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Overcoming the Triple Disadvantage:
Labour Market Incorporation of Skilled Refugee Women in Germany
Case Study Essen

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Abstract

Using Essen in Germany as a case study, this thesis explores the perceived effectiveness of active labour market programmes for skilled refugee women. Refugee women face a triple disadvantage in accessing the labour market, with employment rates lower than those of refugee men, migrant women, and native-born women. Skilled refugee women experience high levels of underemployment, often employed either in positions that do not match their qualification level or in involuntary part-time or temporary positions. In research and policy design, however, this group remains somewhat invisible. This thesis examines whether there is a mismatch between the programmes in place and the needs of skilled refugee women. It further seeks an explanation for the mismatch through the application and development of the framework 'public service failure'.

Drawing on in-depth interviews with skilled refugee women and service providers, as well as an analysis of relevant policy documents, the findings show that central barriers experienced by this group relate to language, difficulties with (re-)orientation, and intersectional challenges linked to gender, religion, and motherhood. Language courses are deemed insufficient to fully prepare for employment. Job-search assistance and training that could aid with re-orientation are seldomly addressed at those with high qualifications and ambitions. Lacking availability of childcare and part-time courses presents a further barrier. Regarding explanations for the mismatch, findings indicate that while refugee women are increasingly a target group in active labour market policies, skill-level is often disregarded. Rigidity of official programmes means the individual support necessary cannot be effectively provided. Measures designed to bring people into employment quickly conflict with desires to find adequate employment. Perceived ineffectiveness can have detrimental effects, as a negative experience of friends discourages others from availing of a service. However, findings also revealed the potential of civil society projects that step in to 'fill the gap'. In order to improve labour market access for skilled refugee women, such projects and initiatives must be supported, and skilled refugee women's needs and interests must be taken into account in the development of new programmes and policies.

Keywords: labour market, integration, skilled refugee women, ALMPs, public service failure

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List of Abbreviations

ALMP   Active Labour Market Policy

BA   Bundesagentur für Arbeit (Federal Employment Agency)

BAMF   Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees)

BMAS   Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales (Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs)

IAB   Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung (Institute for Employment Research)

NRW   North Rhine-Westphalia

OECD   Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

Chapter 1: Introduction

As one of the primary destination countries in Europe for refugees and asylum seekers, Germany places considerable importance on their integration into the labour market. In response to growing numbers of asylum seekers arriving in 2015 and 2016, a myriad of programmes and policies were developed to facilitate their transition into employment, including language courses, job-specific trainings, job coaching, and the mainstreaming of active labour market policies (ALMPs) already in place. As the majority of asylum seekers are young men, this group is often the point of focus in such labour market integration programmes (Bonewit & Shreeves, 2016). According to a large-scale quantitative survey carried out by the *Institut für Arbeitsmarkt und Berufsforschung* (IAB), participation of refugee women in these programmes is comparatively low (Brücker et al., 2020). When it comes to labour market incorporation, refugee women face a 'triple disadvantage'. Despite their high motivations to enter the labour market, their employment is lower than that of refugee men, migrant women, and native-born women (Liebig & Tronstad, 2018). Skilled refugee women in particular experience high levels of underemployment, where they are employed either in positions that do not match their qualification levels or in involuntary part-time or temporary positions (Brücker et al., 2020; Wiedner et al., 2018; Worbs et al., 2016). Considering their positive attitude toward engaging in paid labour, this raises questions regarding the reasons for their disproportionate disadvantage and low participation in ALMPs.

A growing body of research has investigated what influences labour market participation of immigrants and refugees. The predominant focus lies on individual characteristics, with language proficiency and education levels often regarded as primary indicators (Schenner & Neergaard, 2019). Other studies focus on host country labour market structures or policy context. The 'gender gap' is put down to motherhood, or cultural explanations are given (Ala-Mantila & Fleischmann, 2018; Bakker et al., 2017; Ballarino & Panichella, 2018). Institutional factors influencing labour market incorporation are less frequently foregrounded in research (Spehar, 2021). The effectiveness of ALMPs has been studied principally through large-scale quantitative analyses, examining what works for whom based on post-programme employment levels (Butschek & Walter, 2014; Heinesen et al., 2013; Ortlieb et al., 2020). A limited number of studies take into account gender in relation to ALMPs for immigrants (Cheung & Phillimore, 2017; Shutes, 2011; Spehar, 2021).

These have revealed that gendered considerations play an important role. The specific barriers faced by skilled refugee women in entering into employment and the effectiveness of ALMPs for this target group remain undiscussed in academic research.

This thesis therefore aims to understand *how the un- and underemployment of skilled refugee women can be explained in the context of active labour market policies and programmes in Germany*. Labour market integration involves a multitude of actors and complex networks. I therefore approach this question through a municipal case study. This enables a more detailed analysis of programmes available at local level and acknowledges that integration takes place locally. The city of Essen in North Rhine-Westphalia was chosen as the state hosts the largest refugee population in Germany and is home to a pilot project seeking to facilitate labour market participation of refugees (Degler & Liebig, 2017). I take a qualitative approach to examine institutional factors that hinder skilled refugee women's labour market participation by looking at their experiences of programmes intended to facilitate labour market integration. Through in-depth interviews with skilled refugee women, service providers and volunteers, as well as an analysis of relevant policy documents, this thesis seeks to establish what the main barriers experienced by this group are and how they are (or fail to be) addressed by the policies and programmes in place. However, the unique contribution of this research lies in its endeavour to understand why there might be a mismatch between the needs of skilled refugee women and ALMPs in place. This will be examined through the application and further development of a framework from public management literature, namely Van de Walle's 'public service failure' (2016).

Through this research, I contribute by highlighting the experience of a group that remains somewhat invisible in both research and policy. Building on previous research relying on quantitative analyses of the (in)effectiveness of ALMPs, I explore this qualitatively, looking at how they are experienced by those navigating them. Focusing on the intersection of gender and skill-level, I furthermore examine challenges that arise in the implementation of ALMPs from the perspectives of both service user and service provider.

This thesis is structured as follows: In Chapter 2, I review relevant literature in the field and elaborate on the theoretical concepts and frameworks employed. Chapter 3 delineates the research design, outlining and explaining in detail the main research questions, sub-questions, and the methods applied. Chapter 4 provides the policy context, presenting an overview of ALMPs in place at national, regional, and local level. The findings of this research are presented in Chapter 5. These are discussed and related to the larger body of literature in Chapter 6, highlighting the principal contributions and acknowledging the main

limitations of this research. The final chapter summarises the results and analysis, outlines possible avenues for future research, and develops practical and policy recommendations for stakeholders.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I review existing scholarship on labour market integration and the effectiveness of ALMPs for immigrants generally, and refugee women in particular. I identify theoretical and methodological gaps in the literature which this thesis addresses. Furthermore, I outline the definitions and concepts of this research project, as well as the theoretical framework employed.

2.1 Literature Review

This section describes the state-of-the-art in research on labour market integration relevant to this thesis, focusing on two main questions: what are the main barriers to employment for skilled refugee women? And how effective are labour market programmes and policies in addressing these barriers? It intends to highlight in what way the existing body of literature, and gaps therein, have informed the main research question of this thesis, *how can the un- and underemployment skilled refugee women in Essen be explained in the context of active labour market policies and programmes in place?*

2.1.1 Factors influencing labour market participation of skilled refugee women

As refugees do not migrate for economic reasons, their labour market integration is less frequently foregrounded in research (Ager & Strang, 2008). However, quantitative and qualitative studies continue to show high motivation among this group to enter the labour market, as well as the capacity of employment to facilitate other elements of integration, such as learning the language, establishing networks, future planning, promoting economic independence, and restoring self-esteem (Ager & Strang, 2008). Just as with regards to a 'migrant-gap', there is general consensus on a 'refugee-gap': refugees face greater barriers to adequate employment (Bakker et al., 2017; Lens et al., 2019). There is evidence for lower levels of employment (Aydemir, 2011), lower earnings (Cortes, 2004), and a high proportion of employment in the secondary labour market (Schenner & Neergaard, 2019). In regards to labour market participation of migrant women, there is general consensus regarding a 'gender gap', or 'double-disadvantage' in that migrant women experience more difficulties in entering employment than migrant men and their native-born counterparts (Ala-Mantila & Fleischmann, 2018; Ballarino & Panichella, 2018; Donato et al., 2014). Regarding the labour market incorporation of refugee women, Liebig and Tronstad (2018) have suggested a 'triple

disadvantage', where disadvantages relating to gender, immigrant status, and forced migration mutually reinforce one another, with employment levels in this group lower than those of refugee men, migrant women, and native-born women. The labour market access of skilled refugee women is seldom explored in academic literature: this group remains somewhat invisible.

When it comes to explaining what shapes labour market incorporation of immigrants, the dominant research approach is to focus on individual characteristics (Schenner & Neergaard, 2019, p. 15), and here many researchers draw on Bourdieu's human capital theory (Ballarino & Panichella, 2018; Khoudja & Fleischmann, 2017; Ortlieb et al., 2020; Riano, 2011). According to this theory, in order to achieve favourable positions in their social fields, individuals accumulate various forms of capital. An individual's *social capital* refers to their network, where individuals who are better connected have tangible advantages. An individual's *cultural capital* refers to 'embodied' assets such as attitudes, skills, gender, and ethnicity; 'objectified' assets such as cultural products; and 'institutionalised' assets, such as academic credentials and diplomas. These can be converted into *economic capital*. However, the favourable position that can be achieved is reliant on other actors recognising this capital as valuable, which Bourdieu refers to as *symbolic capital* (Bourdieu, 1986). Through this approach, researchers have highlighted how migrants' language proficiency (Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003), gender and cultural norms (Kesler, 2018; Khoudja & Fleischmann, 2017), education level and qualification (Andersson, 2020) and mental health (Ruiz & Vargas-Silva, 2018) influence their labour market access.

Regarding the labour market participation of refugee women, the factors that are most frequently emphasised in academic literature and reports are language proficiency, educational level, motherhood, and cultural values (Spehar 2021). Liebig and Tronstad, who identify the 'triple disadvantage' for refugee women, argue that one of the main challenges is the low educational attainment of refugee women, as well as them tending to have poorer host-country language skills than refugee men (2018, p. 26). Care obligations are further foregrounded as one of the main factors influencing the lower participation of refugee women (Brücker et al., 2020; Kosyakova et al., 2021; Liebig & Tronstad, 2018, p. 28). Source country culture is also provided as an explanation for gender gaps in immigrant employment. According to this argumentation, conservative gender values in the home country regarding the appropriateness of work outside of the house for women translate to differences in labour market participation in the destination country (Koopmans, 2016).

However, these explanations have been challenged. A recent study by Fuchs et al. (2020) examining value differences between recently arrived refugees and German natives found that refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and Syria showed a higher probability of agreeing with gender equality values regarding participation in the labour market than German respondents. A quantitative study by Salikutluk and Menke (2021) examining gender differences in the labour market integration of newly arrived refugees in Germany also found no association between gender conceptions and labour market orientation. They furthermore found that there is no statistically significant relationship between refugee women's work experience and education received in their home country and their employment probabilities in Germany. This challenges the argument that low educational attainment is a main factor explaining refugee women's lower participation in the labour force. It also suggests that skilled refugee women face particular barriers in converting their cultural capital. Salikutluk and Menke advocate for relating their quantitative findings with broader societal contexts, and argue that further qualitative and quantitative research is needed to investigate the specific hurdles faced by refugee women.

From this brief review of the literature on factors which affect labour market outcomes, it is clear that focus tends to be on individual characteristics of refugee women, with less attention paid to how this might link with institutions for labour market integration (Spehar, 2021). Such studies look at education level but not at recognition of qualifications, at language proficiency but not at access to and provision of language courses, and at motherhood and care obligations without looking at the provision of childcare. In the following section, literature that focuses more directly on labour market integration policies and programmes is discussed.

2.1.2 Effectiveness of Active Labour Market Integration Policies and Programmes (ALMPs)
Literature on the effectiveness of labour market integration policies and programmes shows some rather discouraging prospects. In a meta-analysis of evaluation literature, Butschek and Walter (2014) review 33 empirical studies of the effectiveness of ALMPs employed across Europe to counter immigrant unemployment, with the purpose of establishing what programmes work for immigrants. They found that between training courses, job-search assistance programmes, and wage subsidies, the latter has the most promising effects, yet are rarely used for immigrants. As the number of studies reviewing migrant-specific

programmes, such as language and introduction courses, was small, they do not draw conclusions about such programmes.

A recent quantitative study on ALMPs in Switzerland by Auer and Fossati (2020) sheds light on how such programmes are assigned. They found evidence of 'creaming' of those that are easier to help and 'parking' of those who are perceived as more difficult to assist. Using administrative data covering newly unemployed individuals in Switzerland, they distinguished between unemployed persons placed in 'parking' measures, such as temporary employment programmes, and upskilling measures, such as training courses relating to professional development. They argue that in assigning jobseekers to programmes, caseworkers are influenced by the strict evaluation culture of Jobcentres and the anticipation of labour market discrimination. This means that caseworkers are more likely to place immigrants, who they perceive as having lower employability, in 'parking' programmes, which are generally seen as less effective.

Regarding the assigning and effectiveness of ALMPs for refugees more particularly, an older qualitative study by Shutes (2011) examines one policy instrument, namely employment assistance for refugees in the UK. Interviewing both service users and service providers, Shutes finds that service providers are under pressure to deliver results and to quickly place service users into employment. She argues that such pressures may result in prioritising easier cases, 'creaming' those that are more likely to secure employment and 'parking' those harder to help. This can encourage service providers to place refugees in a job into which they can be easily placed, that is to say low-paid, low-skilled, and less secure employment types.

Whether gender plays a role in the outcomes of integration and social policies was further explored in a quantitative study by Cheung and Phillimore (2017) in the UK. Drawing on a large-scale survey from 2007, they found clear gender differences in access to education, training, employment, self-reported general health, budgeting, housing, and language proficiency. They further found that some of these gender discrepancies did not equalise over time. Their data showed that women accessed language programmes later than men, and men were twice as likely to access education training and employment. They call for gender-sensitive measures to ensure that women can participate in social policy arenas.

A more recent study by Spehar (2021) looks into gendered experience of labour market integration programmes. In her analysis, she focuses on voices of refugee women to understand the effect of the institutional systems for labour market integration on those taking part in them. Drawing on in-depth interviews with refugee women, who despite high

motivations to enter the Swedish labour market did not succeed in finding secure employment, she finds that insufficient institutional support during their first years, devaluation of competence, and challenges to 'starting over' were perceived as the main barriers to accessing the labour market. Respondents perceived that street-level bureaucrats did not recognise their skills and competencies due to prejudice about refugee women, and insufficiently engaged in providing services. This study builds on her approach by examining a similar question in a different context, adding the dimension of skill-level as well as taking into account the voices of service providers.

2.2 Gaps in the literature

This thesis identifies and responds to a number of gaps in the literature. Firstly, research on labour market incorporation has been carried out according to gender, status and skill-level, however research on the combination of the three in studying the labour market incorporation of skilled refugee women is scarce. This group remains relatively invisible not only in research but also in policy, which attests to the societal relevance and urgency of such research. Another element that this thesis seeks to address is that structural barriers are generally understudied, with most studies focusing on individual factors affecting labour market incorporation. By focusing on barriers faced by skilled refugee women, this thesis also contributes to research on the effectiveness of labour market integration programmes, where target-group specific research is sparse. I approach this from the perspectives of both service users and service providers in seeking to establish whether there is a mismatch, whether it is perceived by both sides, and how it might be overcome. In a broader literature review of ALMP evaluations, Bredgaard (2015) calls for more interpretative evaluations of ALMPs, that do not only examine which programmes work for whom, but also take into account the context and seek to explain why this might be the case. I respond to Bredgaard's call in seeking an explanation for the expected mismatch. A methodological shortcoming observed in the literature reviewed is that in evaluations of labour market programmes, systematic frameworks for analysis are rarely employed. This thesis seeks to address this gap by using a framework based on public management literature, outlined in the following section.

2.3 Theoretical Concepts

After describing the state-of-the-art in the previous section and identifying the possible contribution of this thesis, this section elaborates on the main concepts addressed in the research question *how can the un- and underemployment of skilled refugee women in Essen be explained in the context of active labour market policies and programmes in place?* First, I define 'skilled refugee women', the main subject of this study. Second, 'labour market incorporation' is conceptualised as the object of this research. Third, 'active labour market policies and programmes' are elaborated on theoretically. The empirical reality of ALMPs in place in Germany is described in Chapter 4. Here, I demonstrate how these concepts are understood in previous research and how I expand these definitions. Lastly, I elaborate on two theories which I build on to answer my research question.

2.3.1 Skilled refugee women

The terms refugee and asylum seeker are often used interchangeably in public debate. In legal terms, asylum seekers are those who have applied for asylum, but whose claim is pending. Refugees are persons whose asylum application has been successful and who are granted formal refugee status according to the Geneva Convention or German law. There is also subsidiary protection status, given to a person who does not qualify as a refugee but would risk serious harm if returned to their country of origin. German legislation allows full labour market access for refugees and people under subsidiary protection. This group is the focus of this study, and for the sake of simplicity the term 'refugee women' is used to describe both those with refugee and subsidiary protection status.

There is no uniform definition of 'skilled' migrants and it is employed to refer to a range of education levels. In some cases, it is understood as the completion of secondary education, in others of tertiary education and extensive work experience in professional fields (IOM, 2012). The problem of rigid definitions for the measurement of skills has been pointed out by feminist scholars, who argue that skills are ideologically constructed, generally based on gendered stereotypes (Kofman, 2012). Skill-level is measured in Germany by a demonstrable qualification and work experience (Worbs & Baraulina, 2017). While acknowledging the problematic assumptions behind rigid definitions of skill-level, I understand 'skilled' to mean the completion of tertiary education in order to ensure a consistent delineation of the group studied. I do not include extensive work experience in acknowledgement of the fact that such experience is often impossible to attain in the war-torn

countries where many of the women originate. Nevertheless, several respondents have extensive work experience, which I highlight where relevant.

2.3.2 Labour market incorporation

Labour market incorporation is also referred to in literature as economic integration or occupational integration. Most studies on labour market incorporation embed it within the broader framework of immigrant integration. Penninx defines integration as 'the process of settlement of newcomers in a given society, the interaction of these newcomers with the host society, and the societal change that follows immigration' (2019, p. 5) He hereby highlights that it is a two-way process, involving both newcomers and host society, an element that is foregrounded by many integration theories (Ager & Strang, 2008; Alba & Nee, 2014; Esser, 2004b). Economic inclusion is argued to be an essential element of the integration process through enabling further interactions and the development of interdependencies, hereby enhancing social cohesion (Ager & Strang, 2008; Esser, 2004a).

Ballarino and Panichella define labour market incorporation as 'the process by which the migrant population becomes similar to the native one concerning the labour market' (Ballarino & Panichella, 2018, p. 126). This is a useful definition as it brings to the fore that labour market incorporation is a process, rather than an end goal. It further includes the essential element of comparison to the native population. To expand on this definition and in line with my approach that looks beyond individual characteristics, as well as the consideration that integration is a two-sided process, I believe it is important to include elements that might facilitate or hinder this process, rather than portraying labour market incorporation as something that simply happens. In this thesis, I therefore understand labour market incorporation to mean *the network of interactions by which migrant and native population become similar concerning the labour market*. These interactions occur between individuals, such as employers, employees, and public service workers, as well as on a larger scale between individuals and institutions.

To elaborate further in what sense 'become similar' is to be understood, Ballarino and Panichella highlight two dimensions of labour market incorporation: the first is the allocation of jobs to individuals, which relates to employment and unemployment rates. The second is the kinds of jobs allocated (Ballarino & Panichella, 2018, p. 126). By highlighting these two dimensions, they show that when discussing labour market incorporation, it is important to

look beyond simply at whether migrants are employed, but also to look at what type of employment they are in.

Considering the type of employment, there are different elements that can be discerned and studied. While some studies focus on income levels and differences between native and migrant earnings (Connor, 2010; De Silva, 1997; Ruiz & Vargas-Silva, 2018), others look at the sector in which migrants are working and how precarious this type of work might be (Schenner & Neergaard, 2019), looking not only at entry into employment but also at exit from employment (Lens et al., 2019). Here it has often been shown that migrants are more concentrated in employment that is less stable, which recently came to the fore in the Covid-19 pandemic (Askola et al., 2021). Others focus on the number of hours worked, looking at migrants that are involuntarily in part-time or temporary positions (Bakker et al., 2017). Lastly, some studies focus on whether migrants work in occupations that do not match their skill or qualification level – also referred to as deskilling or overqualification (Andersson, 2020; Kofman, 2012; Piętka-Nykaza, 2015; Riano, 2011). The term 'underemployment' is used to describe both involuntarily part-time or temporary employment, and the skill or qualification mismatch. Of course, some of these elements are harder to capture than others, which explains why many studies, particularly those relying on large-scale quantitative data, continue to focus mostly on employment levels (Ortlieb et al., 2020). This is a further reason why a qualitative approach is deemed appropriate for this research. I refer to 'un- and underemployment' in my research question, since I focus on a group with a certain skill level and the element of underemployment or deskilling is therefore of central importance.

Another important consideration regarding labour market incorporation is the different levels at which it can be studied. Several studies focus on individual characteristics of migrants, but this ignores the two-sidedness of integration processes. Labour market incorporation is also influenced by 'contextual' factors. Some studies focus on the economic situation in the host country, what might be termed 'economic factors'. Others focus on the political stance towards immigrants, what could be termed 'political factors'. In this study however, I contribute to a body of literature examining the institutional structures and policies of the receiving society, and the effects that these have on labour market incorporation: what could be termed 'institutional factors'. Within this, I focus on active labour market policies.

2.3.3 Active Labour Market Policies

In his definition of labour market policies, Bredgaard makes a distinction between passive and active labour market policies. While passive labour market policies are compensatory and comprise income benefits to unemployed adults, active labour market policies are interventionist in nature. Their main objective is 'to reduce open unemployment and improve the employment opportunities of participants' (Bredgaard, 2015, p. 438). He identifies four types: labour market training, private sector incentive programmes, direct employment programmes, and job search assistance. Butschek and Walter also classify policies into four types: training, subsidised private sector employment, subsidised public sector employment, and job-search assistance and sanctions. Beyond this they identify migrant-specific programmes: language training, introduction programmes, which are customised integration plans towards employment uptake, and general programmes exclusively for immigrants (Butschek & Walter, 2014, p. 5).

In this thesis, I focus on three types of ALMPs namely language training, job-specific training, and job-search assistance. This is motivated by the fact that these are the most widely available and accessible policies for refugees in Germany (Bonin et al., 2020). This includes both general programmes that have been extended or adjusted to be accessible for refugees, such as assistance from Jobcentres, as well as specific programmes developed for refugees.

2.3.4 Public Service Failure

As the review of literature on labour market integration programmes highlighted, such programmes are not always effective, particularly not for (skilled) refugee women. Based on this literature, similar shortcomings can be anticipated in Essen. In order to go beyond identifying the issue and seek an explanation for it (Bredgaard, 2015), this thesis draws on Van de Walle's framework of 'public service failure'. Van de Walle defines public service failure as 'a failure or perceived failure by public organisations to deliver services to the customer against established norms' (2016, p. 832). In contrast to government failure, or policy failure, focus here lies on service delivery – the last step of the policy implementation process, although the root of the failure might occur much earlier in the policy cycle. While government failures and policy failures generally are big events, concerning politically significant groups, service failures are less grand and also less discussed. Osborne argues that

the performance of a service 'is an essentially subjective construct of the consumer, made up of the confluence of their expectations of the service and their perceptions of the process' (Osborne, 2010, p. 3). Focus in an evaluation of whether a public service failure is occurring therefore lies on the perception of the consumer, skilled refugee women in the case of this study. This framework was selected because of its focus on the implementation part of the process, where previous literature has identified inefficacy in the case of labour market integration policies and programmes (Auer & Fossati, 2020; Shutes, 2011; Spehar, 2021), and because of its focus on the perception of the service user. This makes it suitable for the methodology of in-depth interviews employed.

Van de Walle presents a typology of common types of public service failure and their causes. He builds on work by Boin and t'Hart (2000) on crises and policy failure distinguishing three types of general failure: crisis by ignorance, crisis by rigidity and crisis by failed intervention. He adds three further failure types based on public management scholarship: failure by neglect, failure by design and failure by association.

i. *failure by ignorance* occurs when service users perceive a failure but those responsible for the public service do not, and therefore do not take action to improve services.

ii. *failure by rigidity* occurs when there is an awareness of the issue but there is an inability to take action. This might stem from the illegality of a response; for instance, when public service providers are not able to respond to failure because they are not legally permitted to single out individual citizens for preferential treatment.

iii. *failure by failed intervention* occurs when public services respond to a problem but the intervention is considered a failure. This can occur when the problem is deemed a 'wicked problem' (Rittel & Weber, 1973), one that is complex and open-ended, and where standards of success are not agreed upon.

iv. *failure by neglect* occurs when management or policy makers are uninterested in the service, which may be because it has a low-public profile, or because it serves parts of the population who are socially marginalised or not vocal. This might occur when improving the service is not considered a vote winner for politicians.

v. *failure by design* occurs when a service is deliberately designed in such a way that service levels are deficient. This might exist where there is a high demand for services but resources are scarce, and therefore burdensome procedures are introduced to curb demand.

vi. *failure by association* occurs when there is negativity bias in actor's assessment of the services, who therefore fail to recognise objectively good performance. This might occur when a service has a bad reputation.

FIGURE 1

Social Constructions and Political Power: Types of Target Populations

Constructions

	Positive	Negative
Strong	***Advantaged*** The elderly Business Veterans Scientists	***Contenders*** The rich Big unions Minorities Cultural elites Moral majority
Weak	***Dependents*** Children Mothers Disabled	***Deviants*** Criminals Drug addicts Communists Flag burners Gangs

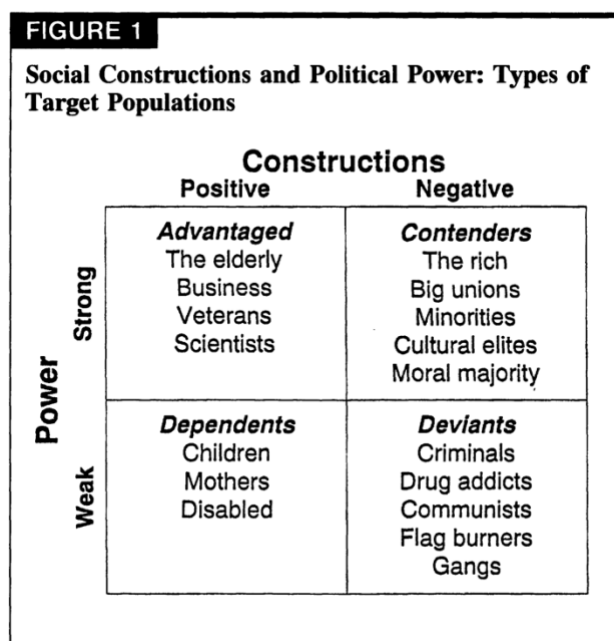(Power — Strong/Weak shown on vertical axis)

Figure 1. Types of Target Population: Source Schneider and Ingram 1993 p. 336

In addition to these six failures and building on literature from policy sciences, I conceptualise a seventh in order to analyse why a service might fail for a specific group: failure by target group construction. Schneider and Ingram define target group construction as 'the cultural characterisations or popular images of the persons or groups whose behaviour and well-being are affected by public policy' (1993, p. 335). They argue that how a target population is constructed has a powerful influence on public officials and contributes to shaping the policy agenda and the design of policy. They argue that on the one hand there is strong social pressure to provide beneficial policy to powerful and positively constructed target populations, and on the other, pressure for punitive approaches to weak and negatively constructed target populations.

vii. *Failure by target group construction* resembles failure by ignorance and failure by neglect, but arises specifically when a target group is constructed in such a way as that they are not seen to be deserving or in need of certain services.

Applying this framework allows for a systematic analysis of the qualitative data that is gathered through interviews and policy analysis. It thus complements previous, more observational and less theoretically grounded approaches seeking to explain why ALMPs might not be so effective for certain target groups. Beyond its main goal of seeking an explanation for high un- and underemployment levels of skilled refugee women in the context of ALMPs, this research therefore also provides insights into the usefulness of the application of such a framework in these types of case studies.

2.3.4 The Local in Multi-Level Governance

Studying labour market integration requires an understanding of a wide range of actors and how they interact. In order to understand these interactions for the chosen municipal case study, this thesis draws on literature on the 'local' in multi-level governance of integration.

Zapata-Barrero et al. (2017) argue that while the governance of immigration in Europe has increasingly shifted to EU level, the governance of migrant integration increasingly occurs at local level. They build on literature by Glick Schiller and Çaglar who highlight the importance of theorising locality in relation to pathways of migrant incorporation, and of looking beyond the national level (2009). Zapata-Barrero et al. identify two dimensions to the local governance of migrant integration. On the one hand, the horizontal dimension looks at how local governments coordinate with other local actors and networks to implement local policy measures. On the other hand, the vertical dimension looks at how local governance relates to other levels of government. Borkert and Caponio's (2010) theory on locality can be employed to further develop this vertical dimension conceptually as they describe how it can be studied through as a bottom-up, or top-down process. A bottom-up approach to policy processes looks at the actors involved and the networks mobilised and how these in turn form a larger network of governance. A top-down approach studies the top-down implementation of legislative provisions, examining for example how national practices are adopted by local branches.

For this research, both the top-down and bottom-up approach are relevant. I examine how national ALMPs are implemented at the local level in Essen. However, looking only at such national programmes would risk ignoring other programmes, such as projects by civil society organisations or migrant-led initiatives. A pluralist approach shines light not only on how national programmes are implemented but also what else is available in the city of Essen. An understanding of the interaction between levels, as the vertical dimension Zapata-Barrero et al. highlight provides, is therefore an essential backdrop for this study.

2.5 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the literature and identified gaps regarding the labour market incorporation of skilled refugee women and the effectiveness of ALMPs for this group. It explained the 'triple disadvantage' experienced by refugee women in accessing the labour market and highlighted the academic debate regarding potential explanations. According to Bourdieu's capital theory, skilled refugee women should be at an advantage in accessing the labour market due to their prior qualifications and experience. However, empirical research shows that the education level of this group does not necessarily place them at an advantage. I argued for the importance of examining institutional factors that might influence their labour market participation, particularly the effectiveness of ALMPs. Previous research

points to an ineffectiveness of such policies for target groups that might be 'parked' because they are considered difficult to place into employment. This research seeks to contribute to this debate by examining perceived effectiveness of such programmes and employing the framework of 'public service failure' to establish what might be the cause of inefficiency. The main theoretical concepts and how they are applied in this thesis were discussed, as well as the two theoretical prisms that guide this research.

Chapter 3: Research Design

This chapter elaborates on the research questions posed and the empirical research conducted in order to answer them. First, it states the research question and relevant sub-questions. Second, the most important variables outlined and conceptualised in the theoretical framework are operationalised in order to clarify how they are applied in this empirical research. Third, the expectations are elaborated upon based on the academic literature reviewed and a review of reports on labour market incorporation in Germany. Fourth, I explain the municipal case study of the city of Essen. Lastly, the methods and ethical considerations are discussed.

3.1 Research Question

This thesis aims to answer the following research question: *How can the un- and underemployment of skilled refugee women in Essen be explained in the context of active labour market integration programmes and policies in place?*

In order to answer this research question, the following sub-questions are posed:

i) *What are the main barriers to adequate employment faced by skilled refugee women in Essen and how does the city of Essen address their labour market participation? What programmes and policies are in place and how are they organised?*

ii) Based on empirical data gathered through interviews and analysis of policy documents*, to what extent do policies and programmes in place meet their needs?*

iii) With reference to evaluation literature of active labour market policies and literature on public service failure, should the empirical research reveal a mismatch between policies and programmes in place and the needs of skilled refugee women, *how can this observation be explained?*

iv) Finally, *in what ways could future policies and programmes more successfully address the needs of skilled refugee women and what would be needed to facilitate this?*

3.2 Operationalisation

The operationalisation of this research is threefold and follows the structure of the sub-questions posed. First, the main barriers to employment experienced by skilled refugee women in Essen are examined. The focus lies on perceived barriers to employment, which are established qualitatively through in-depth interviews with skilled refugee women. Respondents were directly asked what were the main challenges for them at various stages of finding employment.

Second, this thesis establishes whether there is a mismatch between the needs of skilled refugee women looking to enter adequate employment and the programmes and policies in place in Essen. One indicator of this is discontent or frustration with the services provided, which can be identified in interviews with skilled refugee women. This is also a key element in identifying a public service failure (Van de Walle, 2016). Mismatch can further be examined by comparing the needs outlined in interviews with skilled refugee women with the policies and programmes in place as outlined by the service providers and in the policy documents analysed. Another indicator of a mismatch is low participation rate in programmes and interventions, which has been identified in national data (Brücker et al., 2020), and which I verify for the case at hand through interviews with service providers.

Third, in seeking an explanation for the expected mismatch between needs and programmes/policies, Van de Walle's (2016) typology of public service failures is operationalised. These failure types provide a useful framework to test explanations for where problems might be occurring in the implementation of labour market integration policies. Empirical indicators for failure types are based on Van de Walle's definitions, as well as a review of evaluation literature on ALMPs outlined in the previous chapter. As described in the theoretical framework, I added a further failure type, 'failure by target group construction', to capture why the service might not be a match for this particular target group (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). How these failure types are operationalised and identified is shown in the table below. In accordance with an abductive coding approach, the indicators of certain types were adapted during the coding process. The table below shows the adapted indicators.

Failure type	Source	Indicators
1. Failure by ignorance *'failure to recognise a need for service adaptation or reform'*	Interviews with skilled refugee women	Service users perceive a failure/ are frustrated with the services, and note that service providers seem unaware of the problems they are facing
	Interviews with service providers	Service providers do not perceive a failure and on the contrary think the service functions very well
	Analysis of policy documents	Policy documents show no awareness of the failure of this service or of the problems service users are facing
2. Failure by rigidity *'failure as a result of an inability to adapt or reform the service'*	Interviews with skilled refugee women	Service users note that they are not being sufficiently supported and that the service providers struggle to assist them
	Interviews with service providers	Service providers show awareness of the issue and frustration at an inability to act
	Analysis of policy documents	Policy documents dictate strict guidelines about how a programme is to be implemented
3. Failure by failed intervention *'failure as a result of applying a wrong solution'*	Interviews with skilled refugee women	Service users note that there has been an intervention made to address their needs but that this intervention still does not sufficiently address them
	Interviews with service providers	Service providers show awareness of the issue and note attempts that have been made to address it
	Analysis of policy documents	Policy documents show evidence of an attempted intervention to address the issue
4. Failure by neglect *'failure as a result of disinterest'*	Interviews with skilled refugee women	Service users note that the services are insufficiently addressing their needs and that while service providers are aware of the barriers they face, nothing is being done to adapt the services
	Interviews with service providers	Service providers perceive of a failure but note that managers/policy makers are uninterested in making changes
	Analysis of policy documents	Policy documents on the issue are scarce and do not address it as an important service

5. Failure by design	Interviews with skilled refugee women	Service users note many bureaucratic hurdles, service levels are perceived as deficient
'failure as a deliberate design element of the service'	Interviews with service providers	Service providers note scarce resources and are overburdened
	Analysis of policy documents	The policy is deliberately intended to be delivered in this way
6. Failure by association	Interviews with skilled refugee women	Service users disregard the service because of its bad reputation, any positive experience is noted as an exception
'perception of failure as a result of negativity bias'	Interviews with service providers	Service providers note that their service is avoided because it has a bad reputation among service users
7. Failure by target group construction	Interviews with skilled refugee women	Service users feel their position (ie. gender and status) influences the way in which the service is provided to them
'failure of a service for a particular target group because of how they are constructed'	Interviews with service providers	Service providers do not consider this group as needing this kind of service, or note that this group is particularly difficult to help. There is evidence of 'parking' of this group.
	Analysis of policy documents	This target group is not addressed in policy documents as one for which this service is important

Table 1. Operationalisation of failure types

3.3 Expectations

First, it is expected that the labour market integration of skilled refugee women in Essen reflects national trends, which in the absence of availability of quantitative data on municipal level will be verified through reflections of service providers. Second, based on the review of literature examining barriers to employment faced by refugees, migrant women, and skilled migrant women, main structural barriers that I expect to identify are access to childcare (Kofman, 2012), the recognition of qualifications (Andersson, 2020), discriminatory practices (Fossati & Liechti, 2020), and a lack of information (Ballarino & Panichella, 2018). Third, as participation of refugee women in ALMPs is low, I expect that this might be due to a mismatch between the programmes provided and the needs of skilled refugee women (Brücker et al., 2020). Fourth, regarding reasons for a potential mismatch between services and needs, one failure type that can be expected based on previous empirical research is the 'failure by design'. This is anticipated as resources are scarce and programmes are designed in such a way as to get people into employment quickly, rather than into employment

matching skill level, and are generally dealing with a lot of people (Shutes, 2011). Furthermore, 'failure by rigidity' is also one which can be expected, based on previous research that has found that rigid course contents and short time frames of courses dictated by the policies mean that individual needs of service users cannot be taken into account by service providers (Pallmann et al., 2019). A further explanation that appears in previous empirical research is the 'parking' of more difficult cases, which can be mapped to the 'failure by target group construction' since skilled refugee women might be conceived of as a group that is difficult to help into employment (Auer & Fossati, 2020). While these are the main expectations guiding my research, findings will be analysed with the possibility of identifying other unexpected explanations that could further develop the typology.

3.4 Case Selection

In calling for a comparative theory of locality in migration studies, Glick Schiller and Çaglar (2009) call for studies on cities that are not categorised as 'global cities'. They argue that social, cultural, and political dynamics of urban life are best studied in the ways all cities are globalising, a process which, they argue, shapes and is shaped by different forms of migrant incorporation. Essen, as the second largest city of the Ruhr, has been generally ignored by scholars more interested in the larger or more 'global' cities in the region such as Köln, Dortmund, or Düsseldorf. The Ruhr district has been a major migrant settlement area since the turn of the century. When Essen campaigned for European Capital of Culture in 2010, it highlighted its culturally diverse population, which formed a large chunk of its programme *Europa lebt im Ruhrgebiet* (Çaglar, 2007).

When it comes to the study of refugee incorporation, Essen presents itself as a city in North Rhine-Westphalia, the federal state which hosts the largest refugee population in Germany. In Germany, the *Königssteiner Schlüssel* decides the distribution of refugees across the federal states based on tax income and population size, and due to its densely populated nature, North Rhine-Westphalia is assigned around 21% of the refugee population each year. Furthermore, North Rhine-Westphalia is an interesting region for this study, as it has been celebrated for its good practice in labour market integration. The pilot project 'Integration Points' connects several agencies working on labour market integration and facilitates data exchange between them (Degler & Liebig, 2017). This makes this case interesting to study from a multi-level governance perspective. Examining whether refugee women are

disadvantaged despite such a programme provides useful insights into the governance of labour market integration.

Glick Schiller and Çaglar warn of the study of 'paradigmatic cities', where researchers 'glide seamlessly from a narrative about a particular city to generalities about migration in an entire nation-state' (2009 p.182). While this research also seeks to shed light on the situation in Germany, I remain aware of this pitfall of generalisation, and am wary that findings in this research are specific to the city of Essen.

3.5 Methods

Data collection

The primary method of analysis for this thesis are qualitative interviews with skilled refugee women and service providers, supplemented by a policy document analysis. As Fedyuk and Zentai (2018) note, the interview in migration studies can be a tool for knowledge co-production, carving space for the respondents' voices and analysis of the situation. Through interviews with skilled refugee women, I explore their (hindered) trajectories to employment and their experiences with public services in labour market integration. Interviews provided data about their lived experience, knowledge, opinions, and perspectives. In gathering refugee correspondents, a theoretical sampling approach was employed (Bargalowski, 2018). This means that I searched for contrasting cases in order to capture the multi-dimensionality of the group, including women with varying origin countries, time of residence, marital status, family situation, and types of employment (Riano, 2011). I reached correspondents through contact with civil society organisations – I am aware that I was more likely to have contact with highly motivated women who seek out such support. However, I believe that these correspondents have particularly useful insights into barriers they have faced and opportunities they have encountered or created.

A total of 18 interviews were carried out: 12 with refugee women, 5 with service providers and 1 with a volunteer. The majority of refugee respondents originated from Syria, while a smaller number came from Turkey, Palestine, Iraq, and Armenia. Their ages ranged from 28 to 54. The time spent in Germany ranged between three and seven years. The group included a range of professions and qualifications. Primary school teaching was the most dominant in the group, also among women who had studied other subjects. Other professions included IT, business management, engineering, healthcare, and journalism. The service providers interviewed represented different types of ALMPs targeted at immigrants and

refugees, both offered and funded by the state as well as civil society projects. This included a representative from the Jobcentre, a founder of an educational institute that offers language training, and coaches offering job training and job-search assistance. What would have further enriched the findings is a perspective from a representative from the municipality and a caseworker from the Jobcentre, however my requests for interviews were denied. By interviewing both service providers and service users, I shed light on the two-sided nature of the integration process (Ager & Strang, 2008). For the structure of the interview questions, a topic list was developed based on the theoretical framework. For each topic, I included examples of questions as a rough guide, however the interviews are semi-structured leaving space for other perspectives and themes relevant to the main topics to be included. The lists of topics and examples of questions can be found in appendices 1-3.

Fedyuk and Zentai highlight the importance of enriching data collected in an interview setting by further combination of methods (2018, p. 185). The interviews are thus combined with policy analysis, and policy documents form an important source for this research. The documents analysed are national and regional labour market integration policies implemented in Essen, as well as Essen's local approach to integration. These were found and selected by searching on the website of the municipality and of the relevant national ministries, the *Bundesagentur für Migration und Flüchtlinge,* (BAMF) the *Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales* (BMAS) and the *Integrationsbeauftragte*. The list of documents analysed can also be found in the appendix 4.

Data processing

Both interviews and policy documents were studied using an abductive approach, as developed by Reichertz on the basis of Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This approach addresses the weaknesses of inductive and deductive approaches by incorporating both in a multi-stage process (Reichertz, 2007). In this approach, deductive codes are used based on the operationalisation of concepts from the theoretical framework but further combined with open coding to identify new information. I therefore moved between open and axial coding throughout the process. Such an approach allowed for a systematic analysis based on a highly developed theoretical framework to be carried out, yet still left room to further develop this typology.

3.6 Ethical considerations

The use of semi-structured interviews requires several ethical considerations. It calls for a particular reflexivity around positionality. The interviews with skilled refugee women are used to convey a lived experience, which makes them very personal. Speaking about challenges fundamental to their life in Germany can be emotionally taxing. This meant that some interviews were shortened because they were perceived to be exhausting for the respondent. Furthermore, some respondents raised concerns about their language ability during the interview. Creating a comfortable atmosphere in which respondents felt understood and heard was of utmost importance to me during the interview process.

To ensure reflexivity, I kept a field work diary, to capture the conditions and circumstances under which data was collected, and my positioning as a researcher. I followed Fedyuk and Zentai's recommendation for an ethical approach to data collection by understanding it as 'an active process in which the positions of both researcher and interviewee are socially constructed and embedded' (2018 p.185). Furthermore, interview respondents are anonymised in the findings, so that their citations are not traceable directly to them. The element of consent was important. I asked each interviewee to sign an informed consent form. At the beginning of each interview, I repeated this information and asked whether any further questions or concerns arose. The interviews were carried out either by telephone or by video call. Respondents were asked prior to the interview whether they consent to recording. The interviews are securely stored on an encrypted USB-stick, complying with GDPR rules regarding privacy.

Chapter 4: Policy Context

The labour market integration of the many hundred thousand refugees that arrived in Germany solicited a policy reaction from labour market actors on national, regional and local levels. In Germany, the federal government is responsible for setting the legal framework for integration, as well as regulating access to the labour market, integration courses, and ALMPs. Federal states are tasked with concrete implementation but also implement regional support measures. Municipalities in turn implement federal and regional legislation, however often operating with considerable discretion (Degler & Liebig, 2017). This chapter provides a broad outline of the policy context for the labour market integration of skilled refugee women in Germany generally, and North Rhine-Westphalia and Essen more specifically. This overview is based on a review of reports on labour market integration (measures) published by the Bertelsmann Stiftung (Arcarons et al., 2016; Aumüller, 2016), the IAB (Brücker et al., 2020; de Paiva Lareiro, 2021; Knapp et al., 2017; Kosyakova et al., 2021), the BMAS (Bonin et al., 2020; Montero Lange & Ziegler, 2017) the BAMF (Worbs & Baraulina, 2017), and the OECD (Degler & Liebig, 2017; Liebig & Tronstad, 2018), as well as on internet sources, and interviews carried out with local actors in Essen. This review also includes reported participation in these measures since evaluation reports carried out by these actors show that the participation of refugee women in these programmes is disproportionately low compared to the participation of refugee men.

4.1 Germany

4.1.1 Legal Access to the Labour Market

Recognised refugees and those granted subsidiary protection legally have equal access to the labour market as German natives (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, n.d.-a). The Act on the Acceleration of Asylum Procedures of 2015 also facilitates labour market access for asylum applicants and those with a tolerated stay permit; people who are in principle obliged to leave the country but their departure is temporarily not feasible. Applicants with a high possibility of being granted asylum, determined based on the country of origin, have the right to take part in free language courses provided by the state. Asylum applicants and those with tolerated stay permits may take up employment three months after arrival, subject to the approval of the BA. While this approval was formerly based on whether there were other

preferential candidates, since 2019 it is only based on the employment conditions according to which humanitarian migrants are not allowed to be employed in worse conditions than comparable native employees (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, n.d.-a). Overall, in theory, this shows a gradual liberalisation of legal access to the labour market. However, in practice, several administrative barriers remain that make it difficult for humanitarian migrants to navigate and be aware of their possibilities, as well as for potential employers, who are reluctant to employ humanitarian migrants for these reasons. For example, there are uncertainties remaining for employers due to the legal requirements for the termination of the right to stay, which results in employers being hesitant to employ humanitarian migrants regardless of their status (Aumüller, 2016, p. 14).

4.1.2 Language and Integration courses

The BAMF provides integration courses free of charge, which consist of a language course and an orientation course. These are available for all people with a migratory background including recognised refugees, those with subsidiary protection, asylum applicants with a high possibility of being granted asylum, and tolerated stay permit holders. They comprise of 600 hours of language classes and 60 hours of orientation classes. During these courses, participants also learn to write letters and e-mails, complete forms, make telephone calls and apply for jobs (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, n.d.-b). Full-time attendance for these courses is a general rule, with part-time courses offered only in exceptional cases. At the end of these courses, participants are expected to reach language level B1. Should they fail the final exam, they have the possibility to repeat some lesson units and retake the examination once free of charge (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, n.d.-b). The results of a survey carried out by the IAB in 2017 showed that refugee women are less likely to participate in such courses than men. Of the sample of 7430 refugees surveyed, 54% of men, and only 37% of women attended an integration course, and 41% of men, compared to 32% of women attend a language course (Brücker et al. 2020, p. 31).

Following this course, the BAMF provides job-specific language courses. These are available for the same groups as mentioned above, subject to being registered as job seeking, receiving unemployment benefits, or being in or preparing for further education. These courses consist of approx. 730 hrs of training. Participants are referred to these courses through the Employment Agency (*Arbeitsagentur*) or Jobcentre. Following referral, they are obliged to participate in the courses and failure to participate is reported to the *Arbeitsagentur*

or Jobcentre and can result in sanctions (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2020). These courses can bring participants up to C1 level. However, the availability of courses differs per locality.

4.1.3 Recognition of qualifications

Since the Recognition Act of 2012, migrants in Germany can apply for the recognition of their qualifications obtained abroad. During this process, their qualifications are compared with similar German qualifications. If there are no significant differences identified between the qualifications, their equal standing is certified, or applicants are issued with a permission to work in certain regulated positions. If a difference is found, applicants receive a certificate which states these differences. With this certificate, they can directly apply to employers, or they can choose further education paths. There are significant costs connected with this process. When the applicant is registered as a job seeker and availing of unemployment benefits, the cost is taken on by the state under certain conditions (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, n.d.-a). The results of the aforementioned survey showed that women are less likely than men to apply for the recognition of their qualifications. Of those refugees with qualifications, 37% of men had applied for recognition, in comparison to 25% of women (Brücker et al., 2020, p. 40). The nation-wide network 'Integration through Qualification' (*Integration durch Qualifizierung*) is tasked with identifying and filling gaps in the process and improving the recognition of qualifications. Since the arrival of large numbers of refugees in 2015, this network has been more preoccupied with the recognition of qualifications from refugees (Aumüller, 2016).

4.1.4 Job orientation and transition into further education or employment

ALMPs in Germany are funded and organised by the BA and are implemented locally by the *Arbeitsagentur* or the Jobcentre, depending on the status of the humanitarian migrant. Asylum applicants fall under the remit of the *Arbeitsagentur*. However, once refugee or subsidiary protection status is obtained, they fall under the responsibility of Jobcentres. Here, they can avail of the same career guidance provided within these frameworks as native claimants of unemployment benefits. One of the main challenges for *Arbeitsagenturen* and Jobcentres is to develop the necessary intercultural competencies to deal with this target group (Aumüller, 2016, p. 24). The most common ALMPs employed are job-search

assistance, provided either by representatives at the *Arbeitsagentur* or Jobcentre or through a referral to a third-party, or referrals to job-training programmes, called *Maßnahmen*.

In addition to frameworks available for the native population or for people with a migrant background generally, there are programmes developed by the BA specifically for this target group. One programme designed for refugees is 'Perspectives for Refugees' (*Perspektiven für Flüchtlinge*), which lasts for 12 weeks and where participants receive job-related language training; detailed counselling for orientation; are informed on the possibilities for recognition of qualifications and degrees; and receive targeted support for the preparation of job application documents and job application strategies (Aumüller, 2016; Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2017). Such programmes have also been developed specifically for young refugees, as well as for women. The latter can be carried out part-time and where possible, childcare is provided (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, n.d.-b).

A further network is the 'Integration of Asylum Seekers and Refugees' (*Integration von Asylbewerber:innen und Flüchtlinge*). The projects within this network primarily provide individual coaching for refugees, enabling access for this target group to measures provided by the *Arbeitsagenturen* and Jobcentres. They also train employees of *Arbeitsagenturen* and Jobcentres, and engage in public and lobby work (Aumüller, 2016).

4.2 North Rhine-Westphalia

North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) traditionally has had one of the highest shares of people with a migration background across federal states. It was one of the first federal states to introduce a framework for integration in 2001, as well as an independent parliamentary working group on integration. In 2005, it was the first federal state to bring in a Ministry for Integration. The Integration Board established in 2006 came hand in hand with a co-ordinated Integration Action Plan, which included concrete measures to facilitate integration into the labour market (OECD, 2018).

From September 2015, the pilot project 'Integration Points' (*Integrationspunkte)* was implemented in NRW. Their purpose is to ensure smooth cooperation between *Arbeitsagenturen*, Jobcentres and municipalities, and to increase transparency for service users regarding what services are available to them. In this way, they aim to shorten the integration trajectories of refugees and to accelerate recognition procedures and qualification processes (Schüßler, 2016).

In addition to implementing the state-wide measures discussed above, the federal state offers further initiatives, particularly for the facilitation of labour market integration for young refugees. One project is *Durchstarten in Ausbildung und Arbeit*, a project with a budget of 50 million euros, offering coaching, vocational qualification and language support and specific youth integration courses (MAGS NRW, 2021). A report based on statistics of the Federal Labour Agency found that in NRW, while refugee women make up 42% of those availing of welfare benefits and around one third of unemployed, they made up only 25% of refugee participants of ALMPs (Freie Wohlfahrtspflege NRW, 2020).

4.3 Essen

With a general population of around 590,000, Essen has a refugee population of over 23,000 (Stadt Essen, 2021). Of this group, 16,000 arrived between 2015 and 2016 (Stadt Essen, 2016). As a response, in 2016 the city developed a strategy concept outlining how they would approach the integration of recently arrived refugees. Central to this strategy is that the goal was not to establish new services and organisations but to build on those already present and adapt them to be able to face new challenges (Stadt Essen, 2016, p. 3). Labour market incorporation is a central element of the strategy, for which the newly established Integration Point is highlighted to play an important role. The city furthermore developed an integration concept addressing the integration of migrants more generally, named 'Living together in Diversity' (*Zusammenleben in Vielfalt*). Labour market incorporation is the second field of action addressed in the integration concept, following language and education.

4.3.1 Language and integration courses

There are thirteen organisations in Essen offering language and integration courses. Most are private third-party organisations, and there are also courses offered by an NGO *Neue Arbeit der Diakonie*. These are coordinated by the Communal Integration Centre (Stadt Essen, 2020, p. 26). In response to growing demand, the number of courses offered in Essen greatly increased between 2014 and 2018, from 106 in 2014, to 216 in 2018 (JobCenter Essen, 2019). Refugees are referred to language courses through their caseworkers at the Jobcentre, while costs are carried by the BAMF. Despite the fact that some organisations continued to offer courses online during the Covid-19 pandemic, course availability diminished drastically.

4.3.2 Recognition of qualifications, job orientation and transition into further education and employment

Jobcentres are the primary actor on behalf of the municipality regarding the recognition of qualifications, job orientation, and transition into further education and employment of migrants and refugees. Essen has been an *Optionskommune* since 2012, which means that it works separately from the Federal Labour Agency, and the city is primarily responsible for its unemployed citizens. In response to the increased number of refugees that arrived in 2015/2016, as outlined in the strategy concept, the Jobcentres were to increase the number of integration workers from four to twenty-four. The purpose of this target-group specific assistance was to offset disadvantages of this group relating to their forced migration background. The support they received here was to end after eighteen months or when the following points were achieved: B1 level attained, qualifications were recognised, and job-profiling was completed. (Stadt Essen, 2016, pp. 6–7) A further action undertaken was to train personnel from the Jobcentres to prevent and overcome potential misunderstandings relating to cultural differences. (Stadt Essen, 2020, p. 34). With regards to the recognition of qualifications, caseworkers at the Jobcentre either personally offer assistance, or refer service users to their network partners *BildungsPunkt*, or *IQ-Netzwerk*. A similar procedure is followed for job orientation and trainings, where service users are either directly assisted or referred to further *Maßnahmen* offered by network partners (JobCenter Essen, 2019). The labour market integration of migrants continues to be a central goal of the Jobcentre in Essen (JobCenter Essen, 2020).

Beyond such assistance offered by the Jobcentres, further civil society and voluntary organisations play a central role. These partially receive funding from the municipality or through third parties. One that must be highlighted because of its relevance to the case at hand is the project *PerMenti* established to specifically help skilled refugee women into the labour market. Such projects co-ordinate with the Jobcentres and may receive referrals from them. Volunteers are co-ordinated in districts through so-called Roundtables (*Runde Tische*), through which representatives from the municipality and relevant institutions can come into contact with local volunteers.

Chapter 5: Findings and Analysis

This chapter presents the primary findings of this research. In seeking to establish how the levels of labour market integration of skilled refugee women in Essen might be explained in the context of ALMPs in place, I first discuss the perceived barriers to employment experienced by skilled refugee women interviewed. Secondly, I discuss findings relating to the mismatch between barriers experienced and the policies in place, building on the description of the policy context in the previous chapter. Thirdly, based on the interviews with skilled refugee women and with service providers, as well as an analysis of relevant policy documents, I discuss explanations for this mismatch, applying and developing Van de Walle's framework of public service failure for a systematic discussion.

5.1 Perceived Barriers to Employment

As expected, the interviews revealed a highly heterogeneous group with a range of subjective experiences. Respecting and including these varying experiences is of utmost importance. Findings of such projects can represent a form of visibility, which is particularly important in the case of societally marginalised groups (Spehar 2021). The narrative presented in what follows discusses these experiences along three overarching themes: language as a barrier, challenges with (re-)orientation, and gendered experiences and intersectional challenges. Particular cases are highlighted that I consider to reflect reoccurring experiences. I urge the reader, however, to keep in mind my positionality as a white European researcher and how this will have influenced not only the gathering of data but also its presentation. Before addressing perceived barriers to employment, a principal finding to highlight is that all respondents expressed a strong desire to work, and, for many, finding (adequate) employment is a main priority. Work is seen as key to gain independence, to strengthen social networks, and to feel personally fulfilled – in other words, to build a life in Germany. As one respondent figuratively stated: arriving in Germany for her was like constructing a house and without work, she remained in the basement.[1]

5.1.1 Language as a perceived barrier

The most frequently expressed issue throughout the interviews was learning the language. Language presented a challenge at all steps of the process of preparing for and finding

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[1] German original: Wir bauen ein Gebäude aber wir sind noch im Keller.

employment; from finding suitable courses or job offers, to writing applications and carrying out job interviews. Respondents also expressed how they experienced language-related difficulties at the beginning of internships and volunteer work, which they engaged in to improve their language ability. Indeed, this was a central point raised by several respondents: only through work could their language improve significantly. This was described by one respondent as a 'vicious circle'. Finding employment depended on language ability but this in turn depended on finding employment. Ceylan worked for seven years in the IT branch, in her last position as a project manager. Following many applications in Germany, she finally accepted a job as an assistant, in the hope that her German will improve and this will increase her chances.

> Language for me is the central challenge. Unfortunately, it is a vicious circle. To improve your language, you have to be an active part of society, for me that means to work. And I want to work! But, in order to work, you need a certain language level […] It becomes a vicious circle.[2]

Accepting employment below their skill level, in an unrelated field, or engaging in forms of voluntary employment, are ways in which many women attempt to overcome this barrier, with an attitude of 'better this than nothing'.[3] They expressed strong determination to enter into some form of employment, whether adequate or not. Dina, a Syrian nurse, stated that she would accept an offer to assist in a Covid-19 ward, despite not being vaccinated, if this was all she was offered. She would accept it because it is essential for her to make progress with her language. Particularly spoken language was highlighted by many to be an issue. This is exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. For many women, the pandemic greatly reduced their field of social contacts. Many expressed that they feel isolated during this time and worry about their language skills deteriorating.

5.1.2 Challenges with (re-)orientation

For all respondents, finding their way in their new (professional) lives was perceived as difficult. This was a challenge particularly for those with a lot of professional experience. Many recognised that they would not be able to work in a position at the same level as they had in their home country, but expressed that they would like to work in a similar field. For

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[2] German original: Also die Sprache ist die größte Herausforderung. Leider ist es wie ein Teufelskreis. Weil um die Sprache zu verbessern muss man in der Gesellschaft aktiv sein, und für mich bedeutet das arbeiten. Und ich möchte arbeiten. Aber, um zu arbeiten, muss man ein gewisses Sprachniveau haben. […] Das wird ein Teufelskreis.

[3] German original: Eins ist besser als Null.

Yasmin, who had studied business and worked for more than fifteen years for international organisations in Turkey, the prospect of beginning again was dispiriting.

> I want to continue, but this process is never-ending and if at the end I don't find work, I have lost so much time. I know maybe it is impossible for me to do the same job here. So I thought accounting, I can do accounting. That's as if I am back at the beginning of my career. But to begin again is hard when you are 40.[4]

Recognising that she needs to make concessions, the fact that many barriers still remain is demotivating. (Re-)orienting is not only a challenge for those with many years of work experience but also for those at the beginning of their careers. For younger women, one issue is that they do not have work experience in the field in which they studied but often worked as teachers. They expressed difficulties in deciding how they could apply what they have learned in Germany and what path makes sense for them to take. They too cannot imagine 'beginning again' as if the years which they had studied and worked in their home country count for nothing.

For some, a difficulty also lies in adapting their skills and experience to the German labour market. For respondents who are nurses, this is a particular challenge. While the German labour market appears to be more welcoming for this group, they still experience challenges in adjusting to how their profession is to be carried out in Germany. For example, adapting to the use of computerised information systems is experienced as a hurdle.

Most women expressed that they require assistance in this step of the process, to figure out what are the available options in Germany and how they might re-orient or reskill. That this assistance is difficult to find was something that came up in several interviews. Fadwa, who had studied IT but then worked as a teacher, struggles to determine what path she should take in Germany. Although she knows that there are projects in Essen that could help her, it takes her a lot of time and energy to find them.

> I know that there is help available for refugees. But we don't know where to find it. I use the internet, I use other experiences. But I don't know everything […] Where am I supposed to get this knowledge?[5]

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[4] German original: Ja ich möchte weitermachen aber diese Prozess und am Ende keine Arbeit, da habe ich viel Zeit verloren. Ich habe gedacht vielleicht ist der gleiche Job hier für mich unmöglich zu finden. Dann ich habe gedacht Buchhaltung, ich kann auch Buchhaltung machen. Das ist wieder wie der Einstieg in meine Karriere. Aber nochmal ganz von Vorne zu beginnen, das ist schwer wenn du 40 Jahre alt bist.

[5] German original: Glaube ich, gibt es Hilfe für Flüchtlinge. Aber wir wissen nicht wo ist die Hilfe. Auch wenn gibt es Internet, ich benutze Internet, ich benutze andere Erfahrungen. Aber ich weiss nicht alles. […]Von woher soll ich das Wissen bekommen?

The frustration experienced by women at this stage can be detrimental. Feeling that there is not enough support available, that this support is not accessible, or not suited to their needs, respondents indicated that they lose the motivation to continue.

5.1.3 Gendered experiences and intersectional challenges

Beyond these barriers which might be experienced similarly by refugee men, several women raised the element of motherhood. This came up in different forms. For Ceylan, who was pregnant when she came to Germany, the birth of her child meant that when she first went to seek assistance with language and further education, she was told to return three years later when her parental leave was over.

> Back then, they told me I needed to wait for three years for assistance from the State, then, when my child would be in the Kindergarten, I'd get help. That's a long time! I couldn't just wait. So I learned German myself.[6]

For other women, particularly single mothers, the lack of available childcare meant that they could not follow courses, or that they could not accept positions that did not offer part-time employment. These concerns regarding a lack of time to complete courses came up time and again.

A further central barrier addressed by several respondents was discrimination and prejudice relating to the headscarf – to borrow a term from Spehar, 'the materialization of the intersection of gender and ethnicity' (2021, p. 14). Several women feel they are at a disadvantage in the job application process because of the prejudices employers hold against them. One respondent described how she experienced an immediate change once her interviewers saw her headscarf.

> I had a job interview, it was terrible. […] At the beginning, they saw my headscarf. The mood changed instantly. It was really bad.[7]

Women with similar experiences expressed how much it demotivated them and was a cause for anger and frustration, but also sadness. Recognising that there was a pattern of rejections

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[6] German original: Die haben mir gesagt damals, Sie müssen drei Jahre warten auf eine staatliche Beratungsstelle, weil dann das Kind zum Kindergarten geht, dann habe ich eine Stelle. Aber das ist eine lange Zeit. Ich konnte nicht warten. Ich habe selber Deutsch gelernt.

[7] German original: Ich hatte ein Auswahlgespräch. Das war schrecklich! […] Am Anfang haben sie mein Kopftuch gesehen. Ihre Stimmung veränderte sich plötzlich. Ja, das war sehr schlecht.

once people saw her picture, another respondent noted how it took away her energy to continue applying to positions knowing that she might face similar treatment.

Furthermore, beyond these barriers that might also be experienced by other migrant women, there are barriers related to the forced migration background of respondents, such as the unpreparedness of the move and mental burdens relating to family members whom they fear are unsafe. As one respondent stated, it is difficult to concentrate fully on something when your 'head isn't empty'.[8] These experiences show how what Bastia (2014) terms 'categories of disadvantage' intersect and reinforce one another.

5.2 A Mismatch between Barriers and Programmes in Place?

With regards to support received and satisfaction with this support, again respondents detailed a wide range of experiences. Many expressed gratitude for the assistance they experienced and praised their teachers and caseworkers for their understanding, forthcomingness, and flexibility. Others had less positive experiences. The interviews revealed several weaknesses of the system and ways in which the respondents felt that the services could improve to better suit their needs. It is these mismatches that are discussed in this section.

5.2.1 Language courses reviewed

Seen as language was raised as the main perceived challenge in most interviews, it is logical to begin with reviewing the provision of language courses and to what extent these meet the needs and expectations of respondents. Service providers also recognise language as a primary challenge and one that needs to be addressed, as do policy documents such as the municipality's integration plan (Stadt Essen, 2020) and national integration guidelines (Integrationsbeauftragte, 2020). One element that appeared several times in interviews was the lacking availability of language courses, especially at a higher level. While beginner and intermediate language courses (A1/A2/B1/B2) are relatively widely available, for many positions which respondents aspire to, C1 level is required. Especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, these courses are few and far between. According to one service provider, there is currently only one institute in Essen offering such a course.

Another element that came up was that there is a large jump level-wise between B1 and B2, and that B2 can only be repeated once. For respondents who did not pass the

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[8] German original: Kopf ist nicht leer.

requirements for B2, this left them without a perspective as to what to do next. Reasons for not passing the exam were for example social and familial care obligations, or mental or physical health. One respondent admitted that without a perspective of what possibilities she had next, she struggled to find motivation to study. This shows how mental health, obligations and expectations might overlap in these situations.

A further concern that respondents have regarding language courses are that participants in the courses do not have the same aspirations and learning abilities. For respondents of this study, with strong aspirations to enter the workforce, this hindered their learning. People who are unable to read and write are in the same courses as those with a university education. For Juliana, who has a Bachelor in electrical engineering and was preparing for a Masters in Germany, this was cause of great frustration.

> The problem is that there are many people that have no goal. They just come because the Jobcentre told them they had to learn German. They are very slow, they keep asking questions, they don't want to learn. But there are also people like me, I want to complete everything quickly, I want to go to university here [...] Everything is so slow.[9]

The mixedness in regards to age is also perceived as a problem by respondents, both young and old. Age differences between participants mean that the courses do not advance at the right level for them, for some too quickly and for others too slowly.

For mothers, especially single mothers, the lack of part-time courses or courses with childcare provisions is a central issue. One service provider noted how mother-and-child courses are always oversubscribed and so women had to wait quite some time on long waiting lists. Rima worked as a teacher in Syria and is currently following a C1 course online. She has been told that from July onwards the courses will once again be in person. She does not have childcare for her two sons, aged 7 and 10, and is therefore unsure whether she can continue following the course.

However, the biggest challenge that was presented in this regard, as already mentioned in the previous section, is that language courses are not sufficient to prepare for work.

> Language is also a big barrier. We need to be able to speak as if it were our mother tongue. If we have the opportunity to work, then we can improve our language. At home, it is

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[9] German original: Die Probleme da ist es gibt viele Leute sie haben kein Ziel. Sie kommen nur weil das JobCenter hat gesagt du musst Deutsch lernen. Sie kommen in die Kurse, aber sie sind langsam. Sie fragen immer, sie haben keine Lust zu lernen. Also es gibt auch Leute wie ich, ich möchte es schnell machte, ich möchte an die Uni. [...] Alles langsam.

impossible. Also with a course, it is impossible. We can only improve our language through work.[10]

This suggests that more attention needs to be paid to going beyond these courses and offering further possibilities.

5.2.2 (Re-)Orientation reviewed

Regarding the difficulties with re-orienting towards a career in Germany, several women experienced problems with the limited advice and guidance they received, particularly from the Jobcentre. One respondent put this down to the inability or inexperience of employees in supporting educated people. Another also pointed to a lack of experience but beyond this to a lack of understanding and consideration of her individual needs.

> My first conversation at the Jobcentre was terrible. I cried a lot after the conversation. I wanted to follow a C1 course. […] But she said she will find me a job. Cleaner? Sales woman? […] I said I was a teacher, I want to work as a teacher in Germany, I need level C1. I was shocked. She had no idea. She never asked what I wanted. She didn't take us seriously. I felt useless, worthless.[11]

This experience was not isolated but also not shared by all respondents. Others spoke highly of their caseworkers, who they described as being responsive to their needs, or referring them to projects where they received more intensive advice. However, not all caseworkers seem to be aware of these projects, and several women lamented never receiving advice, and losing a lot of time figuring out what their options were.

Respondents also described the general *Maßnahmen* (projects) that are available in Essen. These are courses funded by the Jobcentre, to which jobseekers are referred. Here, they might learn how to write a German CV and cover letter, and how to prepare for job interviews. While some women found these helpful, others stated that they were ill-suited to their needs. They explained that they are directed at people looking for low-level entry jobs or internships and not suited for the kinds of positions they are aspiring towards. For others, these *Maßnahmen* can be a downright hindrance. Leyla studied IT in Syria and has six years of work experience in different fields. She speaks German fluently and has completed a C1

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[10] German original: Sprache ist auch eine große Barriere. Wir müssen wir Muttersprachler sprechen. Aber wenn wir eine Möglichkeit haben zu arbeiten, dann können wir unsere Sprache verbessern. Zuhause geht das nicht. Mit dem Kurs geht das auch nicht. Nur durch die Arbeit können wir unsere Sprache verbessern.

[11] German original: Erste Gespräch mit meiner Ansprechpartnerin vom JobCenter war sehr schlecht. Ich habe viel geweint nach dem Gespräch. Ich wollte einen Kurs besuchen, einen C1 Kurs […] Aber sie hat gesagt ich suche dir eine Arbeit. Putzfrau? Oder Verkäuferin? […] Aber ich habe gesagt ich bin eine Lehrerin! Ich möchte als Lehrerin in Deutschland arbeiten! Deswegen möchte ich einen C1 Kurs besuchen. Ja ich war schockiert. Sie hatte keine Ahnung. Sie hat nicht gefragt was möchtest du, was wünschst du. Sie hat uns nicht ernst genommen Ich fühlte mich dort nutzlos, wertlos.

qualification. After having applied to several positions, she recognised that working in IT will not be possible for her as many years of experience would be required. She wants to take a course in E-Commerce, where she believes she could have more opportunities. But bringing this up with her caseworker, she was instead offered a *Maßnahme*, where she will again be taught to write CVs and Cover Letters. She considers this a waste of time.

> I can't say that they are completely in the wrong. These courses cost money. They need to be sure that I am able for it. But they should also trust that there are some people that have studied, […] that have made a lot of effort. […] I don't want to lose any more time.[12]

Overall, women expressed the need for more personal support in these matters, or a form of support that begins with a recognition of their experience and their wishes.

5.2.3 Gendered experiences and intersectional challenges reviewed

Regarding challenges relating to motherhood, the lack of availability of part-time courses and of childcare was already raised. The lack of part-time employment opportunities equally plays into this. Lacking a network of family and friends that might take care of their children, respondents noted that they are dependent on services. Childcare is scarce, and many women referred to long waiting lists for Kindergarten places. Alina, a nurse from Armenia, is a single mother to her 7-year-old son. In order to have her qualifications recognised, she needs to complete 400 hours of work experience in a German hospital. During the Covid-19 pandemic, her son's school was closed and it was impossible for her to leave her son at home alone. Even as the school reopens, she has serious problems with conflicting schedules. While the school opens at seven, the hospital requires her to be present from six in the morning.

Regarding discrimination, some women disclosed that they feel that service providers hold certain prejudices which can result in the services they receive being insufficient. This kind of prejudice was also noted by one service provider. She recognised her own prejudices and those of her peers working in the services, but also of German society as a whole.

> A problem lies with us, in our heads. […] We have to learn that a woman with a headscarf can be a civil engineer, that tells men what to do. Before, a woman with a headscarf, that was

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[12] German original: Ich kann nicht sagen sie haben kein Recht. Ja sie haben Recht weil diese Umschulung kostet viel Geld. Und sie müssen sicher sein ob diese Frau kann diese Ausbildung machen. Aber gleichzeitig sollen sie auch denken an die Personen die schon gelernt haben […] die sich viele Mühe geben. […] Ich möchte keine mehr Zeit verlieren.

someone who is oppressed, who walks two steps behind her husband, because an emancipated woman looks different.[13]

She recognised that there is still a way to go for German services, and for German society to accept differences and to look beyond them. Such a biased perception of refugee women's ability based on their appearance influences the kind of advice and support they might receive, even if this is not the direct intention of the service provider. This kind of prejudice exists both in public services and services provided by civil society actors.

5.3 Explaining the Mismatch

The unique contribution of this thesis is that it goes beyond a discussion of barriers to employment for skilled refugee women and how these are (or fail to be) addressed by programmes and policies in place, to seek an explanation for why there might be a mismatch between the two. I employ a framework from public administration, namely Van de Walle's 'public service failure' to guide my analysis. In the following, the findings based on interviews with refugee women, service providers and volunteers, as well as an analysis of relevant policy documents, are presented systematically according to failure type. The services reviewed are the services which respondents availed of, primarily language courses, job-search assistance, job-specific training and advice. What must be noted is that some services were perceived as functioning better than others. I therefore make the distinction in some cases between 'official' services, that is those provided and funded by the State, and other services offered. A reflection on the effectiveness and limitations of applying this framework is presented in the discussion in the following chapter.

5.3.1 Failure by ignorance

Failure by ignorance can be identified when service providers and policy documents do not acknowledge the issue and when nothing is being done to address it. This might be because public services do not recognise that there is a failure or potential for failure.

Commissioned reports on barriers to employment for refugee women show that there is no lack of awareness of the issue nationally. They address similar barriers to the ones addressed by the women interviewed (de Paiva Lareiro, 2021). In January 2019, the BAMF

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[13] German original: Ich denke ein Problem liegt bei uns selbst in den Köpfen. […] Wir müssen lernen, dass eine Frau mit Kopftuch auch eine Bauingenieurin sein kann, die Männern sagt, was sie machen sollen. Vorher war eine Frau mit Kopftuch eine Frau die man unterdrückt und zwei Schritte hinter dem Mann geht weil eine emanzipierte Frau sieht anders aus.

and the BA signed an agreement that foregrounded the importance of integrating refugees into the labour market. One paragraph is dedicated to ensuring equal access for men and women (*Kooperationsvereinbarung zwischen der Beauftragten der Bundesregierung für Migration, Flüchtlinge und Integration und der Bundesagentur für Arbeit*, 2019). The issue also received attention at regional level, with a congress organised in 2018 for Jobcentres and Employment Agencies on the labour market integration for refugee women (Schweer, 2019). At the local level, the importance of labour market integration is brought to the fore in the city's integration concept, although there is no specific mention of barriers experienced by women (Stadt Essen, 2020). The Jobcentre in Essen raises the labour market incorporation of people with a migratory background, and equality between men and women as two of its central goals in the upcoming year (JobCenter Essen, 2020).

In interviews with public service providers, there was also great awareness of the issue. This could of course be skewed, as the service providers interviewed were those who responded to my request for interviews, therefore already demonstrating an interest. Several worked specifically with refugee women. A representative from the Jobcentre raised the reports and referred to statistics which demonstrate that refugee women benefit less from the programmes offered. Furthermore, she described training and extra resources that were mobilised in the Jobcentres in order to accommodate the arrival of an increased number of refugees. Taken together, these findings suggest that failure by ignorance is an unlikely explanation for weaknesses in the system.

5.3.2 Failure by rigidity

Failure by rigidity can be identified when there is an awareness of the issue, but seemingly an inability to take action. Rigid regulations might prevent service providers from acting in a certain way. One interesting finding was that service providers who worked outside of the official programmes and received their funding from a foundation rather than from the State noted that they were relieved that this enabled them to act more freely and provide more adequate support. One service provider compared the work of her project to the work of a sister project in a different city, which had become part of an official State programme. By contrast, women could come to her project of their own accord and would not receive sanctions if they did not respond in a certain way. She noted the liberty that this gave her to respond when a situation changed and to adapt to the needs of the women she was supporting. Interestingly, this element of rigidity was also mentioned in the 2019 programme

of the Jobcentre in Essen: 'Experience thus far has revealed that the available instruments do not sufficiently cover the needs of refugees and are too inflexible' (JobCenter Essen, 2019, p. 62). This suggests that rigidity in the services provided by official programmes is a likely explanation for why they fail to address some of the barriers experienced by skilled refugee women.

5.3.3 Failure by failed intervention

At the basis of this failure type is that there is an awareness of the issue and there is evidence of a response to it, yet the intervention is considered a failure, either by service users, service providers, or both. In this case, the findings show that there was a response to barriers to the labour market for refugees more generally and refugee women more particularly. As stated above, service providers noted that more resources were made available at local, regional, and national level to respond to increasing numbers of refugees that arrived in Germany. Special projects were created for refugee women, such as the project *Perspektiven für weibliche Flüchtlinge* (PerF-W).

However, as outlined in section 5.2.2, certain *Maßnahmen* were not always considered helpful by respondents, or in the worst case even considered a hindrance to progress further towards employment. One service provider from an alternative project with more individual support made reference to how generalised projects, where refugees are taught in large groups how to write a CV or how to apply for jobs, are often unhelpful because they are not tailored to their individual needs. Another service provider stated that she believed there might be too many projects:

> I've got to say, and this comes from my background in job assistance, I am not for too many *Maßnahmen*, I always think we have too many *Maßnahmen,* of course there are also some that are very useful, but I want to check first and see if it makes sense.[14]

This finding is in line with previous research, which has been carried out on how Jobcentres in Germany responded to the increase in refugee numbers. Based on qualitative interviews with Jobcentre employees, it was found that caseworkers were sometimes under pressure to fill certain projects, which resulted in refugees being referred to them in an order that was not optimal, or that they were not given to those who could have benefitted most from them

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[14] German original: Ich muss sagen also ich komme jetzt als Arbeitsvermittlerin, und da bin ich also nicht für zu viele Maßnahmen, ich finde immer wir haben zu viele Maßnahmen, aber es gibt natürlich Maßnahmen die sehr sinnvoll sind, und da möchte ich erstmal gucken ob das sinnvoll ist.

(Boockmann & Scheu, 2018, p. 11). This explanation therefore can be considered quite fitting in this case.

5.3.4 Failure by neglect

Failure by neglect suggests that a service might falter because of the disinterest of management or policy makers in the service. There are two elements that Van de Walle's conceptualising of failure by neglect brings forward in this case. Firstly, failure by neglect might stem from the service serving a socially marginalised group. On the one hand, there were resources mobilised and certain changes made, which suggests that the failure cannot be put down to disinterest. On the other, when looking closely at the group studied in this thesis, namely skilled refugee women, it does not seem that they were a priority in the changes that were made. In Essen, the project *PerMenti* was set up by civil society actors particularly for skilled refugee women: the two founders questioned why policies predominantly addressed refugee men, and when they addressed refugee women, they portrayed them as unskilled. There was advice and projects for those who wanted to enter into assistant positions, but for skilled refugee women, there was very little available. By founding the project *PerMenti*, they addressed the gap left by public services for a group that is socially marginalised.

Secondly, failure by neglect might stem from an unwillingness to change the status quo because non-profit initiatives are offering similar services. Considering this project *PerMenti,* as well as individual support provided by volunteers, this can be considered an explanation for why there is no urgency to adapt the services to the needs of this group. Indeed, volunteers noted to what the extent the city depended on them for integration work.

> I think the role of volunteers in this area is enormously high. If I only think of my own, few, personal experiences, that I have from the continuous support that I provided, I can say that would never have gone smoothly or alone, or only with the help that you can get from the services.[15]

However, it was also noted that this is not necessarily perceived as something negative, and as a failure of the state or of the municipality. Rather, another volunteer respondent noted the necessity of the engagement of local residents for successful integration. While failure by neglect seems like an unlikely explanation in light of the many resources that were mobilised

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[15] German original: Also ich glaube, dass die Rolle der Ehrenämter in diesem Bereich enorm hoch ist. Also wenn ich allein denke an die wenigen Erfahrungen, die ich von der kontinuierlichen Betreuung habe, da könnte ich sagen das wäre niemals gut gegangen alleine oder nur mit einer beruflichen Hilfe, die man dann per Amt erfahren kann.

for the labour market integration of refugees and a clear interest to adapt the services noted in policy documents, it raised interesting findings regarding a reliance on civil society actors.

5.3.5 Failure by design

Van de Walle defines failure by design as 'failure as a deliberate design element of the service'. He states that one reason for this might be that there are insufficient resources and burdensome procedures are therefore brought in to curb demand. Some service providers noted a lack of time resources, and service users brought up burdensome procedures such as the mountains of paperwork that had to be completed for official services. Furthermore, while the municipality engaged 20 new integration workers in the Jobcentres in 2016, in order to successfully support all recent arrivals, the 2016 strategy concept stated that a total of 55 integration workers would have been required. As this was not possible, the support was limited to refugees under the age of 35 (Stadt Essen, 2016, p. 7). These limited resources might therefore be seen as a reasonable explanation for the weakness of the services.

What might further be linked to this failure type is that while skilled refugee women would like to be helped into adequate employment, official services are not designed in a way to fulfil this goal. One service provider working outside of the official services, commented on how she felt that some of the people she was supporting were being 'parked' by official services.

> When a participant tells me they have to do a *Maßnahme*. Then I always think, do you really? Or is it just good if they do that now, then I have them off my list, then I can put a tick behind their name and count them as successfully supported. I think sometimes it is a case of improving the statistics, and the more *Maßnahmen,* the better it looks. That's just the feeling I get.[16]

The service provider from the Jobcentre also noted that the first priority is to ensure employment. The rationale behind their work is *fördern und fordern* (to promote and challenge), highlighting the interplay between support and demand. For the support offered, something is demanded in return, and service users must always show that they are working towards employment. The Jobcentre's approach to supporting service users with a migratory background as stated in their 2021 planning document is the 'fastest possible placement into

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[16] German original: Ja weil mir die Teilnehmer halt auch sagen ich muss die Maßnahme machen. Und dann denke ich immer must du das jetzt wirklich machen. Oder ist es gut wenn sie das jetzt machen und dann habe ich sie von der Liste und kann ein Haken dran machen und wieder einen als vermittelt zählen. Ich glaube auch viel, dass Statistiken dann natürlich schöngeschrieben werden soll und um so mehr Maßnahmen, um so schöner wird die. Mein Gefühl.

sustainable employment which covers requirements'[17] (JobCenter Essen, 2020). In its German original '*bedarfsdeckend*' does not specify whose requirements are being covered, those of the service user, or of the labour market? It furthermore states that 'unrealistic career plans are discarded'[18], suggesting a no-nonsense approach to finding employment that does not necessarily begin with the wishes of the service user. Whether or not this constitutes an objective failure of the service is beyond the scope of this research. However, as I am examining how the services are perceived, this constituted a valid explanation.

5.3.6 Failure by association

Failure by association occurs when there is a negativity bias, and actors' assessment of public services might therefore be skewed. The bad reputation might cloud actual experience. The sample size of women interviewed and the ranging experiences that they conveyed make it difficult to establish whether these services truly had a bad reputation that negatively affected how they were perceived. However, one interesting finding in this regard was that a negative experience of friends discouraged service users from approaching the Jobcentre. Describing the bad experience of a friend at the Jobcentre, one respondent noted how she was reluctant to go there herself:

> I have to admit, the word Employment Agency makes me stressed. Because there are always stories. What would happen if they told me I have to work in a specific job? […] I am sometimes afraid of it […] Because what would I do if they treated me badly?[19]

A representative from the Jobcentre similarly described how services provided by the Jobcentre or by the city might not have a positive connotation:

> I think, the Jobcentre is an agency that wants too much at the beginning. Yes, a whole load of paperwork. And then when the money question is cleared, then I don't know whether they dare, and whether then there's a good feeling […] I think that the system, the system Jobcentre, or the system of the city gives rise to certain fears.[20]

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[17] German original: Die schnellstmögliche Vermittlung in bedarfsdeckende und nachhaltige Beschäftigung.
[18] German original: Unrealistische berufliche Pläne werden verworfen.
[19] German original: Eigentlich muss ich zugeben, dass das Wort Arbeitsagentur macht auch stress. Denn es sind ja immer Geschichten. Wie wäre es wenn sie mir sagen, du musst in dieser Stelle arbeiten […] Ich habe manchmal Angst davor […] Weil was würde ich machen wenn der Coach mich schlecht behandeln würde?
[20] German original: Ich glaube, das JobCenter ist eine Behörde, die wollen am Anfang zu viel. Ja ganz viel Papierkram, dann ist das Geld geklärt und ich weiss nicht ob sie und dann nicht trauen oder ob es das gute Gefühl nicht gibt […] Also ich glaube tatsächlich, dass vor dem System, also dem System JobCenter oder dem System Stadt ein bisschen Ängste geschürt sind.

This suggests that failure by association might be occurring in a slightly different way than described by Van De Walle in his framework. Rather than clouding people's actual experience, it can lead to avoidance of the services. It suggests that the Jobcentre might not be the right service to provide this kind of assistance, or that its practices need to be significantly altered.

5.3.7 Beyond Van De Walle's framework: Failure by target group construction / Failure by discretion?

To Van de Walle's framework of public service failure, I added the failure type 'failure by target group construction' building on the concept of Schneider and Ingram (1993). This was added to address the question of why a service might be working for certain groups of the population but not for others. To identify this failure type, attention was paid to how skilled refugee women were addressed by service providers and in policy documents, as well as how they themselves perceived their position influenced how the services were provided to them. In Schneider and Ingram's framework, this group might fall under the 'dependents', for whom there is little pressure to provide beneficial policy. In the BAMF 2019 report on integration, refugee women are referred to as '*besonders schutzbedürftig*' which translates to particularly vulnerable or in need of protection (Widmann-Mauz, 2019). They are not categorised as potential workers. This was supported by the fact that service providers found that this group did not have a high priority when it came to labour market incorporation. In the analysed policy documents, gendered barriers to labour market incorporation played only a marginal role, and refugee women were considered unskilled. Evidence of 'parking' of this group also suggests that they are constructed as a group that is considered difficult to help and with a low priority. In cases where it is difficult to help them into adequate employment, they might instead be referred to project after project. Furthermore, service providers noted how when women are married, the focus is often on the integration of the husbands. It is the husband that begins with German lessons, while the women are pushed into roles as housewives. As soon as the partner finds a job and can support the family, women fall outside of the responsibility of the Jobcentres and can no longer avail of active labour market programmes. They become institutionally invisible.

Beyond these explanations that a systematic analysis through the public service failure framework revealed, there was one explanation which was repeatedly raised by

service users, namely that the service they received strongly depended on the caseworker or teacher in the case of language courses.

> Yes, there are always positive experiences and there are always positive and friendly people. I experienced both. Some people are very negative and say you don't speak German, you have no experience, and so on. And others are the opposite.[21]

There is evidently a certain degree of discretion with which service providers can provide the services, which influenced the perceived effectiveness of the service. This element of front-line worker discretion is absent from Van de Walle's framework. Here Michael Lipsky's work on street-level bureaucrats could contribute to enriching it (Lipsky, 1980). Lipsky understands bureaucrats as not only delivering but actively shaping policy outcomes by interpreting rules and allocating resources (Meyers & Lehmann Nielsen, 2012). Such a failure type inspired by Lipsky's work might be named 'failure by discretion' and form the flipside of 'failure by rigidity'.

5.4 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter illustrated the findings regarding the perceived barriers to adequate employment of skilled refugee women, identified mismatches between barriers and programmes in place, and discussed how the shortcomings of ALMPs can be explained. The primary barriers raised by respondents were relating to language, (re-)orientation, and intersecting disadvantages. Mismatches were identified relating to the unsuitability of language courses to adequately improve language skills for employment, the lack of availability of part-time and higher-level courses, mixed groups within language courses, inexperience of job assistants to support well-educated service users, unhelpful generalised programmes, and discrimination or prejudice of service providers.

Regarding explanations for the mismatch, or the perceived failure of certain services, failure by ignorance was the only failure type which could be confidently dismissed, as an acute awareness of the issue was observed. Among the other failure types, no single explanation stood out above the rest as the most likely. Rather, reviewing each failure type revealed different weaknesses in the system. Some might seem to contradict one another – how can there be both evidence of rigidity and of discretion? Of both neglect and failed

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[21] German original: Ja es gibt immer positive Erfahrung und es gibt immer nette und positive Menschen. Ich habe so und so erlebt. Manche Menschen sind sehr negative und zum Beispiel sagen nur du kannst kein Deutsch, du hast keine Erfahrung und so und so. Und manche Menschen sind umgekehrt.

intervention? While examining rigidity revealed that there was recognition of the inflexibility of certain services and that caseworkers are prevented from giving individualised treatment, an element of discretion nonetheless emerged as service users described how their experience of the service depended on their service provider. This can be explained in that there is discretion even within rigid systems. The target group element also blurred the line between some failures. Failure by failed intervention was identified in that the interventions might not meet the needs of skilled refugee women and that this is a group that is somewhat neglected by policy. This shows that public service failures are never that simple. Different elements overlap and intersect, add to one another, or are mutually dependent.

Furthermore, a multiplicity of services are offered, and where one shows a weakness, another steps in. This makes it difficult to identify one single reason for failure, as the services complement one another, and the weakness of one service might be the strength of another. The inability to provide individual targeted guidance in the Jobcentres for instance means that they refer service users to civil society projects where such assistance is available. In this way, while the service might fail, the system may function fairly well. What must further be noted here is that in general the failures identified were related to the organisations which were not part of the interviewed sample, i.e. general *Maßnahmen*, Jobcentres or actions by the municipality. This relates to the methodology of interviews employed in this thesis, as service providers are more likely to mention examples of failures from outside of their own organisations. However, also based on interviews with service users, projects by civil society actors which stepped in to 'fill the gap' left by public services were highly praised, so it is not unreasonable to assume that these are perceived to function well.

Chapter 6: Discussion

This chapter presents a reflection on the research findings and connects them to the existing body of literature. It outlines the main contributions and limitations of this research, first in relation to empirical research on barriers to employment experienced by refugee women and second in relation to the theoretical framework of public service failure employed.

6.1 Overcoming the Triple Disadvantage

The comprehensive policies and the extensive availability of programmes for the labour market integration of immigrants and refugees in Germany raises questions regarding why skilled refugee women continue to be disadvantaged on the labour market. As discussed in the previous chapter, a lack of awareness of the problem, or in Van de Walle's words 'failure by ignorance', does not seem to offer a valid explanation. Previous research has highlighted language proficiency, level of education, cultural values, and care obligations as primary barriers to employment. I maintain the importance of considering skilled refugee women's experience of the programmes and institutions in place, in order to establish whether there might be a mismatch, what this consists of, and how it can be explained. I join researchers calling for an exploration of institutional factors, rather than individual characteristics affecting labour market participation (Spehar, 2021). In this, I by no means deny the presence and influence of other factors, which may have been overlooked through the active decision to focus on institutional barriers.

The findings showed that language proficiency was indeed one of the primary perceived barriers to employment. However, they also showed the importance of looking at what lies behind this and how it can be improved. An important finding of this research is that language courses alone do not suffice, and that there is an urgent need to enable refugee women to gather relevant work experience in Germany. Regarding level of education, the findings challenge the assumption that low education levels are a reason why refugee women face greater difficulties entering into employment. They showed that having a high level of education can also act as an obstacle for refugee women, as they feel that they cannot receive adequate support from services accustomed to working with those with a lower level of education. Regarding cultural values, the primary finding of this thesis is that they can indeed pose a hindrance – however in a way differing from findings of previous research, which

bases the difference on source country gender gaps in labour market participation or on traditional gender values held by newcomers (Koopmans, 2016). The obstacle repeatedly addressed by respondents who wear a headscarf was that this visible indicator of cultural difference causes them to be perceived differently, and therefore treated differently by potential employers and service providers. Regarding motherhood, the findings draw attention to the lack of availability of childcare and part-time courses and positions. While some respondents described how being a mother influences their desire to work, this would be too simplistic as an explanation. For others it is precisely because they are single mothers that work becomes essential for them. This again highlights the importance of looking beyond individual characteristics and at the levels of institutional support that might be lacking (Spehar, 2021).

Furthermore, these findings also contribute to the scholarly debate of how labour market integration should be understood. They show that rather than looking simply at employment or unemployment levels, it is important to consider the type of employment (Ballarino & Panichella, 2018). The prevalence of precarious employment, with contracts soon expiring, or employment not matching skill level showed that this is something that is vital for researchers to consider. Looking only at employment levels is not sufficient. These findings also contribute to the debate regarding the 'triple disadvantage', and to what extent gender and refugee status contribute to making access to the labour market more difficult (Liebig & Tronstad, 2018). The gendered experience of skilled refugee women came to the fore in interviews. However, focusing on gender alone would be misleading, as it interrelated with other factors, such as religion, in the case of discrimination on the grounds of the headscarf. An intersectional approach, where systems of inequality are examined on the basis of multiple and intersecting grounds for disadvantage or discrimination, is therefore appropriate in these kinds of studies (Bastia, 2014). While theories on integration have recently sought to recognise multi-dimensionality, they must also acknowledge that it is a gendered and intersectional process (Cheung & Phillimore, 2017).

The main contribution of this research lies in looking beyond barriers to employment at the active labour market programmes and policies in place to address them. While previous quantitative approaches have sought to establish the effectiveness of programmes, measuring employment outcomes following course participation (Auer & Fossati, 2020; Ortlieb et al., 2020), this research focuses on perceived effectiveness. This allows for a more nuanced understanding of what works for whom, and more importantly can begin to answer the crucial question – why (not)? (Bredgaard, 2015) The findings show that while many

respondents are satisfied with (parts of) the support they received, and indeed expressed great gratitude, they identified areas in which it could improve. Recommendations that can be drawn from this are discussed in the conclusion.

A main limitation of this research is that using interviews as a primary source risks producing a biased narrative. Particularly as I was unsuccessful in recruiting respondents from the municipality or caseworkers from the Jobcentre, the results may unintentionally portray only one side of the picture. Respondents are more likely to describe weaknesses and failures beyond their control. Furthermore, interviews were conducted via Zoom and my knowledge of the city of Essen is limited to information available online or received from respondents. There is thus the possibility that important actors or organisations were overlooked. My own positionality as a young white female researcher also undoubtedly affected the collection of data, influencing how questions were formulated, what was disclosed to me and how I understood the information provided. This research therefore sheds light on the question of institutional barriers to labour market incorporation of skilled refugee women from a limited perspective and does not profess to be all-encompassing.

6.2 Reviewing the Public Service Failure Framework

A unique element of this research was the application of the framework of public service failure to the question of the effectiveness of active labour market policies and programmes in the labour market integration of skilled refugee women. The main benefit of using this framework was that it supplied a structure of possible explanations through the 'failure types'. This allowed for a systematic analysis of the data, providing guidance on what questions could be asked, and how the findings could be understood. Rather than resulting in distinguishing one failure type that stood out above all others, systematically going through each failure type served to highlight weaknesses in the system of support available to refugee women in Essen to integrate into the labour market. Through this approach bridging sociology and public administration, this research highlights the utility of interdisciplinarity in migration studies (Favell, 2007).

However, one of the main limitations of using this framework was that it was difficult to adjust to a case where there is a multiplicity of services offered. Some services are perceived as functioning better than others, and grouping them together meant that some nuance might have been lost. The systematic element of the framework, which is also its strength, could not quite capture the complex interplay of public, private, and non-profit

services which together form the local system of labour market support. It might be more effective to apply this framework in the analysis of one specific service only, for instance the assistance provided by Jobcentres. A further limitation is that this framework lacks the element of a public service functioning (or not) for a specific target group. I anticipated this limitation by adding a further failure category, failure by target group construction. This might be developed more in future research. In this framework, the element that was most lacking, however, is that the provision of services depends on individual service providers. Respondents often remarked how their experience depended on who provided the service to them: they noted that they were either lucky or unlucky. While I argue for the importance of highlighting and exploring structural rather than individual characteristics, this serves as a reminder that behind public services there are not only people experiencing them but also people providing them. Street-level bureaucrats are important actors. Lipsky's work on street level bureaucrats can enrich Van de Walle's framework through the failure type that I coined 'failure by discretion'.

Considering these two further failure types, the framework which began with Boin and 't Hart's three types, and was expanded by Van de Walle to include six, would now comprise eight reasons for why failure might occur. Complexity can add nuance in such frameworks, but it also raises questions about what the purpose of applying such frameworks is. If it is to simplify, then adding complexity seems counterproductive. At the same time, as researchers, we might ask ourselves why there is a necessity to classify and codify all findings into neat boxes, when our findings might just defy such classifications, revealing instead complex interacting and mutually dependent explanations.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The women interviewed in the frame of this research face multiple challenges on their path to employment. They are confronted with manifold barriers, which they approach with resilience and determination. The findings show that in line with previous research, entry into the labour market proves either virtually impossible, occurs with a long delay, or does not succeed in a field related to prior qualifications or in line with skill-level and previous experience. Nevertheless, all women interviewed displayed high motivation to find employment and to contribute in this way to German society: 'We want to do something for Germany. We want to help'[22]. Considering this determination, along with the resources mobilised in Germany to enable the labour market incorporation of newly-arrived refugees and ALMPs in place, the levels of un- and underemployment of skilled refugee women are high. Bourdieu's capital theory would suggest that prior qualifications and experiences would be an advantage on the German labour market. ALMPs in Germany address the importance of providing equal support for men and women. However, skilled refugee women continue to be disadvantaged in accessing the labour market.

This thesis addresses as its central research question: *how can the un- and underemployment of skilled refugee women be explained in the context of active labour market programmes and policies in place?* A qualitative approach through a municipal case study was selected, as at the forefront of this research are skilled refugee women's experiences of the services offered. In-depth interviews with skilled refugee women form the main body of sources, complemented by interviews with service providers and volunteers, as integration is understood as a two-way process. An analysis of selected relevant local and national policy documents was further carried out to enrich this data.

To begin, this thesis asked what the perceived barriers to adequate employment faced by skilled refugee women are, and how their labour market incorporation is addressed in Essen. Challenges relating to language, (re-)orientation, and intersectional challenges regarding gender, religion, and motherhood are identified as principal barriers. The findings revealed an extensive system of labour market support available but also several shortcomings that remain. In this, the findings provided an answer to the second sub-question, namely to what extent the programmes meet the needs of skilled refugee women.

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[22] German original: Ja wir möchten etwas machen für Deutschland. Wir möchten helfen.

Firstly, programmes in place do not always reach those who are in need of them. Despite a myriad of available programmes, respondents noted that it takes considerable time and effort to establish what programmes are suited to them, if they find them at all. Secondly, the services provided are not always effective. Generalised programmes are perceived by some respondents as a waste of time, because they do not address the specific barriers they face. In language courses, mixed groups of people who do not share the same aspirations means that they cannot proceed at a pace suitable for all participants. Furthermore, language courses are not sufficient in fully preparing refugee women for the labour market; hence more emphasis must be placed on making available options beyond these. Thirdly, assistance and advice received from Jobcentres is perceived by some respondents as inadequate. Such ALMPs are designed for people who are less qualified, and therefore do not sufficiently help those who are highly ambitious, educated, and experienced. Lastly, the findings revealed that there continues to be a lack of support that addresses the particular barriers faced by refugee women. Childcare continues to be a central barrier, as part-time courses and positions remain few and far between. The third sub-question called for explanations for this mismatch. Findings indicate that while refugee women are increasingly a target group for ALMPs, skill-level is often disregarded. Gender roles are reinforced through ALMPs that prioritise the labour market incorporation of refugee men. On the one hand, rigidity of official programmes means the individual support necessary cannot be effectively provided, on the other, caseworker discretion means that the quality of the service often depends on the person providing it. Measures designed to bring unemployed into employment quickly conflict with desires to find adequate employment. Perceived ineffectiveness can have detrimental effects, as a bad experience of friends discourages others from availing of a service. However, findings also revealed the potential of civil society projects that step in to 'fill the gap'. The recommendations called for in the fourth sub-question are discussed below.

7.1 Research Recommendations

This research focused on one municipal case study to ensure feasibility and to capture the programmes available at local level. Future research might be conducted on a larger scale. A comparative approach, comparing labour market participation and ALMPs in cities of different regions, or between cities and more rural locations would further enrich the field. While this research looked at institutional support available more generally, future research could hone in on one specific ALMP and trace its (perceived) effectiveness to pinpoint more

precise shortcomings or policy actions. Furthermore, this research revealed interesting differences in the perception of certain public, or state-funded programmes, and civil society projects which invites further inquiry. Lastly, omnipresent throughout the interviews were the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on lives of respondents, the provision of services, and access to the labour market. This undoubtedly deserves further discussion.

7. 2 Policy Recommendations

Throughout the interviews, I reflected with respondents, both skilled refugee women and service providers, on how the services could be improved. The following recommendations are based on their reflections and personal experiences. Above all else, this constitutes the main overarching recommendation of this research: to include service users in the reflection on how services can be improved.

Firstly, the interviews highlighted the importance of supporting networked knowledge. It must be ensured that the available opportunities are known to those in need of them. 'Integration Points' are a step in the right direction. Municipalities are further advised to support active networks, and to ensure information is shared effectively. What emerged from the interviews was that information is most effectively shared through networks of peers – respondents learn of support available through friends and fellow course participants. These networks should be actively strengthened. Employing refugees in positions within the municipality and Jobcentres would be a good starting point to strengthen such networks and to ensure that the knowledge of these networks is heard and acted upon.

Secondly, the interviews revealed the importance of what one service provider described as 'collecting people where they are'.[23] Personal needs and preferences must not be subordinated in helping people into employment. In aiming to make services more responsive, progression to better quality employment should be facilitated. As past research has also shown, it is ineffective to push people into employment that they are not satisfied with, and equally to prescribe programmes which they deem unhelpful. Targets for Jobcentres to bring refugees into high-skilled jobs might present a concrete policy action.

Thirdly, there is a great need for part-time courses and part-time work. As argued by previous research and in this thesis, labour market integration is a gendered process, and gender-sensitive measures are needed to ensure that women are fully included.

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[23] German original: Ich finde es immer ganz wichtig die Leute abzuholen.

Fourthly, the contribution of civil society organisations and volunteers came to the fore as indispensable. The kind of individual and targeted support that they can provide is perceived as invaluable. It is recommended that these kinds of projects continue to receive adequate funding and further support to ensure their existence, and that their energies are channelled and rewarded. Grass roots community-based organising, such as the 'Round Tables' in Essen are important actors in fostering integration, which is a two-way process and can occur only with the support and involvement of an open and welcoming society.

In 2015 and 2016, when increased numbers of refugees reached Europe, their arrival was at the forefront of media and political attention. Today, several years down the line, as the most immediate needs have been covered, attention has waned. Most refugees cannot return home. The independent experiences and voices which this thesis strives to make resonate only scratch the surface and are but a small representation of the potential and ambition that this group harbours. They must be enabled to build new lives, and participation on the labour market for many forms a central element.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Interview Guide Skilled Refugee Women

A. Introduction
Thank you for taking the time and effort to participate in this study. Before we start, I will give you a short summary of the research project.

I am conducting interviews to get insights into whether and how programmes and services available in Essen are helping skilled refugee women in reaching adequate employment. I would like to know what barriers you face/faced in the process of finding a job and working in Essen, and how the services provided are helping you to address these. *[read through consent form and clarify insecurities and questions]*

B. General questions about personal and professional background
To begin, I will ask you some general questions about your background. This information will be anonymised in the thesis.
1. How old are you?
2. When did you come to Germany?
3. What is your country of origin?
4. What is your educational background?
5. What is your professional background?
6. Are you in Germany with family members, and if so, with whom?

C. Experience in accessing employment
I will now ask you questions about your personal experience in finding/looking for employment.
What is your current position? Are you employed/searching for employment/preparing for employment?

    If in employment:
- What is your position?
- How long have you held this position?
- How do you feel about your position?
- How does this position compare to previous positions you have held in your country of origin (if applicable)?
- What were the main challenges for you in finding this employment?

    If searching for employment:
- How long have you been searching for employment?
- What kind of employment are you searching for?
- What are the main challenges for you in finding employment?

    If currently preparing for employment:
- What kind of employment are you preparing for?
- What are necessary steps that you need to take?
- What are the main challenges for you in preparing for employment?

D. The role of public services
In this section, I will ask about the role of public services in searching for/finding/preparing for employment.

i. Language and integration courses
1. Could you describe the language and integration courses you have taken part in?
2. How did you find these courses/know about their existence and availability? Who recommended them?
3. How beneficial do you feel this course is/was in helping you to find/search/prepare for employment?
4. How well do you feel this course was adapted to your needs?
5. How would you describe your overall experience during these courses?
6. If there was something you could change about these courses, what would you change?

ii. Job training courses / Further 'Maßnahmen'
1. Could you describe any further courses that you took part in?
2. How did you find these courses/know about their existence and availability?
3. How beneficial do you feel this course is/was in helping you to find/search/prepare for employment?
4. How well do you think this course is adapted to your needs?
5. How would you describe your overall experience of these courses?
6. If there was something you could change about these courses, what would you change?

iv. Jobcentre/ Job seeking advice
1. Did you receive advice or assistance in seeking employment from the Jobcentre or other organisations?
2. How beneficial do you feel the advice is/was in helping you to find/search/prepare for employment?
3. How well do you think the advice that you received was adapted to your needs?
4. How would you describe your overall experience?
5. If there was something you could change about your appointments, what would you change?

Are there any further courses or forms of assistance that you would have wished for? How do you think your experience could have been facilitated?

Do you have any comments or questions or is there anything else that you would like to add? Do you know any other people that we should talk to about this topic? *[other skilled refugee women]*

Appendix 2 Interview Guide Public Service Providers

A. Introduction
Thank you for taking the time and effort to participate in this study. Before we start, I will give you a short summary of the research project.

I am conducting interviews to get insights into whether and how programmes and services available in Essen are helping skilled refugee women in reaching adequate employment. I would like to know what public services in Essen are doing to help skilled refugee women in addressing barriers to labour market participation.
[read through consent form and clarify insecurities and questions]

B. Questions about their role within the organisation
To begin, I have some questions about your role at [organisation] and the work you do in relation to the labour market incorporation of skilled refugee women.
     1. What is your current position at [organisation]?
     2. How long have you been working in this role?
     3. What does your role entail?

C. General questions about the organisation
The next questions are general questions about the organisation for which you work.
     1. How would you describe the role of your organisation in the labour market integration of refugees?
     2. Where does the funding for this project come from?
     3. How did your role of your organisation change with the arrival of increased numbers of refugees?
     4. How does the work your organisation does fit into the network of programmes addressing the labour market incorporation of refugees/women in Essen?

D. Questions regarding the labour market incorporation of skilled refugee women
In this next section, I'll ask some questions about how you feel the work of your organisation can impact the labour market incorporation of skilled refugee women.
     1. What are, in your opinion, the main barriers faced by skilled refugee women in accessing adequate employment?
     2. How do you feel the work you do can address this?
     3. What are your biggest challenges you experience in offering this kind of support?
     4. How is the work you do structured? Are there particular protocols that you follow?
     5. How would you describe the uptake of the programme you offer? How do you feel that the support that you offer is perceived? What, in your opinion, is the reputation of [organisation]?
     6. How important do you think the labour market incorporation of skilled refugee women is for your organisation? For the network of organisations in Essen?
     7. How do you feel the resources you have match with your task?
     8. Where do you see most room for improvement in the system facilitating labour market integration of refugees? Do you have any suggestions?

Do you have any questions/comments or is there anything else you would like to add?
Do you know any other people that we should talk to about this topic? *[other service providers]*

Appendix 3 Interview Guide Volunteers

A. Introduction
Thank you for taking the time and effort to participate in this study. Before we start, I will give you a short summary of the research project.

I am conducting interviews to get insights into whether and how programmes and services available in Essen are helping skilled refugee women in reaching adequate employment. I am also interested in the involvement of civil society actors and volunteers. *[read through consent form and clarify insecurities and questions]*

B. General questions about role
To begin, I have some questions regarding the kind of support that you offered and how you experienced this.

1. Could you describe the kind of support that you offered relating to the labour market integration of refugees?
2. What were the main challenges for you in offering this support?

C. The role of volunteers in integration
1. What role do volunteers play in the labour market integration of refugees?
2. What kind of experience have those you have assisted had with public services?
3. What kind of experience have you had with public services yourself?
4. How do voluntary organisations work with public services?
5. What kind of reputation do the measures have? The job centres?
6. What could be improved in Essen?

Do you have any questions/comments or is there anything else you would like to add?
Do you know any other people that we should talk to about this topic? *[other volunteers/ service providers/ refugee women]*

Appendix 4 Referenced Policy Documents

National

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Local

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