes argued that qualitative methods provide rich knowledge about the individual and contextual but that it takes quantitative methods to enable generalization", qualitative methods are, and have been, fruitfully used to provide such generalisations (Danermark, Ekström and Karlsson 2019:116–117). They can be very useful in this regard because not only do they examine individual experiences, they also serve as a method to examine and "clarify the generality of phenomena by exploring different settings and contexts in which the phenomena may occur" (Danermark, Ekström and Karlsson 2019:119). Qualitative case studies are therefore a fitting tool for studying underlying generative mechanisms. Qualitative methods are also useful, in comparison to their quantitative counterparts, for investigating an issue in order to gain an in depth and detailed understanding of occurrences within a specific setting and context rather than achieve a broad overview (DeLyser, Herbert, Aitken, Crang and McDowell 2010:158). In addition, examining the specific contexts in which events occur accords with critical realism's endeavour to examine the particular circumstances under which generative mechanisms emerge and operate.

However, in adhering to a critical realist ontology and epistemology, it is important to remember that what is told, seen and understood by means of interviews, observations, and examining material on a given subject concerns only what is in the empirical domain. Consequently, what I as a researcher

have observed in an interview cannot be taken for granted as explaining occurrences in the domain of the real (Danermark, Ekström and Karlsson 2019: 191). Nevertheless, it can offer insights into various questions and provide a basis upon which we can reason about what is in that domain. It is also possible to identify patterns in the empirical data that is collected. Such patterns, which are termed *demi-regularities* from a critical realist perspective, are to be regarded as tendencies rather than universal patterns or laws. They are a key aspect of a critical realist analysis since they can constitute "evidence of relatively enduring and identifiable mechanisms operating at the deeper levels of reality" (Boost, Blom and Raeymaeckers 2022:18, see also Næss 2019). Qualitative data is thus very useful for analysing and coming closer to the domain of the real, although a rigorous analysis is important in order to ensure that the research does not simply describe what is in the empirical domain (see section on analysis below). Moreover, the context-specific detailed understanding of a topic that can be gained through interviewing can be combined with the results of other methods, such as desk research or an overview of previous research, to acquire a broader background knowledge (see the section on desk research below).

Semi-structured interviews

The data for this project—which can be seen to exist in the empirical domain in light of the above elaboration concerning ontology and epistemology—was collected through semi-structured, qualitative interviewing. Semi-structured interviews are useful for exploring the research questions of this thesis because of their flexibility—they allow for exploration in respect to concepts found in previous literature, but also make it possible for new conclusions and ideas to emerge that can be further explored (cf. Lawani 2021:325). Moreover, they also allow space for me as a researcher to ask for clarification and greater detail when needed (Galetta 2013:24). These types of interviews are also particularly useful in a critical realist study insofar as they permit the researcher to explore emerging ideas about generative mechanisms throughout the interview process. In other words, I could shift my focus during a given interview somewhat further along in the research process in order to explore emerging themes while still keeping to the overarching interview themes.

This type of interviewing is also fruitful in the way that it can draw attention to a refugee's lived experiences (Galletta 2013:24). This allows for insights not only in respect to the empirical domain and a refugee's experiences of reality, but also regarding potential expressions of agency, including opportunities and constraints. Semi-structured interviews leave space for the respondent to engage more actively than in structured interviews, which is desirable in a project that focuses on refugees as agents (Galetta 2013:24). Respondents can also take interviews into directions they thought useful, thus leaving space

for new perspectives that I had not taken into consideration while continuing to be guided by the research questions and allowing for the inclusion of themes that I had chosen.

The themes in the interviews were centred on opportunities and obstacles on the labour market for highly skilled refugees and on examples of integration and inclusion. There was also a focus in the interviews conducted for Article I on understanding labour market integration structures and on what highly skilled refugees may come into contact with when attempting to obtain employment in Sweden. Questions put to refugee participants were focused on their experiences at workplaces and when seeking employment during their time in Sweden, although I also asked about their previous qualifications and job experience. I limited the questions in this way in order to avoid a focus on post-flight and potentially traumatic memories.

Interviews were conducted in Swedish or English insofar as I do not speak any of the native languages of the refugee engineers. All interviews with integration initiative providers were conducted in Swedish. Most interviews with refugees were also conducted in Swedish since most interviewees had already completed their Swedish classes and obtained Swedish language qualifications. Some who had not yet completed their Swedish classes still chose to hold the interviews in Swedish since they saw it as an opportunity to practice the language but would also mix in English phrases and terminology.

Most interviews were conducted online via Zoom or Microsoft Teams, but a minority were conducted in person. One was conducted via phone and one respondent preferred to answer questions in written form. These different types of methods can have an effect on how a given interview is conducted and perceived.

Although digital interviews are similar to in-person interviews in many ways, they also allow for different possibilities. For example, although they allow for long-distance participation—the geographical area within which interviewees lived was much larger than it would have been with only in-person interviews—they can make it more difficult to interpret visual cues and body language (Thunberg 2021). In addition, technical difficulties can interrupt interviewees, which can make is difficult to analyse data. This happened on a small number of occasions—in one case the interview was cut off and had to continue on a different online platform, while in another case the internet connection was poor and froze at times. While these situations were dealt with, they nonetheless created unwanted interruptions in conversations and important narratives, disrupting trains of thought as participants spoke.

Furthermore, digital interviews did not allow for pre- and post-interview rapport in the same way as in-person interviews, where we would usually engage in small talk before and after the actual interview. Digital interviews can also present another set of ethical challenges beyond those associated with in-person interviews, such as issues of secure data storage (Gill and Baillie 2018). This was addressed in part by using a separate recording device rather than an

online platform's own recording function, which stores files in potentially insecure ways.

Observations

Observations were conducted during data collection in addition to interviews. These included observations at workplaces where highly skilled refugees work, at labour market events such as job fairs (virtually or in real life), and at integration initiatives such as professional mentoring programme meetings.

The different observations served different purposes. Initial observations, such as visits to job fairs, helped identify issues of particular interest and provided a sense of direction for the research to be conducted (cf. Ciesielska, Boström and Öhlander 2018: 34). I took note of the labour market integration actors present, and what kinds of topics they focused on in their conversations with others and in their informational material. The analysis of the fieldnotes taken gave insights into labour market actors who had integration agendas and provided information about different types of courses for educated migrants. Moreover, these initial observations were used to gain access to initial interview contacts from integration initiatives.

Later observations were guided by more precise research questions. These included observations at so-called integration initiatives, where the goal was to gain an understanding of how such initiatives functioned. I also listened for the types of topics that were raised with regards to opportunities and constraints on the Swedish labour market. The analysis of the fieldnotes taken during these observations were useful for gaining a more detailed understanding of what function these integration initiatives had, and how they could affect labour market integration opportunities.

I conducted two observations at Swedish workplaces at a later stage of the project when the majority of the interviews had already been conducted. The observations involved accompanying an employee during their working day and observing their work tasks and workplace interactions. I spent time with the engineers in their offices, accompanied them when they did their work, and went to lunch and coffee breaks with them.

These observations were more central to the analysis of Article III, and provided insights into specific workplace geographies, temporal workplace patterns, particular workplace routines, and possibilities for interaction at the workplace (cf. Ciesielska, Boström and Öhlander 2018:37-38). Moreover, the observations contextualised workplace experiences that had come up during the interviews. This was the case in part due to the fact that we also spoke about their general routines and tasks during the observation, even though I could not witness them all.

In addition to observing the participants' workday, the day spent together consisted of a great deal of in-depth conversation on topics relating to their

workplace, what went on during the day, and their labour market experience as a whole. This added to the interviews that had already been conducted by allowing for longer and more detailed accounts. It was also important that the conversations allowed me to ask follow-up questions regarding topics raised in the interviews.

All of the different types of observations conducted were either direct partial-participant observations or direct non-participant observations. The former, such as those that took place at the workplaces I observed, meant that I took part in interactions, but not in professional tasks (Ciesielska, Boström and Öhlander 2018:40). In contrast, the direct non-participant observations were conducted at integration initiative observations where, for example, I did not participate in mentoring meeting discussions insofar as they pertained to parts of a mentorship programme in which I had not participated. I also did not participate in the job-seeking process at job fairs, instead taking a more indirect observational role, although I also spoke to some of the organisations that were represented.

Both partial and non-participant observations were useful for the present study insofar as they allowed for the collection of information concerning different practices, such as what and how people work and how integration initiatives function in an environment that is familiar to the participants (Ciesielska, Boström and Öhlander 2018:42). These were used to enhance the quality of the data insofar as they helped interpret data by letting me as a researcher learn more about a given context and the respondents' experiences in that context (DeWalt and DeWalt 2001:19–23). The workplace observations in particular comprised a good complement to the interviews since they granted insight into topics that had been mentioned in less detail in the interviews. This made possible a "deeper and less limited understanding of what is being studied than relying solely on participants' explanations of what they do and why they do it" (Paterson, Bottorff and Hewat 2003:30). Participant observations also offered the opportunity to develop better rapport with respondents, which can aid in the process of exchanging and sharing experiences (ibid.).

Desk research

A key component of the analysis has been what I term desk research. Although not always as obviously present in the articles and the list of empirical material, I mention it because of its importance for the final thesis product and also because it has been commonly used, but rarely acknowledged, in previous research. Desk research has included, for example, examining empirical material which I did not collect first-hand that has been taken into account in the analysis. It perhaps goes without saying that this includes literature reviews of previous research regarding the topics addressed in my thesis and integration frameworks. This has been important for establishing patterns and building

upon past knowledge in order to define a useful research-guided question (cf. Lawani 2021:325) and to draw conclusions concerning my using integration as a concept (see Chapters 2 and 5).

This has also involved reviewing online material that provides insights into the Swedish labour market and the context of workplace integration. This has included, for example, online informational material on various actors offering integration programmes; reports on integration programmes; informational material concerning diploma evaluation and accreditation processes; and rules and requirements regarding residence permits. The collection of this type of data has been less systematic than the collection of other data, but it has been continuously ongoing. It is therefore not included in the list of empirical material presented at the end of this chapter.

Collection and sampling

The interviews were conducted between 2020–2023. Initial respondents from integration initiatives were identified and contacted though, among other methods, observations at job fairs. Snowball sampling also took place when interviewees provided insights regarding whom to contact next. Integration initiative and refugee participants were also found through attending in-person and digital events, which in some cases led to further snowball sampling. I had also established relevant personal contacts prior to beginning the PhD programme.

Refugee engineers were primarily identified through targeted searches on various social media platforms since snowball sampling based on the interviews was of limited usefulness in this regard. The specific platforms and pages used have been left out of the thesis for reasons of participant confidentiality. The selection criteria for interviewees were different for integration initiatives and highly skilled refugees, and they also varied somewhat during the study process in respect to participants with a refugee background. For integration initiatives, the people contacted worked at initiatives that dealt with questions of how to aid newcomers on the labour market—either in practical terms or on a more strategic level. This included, for example, both people representing internship programmes and people working in municipalities in relation to labour market integration. No initiatives were identified that focused solely on efforts towards refugees with a higher education, although several came into contact with this group through their focus on either highly educated migrants or refugees in general. Although certain interviews were consequently conducted with actors who did not specifically focus on refugees with a higher education, specific interview questions regarding highly skilled refugees were still asked.

The selection criteria for people with a refugee background changed somewhat throughout the various stages of the study. These criteria were broader

during the initial data collection, focusing on finding any highly skilled interview participants with a refugee background. This broad preliminary search was in part due to the difficulty in finding participants. After a number of initial interviews, it became clear that the group to which I had the most access to that point were engineers, most of whom came from Syria. I therefore continued searching for interview participants with an engineering degree from Syria. Although the focus on people from Syria had not been decided in advance, it naturally emerged through the selection process.

In respect to the observations, the job fairs and observed integration initiatives were found through online searches, on the basis of contacts, and by means of interviews with integration initiatives who either referred to other initiatives, or themselves agreed to observation. Job fairs with a special focus on integration topics were prioritised. The integration initiatives I observed were chosen because they were to some degree pertinent to highly skilled refugees and were willing to participate in the research.

The workplace observations were chosen with two people who had already been interviewed. Both agreed and were already employed, and their managers also agreed to my visit. Although initially planning to visit them for a week, one of the participants preferred to be visited for only a day and the other would have needed new permission and clearing from their employer. I also found it difficult to travel to their workplace due to the geographical distance involved and the need for further travel funding. I had intended to visit more workplaces, but this was complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic, people declining, geographical locations, and last-minute cancellations. Moreover, letting somebody come to one's workplace involves a greater commitment than participating in an online interview, and I was careful to not push the issue if people seemed unsure. I also suspect that only meeting digitally did not provide the same levels of rapport that would have been possible when meeting in person, which affected access as well.

The temporal context of the study also impacted data gathering. Conducting the research during the COVID-19 pandemic provided a very specific temporal context in which many workplaces and events moved to digital meetings instead of in-person activities. This made it substantially more difficult to find research participants for interviews as well as integration initiatives and workplaces for observation. Furthermore, interviews were mostly conducted online, and certain integration initiatives were also observed online since their activities had become digital.

This context has also affected the geographical analysis presented in the thesis. I had initially intended to compare three geographical contexts in Sweden. Insofar as integration initiatives had moved online and social distancing was recommended, it was not possible to visit the three geographical cases I had planned on comparing during the period of data-gathering. While I had sought to make more concrete statements about specific geographies, this was not possible due to the data gathered.

Because of the COVID-19 outbreak and the subsequent social distancing recommendations, the interviews were primarily conducted digitally, which resulting in the interview participants being spread out across Sweden. Although many participants lived in various urban areas, others lived in less population-dense areas. Furthermore, participants spoke of their labour market and workplace experiences at various different locations, both cities and towns, since most of them had not lived in only one location after arriving in Sweden. Although where research participants lived or worked evidently influenced their labour market experiences, I could only gauge in what way through their own accounts. However, I do not specify geographical locations in the thesis because of participant confidentiality. In addition, the particular sample size and the variety of locations did not allow for a comparison between cases or for an in-depth analysis of how the cities and towns impacted labour market and workplace integration. Geographical issues are instead taken into account more generally, in analyses regarding how specific places allowed for more or less access to the labour market and integration initiatives. However, the third article in particular focuses on the actual workspaces of two engineers and the particularities of those specific contexts.

While I draw certain conclusions concerning general geographical impacts, I make the most geographically aware analysis in respect to the two workplace observations. It is important to remember, however, that these workplaces do not exist in a vacuum and are connected to other spaces as well. For example, employees work in specific workplaces, which are part of local labour markets, which are in turn tied to other labour markets in the global economy (cf. Herod 2003:118).

The geographical data I analyse is thus either collected in a non-direct fashion—relying on recollections from the interview participants or from information analysed during desk research—or based on observations I conducted later in the project. The latter include the workplace observations and some of the initiatives and events I managed to visit on site, where I could more easily make conclusions about the temporally and geographically specific contexts in question.

Analysis guided by critical realism

The data that was gathered was subsequently analysed in relation to the research questions and aims. Since a critical realist epistemology and ontology also has an impact on data analysis, I will explain in this section how the analysis was conducted in relation to critical realism. This is particularly important insofar as critical realist research has suffered in the past from a lack of accessible literature on methodology and accounts of how critical realism affects research, such as in respect to analysis and the coding of the material (Fletcher 2017:182). Some of this can perhaps be explained by the difficulty in

unveiling what is in the real since "mechanisms are hidden beneath the empirical level and cannot be observed directly through our own senses" (Boost, Blom and Raeymaeckers 2022:16). Much of the relevant literature has either been highly theoretical, philosophising about science and theory, or has consisted of empirical studies that provide solutions to social issues without detailed descriptions of the critical realist methods used (Fletcher 2017:182). More recently, these lacunae have been partially filled in by work on applied critical realism, which reflexively discusses this past shortcoming in critical realist scholarship. This has provided more detailed descriptions of coding techniques and analyses that have been conducted in accordance with a critical realist ontology and epistemology (see e.g. Fletcher 2017; Hoddy 2019; Lawani 2021; Boost, Blom and Raeymaeckers 2022). This literature has served as a basis for how the analysis and coding have been conducted in this thesis.

Critical realist analysis can be described as consisting of several different stages that delve into the empirical, actual and real domains of reality and help the researcher approach more closely to the generative mechanisms that help explain "how events are the results of causal structures operating in particular contexts" (Boost, Blom and Raeymaeckers 2022:16). The stages that have been employed in the present analysis—which are adapted from Boost, Blom and Raeymaeckers 2022, where they are further elaborated—are described in the order of operation in Table 7**.** This entire analytical process in critical realism may be termed abstraction since we as researchers can only approximate the mechanisms that we study (Boost, Blom and Raeymaeckers 2022:16). We must therefore be critical of both our results and what it is that we are studying (Sayer 1992: 5–6). However, through the steps described in Table 7**,** we can evaluate and come closer to what is in the real domain in addition to what resides in the empirical and actual domains. This process acknowledges that researchers do their best to provide hypotheses and arguments concerning what is in the real, but also recognises that research is an ongoing process in which researchers build upon each other's research in order to further scientific inquiry. The analysis is crucial in that it aids the researcher in taking results beyond the empirical domain of reality and moving the argumentation forward from the particular to the general (Danermark, Ekström and Karlsson 2019: 117–118).

The interviews, observations and desk research served as the basis for the analysis presented in the study. The analysis resides upon transcripts and notes taken during and directly after observations and upon online informational material about specific initiatives, rules, and regulations. In addition, the focus of the notetaking differed somewhat in accord with the various forms of observation. During the observations at job fairs, for example, the focus was on identifying and understanding the various initiatives as well as the different actors with whom newcomers could come into contact. At integration events, the focus was on understanding how the initiatives operate, such as by noting

the types of topics covered in the different classes. During workplace observations, the focus was on acquiring an understanding of the workplace as a whole, how it functions, and the types of tasks participants had during the day, including when and with whom. I also took note of the physical workplace structures as well as social interactions and where these took place. In respect to interview analysis, notes were first taken during interviews, which were also recorded if the participants agreed. If a participant did not wish to be recorded—this happened once—I took notes during the interview that were filled out in greater detail afterwards. The audio files of the recorded interviews were subsequently transcribed, and both the transcripts and interview notes were coded and analysed.

After a descriptive phase (Stage 1 in Table 7—description), I coded for patterns in the empirical material (Stage 2—analytical resolution), so-called demi-regularities. As mentioned previously, these are tendencies, rather than universal laws, that can provide insights concerning the generative mechanisms at play (Boost, Blom and Raeymaeckers 2022). I also conducted a first general coding that broadly focused on the constitution of the labour market landscape as well as opportunities and constraints to labour market or workplace access and integration. Codes also included integration and what it entailed, along with critical realist-related codes regarding structure and agency (cf. Fletcher 2017:186). Several subsequent read-throughs and coding were conducted in order to further narrow down demi-regularities and patterns in the data and identify the most re-occurring themes.

I then placed the data within a more general context and redescribed it, tying the results to larger phenomena from the existing literature (Stage 3—abduction, also referred to at times as theoretical redescription [Fletcher 2017:184]). Critical realism is not opposed to the use of already existing theories or conceptualisations. Bhaskar (1979) maintains, however, that these must be regarded as initial theories only, and that some may be closer to what is real than others. I then hypothesised concerning the underlying generative mechanisms that could be necessary for the demi-regularities that were identified to emerge (Stage 4—retroduction). I compared my various hypotheses regarding generative mechanisms with each other and chose the one that appeared to be most suitable for explaining the occurrences revealed in the empirical data (Stage 5—comparison between abstractions). Finally, I contextualised the events and processes observed in respect to the types of opportunities and constraints that were associated with these processes (Stage 6—concretisation and contextualisation). This last stage involved going back to the empirical material and taking into consideration the specific contexts in which they occurred (Boost, Blom and Raeymaeckers 2022; Danermark, Ekström and Karlsson 2019). Quotations were then chosen that pertained to key themes, and those which were originally in Swedish were translated into English.

These steps comprise a cycle that is repeated at different stages of the analysis insofar as it can be fruitful to return to the empirical material and hypothesise new generative mechanisms as the research progresses and more data and knowledge have been gathered.

While the thesis in general has included all stages of this analysis, the stages are not equally present in all articles. For example, while the first article can be regarded as establishing the background context, including the organisations and structures involved in the labour market integration of highly skilled refugees in Sweden, the other two advance the analysis by discussing the generative mechanisms at a deeper level.

Table 7: Stages of Critical Realist Analysis (adapted from Boost, Blom and Raeymaeckers 2022; Danermark, Ekström and Karlsson 2019)

Stage of Analysis	**Analysis Undertaken at this Stage**
1. Description	Describing the empirical context; reviewing the various empirical accounts concerning the subject area; finding out about the case through empirics.
2. Analytical Resolution	Sorting through issues of interest in the data; identifying patterns (demi-regularities) that can suggest the existence of generative mechanisms.
3. Abduction	Redescribing the data with regards to more general phenomena; redescribing the empirical data in respect to various experiences, analogies/metaphors, and already existing theories/concepts/models.
4. Retroduction	Reconstructing the conditions necessary for the demi-regularities to occur; hypothesising what underlying processes and structures made the events observed in the empirical data take place.
5. Comparison between different abstractions	Deciding which potential mechanism among those possible is most fitting for explaining the phenomena observed, using "judgmental rationality". Good explanations aim for consilience, simplicity and analogy. Consilience refers to the theory being explanatory to a greater degree, and in respect to more factors, than other theories; simplicity refers to the theory having fewer "special or ad hoc assumptions" (Boost, Blom and Raeymaeckers 2022:23); analogy refers to how a theory can be stronger if supported by other already existing theories.
6. Concretisation and Contextualisation	Examining the conditions that cause the mechanisms identified, and how different mechanisms interact with each other, to either create opportunities for or obstacles to the emergence of a given mechanism. Contextualising the mechanism under study and concretely evaluating why mechanisms emerge in specific contexts.

Analysing morphogenetic integration

Insofar as this thesis focuses on morphogenetic integration processes, I have also had to take into consideration how it is possible to identify and analyse such processes in my study. In addition to following the analytical framework indicated above—whereby I utilise the empirical data to come to a deeper understanding of generative mechanisms through such steps as abduction, retroduction, and contextualisation—I have had to take temporality into account in my analysis.

Defining integration as a process of structural and individual *change* necessitates a temporal perspective insofar as change involves the passage of time. It would have therefore been desirable from a certain point of view to conduct a longer-term study, which would have made it possible to compare how things currently are with how they have been in a way that would perhaps serve to highlight large-scale changes more clearly. This may well have helped cast light not only on the individual changes that have taken place, but more particularly on possible structural changes. My empirical material, however, is focused on a specific time period, with the data having been collected between the years 2020-2023. This material provides insights into certain contexts, including the changes that particular individuals have undergone, but it obviously does not provide for studying a more broad span of time. However, morphogenesis was also identified and addressed by means of desk research, literature reviews, and the analysis of conceptual development, which have provided a larger timeframe for gaining a grasp of more general, structural changes. It was also possible to analyse morphogenetic processes within an extended timeframe on the basis of the secondary accounts in which interviewees spoke of both their past and present experiences.

As has been noted in Chapter 3, structural and individual changes often take place at different rates, with individual change operating over a much shorter time scale than structural change. This has consequences for the present analysis in that the data which I have collected in the empirical domain of reality is more illuminative of agentic changes. These results are nonetheless complemented by the conclusions I have drawn from analyses of previous research, which are a key component in acquiring an understanding of larger morphogenetic changes, such as showcasing how the dominant integration policy frameworks in Sweden have shifted over the past century (see Chapter 4).

Ethics, researching “vulnerable groups”, and unequal power relations

The collection of research data took place after permission was obtained from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (2019-05330). The research was

carried out according to the principle of informed consent. Information about the project aims and how the data would be used were communicated to research participants in both written form and orally before participation. Participants were also informed that they could revoke their consent at any time and how they could do so.

I have employed pseudonyms, redacted place names, and avoided naming specific organisations and employers in order to further reduce possibilities for identifying the research participants. In the case of highly skilled refugees, I have also utilised general year spans instead of indicating the exact year of arrival and the precise years of professional experience—this information could make it easier to identify specific engineers when combined with people's degrees. In order for participants to have greater influence over how they were presented, the participants whom I quoted were given the opportunity to look over the quotations that I used in the articles and the thesis.

Conducting research according to these principles can ensure a substantial level of ethical research practice, but there are other ethical considerations that one needs to make as well. For example, ethical issues can arise from the notion that a researcher can represent others, or in respect to problems arising from conducting research with what are considered to be "vulnerable groups" (cf. Hugman, Pittaway and Bartolomei 2011).

One important contribution of this thesis, in my view, is the empirical material and the experiences shared in interviews and during observations, which provide a rich representation of the issues as the interviewees understood them in the empirical domain. However, problems may be associated with the notion that I, as a researcher, can "give voice to others". Although not attempting to do so may lead to a study too focused on the researcher's perspective, doing so may on the other hand lead to an unequal power relation such that someone—in this case a researcher from Sweden—has, for some reason, the right, possibility, and power to present the voices of others. Furthermore, a critical realist ontology and epistemology also leaves open the possibility for the researcher to make decisions about the empirical material and the generative mechanisms to which it may refer. This in itself leaves space open for unequal power relations—where I as a researcher have the power to interpret what an interviewee says in a way that they may not agree with.

That is not to say that it is of no value to showcase refugees' own experiences through their voices. I have therefore purposefully endeavoured to be as transparent as possible when making statements by incorporating direct quotations of the participants. However, it is also important to clearly acknowledge that I, as a researcher, am always the sole author of this thesis and have power over what it includes. Insofar as the results shown and the quotations provided have all been chosen by me, some perspectives are consequently edited out. Some voices are not given as much space as others merely because they were in the minority. For instance, one engineer wished to be regarded as a positive example, showing that it is possible to succeed,

find desired employment, and join a pleasant workplace. Unfortunately, since this was only mentioned once, I did not highlight this perspective.

This example casts light on the issue of researcher authority, which has been discussed in detail in the literature, notably in ethnographic research. Fieldwork, such as the observations I conducted, can arguably imply "a degree of violence on the ethnographer's part" since there is an inherent asymmetry in the relation between the researcher and the informant (Hastrup 1992:121). Since I am the author of the text, I strongly influence the final product and have the authority to present the refugees' stories I have chosen—and to do this for a very specific target group of scholars in a community we share. Researchers thus "shape the phenomena that they study" (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:191), and the author's influence is a dominating force to the degree that "the informants' voices cannot penetrate the discursive speech of the ethnographer [researcher]" at all (Hastrup 1992:120).

One could also argue that I, as the researcher who has conducted the fieldwork and presents the results, diminish a participant's agency by examining them as an object of study—above all by having the power to categorise them as "refugees" or "labour market actors". The focus on constraints to agency, which highlights the difficulties faced, could also conceivably contribute to the victimisation of the group by paradoxically presenting them as lacking agency. In response to such comments, it is important to make clear that being in a vulnerable position—as is a previous asylum-seeker—does not contradict one's agency, resilience, or autonomy. Moreover, "[v]ulnerability is shifting, dynamic and compatible with agency", and being active or passive is not binary (Said 2015:212, see also O'Higgins 2012; Clark 2007; Rogers, Mackenzie and Dodds 2012).

Moreover, not talking about people's difficulties can be counter-productive insofar as identifying the types of issues that may constrain agency can be an important step in identifying underlying exclusionary processes, such as labour market discrimination, and seeking to remedy such problems in the future. Nevertheless, it remains important to not overstate the power that research participants have had in affecting the narrative presented here, which always takes place through me, the researcher.

Reflections on positionality

There is an added layer in this asymmetrical relationship between the participants in the project and me and since I am studying a so-called "vulnerable group" while not being part of it myself. I am also a long-term citizen of Sweden who resides in the country, which can conceivably provide access to certain knowledge about the context that more newly arrived migrants may not have. It is important to make this position visible in the thesis and reflect on my own positionality while collecting data and writing the text.

Throughout the research I conducted, my own background has influenced the processes and relationships involving the research participants. It has been important to "refer continually to [my] own experience" (Bourdieu 2003:287–288) and keep in mind the significance of autobiography (Hastrup 1992:118)—how my background shapes the text, the observations, and the analysis (cf. Bourdieu 2003), even if it may at first feel uncomfortable to speak about oneself in academic research. Scholars have argued that, despite being viewed at times as narcissistic (Bourdieu 1993:366; Finlay 2002), it is important to share reflections on positionality for reasons of transparency (Verne 2012:43); provide the researcher with "important insights into their research interests" and help them reflect upon and interpret their data; and recognise the usefulness of subjective reflections in research (Carstensen-Egwuom 2014:270). Positionality refers to an individual's self-identification, their experiences in the world, and potential privileges or marginalisation. Reflecting on positionality in research entails considering how these different identity positions can influence the research being conducted (Massoud 2022).

For example, it is important to take into account the fact that I do not have a refugee background, which means that I am an outsider in one way to one group of interviewees in the research. However, although I do not have a refugee background, I do have a migration background that most people can recognise by my appearance and through my name. This provided a certain degree of common ground with the migrants whom I interviewed—refugees and people working in integration initiatives from various countries. Labour market integration actors had varied backgrounds—some discussed their own migrant background, but most did not share personal details and spoke more from a position of representing the organisation of which they were a part. The representatives of labour market integration initiatives also had varied backgrounds, but in the interviews with these respondents I felt that we had a familiarity with Swedish social structures and shared certain norms in common.

However, people with a refugee background would often take note of my appearance or name, become interested, and ask me specifically about my own background. Some participants appeared to be more comfortable in commenting on "strange Swedish culture" to me in ways that might not have happened if I did not have a migration background. While this provided some common ground and a good rapport, our actual migration experiences were not comparable. Having lived in Sweden for most of my life gives me access, knowledge, and a certain privilege concerning the Swedish context and language that research participants who had more recently moved to the country might not have. This means that while I can take some things for granted in interacting with certain refugees, I might also not understand certain social cues from parts of the world with which I am unfamiliar. I myself have no personal experiences from Syria, Iran, and Iraq, the home countries of the refugee participants, and am unfamiliar with the labour market and engineering contexts there, about which I had to ask clarifying questions. While my own migration

identity made me recognise some of the issues shared by participants in respect to being a noticeable migrant in Sweden, I had little frame of reference for experiences that are particularly associated with a refugee background or with difficulties in obtaining employment due to this background.

In other ways, my own position as having a university education provided commonalities with some of the representatives of integration initiatives and the refugee engineers, who also had academic degrees. Moreover, those who agreed to be interviewed and were part of observations often shared an expressed common interest with me—to help contribute to understanding how employment integration processes can be improved. Such shared interests made most interactions comfortable since there was a very clear common goal from the outset. I also spoke with people who had more, or higher, academic degrees than me, including people who had previously worked in very prestigious roles or were much older. My own gender and age came into play in these interviews since I sometimes felt somewhat more relaxed in conversations with women my own age than I did with older interviewees who had greater academic and professional experience. My current sample is also quite gender-balanced, with only slightly more women than men represented in the material (see section on empirical material below). It is conceivable that the greater number of women is due to the fact that they were more inclined to respond to messages from a stranger who was also a woman, but this could have been due to other factors as well.

While researcher positions are often discussed in terms of a higher hierarchical status, it is also important to question whether this is true in all areas. For example, it must be noted that all of the research participants had more knowledge regarding engineering issues and their own professions than I did. This varied greatly in respect to labour market actors depending on the given organisation and an actor's position within that organisation. Nevertheless, they also had more empirical knowledge about how integration initiatives functioned than I did. It is interesting and valuable to reflect on this in respect to researcher positionality—even though the researcher has the authority to use the knowledge provided in their own way, the people I interviewed were in many senses teaching me and were often more "highly skilled" than I was. This illustrates how positionalities are fluid, continuously changing from context to context. Positionalities were also intersectional insofar as they were viewed at times through the overlapping identities of researchers and research participants (cf. Njeri 2020), which provided a space for acknowledging both difference and similarity.

Furthermore, positionality is dynamic rather than static (Soedirgo and Glas 2020), and it can shift depending on time and space (Bayeck 2022:1). For example, when I am recognised as a migrant, my positionality in interviews shifts in comparison to when I am not. In addition, the dynamics were different when I visited someone's workplace, where they had more knowledge about the context than I did, with the converse being the case when research

participants were interviewed on university premises, which were more familiar to me than they were to the interviewees. We thus shifted between outsider and insider positionalities in certain respects and at certain times (cf. Merriam et al. 2001; Naples 1996). Reflecting on these shifting and dynamic positionalities marked the entire research process as well as the analysis, and it was important to reflect in this manner insofar as positionality constitutes a filter through which we witness the empirical domain of reality. The positionality of researcher and research participant can impact research results insofar as it influences interviews as well as my access to information on the basis of similarity or difference with others. It also influences the way in which people—including both research participants and researchers—understand their world (the empirical domain) and the types of experiences they have within it. Positionality thus has a complex impact on research, affecting how researchers choose the area of research, their access to participants, and power relations and inequalities within interaction (Secules et al. 2021).

Empirical material

The empirical material comprising the interviews and observations is indicated below in Tables 6, 7 and 8. Although the desk research is not listed insofar as it was a less systematic and continuous process, previous research is reviewed in Chapter 5. The thesis is primarily built upon 53 semi-structured interviews—33[9] with actors from integration initiatives and 20 with refugee engineers. Data was also collected through observations—at two refugee engineers' workplaces as well as job fairs, labour market internship programmes, labour market mentoring programmes, and labour market training courses. These methods have been used to differing degrees in order to answer the separate research questions (see Table 1 in Chapter 1).

The majority of the highly skilled refugee engineers who were interviewed had obtained a degree from Syria. Some of the participants had a varied background, however, having studied in several countries. In addition, one participant is identified as being from Iran and one from Iraq. These interviews were used for the analyses presented in Articles II and III. Interviews were also conducted with so-called "labour market integration actors", who represent organisations and government authorities that aim to help people obtain employment and promote labour market integration in specific ways as well as employers who have labour market integration programmes. These programmes included, for example, labour market training programmes, internships, and mentoring programmes. These interviews were the basis for the analysis presented in Article I. An overview of all the data is presented in

[9] 33 interviews were conducted with a total of 37 participants. Most were conducted one on one, but four included two participants each.

Table 8, Table 9, and Table 10, including the interviews and observations that were conducted.

Table 8: Interviews with labour market initiatives. P = Person interviewed. VO = Volunteer Organisation. U = University. NPO = Non-profit organisation. GA = Government Agency. M = Municipality. M+ = Municipality in collaboration with other actors. CAB = County Administrative Board. C= Company. Gov = Government. A = Association. AC = Academy. S = School. ToO = Type of Organisation

P	Type of initiative/work	Role	ToO
P1, P2	Swedish course	School principal (1) teacher (2)	S
P3	Mentor programme	Working environment and integration investigator	VO
P4	Labour market training programme	Coordinator	U
P5	Labour market integration network	Regional project leader	NPO
P6	Fast track	Course coordinator	U
P7	Mentor programme	Founder	NPO
P8, P9	Network for refugees, labour market training programme	Founder, project leader	NPO
P10	Internship programme	Teacher and mentor for mentors	U
P11	Labour market training programme	Administrator	GA
P12	Labour market training programme	Project leader	NPO
P13	Financial aid for new arrivals	Social worker	M
P14	Advocacy, information gathering	Business policy expert	VO
P15	Early initiatives for asylum seekers	Integration developer	CAB
P16	Informational initiatives, advocacy, educational initiatives	Administrator competence maintenance, work environment	VO
P17	Coordination, reports	Integration coordinator	M
P18	Coordination, planning	Labour market manager	M
P19	Labour market training programme	Project leader	C
P20	Mentor programme	Project leader	NPO
P21	Labour market programme	Project leader, administrator	M
P22	Labour market programme	Responsible manager	C
P23	Labour market network	Regional head	NPO
P24	Labour market work	High administrative official	Gov
P25	Skills supplier	Language developer	A
P26	Internship programme	Communicator	AC

P27	Internship programme	Project leader	AC
P28	Language programme	Study and job counsellor	M+
P29	Labour market programmes and coordination	Project coordinator	GA
P30	Internship programme	Recruiter	C
P31, P32	Complementary education	Education officers	U
P33	Coordination of efforts for highly skilled new arrivals, including internship and mentor programme	Project coordinator	VO
P34	Labour market training programme	Project leader	NPO
P35, P36	Network for refugees; various integration programmes	Activity leader, activity leader	NPO
P37	Mentor programme	Organiser, mentor manager	NPO
P	**Type of initiative/work**	**Role**	**ToO**

Table 9: Interviews with highly skilled refugees. R = Respondent, G=Gender, M = Male, F=Female. Year1 = Year of arrival. Year2 = Years professional experience pre-arrival. Job = Current employment status.

R	G	Year1	Degree	Year2	Job
R1	F	2010–2015	Petroleum engineering	0/unknown	Engineering job
R2	M	2010–2015	Petroleum engineering	5–10	Engineering job
R3	M	2010–2015	Civil engineering	0/unknown	Engineering job
R4	M	2010–2015	Civil engineering (roads and water)	5–10	Non-engineering part-time job
R5	M	2010–2015	Civil engineering (construction)	0/unknown	Engineering job
R6	F	2010–2015	Civil engineering (construction)	10–15	Engineering job
R7	M	2010–2015	Mechanical engineering (energy)	0/unknown	Engineering-adjacent job
R8	F	2010–2015	Civil engineering (machine technology)	1–5	Engineering job
R9	F	2010–2015	Civil engineering	1–5	Engineering job
R10	M	2016–2021	Electrical engineering	20–25	Non-engineering part-time job
R11	F	2016–2021	Civil engineering	1–5	Engineering job

R12	F	2010–2015	Civil engineering	5–10	Engineering job
R13	F	2010–2015	Electrical engineering	5–10	Engineering job
R14	M	2016–2021	Civil engineering (roads and water)	10–15	Non-engineering part-time job
R15	M	2010–2015	Civil engineering	20–25	No current job
R16	F	2016–2021	Survey engineering	5–10	Engineering job
R17	M	2016–2021	Civil engineering (construction)	5–10	Non-engineering part-time job
R18	F	2010–2015	Environmental engineering	10–15	No current job
R19	F	2010-2015	Electrical engineering	1-5	Engineering job
R20	F	2005-2009	Nuclear engineering	1-5	Engineering job
R	**G**	**Year1**	**Degree**	**Year2**	**Job**

Table 10: Observations Conducted

Activity observed	**Total amount (digital or in person participation)**
Job fairs	3 (1 digital, 2 in person)
Labour market programme	3 (digital)
Integration programme, including labour market elements	2 (in person)
Mentor programmes	3 (digital)
Integration events/conferences	3 (1 in person, 2 digital)
Workplace observations	2 (in person)

Chapter 7: Article Summaries

This chapter provides an overview of the three research articles that are included in the thesis. The articles have been ordered in the sequence in which they were written and thus naturally progress from being more explorative in nature to presenting more in-depth analyses. The articles also progress from a broader to a narrower context. I begin by examining the labour market and its structural landscape more generally, first from the perspectives of labour market integration actors (Article I). This is followed by the perspectives of refugee engineers who can highlight their specific experiences of labour market integration (Article II). Finally, in Article III, I examine integration processes as they occur at workplaces of refugee engineers.

Article I: 'One Step Forward, Two Steps Back'. Labour Market Integration Paths of Highly-Skilled Refugees in Sweden

This article explores the labour market integration of highly-skilled refugees seeking employment in Sweden. It does so by means of two key concepts: the structural landscape – comprising the web of social structures, organisations, programmes and regulations which structure highly skilled refugees' labour market paths, and knowledgeable agency – comprising the extent to which refugees can make informed decisions within this landscape. The interaction between these two factors highlights how opportunities and constraints affect refugees' employment outcomes and their ability to exercise their agency. The article provides answers to the following three research questions: What constitutes the labour market integration paths of highly-skilled refugees in Sweden? What types of actors and initiatives, such as programmes, institutions, and organisations, are present on these paths? How does this structural landscape, in terms of opportunities and constraints, influence the labour market paths of highly-skilled refugees?

The material used for the analysis consists of documents, reports, informational websites, and videos from labour market actors; observations at job fairs, information sessions, and webinars; and 33 semi-structured interviews with integration initiatives, such as non-profit organisations, representatives from government agencies, labour market integration programmes and

municipalities. This empirical material is analysed by means of qualitative data coding of themes concerning labour market integration actors and obstacles and opportunities for labour market integration.

The results show that highly skilled refugees encounter a complex structural landscape on their path to employment, consisting of a web of multiple actors. This wide range of initiatives creates opportunities for agency and to choose between and take part in many different initiatives, as well as opportunities for targeted support and the establishment of employer connections. However, it also creates constraints with regards to exercising knowledgeable agency. This is due in part to unclear career paths and path gaps, comprising a lack of clarity due to the plethora of initiatives and waiting times between initiatives. Constraints can also be caused by a lack of coordinated advise and guidance, and the unknowledgeable agency of people working within the labour market integration structures. Moreover, regulations associated with particular labour market programmes and officially communicated paths may limit knowledge of other, alternative, paths to employment. Legal, spatial and temporal constraints are also identified, whereby residency laws, municipality placement, temporary programmes, and short-term vendor contracts shape uneven opportunities.

The labour market paths of highly skilled refugees in Sweden are found to be complex, multifaceted, and non-linear, including many different actors and initiatives. Even though refugees can exercise agency on their labour market path, the analysis shows that it is difficult to acquire the knowledgeable agency needed for making informed decisions to navigate through the complex structural landscape.

Article II: Nuancing the Refugee Gap. The Labour Market Integration of Syrian Engineers in Sweden.

Refugees are consistently found to have lower labour market participation than other migrants and majority populations, an observation that has been termed the "refugee gap" in quantitative studies (Fasani, Frattini and Minale 2022; Ruiz and Vargas-Silva 2017). This article explores the labour market integration of Syrian refugee engineers in Sweden, providing qualitative data that nuances this refugee gap by showcasing what kinds of opportunities and constraints they face when trying to obtain employment. The article provides answers to the following research questions: What constitutes the labour market integration structures for highly skilled refugees in Sweden? How can the opportunities and constraints regarding the labour market integration of highly skilled refugees be understood? Why do these opportunities and constraints emerge?

The empirical material comprises 18 semi-structured interviews with Syrian refugee engineers. This is complemented by a literature review of integration policies and welfare service reforms in Sweden over time, as well as analyses of previous research, the engineering labour market, and online informational material about rules and regulations regarding labour market entry and existing integration initiatives. Observations were also conducted at various labour market integration initiatives, which informed the analysis with regards to the types of existing labour market integration measures.

The material is analysed in accordance with a critical realist ontology and epistemology, by means of a retroductive analysis which makes hypotheses about underlying, real, mechanisms based on empirical events and experiences. Moreover, labour market integration is conceptualised as a relational process, occurring between all members of a group and leading to increased equal opportunities on the labour market (cf. Klarenbeek 2023). The integration process is, in addition, understood in terms of morphogenesis – the process of reshaping a state or structure (Archer 1995) – and comprising structural and agentic change toward equal labour market opportunities.

The results of the analysis indicate that the engineers, despite their relevant qualifications, work experience and generally good labour market prospects in Sweden, are found to experience labour market discrimination and exclusion. The majority of respondents faced repeated job rejections and lack of interview callbacks, and did not feel that their Syrian engineering degree was valuable on the Swedish labour market. Moreover, constraining factors appeared intersectional with regards to respondents' age, foreign background and education, and language ability.

Other obstacles to labour market integration included individual and structural language constraints. While individuals' language ability had an effect on labour market opportunities, so did the lack, and geographically limited availability, of profession-specific and technically advanced language training. Their labour market success was often influenced by the ability to connect with knowledgeable guides, which was not always available, as support from the Swedish Public Employment Service was seen as inconsistent or inadequate for the kind of guidance needed. Other available structural help was also deemed inadequate for their level of education and skill. Moreover, the opportunities and constraints on the labour market were found to be temporally and geographically contingent, as opportunities varied depending on where and when refuges arrived, availability of employment opportunities, and shifting policy landscapes. The nature of seeking asylum also created constraints due to waiting times and lack of opportunities to stay up-to-date with one's technical engineering skills.

These results can be further understood through an analysis of the changing structural landscape of labour market integration. Neoliberal reforms, ideologies, and marketisation of employment services have contributed to shifting responsibility onto individuals for their own labour market integration, while

outsourcing labour market support measures to private vendors without long-term contracts. Moreover, the Swedish Public Employment Service has undergone budget cuts, closed down local employment offices, and been subject to reforms which have changed their role in employment mediation. This has created conditions which can help explain the constraints identified by the refugee engineer respondents – a lack of guidance, inadequate support, and uneven geographical distribution of labour market support measures.

In conclusion, the article reveals that existing labour market structures include the Swedish Public Employment Service, private vendors that offer various labour market integration courses, university programmes, and employing organisations that can provide opportunities for internship programmes. The opportunities and constraints that highly skilled refugee engineers face can be understood as pertaining to both structure and agency, and as intersectional. While no single constraining factor may be specific to refugee engineers, the intersection of identified factors creates an intricate mosaic of labour market integration constraints for this group. Moreover, certain constraints may be specifically relevant for this group, such as the need for highly technical language, for knowledgeable guides with appropriate engineering competence, and for regularly updated professional skills. The opportunities and constraints that came to light in the analysis through the empirical material can furthermore be understood as emerging due to generative mechanisms connected to discrimination, and a larger tendency toward neoliberalism, new public management, and a marketisation of welfare services.

Article III: Norm Circles and the Geography of Workplace Integration. Workplace Experiences of Refugee Engineers in Sweden.

This article investigates the workplace integration of refugee engineers in Sweden, exploring the opportunities and constraints that they experience after obtaining employment or through their internship opportunities. The two research questions guiding the analysis are: What characterises the workplace integration of highly skilled refugees? How can the opportunities and constraints to workplace integration be understood, and why do they emerge?

These questions are explored through a critical realist lens. The article particularly focuses on the concept of norm circles – comprised of a group of people who reaffirm norms by having a similar understanding of ways of behaving (Elder-Vass 2010) – to examine workplace integration processes. Moreover, workplace integration is theorised as a relational process whereby members of a workplace interact and create conditions for equal workplace relations (cf. Spencer and Charsley 2021; Klarenbeek 2023). This can be understood as a morphogenetic process, denoting a process of change or re-

shaping of a state or structure (Archer 1995:75; Buckley 1967). This process of change comprises structural and agential change toward equal workplace relations, and is shaped by the interplay of existing structures, agents, and evolving norms over time.

The article analysis is based on empirical material comprised of 20 semi-structured interviews with refugee engineers from Syria, Iran and Iraq. In addition, two workplace observations were conducted with two refugee engineers. The analysis was conducted through coding of interview transcripts and fieldnotes, guided by a critical realist methodology, taking its starting point in empirical data but also making hypotheses about conditions that may have triggered the observed events in the empirical material (Mukumbang, Kabongo and Eastwood 2021; Boost, Blom and Raeymaeckers 2022).

The results indicate that workplace norm circles shaped the opportunities and constraints to workplace integration. Existing norms that were evident at the workplaces included ones related specifically to how the engineering profession is carried out in Sweden, as well as norms about workplace behaviours. The refugee engineers were often found to adapt to these norms, which suggests a one-way adaptation process rather than one of relational integration. Constraints to workplace integration could emerge when workplace members made the refugee engineers feel excluded on the basis of gendered and national stereotypes. Moreover, workplace mentors and colleagues could comprise norm guides, who helped the newcomer engineers understand the existing norms that were carried out within the workplace norm circles.

Exceptions to this one-way adaptation included inclusive and welcoming relational interaction between engineers and other workplace members. Opportunities for workplace integration could thus arise when norm circles were inclusive and fostered mutual respect and collaborative environments.

Workplace integration, and the communication of workplace norms, was moreover found to be affected by the sociomateriality of the workplaces, and the temporal patterns of the workdays. The different features of each workplace created differing opportunities for relational interaction and the learning and communication of engineering and workplace norms.

Opportunities and constraints to workplace integration can thus emerge because of normative social practices at the workplaces that are carried out by members of norm circles, as well as specific workplace geographies. Furthermore, these results may be understood in relation to a larger societal context, in which dominant societal discourses of civic integration portray it as something which migrant "others" do by learning and adapting to the perceived majority. This could suggest the existence of a larger circle of norms around how integration itself is conceptualised which affects workplace practices and understandings of integration at the workplace.

Chapter 8: Discussion, Contributions and Conclusions

This thesis comprises an inquiry into the labour market and workplace integration of highly skilled refugees in Sweden. Its aim has been to answer the following three research questions: *How can integration processes be conceptually and theoretically understood? What characterises the labour market and workplace integration of highly skilled refugees?* and *How can opportunities and constraints regarding labour market and workplace integration be understood, and why do they emerge?*

The field of integration studies is arguably multidisciplinary in character, offering a great variety of definitions and conceptualisations, which has nonetheless been criticised for being under-theorised (Chapter 2). Migration and refugee studies have more recently delved into integration with regards to highly skilled refugees, and their contributions in this regard have been steadily increasing. On the basis of a critical examination of both general and particular debates regarding integration, the present thesis identified the conceptualisation of the relation between structure and agency as a promising starting point for a more in-depth theorising that would lead to a more complete understanding of how and why integration processes occur (Chapter 3).

More specifically, the approach adopted in the present exploration has been informed by the critical realist perspective. The process of integration of highly skilled refugees was conceptualised in this respect as existing within the interplay of structure and agency and as a process of structural and agential change (Chapters 2, 3; cf. Archer's notion of morphogenesis [1995]). Such understandings of integration address some of the previous criticisms that have been associated with the integration concept, building upon more recent conceptualisations of integration as involving a process of relational change (cf. Klarenbeek 2023; Spencer and Charsley 2021).

Integration is viewed in this thesis as a process of morphogenetic change that can be fruitfully understood with regards to relational processes of equality between all individuals, not merely migrants and the receiving "society". Moreover, not only does integration involve relational interaction between all agents within a given group and their relations with structure, it also constitutes a process of change within interconnected structures and domains. The two domains on which the present study focuses, among the variety of domains that the concept of integration may include, are the labour market and

the workplace—which are particularly relevant within the context of the post-migration integration experiences of highly skilled refugees.

This thesis takes labour market and workplace integration into consideration as specific types of integration processes. The former denotes processes of equal opportunity when seeking employment, while the latter is understood with regard to equal workplace relations. An examination of these processes in respect to engineers as a representative group of highly skilled refugees in Sweden has found that their labour market integration was characterised by a web of social structures. The latter represent a complex structural landscape that is difficult to navigate without the acquisition of the necessary knowledgeable agency**,** which the certified and highly relevant professional qualifications of the refugee engineer do not readily provide (Article I). The findings of the empirical study in this regard suggest, for example, that a lack of available courses concerning technical engineering language, a lack of adequate labour market integration courses, and the lack of knowledgeable guides represent some of the main constraints upon the refugee engineers' agency. Moreover, this creates obstacles to integration on the labour market that are not easy to ameliorate. We may thus view such refugees, regardless of their pertinent professional credentials and skills, as disadvantaged on the labour market, which suggests the prevalence of labour market discrimination (Article II).

Both workplace and labour market integration processes pertain to how individuals and structures interact relationally to create structural and individual change. Regardless of exclusionary processes taking place at both labour market and workplace level, there were significant differences between the two domains, as the identified opportunities and constraints differed from one another. At the workplace, these were related to engineering and workplace norms and the expectations that agents adapt to them. Integration processes at the workplace are also understood with regards to normative social practices that affect the opportunities available to refugee engineers at the workplace. However, interaction with one's colleagues does not necessarily lead to integration. While it could, on the one hand, provide opportunities for relational workplace integration, it might also contribute, on the other, to feelings of exclusion (Article III). Notably, the present study of integration at the workplace has been limited to workplaces at specific physical locations, such as the traditional office or factory-based workplace, and digital or home-based workplaces have not been taken into account. This reflects the context-specificity of the present case study, which included types of engineering work that could not be practiced at home, such as construction engineering.

Furthermore, opportunities and constraints concerning labour market and workplace integration have been addressed as they are affected by intersecting positionalities, including age, foreign background, level of education, and language ability. These positionalities are also context-specific—while having a Syrian engineering degree could open many doors and opportunities for employment in Syria, this was not the case in a Swedish context. Integration

processes in the labour market and at the workplace are thus revealed to be temporally and geographically contingent in that they take place in specific contexts that create possibilities for and obstacles to integration (Article II, III). This is associated, for example, with where one lives, where integration initiatives are located, when one arrived in Sweden, and specific workplace geographies and daily schedules that may create either opportunities for or constraints to relational interaction (Article II, III).

The focus on highly skilled engineers in this thesis nuances previous research that has focused only on the refugee category in integration studies. The present study has contributed to gaining an understanding of a number of factors important for the labour market and workplace integration of refugee engineers. While more must be done to tease out how the specifics of the engineering profession may impact opportunities and constraints to integration in comparison with other professions, this study provides a sound starting point for future comparative studies. It suggests that obstacles for labour market and workplace integration exist for refugee engineers in spite of their relevant skills and experience. While some of these obstacles are not necessarily engineering-specific or related to having a higher education, others are clearly specific for highly skilled individuals. This is the case, for example, in respect to the disadvantages such individuals may encounter due to the structural focus on so-called "low skilled" measures. Disadvantages are also associated with the uneven geographical and temporal availability of profession-specific language learning opportunities as well as the assumption that highly skilled refugees can accept a greater responsibility for their own labour market integration because they are supposedly closer to the labour market.

In addition, the studied refugee engineers have experienced both opportunities connected with the universality of engineering knowledge as well as constraints linked to requirements regarding engineering-specific norms, highly technical engineering language, and the need for up-to-date technical skills (Article II). Untangling the specifics of integration processes with regards to a given profession is important for understanding whether equal opportunities occur for different groups. The present study also shows that engineering workplaces are not homogenous, which suggests that much work remains for profession-specific studies if they are to reveal the workplace and labour market processes specific for each professional group.

The analyses presented in Article I, II, and III not only provide answers to the various questions concerning how refugee integration occurs, but also develop hypotheses concerning why the opportunities and constraints noted above emerge. Particular studies and contexts can be further analysed in order to develop hypotheses regarding the generative mechanisms in the ontological domain that have given rise to the empirical events observed in the present study.

The mechanisms that may have generated the empirical results include discrimination as well as neoliberalism, which has taken shape through policy

changes and the implementation of for-profit models and reforms (Article II). Moreover, civic integrationist ideologies and norms may create conditions for non-relational views of integration that both refugees and employers might adapt (Article III). These explanations relate to a larger shift in recent decades away from welfare models for all towards placing increased responsibility on immigrants and other jobseekers for their own labour market outcomes (Chapter 4). This trend appears to have created the prerequisites for unequal labour market participation within the specific contexts investigated in this dissertation.

The empirical realities that have been showcased through the interview and observational material in this thesis may thus provide insights into the underlying factors within the real domain that have made them occur by analysing them in respect to other scholarship as well as overarching historical tendencies. This provides a broader time frame, extending beyond how agency is exercised on an individual level, for understanding the potential processes of structural morphogenesis, which take longer to occur than agential change.

The meaning and character of the job fair I attended in 2022—described at the beginning of this thesis—is therefore much clearer to me now than it was then insofar as I can now place it within a larger context. The plethora of stalls, offering seemingly identical labour market efforts and competing for participants, aptly illustrates the complex structural landscape of opportunity and constraint that renders attaining knowledgeable agency challenging (Article I). It can be understood as an embodiment of the consequences of marketisation reforms and for-profit models (Article II), whereby similar private actors compete for jobseekers who must make difficult judgments about which labour market initiative to choose. It also illustrates the unevenness of labour market opportunities, as remote municipalities sought to attract as many jobseekers as possible by means of relocation packages, aiming to fill their increasing labour shortages.

I would like to end this work in the same manner that I began it, with another insight from Abdel. He was mentioned at the beginning of this thesis in reference to the "expensive decisions" he had to make on his labour market journey. Abdel, like many of the engineers interviewed for this dissertation, had a temporary residence permit and thus needed to periodically apply to have it extended. He wanted to apply for permanent residency, which requires, among other things, a stable income. One "expensive decision" that Abdel consequently had to make was to interrupt his education in Sweden to take a job that he did not want in order to ensure that he could obtain his new residence permit. But he feels like an outsider at his job and wants nothing more than to work somewhere else or to continue studying. Abdel obviously has agency and actively makes decisions, but his agency is constrained because of regulations concerning residence permits. Moreover, his story showcases how having employment, although often framed positively, can also be associated with unequal workplace relations. Abdel's situation highlights the need for

further studies concerning highly skilled refugees not only in respect to both their labour market and workplace situations, but also in respect to how—and why—their integration is simultaneously influenced by an assortment of enabling and constraining factors.

The contributions of the present research on the empirical level include unique material and insights concerning refugee engineers as well as the labour market and workplace integration of highly skilled refugees. This study also makes unique contributions on the theoretical level with regards to its elaboration of integration as a relational and morphogenetic process, utilising critical realist concepts in a new way within migrant integration research. This is important for dealing with the criticisms that have been raised regarding prior integration research, including demands for more rigorous scholarship (Chapter 2). The results of such more rigorous studies can, moreover, be employed to improve labour market and workplace equality in the long term insofar as they can identify underlying processes that give rise to the constraints identified in previous studies.

By bringing together these theoretical and empirical fields—and making connections between the literature on migrant integration and that concerning sociological and philosophical discussions of structure and (constrained) agency—this study has provided new avenues for future research that may be able to more clearly examine why integration processes occur. In addition, the results contribute to a more temporally and spatially sensitive understanding of integration processes insofar as integration has been shown to be not only a social process, but also a process that is tightly interwoven with material factors (Article III) and with temporally shifting policy landscapes that influence labour market initiatives and refugee reception (Article I, II, Chapter 4). This initial look into these factors can serve as a foundation in the future for gaining a better understanding of the changing complexities of labour market and workplace geographies, especially through a longitudinal study.

In this sense, a further untangling of the geographically and temporally contingent intersectional aspects of integration—which allows for a more in-depth analysis of how opportunities and constraints operate, illuminates structural and agential morphogenesis, reveals more nuanced socio-spatial processes, and makes evident how specific workplaces are embedded in time and space—represents a prospective agenda for future geographical research.

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