

Chapter 5

Helping migrants find work in Sweden

Where previous chapters have examined both the supply of skills embodied in Sweden's foreign-born population, and the demand of Swedish employers for these skills, this chapter focusses on finding work; on matching migrants with skills to employment opportunities that require those skills. The heavy reliance of job search in Sweden on networks can put migrants, who have more limited access to such networks, at a disadvantage and the Swedish PES, upon whom migrants rely more heavily than their native counterparts, has limited contact with employers. This chapter begins with an examination of the public support available for those seeking a job before proceeding to examine the hurdles facing, and support available for those seeking to have their qualifications accredited and their prior learning recognised in order to find the right job – that is a job that utilises their existing skills and experience.

Early integration into employment can have an important impact on the long-term integration prospects of newly-arrived migrants. Conversely, an inability to access employment can lead to a depreciation of skills and experience. Previous chapters have examined both the supply of skills embodied in Sweden's foreign-born population and the demand of Swedish employers for these skills. This chapter now turns to the challenge of matching supply and demand, and of smoothing the transition into appropriately skilled work.

Finding a job: Networks and the Public Employment Service

In normal circumstances, the introduction programme for refugees lasts for two years. Substantial investment is made during this period to overcome the hurdles facing these new arrivals – in terms of language abilities, foreign qualifications, skills deficits, and poor knowledge of the Swedish labour market and job application procedures. Following these two years of targeted integration activities, refugees and their accompanying family are expected to be able to function in Swedish society and search for employment alongside native-born Swedes. Support for job seekers at this point is untargeted.

When the introduction programme was first introduced, it was expected that those new arrivals closest to the labour market would self-select out of the introduction programme and into employment as soon as they were able to do so – such that the full two years would apply only for those in need of greatest support. In practice, however, this has rarely been the case; in 2014 only 7.2% of introduction programme participants (10.8% of men and just 2.5% of women) left the programme for employment within the first two years (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2015).

Many vacancies in Sweden are filled through informal networks

In Sweden, contacts made through informal networks – including friends, relatives and previous employers – are an important source of labour market information and a central component of job search. Indeed studies suggest that up to two thirds of all filled vacancies involve some form of informal contacts (Behtoui, 2008). This heavy reliance on networks to some extent undermines the role of the PES and contributes to the substantial ethnic workplace segregation that characterises the labour market in Sweden (see Åslund and Nordström Skans, 2010).

Immigrants, especially the newly-arrived, tend to have fewer contacts that are relevant to the labour market than do native-born Swedes. As a result, the predominance of informal recruitment means that, in practice,

many job vacancies, although not necessarily closed to immigrants, may be filled in such a way that they have little opportunity for their application to be considered, irrespective of how well they are equipped to meet the Swedish labour market.

In addition to having fewer labour market contacts, the networks available to immigrants are often largely concentrated among other immigrants – who are themselves more distant from the labour market, or are concentrated in lower-skilled jobs. Indeed studies have found that vacancies filled via networks of third-country nationals often provide lower salaries (Olli-Segendorf and Teljosuo, 2011) and that ethnic-enclaves (where networks tend to be highly concentrated) in Sweden tend to increase the propensity for welfare dependence (see Åslund and Fredriksson, 2009) and self-employment (Anderssen et al., 2011).

Edin et al. (2003) find that living in an ethnic enclave – with concomitant access to ethnic networks – improves labour market outcomes for less-skilled immigrants in Sweden. Yet, while ethnic networks may benefit those searching for unskilled work, the heavy reliance on personal networks puts skilled immigrants at a distinct disadvantage as compared to their native-born counterparts. Indeed, a survey conducted by Statistics Sweden found that 70% of highly educated third-country nationals consider lack of personal contacts to be the largest impediment to accessing a job matching their qualifications.

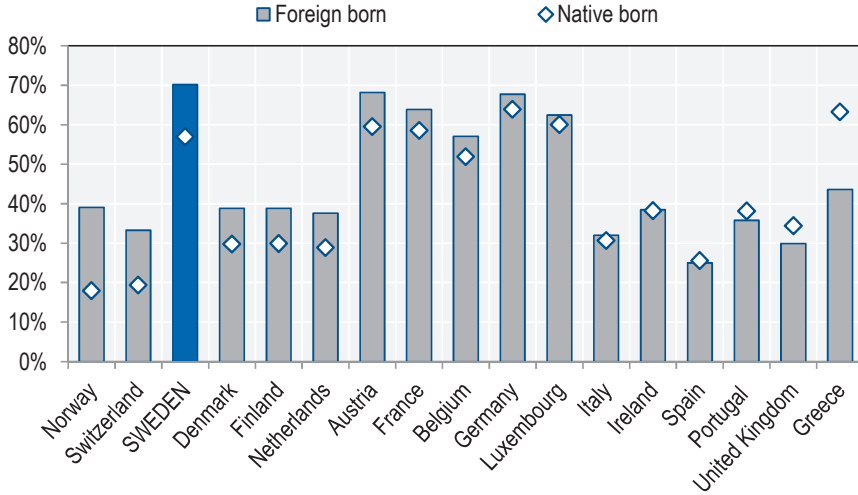
Despite its strong brokerage role, the PES has limited contact with employers

Job brokerage, the process of matching job seekers with employers who are seeking to fill vacancies, is the central function of the PES. The important role traditionally played by the Swedish PES in this respect is illustrated by the extent to which contact the PES is widely used as a job-search method. And though many vacancies are filled through other recruitment channels – such as informal networks as discussed above – Sweden is one of the few European countries in which contact with the PES ranks as the most important job-search method among the unemployed.¹ The job brokerage role of the PES is particularly important for migrants who often have more limited access to other recruitment channels. And, when compared to native-born Swedes, immigrants are over-represented among those relying on the PES as their primary source of job search support (Figure 5.1, Panel A). In contrast, the foreign-born in Sweden tend to make relatively limited use of direct contact with employers in their job search (Figure 5.1, Panel B).

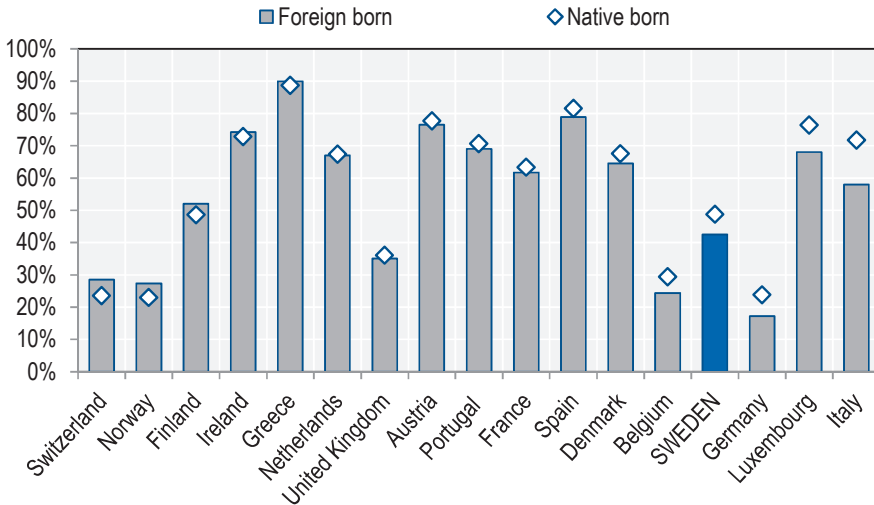
Figure 5.1. Methods used to find work, 2013

Percentage of unemployed (25-64)

Panel A. Contacted PES office to find work



Panel B. Contacted employer directly



Note: Data ordered according to the disparity in method use between foreign- and native-born individuals.

Source: European Union Labour Force Survey 2013.

The efficiency with which the PES is able to act as a job broker is dependent both on the reach of its vacancy database and on the relationship of the agency with employers. Sweden's vacancy database is relatively widely used. Though while employers in Sweden were previously *required* to notify the PES when they opened a vacancy, more recently such notification has been made voluntary and the ratio of PES registered vacancies to total new hires has fallen to 44% (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2014). The decreasing number of vacancies on the PES database has, to some extent, become a vicious cycle that disadvantages migrants as employers that do inform the PES of their vacancies report being overwhelmed by the number of applications from inappropriately qualified individuals whose benefit receipt is contingent on their demonstration of active job search. Nevertheless, the numbers registered remain relatively high in an OECD context.

Alongside the strength of the vacancies database, the ability of the PES as an effective job broker is dependent on the strength of interaction with employers. Employer engagement is critical to a well-functioning PES however a recent report by the Swedish National Audit Office (Riksrevisionen, 2015) notes that many Swedish employers feel the PES often finds it difficult to identify candidates with the requested educational and professional background, and lacks sufficient industry knowledge. The resultant reluctance of employers to use the PES to source candidates is particularly damaging to the employment prospects of migrants whose lack of networks renders the PES particularly important in their job search. Given that they lack employer contacts of their own; that the PES maintains strong contacts with employers is of vital importance for migrants. In Sweden, however, the organisational model of the PES is such that the relationship between PES caseworkers and employers is less well developed than elsewhere in the OECD. The organisational models used by PESs operating in OECD countries can be broadly divided into two types: models such as that in Sweden in which PES counsellors work with both employers and job seekers, and models in which PES have dedicated employer relationship staff. Countries with the latter organisational model include Austria and the United Kingdom where account managers at the regional or national level are dedicated to interacting with employers, and France, where the PES has formal agreements with large company networks and industry sectors concerning recruitment support (OECD, 2015). Both organisational models have strengths and weaknesses.

While generalist staff may be better positioned to match their clients with employment opportunities, there is a risk that their attention becomes heavily focused on job seekers, to the detriment of employers. On the other hand while dedicated staff can offer more specialised support to employers, there is a risk of disconnection between services to employers and job seekers.

In an attempt to fill this gap and help migrant job seekers overcome the disadvantage of their limited contact with the labour market, the social welfare services in the municipality of Goteborg have begun working with “recruiters” to offer help to companies in sourcing motivated foreign-born candidates with strong non-cognitive skills. These recruiters effectively act as head hunters operating in response to demand from employers, they conduct interviews with prospective immigrant candidates prior to deciding whether to refer them to the employer with whom they are working. Anecdotal evidence suggests that results of this experiment have been promising and efforts to evaluate and, if appropriate, apply the model in other municipalities would be worthwhile. In an effort to address this gap at the national level, in 2015 a new role was created within PES (“*Kundresurser*”). These new staff have been tasked with working to increase contact with employers and coaching of job seekers. The results of this new development, however, are yet to be felt. Elsewhere in the OECD efforts have been made to provide support for migrants from industry specific advisors with strong links to relevant employers. Such support can be provided either from within the PES or via externally funded organisations (see Box 5.1).

Box 5.1. Employment services catered to the needs of immigrants in Canada, France, and Norway

When searching for work in an unfamiliar labour market skilled migrants can benefit from tailored advice on work-search strategies and how to make contact with employers in their professional field. Such assistance can be more effective than generic job search support or CV writing workshops. Elsewhere in the OECD both Canada and Norway have found such support to be effective.

The **Ontario**-based immigrant organisation COSTI Immigrant Services offers tailored services to different categories of foreign-born persons. Within the programme, clients are offered work-search strategies and support in line with their professional field. Services include workshops on diversity and adapting to the Canadian workplace; credential evaluation assistance; writing job applications; accessing mentoring opportunities and searching for employers; interview preparation and one-to-one employment counselling. Service is offered in a wide range of different languages. There is no fee for the programme which is funded by the government.

In **France**, the PES has formal agreements with large company networks and industry sectors concerning recruitment support (European Commission, 2012b).

In **Norway** “NAV Intro”, a branch of the Norwegian Employment Service, has been facilitating the labour market integration of immigrants and their children since the 1980s.

Box 5.1. Employment services catered to the needs of immigrants in Canada, France, and Norway (cont.)

While immigrants with medium-level skills are seen as being sufficiently taken care of by the regular mainstream services, alongside low-skilled immigrants the NAV Intro targets immigrants who are highly qualified, providing each with a specialised caseworker. The office has established close connections with employers, and ensures regular follow-ups for immigrants in work placements. NAV Intro offices, across the country, also assist the regular local NAV offices in their region to account for the needs of immigrants by providing training in counselling for persons with an immigrant background, advice in the design of programmes for immigrants with special needs, and general information on the merits of diversity in the workplace. NAV Intro also provides information sessions for employers regarding diversity matters.

Source: OECD (2012), *Jobs for Immigrants (Vol. 3): Labour Market Integration in Austria, Norway and Switzerland*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264167537-en>; <http://www.costi.org/programs/>; and European Commission (2012), *How to Best Structure Services for Employers*, Brussels.

Alongside the PES, voluntary mentors can provide a supplementary job brokerage role for migrants (see OECD, 2007). Such mentorship programmes match immigrant job seekers with a native-born individuals with a similar background (e.g. sex, age and occupation) with the aim that the native-born person provides the immigrant with general information about host society procedures, institutions and practical issues (see Box 5.2 for a discussion of various mentorship schemes in use in other OECD countries). The mentor can also offer the immigrant the benefit of his/her own contacts and in some cases, even act as an intermediary to potential employers. Mentorship programmes which help to overcome information asymmetries; providing immigrants with access to personal networks and tacit knowledge about the functioning of the labour market while involving the native population have become increasingly popular among OECD countries in recent years. Indeed countries such as in Denmark and France have introduced these programmes on a large scale. Attempts to introduce mentoring programmes in Sweden have, thus far, been decentralised and report to have struggled to gain sufficient volunteers to cater to the large number of potential beneficiaries. The reasons for this are not entirely clear since, in other countries, practitioners report that finding mentors has not been an issue.

Box 5.2. Mentorship programmes in Denmark and Norway

Mentorship programmes in which native-born individuals, or established migrants, share their knowledge and contacts with new arrivals, can be particularly valuable for skilled-migrants searching for employment. In Sweden, where vacancies are frequently filled through non-formal channels, such programmes hold particular promise.

In **Denmark**, the *Kvinfo* mentorship programme that started in 2003 is an independent institution under the Ministry of Culture run through the regional branch. The programme uses a database of interested parties to matches immigrant women (especially refugees) with native-born women who have experience in the labour market. The mentor is expected to share his/her experiences, to advice the immigrant and open his/her network to the respective mentee. They discuss issues such as how to write job applications, job interview practices and how to establish contacts with potential employers and professional networks. The mentorship relationship is initially established through a formal agreement fixing a determined timeframe (generally between six months and a year). When the time-periods come to an end, the formal mentorship period ends however an informal mentorship relationship often continues as an informal friendship (OECD, 2007). Between 2003 and 2013, the *Kvinfo* Mentorship programme matched around 3200 mentees and mentors.

In addition to the goal of helping migrants to build professional networks and gain knowledge of the Canadian labour market, the “Mentoring Partnership” run by the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) also provides employers with the opportunity to engage with persons with international professional experience. Employer partners contribute to the programme by engaging identified employee groups to become mentors, marketing the Mentoring Partnership internally to employees, and hosting orientation events for mentors.

The **Norwegian** Enterprise’s Regional Federation for the Agder Region in Southern Norway established a mentorship programme for highly-educated migrants in co-operation with the local business school. Native students who participated in the project as mentors could obtain credits for their university in the framework of management development skills.

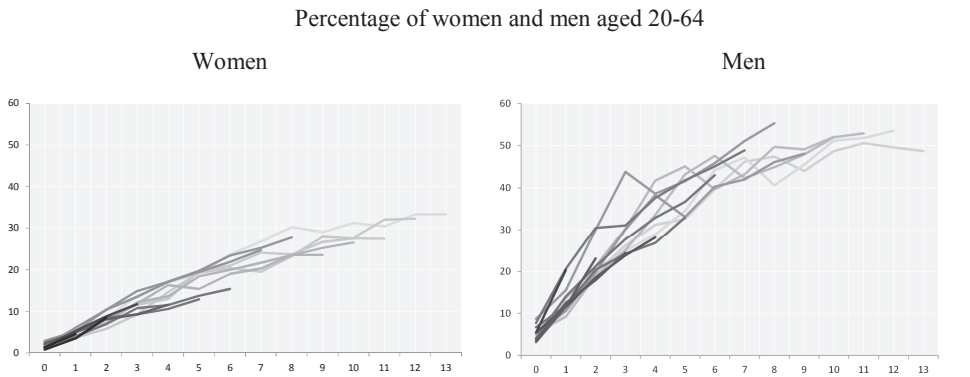
Two years has rarely been sufficient to find employment, particularly for the low-skilled

While two years may be enough for some of Sweden’s new arrivals to prepare for Sweden’s labour market, it is rarely sufficient to enable those with very low skills to enter sustainable and unsubsidised employment. Indeed, the majority of Introduction Programme participants require longer than two years to find employment.

Figure 5.2 which shows, for each refugee cohort, the proportion of the population that has entered employment according to the number of years they have been resident in Sweden. The numbers differ marginally from cohort to cohort. Beyond the influence of policy, this results from changing macroeconomic conditions and the changing composition of the migrant population in each cohort. Nevertheless, across cohorts, the pattern has

remained relatively constant. What clearly stands out from Figure 5.2 is that those who are most distant from the labour market require many years to find employment and, under the current integration system, a large number never do so. Disaggregating these figures by gender it becomes apparent that, among women, the hurdles are still higher. After eight years in Sweden, the employment population ratio among low-educated women tends to stabilise, with approximately 70-80% of women still out of work.

Figure 5.2. Employment population ratio of primary or lower secondary educated refugees and accompanying family by duration of stay, 2000-13



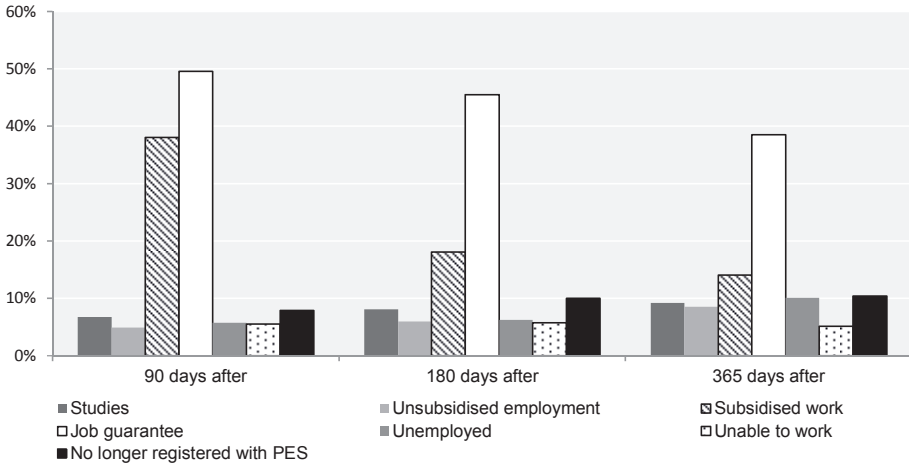
Note: Darker lines represent more recent cohorts.

Source: Data provided by Statistics Sweden.

After completing the introduction programme, the majority of migrants remain registered with the PES. Indeed in 2015, 90 days after finishing the introduction programme 50% of former participants were still enrolled in other labour market programmes, largely the Job and Development Guarantee (see below for a discussion of this programme), while only 31% of participants were in work or education (Figure 5.3). Of these 31%, the majority (19%) were employed in the subsidised employment provided by “Step-in Jobs”, “New Start Jobs” (see Chapter 4 for a discussion of these programmes).

Figure 5.3. Status after the introduction programme, 2015

Status after 90, 180 and 365 days after finishing the introduction programme

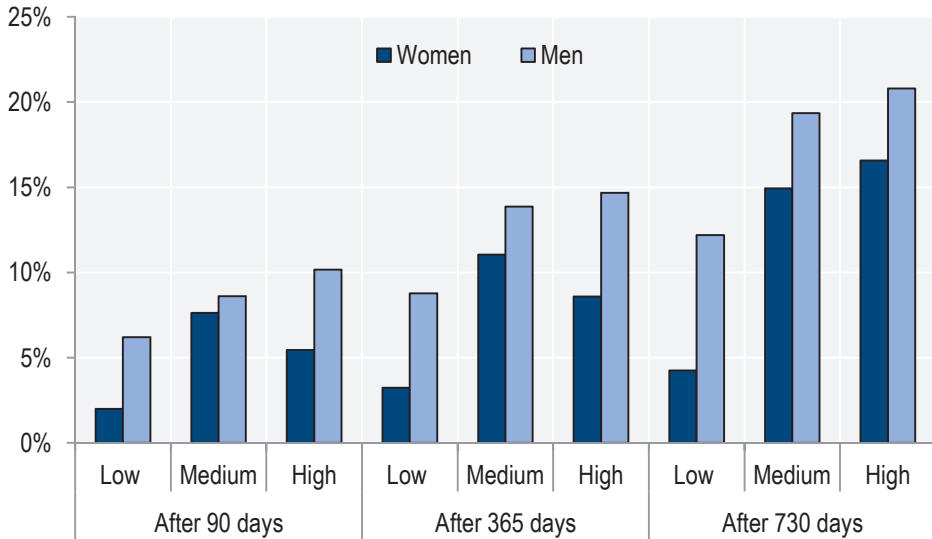


Source: Arbetsförmedlingen (Swedish PES) 2014.

Only 5% of former participants were in unsupported employment within 90 days of the end of the introduction programme. These low rates of unsubsidised employment are particularly pronounced among those with a low level of education, and tend to be quite persistent over time. Two years following the end of the Introduction Programme, only 12.2% of men and 4.2% of women who hold only a primary or lower secondary level of education had managed to enter regular (unsubsidised) employment (Figure 5.4).² This is worrisome since, in 2014, 37% of introduction programme participants arrived with this level of education, between 2010 and 2013, the figure hovered around 50%.

Figure 5.4. Introduction programme participants in unsubsidised work, by level of education, 2015

Status after 90, 365, and 730 days after finishing the introduction programme.
Participants who left the programme between 2010 and 2013



Source: Based on data provided by Arbetsförmedlingen (Swedish PES).

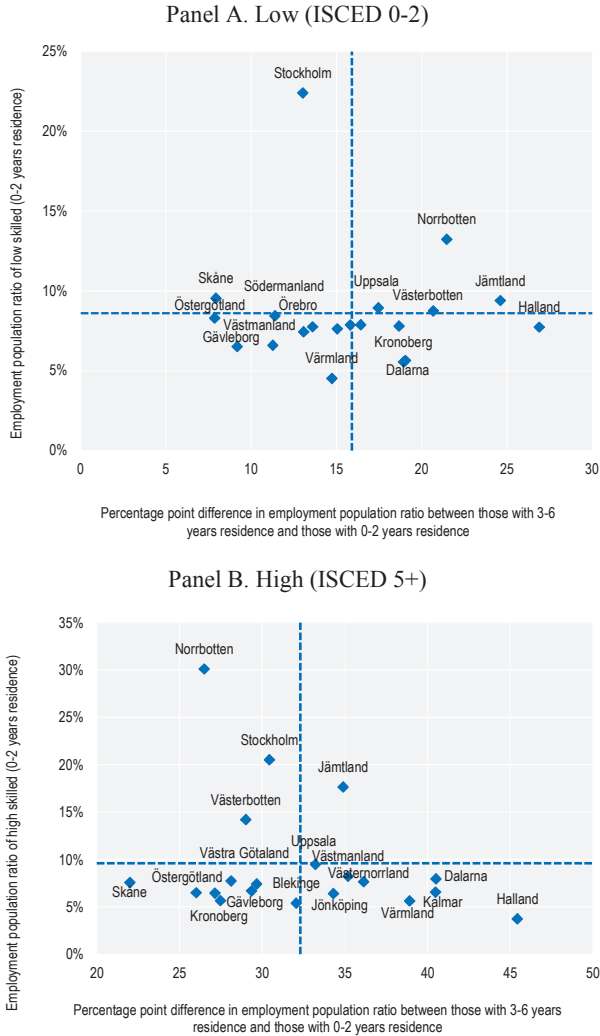
...But outcomes vary across the country

National guidelines on the labour market component of activities undertaken during the introduction programme are limited to the requirement that these activities contain a mixture of preparatory activities and labour market programmes and there is little data collected regarding the content of introductory activities undertaken by new arrivals across the country.

However, the extent to which local PESs are successful in moving migrants into work has varied across the country – particularly among the highly-qualified.³ Indeed, while employment population ratios among the highly-educated tend to hover around the national average of 10% in the early years following arrival, the share that move into employment in the four years that follow varies substantially across the country – ranging from a 22 percentage point increase in Skane, to a 45 percentage point increase in Halland (Figure 5.5, Panel B).

Figure 5.5. Employment pathway of refugees and their accompanying family, by education and duration of residence, 2014

Employment population ratio upon arrival, and percentage point increase in employment population ratio within first six years of residence



Note: This figure is based upon cross-sectional data and does not, therefore, account for the different compositional make-up of refugee cohorts.

Source: Based upon data provided by Statistics Sweden.

The motivation for moving responsibility for migrant integration to the PES was to overcome regional disparities that had arisen under the aegis of municipalities. To the extent that regional disparities remain it will be important to investigate the extent to which these stem from local labour market conditions, from local PES referral practices, or from lack of co-ordination between actors at the local level. This will require the collection of performance indicators both for inputs and for final outcomes – both to gain an insight into the relative performance of different parts of the organisation as well as to gain an understanding of what appears to be working. In Australia and Switzerland a rich set of job seeker characteristics and survey information on local labour market performance is used to compare local PES office performance on a regression-adjusted basis (OECD, 2013).

The post-introduction Job and Development Guarantee is, for many, a dead end

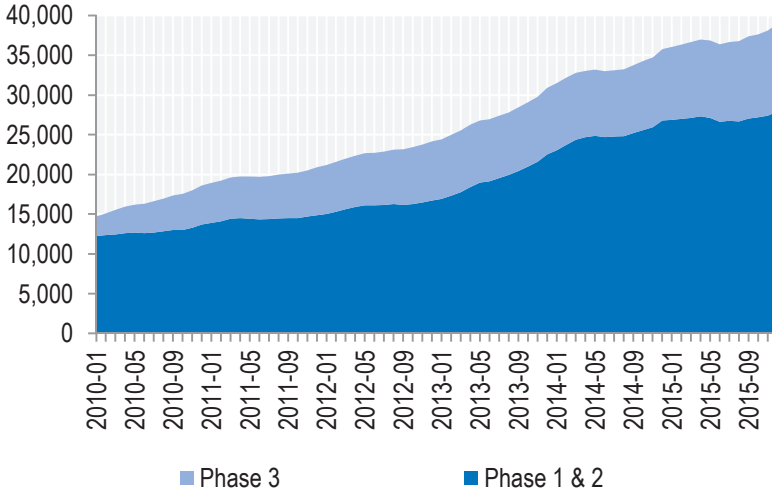
Following the introduction programme, many migrants move directly to the labour market programme *Job and Development Guarantee*. In 2015, close to half of former introduction programme participants were registered on this programme 90 days following the end of their introduction programme. Those under 25 are referred to the Job Guarantee for youth (3%), while those who are over 25 are referred to the Guarantee for the long-term unemployed (44%). Though these programmes are not specifically targeted at immigrants, there are a large number of immigrants among their beneficiaries. And indeed, by the end of 2015 the foreign-born accounted for over 55% of Job and Development Guarantee participants up from 33% in 2010 (see Figure 5.6). As a result activities targeting those specific hurdles that impede labour market success of the foreign-born should not be overlooked at this point.

The Job and Development Guarantee for long-term unemployed has, until February 2016, consisted of three phases. In a first phase, lasting 30 weeks, the participant is offered job search training and coaching, in the second phase, which lasts for a further 60 weeks, participants are offered work experience and in the final phase, which is open-ended, participants are given permanent publicly funded employment (Figure 5.7 outlines the various stages of this process).⁴ Participants on the Job and Development Guarantee and the Youth Guarantee receive PES-funded activity support development support for up to 450 days.⁵ Thereafter, those without other means are referred to the municipalities for welfare support.

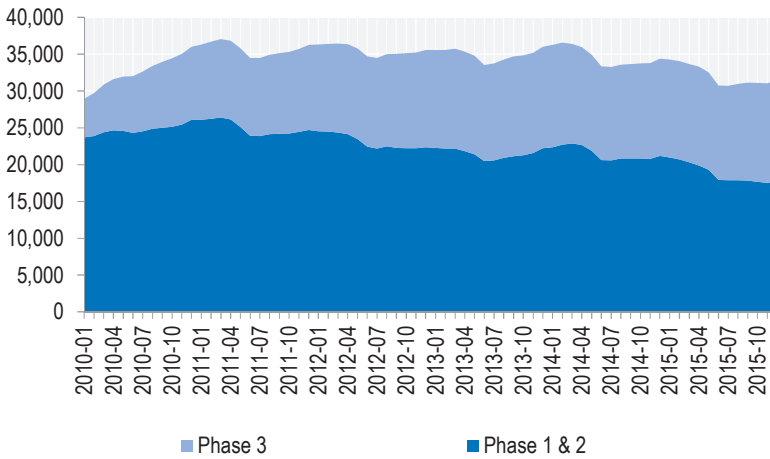
Figure 5.6. Job Guarantee participants by programme phase

Number of participants

Panel A. Foreign-born participants

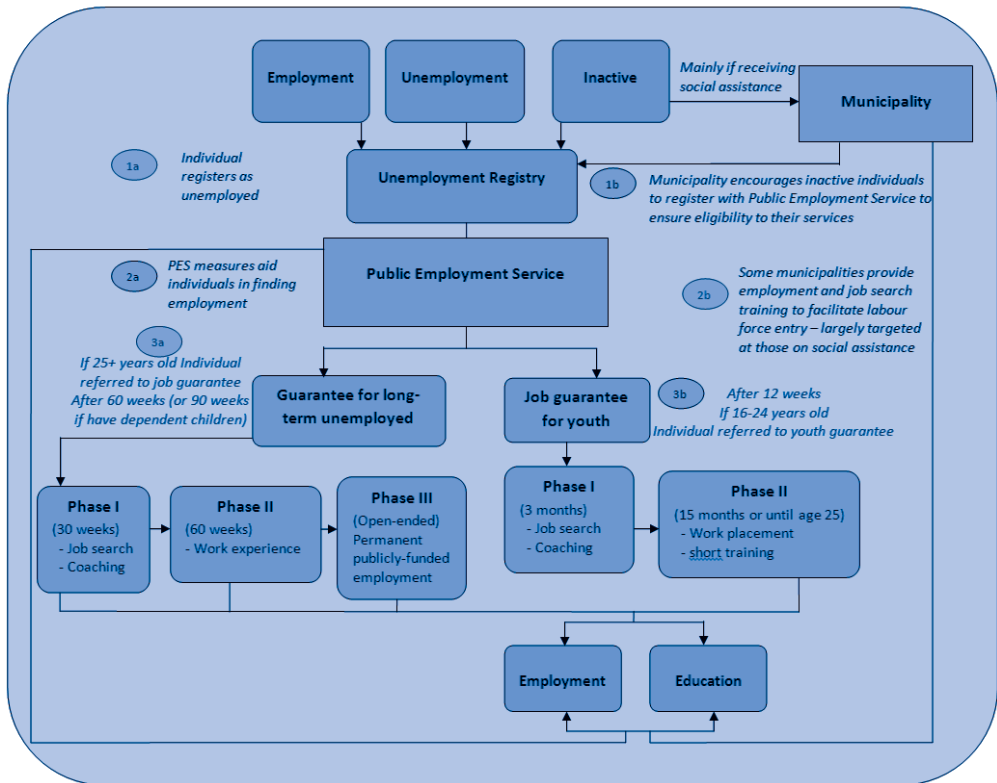


Panel B. Native-born participants



Source: OECD Secretariat calculations based upon figures provided by Arbetsförmedlingen (Swedish PES).

Figure 5.7. The pathway to work among established migrants



Source: OECD Secretariat analysis based on national legislation and regulations.

While the outcomes Job and Development Guarantee participants would have achieved in the absence of the programme are unobservable, some sense of the effectiveness of the programme can be ascertained from the proportion of participants that are able to leave the programme to move into employment. At 4% per month, outflow from the Job and Development Guarantee implies that participants remain on the programme for an average of about two years before finding work.⁶ However, while close to 60% of job guarantee participants leave the programme in the first year; the remaining 40% experience considerable difficulties in moving out of the programme.⁷

Currently however, by the time participants reach phase 3 of the programme, the job search and training activities of the Job and Development Guarantee peter off such that those in need of the most support

to enhance their employability are not able to access it. Indeed many participants report being parked in subsidised employment with employers who have no intention of hiring them on a regular contract and, in some cases, offer very little in terms of a work programme. Learning at this stage is likely to be extremely limited and the employability of participants is not likely to be enhanced. By the end of 2015 there were 25 000 people enrolled in phase 3 of the Job and Development Guarantee; 45% of these were foreign born.

In response to this lack of success on the part of phase 3 to move individuals back into work, it has recently been announced that this third stage of the Job and Development Guarantee will be phased out and replaced with a greater focus on vocational training. Ensuring that training accompanies workplace experience is an important step in preparing those that have become distant from the labour market for productive work. However it is important that vocational programmes remain closely linked to the world of work and do not become holding bays for those migrants that are difficult to place. At the same time, those migrants arriving in Sweden without the skills that are necessary for participation in the Swedish labour market should be offered a structured route to gaining these skills, rather than being moved from short PES-run courses on the introduction plan, into job search and work experience courses during phases 1 and 2 of the Job and Development Guarantee, before moving back to education in phase 3.

And lack of continuity may mean some fall through the cracks, particularly women

Given the extent to which many migrants still require support following the introduction years, continuity at this stage is of critical importance. However, delays before starting the Job and Development Guarantee Programme are common and many migrants fall into unemployment while waiting to start. During the introduction programme, specific resources are devoted to migrants and the division of responsibilities are clear. After the two years, however, when the programme ends the PES has only a few activities targeted at migrants. “Step-in jobs” is one such programme, the majority of the other programmes are untargeted and enrolment is open to all unemployed people. The rationale behind the abrupt end to targeted programmes is the belief that after two years migrants should be integrated in Swedish society and further targeting would discriminate them unnecessarily from native-born individuals in need of support.

However many, particularly women, get lost in the mainstream and become increasingly distant from the labour force following the end of introductory activities. The introduction programme represents an important

opportunity to reduce the gap between women and the labour market. If the labour market activities of the introduction plan are able to bring women closer to the labour market and prepare them for work, there will be a long-term payoff – both for the women themselves, for their families and for society. However, if momentum is to be maintained, it is important to build on the initial steps taken during the introduction period. Currently, when introduction activities end, many women are becoming increasingly distant from the labour force and, in 2015, the proportion of former female participants no longer registered with the PES increased from 11%, 90 days after the end of the introduction programme, to 19% one year later (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1. Status after the introduction programme, 2015

Status after 90 and 365 days after finishing the introduction

	90 days after finishing the Introduction Programme		360 days after finishing the Introduction Programme	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Working/studying	21%	39%	26%	39%
Work (subsidised)	3%	5%	2%	3%
Work (not subsidised)	3%	6%	5%	11%
Work New Start jobs	7%	22%	7%	18%
Studying	8%	6%	12%	7%
Programmes within PES	53%	47%	40%	37%
Job and Development Programme	48%	42%	34%	31%
Youth Job Programme	3%	4%	3%	4%
Unemployed	6%	6%	8%	12%
Prevented to take immediate work	9%	3%	7%	3%
Left PES	11%	5%	19%	9%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Figures provided by Arbetsförmedlingen (Swedish PES).

Women will often need additional support to boost their confidence through mentoring schemes, outreach, and support during the initial period of work (see Box 5.3 for some policies targeted specifically at women in OECD countries).

Box 5.3. Programmes targeted at women with a refugee background in Australia and Norway

In many OECD countries programmes have been designed to specifically target women with a refugee background in order to help them overcome the specific difficulties they face.

In **Australia** a number of such programmes have been developed with the goal of helping refugee women develop new skills and increase their participation in the labour market. Programmes in this ilk include the New Futures Training Program run by the Victorian Cooperative on Children's Services For Ethnic Groups (VICSEG) which trains people, predominantly women, from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to be certified childcare workers. The programme has the dual aims of i) equipping these women with skills that are valuable in the workforce, and ii) diversifying the childcare sector so that it is better equipped to meet the needs of families from various backgrounds. In addition to training towards the attainment of a childcare certificate the programme also offers: pre-employment training to familiarise participants with the Australian labour market, mentoring from community members currently in the childcare sector, and follow-up supervision in the workplace. The programme has been successful in increasing labour force participation and levels of employment for women. Alongside this the Stepping Stones to Small Business programme offers mentoring, business training and support as well as help and support in gaining access to micro-finance loans.

In the **Norwegian** municipality of Levanger, a new model for shaping measures and ways of co-operation has been piloted which gives women arriving as refugees or family migrants with low education a new opportunity to find regular work. In co-operation with the adult teaching centre, the municipality and local employers, the PES NAV developed an intensive 6-step model to integrate this target group into the labour market. In the first step, a curriculum has been developed jointly by teachers and professionals for the sectors of health, cleaning and early childhood education (kindergarten). After having passed the recruitment in a second step, the women are provided with three lessons of practical training, together with a workplace supervisor in the third step. These are accompanied by three lessons of theoretical training per week, for a total of 13 weeks. The fourth step consists of a one-year municipal work placement to deepen the understanding of the tasks and routines. This is followed by a fifth step which provides practice with or without a mentor in an ordinary work place. The mentor is chosen on a voluntary basis and receives compensation. As the sixth step, the objective is to find a regular job for the participants. During the programme the participants are familiarised with and use an e-learning platform [dokker.no](http://www.dokker.no) for planning, documentation, communication and assessment.

Source: Australian Refugee Council, <http://www.bsl.org.au/services/refugees-immigration-multiculturalism/stepping-stones/>, OECD (2016) and Froy and Pyne (2011).

Finding the right job: Recognition, validation and bridging

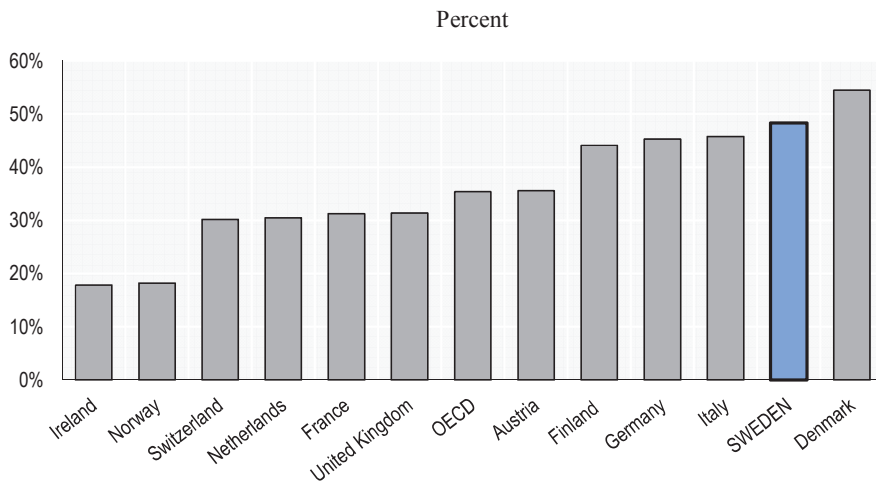
The Swedish integration system has, for some years, put a heavy emphasis on facilitating the transition of new migrants into employment. Beyond this, the emphasis of more recently policy has moved from helping migrants take steps towards employment, to helping them take steps towards

quality employment. Qualification recognition is an important part of this process however, in many cases, the qualification that an immigrant brings with them is not deemed sufficient to practice the relevant occupation in Sweden. When this is the case, areas of weakness will need to be bridged before migrants are able to use their skills on the labour market.

Migrants trained abroad face particular barriers to using their formal qualifications

Formally assessing foreign qualifications, prior learning and work experience against domestic education and training standards helps migrants to highlight their skills, increase transparency over their qualifications and make them easier to interpret by local employers. In Sweden, where a relatively high share of highly-educated immigrants have obtained their education and work experience abroad (Figure 5.8), efficient evaluation of foreign qualifications and work experience is particularly important.

Figure 5.8. Persons aged 25-64 who obtained their education outside the host country, 2012-13



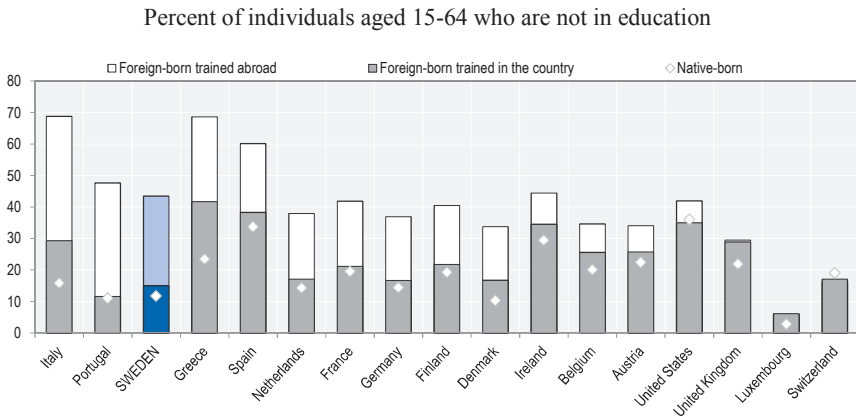
Source: European Union Labour Force Surveys 2011-2013.

Across the OECD, education acquired outside the OECD is strongly discounted in the host-country labour market. A typical consequence of this is over-qualification. Over-qualification among the foreign-born frequently occurs when, unsure about the value of migrants' foreign qualifications, employers are unwilling to offer employment at a commensurate level. Migrants who are pushed to find work in a hurry – to become self-sufficient,

to integrate in Sweden and potentially to support a family – are particularly vulnerable to becoming stuck in a “survival job” for which they are overqualified.

In most OECD countries, the country where a person obtained their highest qualification is a stronger determinant of wages and the probability of being over-qualified than is their country of birth and this pattern is particularly stark in Sweden. While there are large disparities in over-qualification rates between native- and foreign-born employees in Sweden, much of the gap is driven by over-qualification among those immigrants with qualifications obtained outside Sweden. Where 44% of highly-educated migrants with foreign qualifications are formally overqualified for their job, the same is true for only 13% of the highly educated immigrants with Swedish qualifications. Alongside Sweden, only Italy and Portugal see overseas training so heavily penalised (Figure 5.9).

Figure 5.9. Over-qualification rates among native- and foreign-born by where qualification obtained, 2012-13



Note: Data are ordered according to the disparity in over qualification rates between the native-born and the foreign-born who were trained abroad.

Source: Adapted from OECD and European Union (2015).

Sweden has a relatively advanced recognition framework...

The recognition of foreign higher qualifications has a long history in Sweden, dating back to 1987. Since then, recognition has evolved from a relatively strict comparison of training contents to a more flexible assessment of qualifications based on a variety of programme characteristics.⁸ Responsibility for the recognition of foreign qualifications has, since 2013, been the responsibility of the Swedish Council for Higher

Education.⁹ Alongside this the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications in occupations that are regulated by law has always been the responsibility of the competent sector organisation (see Box 5.4). Figure 5.10 below illustrates how authority is divided among the relevant agencies depending on whether recognition is undertaken for work or education purposes, and in regulated or unregulated professions.

Box 5.4. The current policy framework for the recognition of foreign qualifications in Sweden

Co-ordinating bodies

- Since 2013, the assessment and recognition of foreign upper-secondary, post-secondary, and tertiary education for labour market purposes is undertaken under the aegis of a new agency, the **Swedish Council for Higher Education**. In 2014, the agency received more than 18 000 applications, of which more than 14 000 resulted in recognition statements.¹
- Applications for recognition for the purpose of further studies are also treated by the Swedish Council for Higher Education – as long as they are for upper-secondary qualifications. Persons who want to pursue studies at the master level or above in Sweden have their higher education credentials evaluated during the process of admission by the competent **higher education institution**.
- Applications for recognition of degrees – both academic and non-tertiary – in *regulated* professions are assessed separately by each **regulatory authority** for their respective professions. The most important ones are the National Board of Health and Care (*Socialstyrelsen*), which recognises the qualifications of doctors, nurses, dentists (and 18 other professions in the health care sector) and the Swedish Board of Agriculture, which validates veterinary qualifications. The Swedish National Board for Education (*Skolverket*) recognises teaching qualifications.

Eligibility

All immigrants with a valid residence permit can apply to have their foreign qualifications assessed and recognised at the Swedish Council for Higher Education. Asylum seekers already in the country can apply for recognition while their request for asylum is pending.

Language

Applications may be submitted for recognition either in Swedish or in English. Furthermore, translation is not required for qualification documents in Danish, Finnish, French, German, Icelandic, Norwegian and Spanish.

Costs

Recognition of qualifications in non-regulated professions is free of charge. Recognition of academic qualifications in regulated professions is usually subject to a fee (between EUR 50 and EUR 200), and so is recognition of non-academic qualifications in regulated professions (around EUR 990). Unemployed persons may have their qualifications assessed and recognised as part of a labour market programme.

Box 5.4. The current policy framework for the recognition of foreign qualifications in Sweden (*cont.*)

Outcome of the recognition procedure

The outcome of the recognition procedure depends on the type of qualification and the purpose for which recognition is sought.

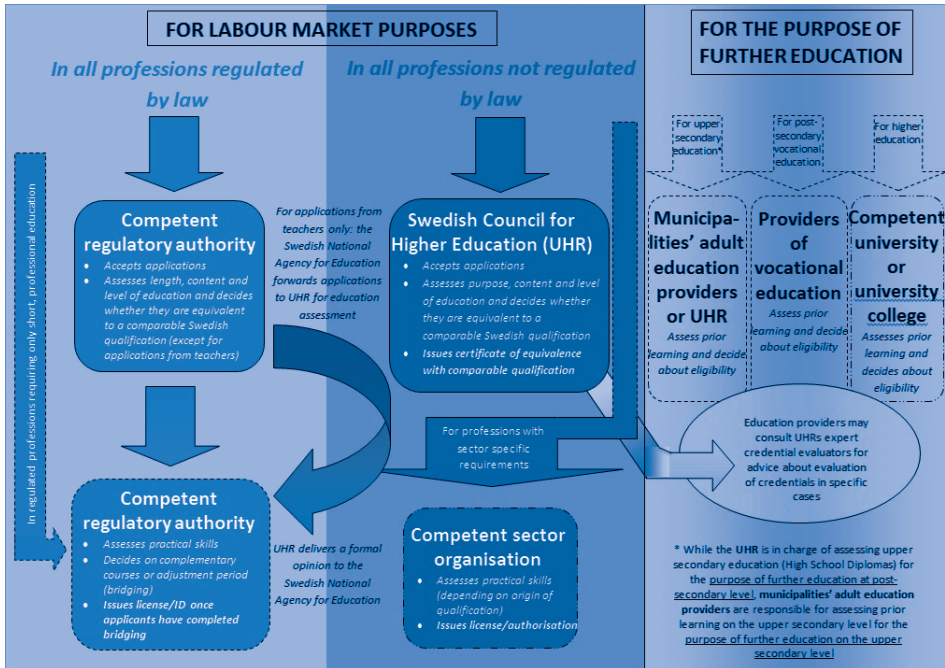
- Recognition of education credentials for the purpose of *further study* results in an evaluation report stating whether the applicant meets the entry requirements for programmes at Swedish Higher Education Institutions.
- Applicants in unregulated occupations who have their qualifications recognised for *labour market purposes* receive a statement describing their foreign qualifications and comparing it in level and subject to an equivalent Swedish qualification. The result is a recognition statement indicating full or partial equivalence with a Swedish degree. Along with the statement the applicant receives a letter with concise information on how to proceed with studies or start working. Since 2012, there is also a separate cover letter addressed to employers. A Swedish degree is obtained only if the relevant educational body assesses actual competences after being admitted and registered as a student.
- Recognition in regulated professions results in a legally binding certificate of equivalence provided that the applicant has completed additional competence requirements (such as Swedish language, a knowledge test, and a supervised trial period at the workplace).

1. This does not include those applications that are transferred to UHR from the National Board for Education (about 1 200 in 2013).

Source: Swedish Ministry of Employment.

In recent years Sweden has taken significant steps towards increasing the clarity of the recognition process and reducing the number of actors involved. In 2013, the Swedish Council for Higher Education (UHR) was given the mandate to assess post-secondary and vocational training from the Agency for Higher Vocational Education, and with this move a single unit in charge of assessing and recognising foreign upper-secondary, post-secondary, and tertiary education for labour market purposes in all occupations that are not regulated by law was established. This simplified framework increased the transparency of the process such that it is now easier for applicants to know who is responsible for assessing their qualifications.

Figure 5.10. Credential recognition and validation in Sweden



Note: Solid lines represent procedures related to the assessment and recognition of formal qualifications. Dotted lines represent procedures for the recognition of prior learning (RPL). Sector organisations and universities or university colleges may be competent to assess and recognise both formal qualifications and prior learning, which is why the lines surrounding these institutions are a mix between dotted and solid.

Source: OECD Secretariat analysis based on national legislation and regulations.

Partially in response to this, and partially a result of the increasing number of inflows and attempts to integrate the recognition procedure within the Introduction Programme, recent years have seen a significant increase in the number of qualifications submitted for recognition. The increase has been particularly pronounced at the Swedish Council for Higher Education, where the number of applications has nearly doubled over the past three years, reaching 24 800 in 2015 (Table 5.2).

When it comes to qualifications in regulated professions, the recognition procedure still involves many actors, each with heterogeneous procedures, fees, processes and bridging courses (see Box 5.4 above). The majority of applications for the recognition of foreign qualifications have been filed in the health sector, with the National Board for Health and Welfare, and in the teaching profession.¹⁰

Table 5.2. Applications for recognition of foreign qualifications received by the Swedish Council for Higher Education and the National Board of Health and Welfare, 2012-14

Type of degree	2012	2013	2014	2015	Change 2012- 2014/15
Secondary education	5 377	6 082	8 442	10 340	92%
Post-secondary vocational education	792	1 260	1 837	2 760	248%
Academic training	5 431	6 643	7 811	9 775	80%
Teacher training	1 005	1 228	1 193	1 896	89%
Sub-total at Swedish Council for Higher Education	12605	15 213	19 283	24 771	97%
Health occupations (from non-EU/EEA countries)	1 229	1 454	1 973	n.a.	61%
Health occupations (from EU/EEA countries)	2 601	2 289	2 457	n.a.	-6%
Sub-total at SoS	3 830	3 743	4 430	n.a.	16%

Note: Applications for recognition of secondary education, post-secondary vocational education, academic training and teacher training are treated by the Swedish Council for Higher Education. Applications for recognition in health occupations are treated by the National Board for Health and Welfare (SoS). The number of applications for recognition of secondary and post-secondary vocational education, as well as the number of applications received for the recognition of academic training and teacher training includes applicants from EU/EEA countries.

Source: Data received from *Universitets- och högskolerådet* (Swedish Council for Higher Education), 2016 and *Socialstyrelsen* (National Board of Health and Welfare) 2015.

Box 5.5. The outcome of the recognition procedure for foreign qualifications

Rejection rates are an important indicator of the performance of a recognition system. Depending on the context, high rejection rates can reveal complex regulations and a lack of information, resulting in incomplete or ineligible applications, or rigid treatment by authorities. They may also reflect deviations in training standards or education requirements for particular professions. Data from the Swedish Council for Higher Education suggests that the likelihood to obtain a recognition statement varies significantly with the type of qualification. Secondary qualifications are usually recognised (with 87% of the decisions made in 2015 resulting in a recognition statement) and the same was true for almost three in four applications for the recognition of higher education credentials. At the same time, in 2015, merely 58% of decisions made on post-secondary vocational education resulted in a positive recognition (UHR, 2016).¹ And, among those seeking recognition in the teaching profession, the Swedish Council of Higher Education estimate that, in 2015, only 36% of cases assessed resulted in a positive recognition of credentials.²

Box 5.5. The outcome of the recognition procedure for foreign qualifications (*cont.*)

Data from the National Board of Health and Welfare provides some evidence on the outcome of applications in the health sector but overall approval rates can only be estimated. This is due to the relatively long processing times at the National Board of Health and Welfare which can imply that one year or more elapses between the initial registration of an application and the issuance of a licence. As a result, it has not been possible to link the number of registered applications in a given year to the number of approvals made in the same year. Based on the number of approvals for bridging programmes that have been issued by the National Board of Health and Welfare it appears that doctors and dentists generally have among the highest approval rates, while applications from nurses are only recognised in less than half of all cases. Recognition is even rarer in some specialised professions such as midwifery, where there have been no recognitions in recent years.³ Underlying these difficulties in the nursing profession is the fact that nursing requires a more advanced level of training in Sweden than it does in many origin countries. And while nurses in Sweden must complete training at university, the required training in many origin countries is at a lower academic level or too short in length. Midwifery, for example, which is a regulated profession in Sweden, requires both a diploma as a general care nurse and specialised studies as a midwife. Applications from countries where midwifery is a separate profession, not requiring a basic nursing degree, are therefore rejected.

1. According to practitioners at the Swedish Council for Higher Education, the relatively higher number of rejections for post-secondary vocational qualifications can be explained by the fact that many of the qualifications submitted as “post-secondary vocational qualifications” do not easily compare with a qualification in the Swedish education system.
2. Unfortunately, no information is available about the reasons underlying the low approval rates for teacher qualifications at the Swedish Council for Higher Education. Please note a positive decision about a teacher qualification from the Swedish Council for Higher Education is not equivalent to a recognition statement. While a positive decision is a requirement to obtain recognition, a recognition statement in the teaching profession can only be issued by the National Board of Education upon assessments of the person’s actual competencies and completion of additional training.
3. While no initiatives have been taken in midwifery, universities offering bridging programmes have great autonomy in setting the entry requirements and validating the competence of applicants to the programme. According to the ordinance that regulates the bridging programmes the entry requirements to be able to attend a bridging programme is a finished foreign education that corresponds to a Swedish higher education and the entry requirements deemed necessary by the higher education institution for the students to be able to benefit from the education. The University in Gothenburg, for example, has for a number of years accepted applicants to the bridging programme for nursing from those who have not received an approval from the National Board of Health and Welfare. These students have not been found to have poorer results during the programme and, following the bridging course, have been granted their diploma to practice in Sweden.

...but processing times are long, especially in the health sector...

With the growing number of applications, processing times have slowed down significantly at all institutions involved in the recognition process. With additional resources and internal reprioritisation the Swedish Council for Higher Education has, thus far, managed to keep processing times for assessment of foreign educational credentials in non-regulated professions under five months. The increase in waiting periods for applications in the health sector, however, has been stark. And by September 2015 the waiting period between filing of an application and the first step of the assessment procedure (the evaluation of educational credentials) took, on average, a full year – increased from just five months in 2013.

Long processing times are problematic, particularly in regulated professions, where they effectively lengthen the period of time during which immigrants cannot access the appropriate labour market. To shorten lead times and meet the increased demand for recognition of foreign qualifications, additional resources for assessment activities have been allocated to the bodies in charge of recognising qualifications in regulated professions. In 2016, an additional SEK 8 million have been allocated to the Swedish Council for Higher Education, with a further 12.5 million planned for 2017. The National Board of Health and Welfare will receive an additional SEK 65 million in 2016 and another 42 million in 2017.

In addition to these increased resources, a reorganisation of tasks may help to enhance efficiency and speed up the lengthy recognition procedure in health professions. Such a reorganisation may take the form of moving responsibility for the assessment of educational credentials in health professions to the Swedish Council for Higher Education. In this manner, the assessment of all qualifications would be concentrated within one authority with expertise on foreign education systems. At the same time such a move could free resources to enable the National Board of Health and Welfare to focus on the later stages of the recognition process.¹¹ A further advantage of moving the assessment of education credentials from the National Board of Health and Welfare to the Swedish Council for Higher Education would be that the latter has the possibility to issue a statement of partial equivalence in cases where a qualification is perceived to differ too much in length and level from a domestic degree to merit a full equivalence. The National Board, on the other hand, can currently only issue a negative decision in such cases, which essentially excludes the person from the possibility of participating in bridging programmes.

...and barriers remain for those who have not completed their degree or lack formal documentation

Recognition of foreign qualifications can be extremely difficult for persons who have no proof of their degrees, or those who were not able to finish their course before migrating. This poses a particular problem for humanitarian migrants, who are frequently unable to bring proof of their qualification with them and who, when fleeing war and persecution, are more likely to have had to abandon their studies prior to completion. In 2014, the Swedish Council for Higher Education has started to issue a so-called background paper (*“Beskrivning av utländsk utbildningsbakgrund”*) to refugees who do not have access to their educational documents. This paper provides a description of the educational background of the applicant’s degree, based on his or her own description of the contents of the stated degree, as well as informal documents, the applicant’s CV and reference documents held by UHR. Nevertheless, relatively few of such documents have been issued so far and applicants who are unable to provide documentation of their qualification are largely excluded from the formal recognition procedure. Given the large number of humanitarian migrants in Sweden this poses a problem and, in 2015 the Swedish Council for Higher Education rejected approximately 1 000 applications for recognition due to a lack of documentation.¹²

To overcome barriers related to the absence of official documents, it is important that providers of formal qualification assessments develop alternative assessment methods to ensure that completed education does not have to be repeated. In doing so they can rely on alternative forms of documentary proof that may include affidavits in which applicants describe their situation and knowledge, endorsements from professional associations, testimonies from instructors and other evidence of enrolment in an education establishment, such as published lists of registered students, student IDs, text books and other study material, notifications of attendance for state examinations, proof of tuition fee payment, and proof of professional status (OECD, 2016).

In Sweden, in an effort to address this gap, the government has recently initiated a four-year pilot scheme aiming to assess and recognise the tertiary level skills of persons with foreign qualifications, including new arrivals covered by the Introduction Act who lack full documentation of their previous education. Other OECD countries have been using various combinations of assessments, assignment and skills mapping to tackle this question for some time (Box 5.6).

Box 5.6. Recognition of foreign qualifications in case of missing or insufficient documentation

Given the circumstances under which many humanitarian migrants left their native country it is not always possible for them to bring with them proof of their qualifications, many countries are now working to develop recognition systems that do not require such formal documentation.

Norway rolled out a national recognition scheme for humanitarian migrants with little or no documentary proof of their higher education credentials. It is known as the Recognition Procedure for Persons without Verifiable Documentation (the UVD procedure) and, since 2013, has been carried out by expert committees commissioned and appointed by the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in education (NOKUT). The procedure involves a combination of academic assessments, home assignments, and a mapping of work history. It results in a formal decision on whether to recognise foreign qualifications as equivalent to a Norwegian higher education degree. A survey of applicants suggests that more than half of the refugees who had their skills recognised in 2013 either found a related job or entered further education.

In **Germany**, humanitarian migrants and asylum seekers with little or no documentary proof of their foreign qualifications can have their professional competencies appraised under the terms of the Professional Qualifications Assessment Act through a so-called “qualification analysis” which assesses skills, knowledge and capabilities on the basis of samples of their work. To increase the number of quality-assured qualification analyses carried out across Germany, the Federal Employment Agency has designed a pilot project with funding from the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. The pilot supports qualification analysis practitioners through decentralised training sessions, individual consultations, work tools, knowledge management and a special fund that offers financial support to applicants for qualification analysis.

In the **Netherlands**, the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) assists refugees who have been granted residence in compiling portfolios of their prior learning, education and work experience. The aim is to help refugees find their place in the Dutch labour market. However, they still need to supply formal proof of their qualifications. To plug that gap, the Dutch Centre of Expertise for International Credential Evaluation has worked with several refugee organisations and the business community to develop a credential evaluation instrument from the information provided by refugees.

Beyond formal qualifications, recognition of prior learning documents non-formal competences

In addition to the recognition of formal qualifications, there is the much broader issue of the recognition of prior learning (RPL).¹³ RPL focuses on the assessment of non-formal and informal competences gained, not through structured programmes, but in the context of short courses, work experience, leisure activities and volunteering. The aim of RPL is to provide formal

recognition of these competences in a way that has value in the labour market and within the education system. As such recognition of prior learning is a complement to the assessment of formal qualifications and may be particularly important for immigrants, who have acquired their job related skills in a very different context. In addition, RPL can provide a relatively quick and cost-effective means to identify individual needs for further training and to prevent the duplication of training content.

Since 2009, the Agency for Higher Vocational Education co-ordinates activities related to RPL in Sweden. And although RPL was initially established in the framework of a life-long learning strategy for the entire population, in 2007 sector-specific RPL models were developed for immigrants in co-operation with industries.¹⁴ In 2014, the PES undertook particular efforts to increase the number of new arrivals who have their skills assessed according to a sector-specific RPL procedure. As a result, the number of immigrants in the introduction programme who participated in sector specific RPL activities tripled – from 115 participants in 2013 to 355 participants in 2014. Despite the stark increase, this number continues to represent only a marginal share of the 42 160 new arrivals that were covered by the introduction programme at the end of 2014 (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2015).¹⁵

Since 2014, significant efforts have gone into the development of further sector-specific RPL models for new arrivals. They typically entail a general mapping of competencies and a skills assessment at the work place and result in the issuance of a license or an equivalent industry specific certificate. Such models have been put in place in a total of 20 sectors, covering 140 occupations. However, although they are used by a wide range of actors including the PES, individual employers, and adult education providers, existing industry specific RPL models are still widely under used by immigrants.

As outlined in Box 5.7, the four principal providers of recognition of prior learning are the municipality's adult education providers, the providers of vocational education and the universities or university colleges and the sector organisations. While the first three institutions recognise the prior learning of people who would like to enter the education system, sector organisations have developed RPL procedures for persons whose plan is to work.

Box 5.7. Swedish Policy at a Glance: Skills assessment and recognition of prior learning

Co-ordinating body: From early 2016, the National Delegation on Validation will take over from the Agency for Higher Vocational Education in order to monitor, support and co-ordinate the development of a comprehensive national structure for the assessment and recognition of prior learning and education.

Main actors involved: Responsibility for recognition of prior learning in Sweden is currently split between various institutions, depending on the type of competencies that are to be assessed and the purpose for which RPL is sought:

- The *municipal adult education system* recognises secondary and vocational competencies for access to vocational education at the upper secondary level.
- The *providers of vocational education* recognise secondary and vocational competencies for access to vocational education at the post-secondary level. RPL within the vocational training system usually involves a mentor or instructor from the workplace.
- The *universities or university colleges* recognise prior learning for the purpose of entering a higher education programme.
- Immigrants who want to work in an occupation with sector specific requirements may require a license or ID to practice their occupation in Sweden. Licenses and IDs are issued by the *competent sector organisation* upon an assessment of the immigrant's practical skills. Such assessment is based on occupation specific sector models, developed jointly by employers and union representatives.

Immigrants that are covered by the Introduction Act are referred to the competent provider of RPL by the *PES*, based on their profile and individual needs. Where RPL relates to the labour market, the *PES* often performs the procedure on behalf of, or in co-operation with, other competent bodies. In 2014, the *PES* had a special mission to increase the scope of validation of professional competences among new arrivals.

Costs: Recognition of prior learning is free of charge both within the education system and when undertaken as part of a labour market programme. Where sector specific RPL is not performed as part of a labour market programme a fee (EUR 50-200) may apply for applicants who require a license to practice.

Outcome of the RPL procedure: If RPL is performed within the education system, the results are usually educational marks (in adult education) or formal educational credits (in higher education). Where RPL is performed for labour market purposes, successful candidates are awarded occupational certificates or licenses, provided that sector-specific validation models were used.

Source: Arbetsförmedlingen (Swedish Ministry of Employment).

To facilitate co-ordination and clarify responsibilities among the various actors involved in the assessment and recognition of prior learning in Sweden, various reports have underlined the need for a central body to steer the overall process and act as an intermediary board between the various actors involved in the process (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2015; UHR, 2014). Between 2009 and 2015 the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education had been given this role, however, representing just one player in the multi-layered RPL system, the agency has experienced some limitations in strengthening co-ordination and enhancing clarity.

The recent decision to establish a national delegation in charge of the co-ordination and development of RPL will put in place a more representative body, composed of delegates from all the relevant authorities in the field of RPL and foreign qualification recognition, including the PES, the Swedish Council for Higher Education and the Social Partners. As such, the delegation should be in a position to monitor, mediate and improve RPL activities regardless of whether these are anchored in the education system or the labour market institutions. The new body is expected to submit regular proposals to the government about how to improve the overall structure for RPL and skills assessments. For this task, the delegation has been allocated a budget of SEK 5 million over the period 2016-19.

The extent and scope of bridging in Sweden remains limited

Bridging began in Sweden at the beginning of the 1990s when various university courses were introduced, largely on a temporary basis, to target professions facing shortages in labour supply – largely within the health sector. The number of professions covered by bridging courses was expanded in the 2000s as the Ministry of Integration began to finance these courses on a regular basis, expanding this list of professions to include jurists, law graduates, teachers, advanced administrators, and later physicians, nurses, dentists and veterinarians.¹⁶

In a recent evaluation of the complementary education in Sweden, Niknami and Schroder (2014) match course participants to non-participants on the bases of demographic, labour market and educational characteristics. The authors find that complementary education has a positive impact both on the probability of employment and on the incomes of those undertaking such education in both the teaching and administrative professions. The authors identify a 17.5 percentage point increase in the probability of employment of those undertaking complementary education in teaching and a 15.4 percentage point increase among those undertaking administration programmes.

The number of professions in which bridging courses are offered, however, remains restricted. And, prior to the Fast Track agreements currently under negotiation (see below), bridging has largely been limited to the regulated professions including the teaching (500 places in 2016), health (165 places for physicians, nurses and dentists), and legal professions (30 places open to jurists). Furthermore, even in the teaching profession, where the bridging offer is most developed, Niknami and Schroder (2014) estimate that less than 1% of immigrants who meet the eligibility criteria for these bridging courses participate in such a course.¹⁷ The availability of bridging places will, to some extent, be addressed through the Fast Track initiative and indeed, in the teaching profession alone, the PES has contracted with universities to procure courses for 500 participants of the new “Fast Track for Teachers” (see Box 5.10 below). This, however, is separate from the validation courses offered by universities and it is hoped that participants will later apply to take part in the bridging programmes for teachers. However, there remains much work to be done in order to achieve the scale needed to ensure that migrants arriving with skills and qualifications are able to use their competences in Sweden.

And some bridging courses can be difficult to access for those in employment

The emphasis on rapid labour market integration that has arisen from the labour market focus of integration in Sweden can, to some extent, create a conflict with the goal of finding appropriate employment that takes full advantage of each migrant’s skills, qualifications and experience. While encouraging new arrivals into early employment can bring benefits in terms of their short-term integration, language acquisition and self-esteem it can entail long-term costs if these migrants become stuck in “survival jobs”. Highly-qualified immigrants who take up employment in positions for which they are overqualified are likely to be at a particular disadvantage when it comes to taking advantage of bridging courses in Sweden. In the first place, given that these immigrants are no longer among the unemployed, they are ineligible for PES support and may struggle to identify appropriate bridging courses.¹⁸ In the second place, the time commitments imposed by a survival job can mean that a “topping up” existing qualification alongside work is rarely a feasible option. Bridging courses are organised by the higher education institutions. They are largely full time and last for a number of years. Bridging courses for health care professionals last for one year while those in legal profession tend to last for two years.

The teaching profession, and to some extent the legal profession, provide an exception to this inflexibility and some higher education

institutions offer bridging programmes for teachers that are part-time. In addition modular courses enable institutions to take existing studies and subject knowledge into account before deciding which modules are necessary to top-up knowledge gaps and thereby to tailor the course duration to the needs of the individual. Lastly some of the courses on the bridging programmes for teachers can be partially undertaken via distance learning enabling those with family or employment commitments that render travel to the university difficult to supplement their learning from home. This flexibility, however, could be expanded in the bridging courses available in other professions as has been done in Germany (see Box 5.8).

Box 5.8. Individualised bridging in Germany

In 2012 a new Federal Integration Act entered into force in Germany covering 600 occupations – both regulated and non-regulated. A primary innovation of the act was to ensure that equivalence between foreign qualifications and German occupational profiles is now assessed on an individual basis such that where further bridging measures – such as training or experience – are needed they can be tailored to the requirements of the individual thereby avoiding unnecessary repetition.

Given that the outcome of individualised recognition is liable to be quite unique the resultant bridging requirements are unlikely to be fulfilled by any one specific course without substantial repetition. As a result where an individual is found to require further practical training to achieve equivalence with a German qualification

Bridging for an individual that is found to require further theoretical training in order to achieve equivalence will likely involve a degree of participation in regular courses. Some regulated professions are now co-operating with recognition authorities and educational institutions in order to divide the course work into several modules. These modules can then serve as an orientation to recognition authorities who are able to require candidates to attend only those modules relevant to the competencies that they are found to be lacking. The flexibility inherent in this modularisation enables a more individualised bridging offer that is able to avoid unnecessary repetition.

Practical experience on the job is also often required as part of the individualised recognition notification. If an individual is found to require additional hours of experience in a German professional context then the educational institute conducting the bridging course will use their networks to identify an appropriate job or internship, and support the candidate in applying to the position.

Source: Tür and Tür (see <http://www.tuerantuer.de/integrationsprojekte/migranet.html>).

Alongside flexibility in bridging courses, co-operation with employers is critical in facilitating the combination of employment and bridging. Effective bridging courses are built upon a partnership of actors that extends beyond colleges and universities to regulatory bodies, employers and the

immigrants themselves. In particular, involving employers can be critical to the success of effective and flexible bridging programmes.

In the first place, given that it is ultimately up to employers to accept the recognised skills of migrants as “equivalent”, employer involvement in recognising learning, identifying knowledge gaps that require bridging, and implementing assessments and training, is critical to the success of such measures. Some efforts, undertaken in Denmark and in the Netherlands, to engage employers in the assessment of the skills of migrants are outlined in Box 5.9.

Box 5.9. Employer involvement in skills assessment in Denmark and the Netherlands

In close co-operation with employer organisations and trade unions the **Danish** Ministry of Employment has established five Regional Knowledge Centres for the Clarification of Competences of Refugees and Immigrants. Created back in 2004, the centres have since supported employers, local authorities and job centres in assessing immigrants’ practical, interpersonal and social skills rather than providing formal recognition of foreign qualifications. Based on different assessment activities, most of which happen in the work place, immigrants are issued a digital “Competence Card” that sets out their skills, and which employers can consult online. A robust evaluation of the Competence Card is still outstanding but anecdotal evidence suggests that awareness of and interest in the tool has grown among employers since the launch of the centres.

The **Netherlands** provide a good practice example of successful engagement with employers and social partners. In some industrial branches, trade unions and employer organisations run so-called Training and Development Funds to promote industrial training of employees. These funds are also used to assess skills and competencies of employees.

Beyond recognition of skills, employer involvement is also important to ensure that the skills addressed through bridging programmes are relevant. And, by providing work experience placements, employers can enable participants to gain the practical experience of the Swedish labour market that is a necessary complement to formal credentials. The incentive for employers to support bridging activities for their existing employees will depend, inevitably, upon the degree to which the professional field is relevant to the current position of the employee and to their future career within the company. If additional education is likely to help a foreign-born worker to improve their productivity within the company, then employers have a strong incentive to co-operate with the institutions providing the bridging programme – through flexible hours and the provision of on-the-job training, for example. If, however, the migrant is employed in a field that is distant from their existing qualification – and hence distant from the

intended bridging course – then the employer is likely to be less flexible in aiding the migrant to combine bridging with employment. With this in mind it is of paramount importance that migrants enter a field related to their experience such that, with the support of their employer, they are able to progress along a career pathway combining flexible bridging courses with practical training on-the-job.

The “Fast Track” initiative is an important step towards making pathways quicker and more flexible

Acknowledging the importance of the effective use of migrant skills, the Swedish Government has devoted much emphasis and substantial resources towards streamlining activities to match skill supply with labour demand in key sectors, and bridging is an important component of this effort. To this end, the budget bill for 2016 saw substantial allocations to bridging programmes, including additional funding for student aid, and the government has earmarked further resources for the years 2016-19 to create “Fast Tracks” in 20 different professions. These fast tracks will combine trade customised bridging education (including vocational Swedish) with validation of credentials and recognition of prior learning to provide an occupational certificate (see Box 5.10).

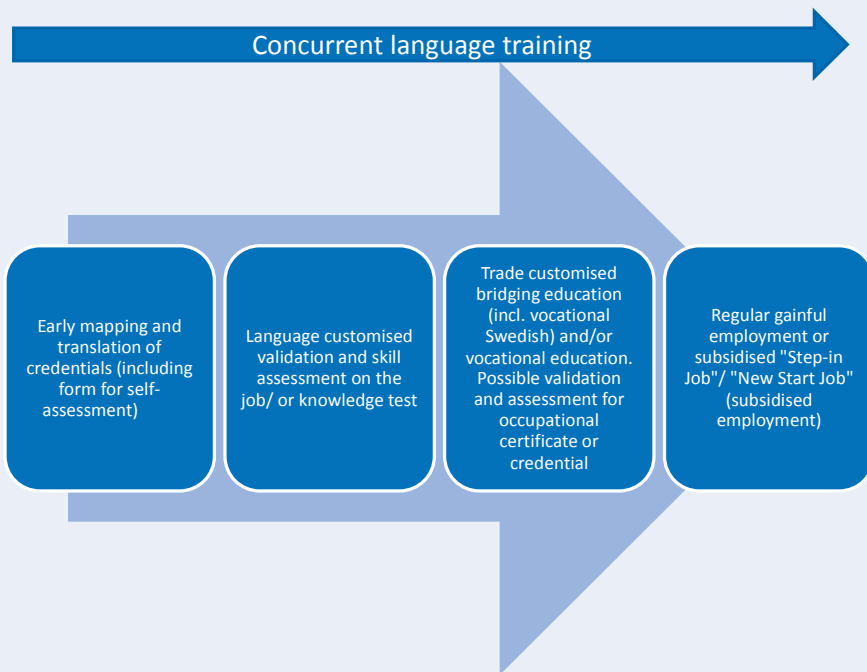
**Box 5.10. Swedish integration policy at a glance
The Fast Track: Combining recognition and bridging**

In 2014, over one-quarter of the new arrivals in Sweden with an introduction plan had tertiary education. Many of them have both training and experience in shortage occupations such as engineers, teachers, technicians and doctors. The goal of the Fast Track initiative proposed in the Swedish National Reform Programme 2015 is to co-ordinate existing PES measures into a streamlined package for migrants arriving with skills in these shortage occupations. In addition, social partners may apply for funds to develop initiatives such as the translation of validation models in other languages. The Fast Track initiative will speed up the entry of skilled immigrants into shortage occupations by beginning activities to map, validate and bridge the skills of migrants identified as eligible for the programme in the mother-tongue of the migrant. Language tuition will be offered concurrently throughout the process but will not be required prior to the commencement of validation and bridging efforts (see Figure 5.11).

Tripartite Fast track discussions are currently ongoing in 14 sectors covering 20 different professions. Several sectors have already reached agreements on fast tracks, most importantly a number of licensed professions where there is shortage of labour including physicians, pharmacists, dentists, nurses, teachers and kindergarten teachers. For blue collar workers fast tracks have been agreed in occupations such as painters, butchers, chefs and professional drivers as well as for construction engineers and industrial engineers.

Box 5.10. Swedish integration policy at a glance
The Fast Track: Combining recognition and bridging (*cont.*)

Figure 5.11. The Fast Track initiative process



To overcome the restriction on tertiary education undertaken under the introduction programme the PES has procured contract education from Sweden’s universities. Procuring tailored courses in this manner has enabled the PES to temporarily bypass the language requirements that bridging courses entail. However, obtaining a sufficient number of places and co-ordinating tenders has, to some extent, slowed largescale implementation. Nonetheless, the first fast tracks will begin operating in February 2016.

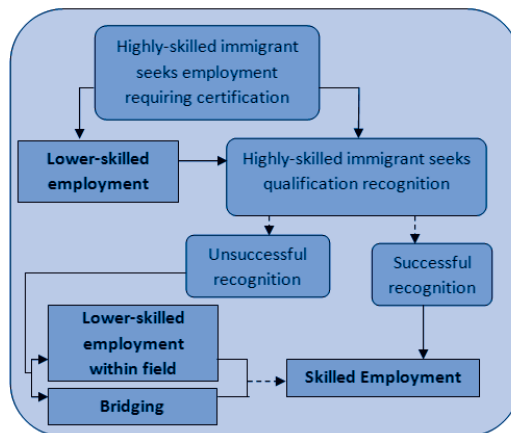
In the teaching profession, for example, where the skills of up to 1 500 newly-accepted refugees with experience as teachers are needed to help accommodate newly-arrived minors into school, the PES has procured 500 places on contract education provided in the universities, through the “Fast Track for Teachers”. These courses will initially concentrate on bridging – notably regarding Swedish pedagogy – and building language skills alongside this process. At the end of the course teachers will be able to continue their language studies alongside work by working four days a week in the classroom in their mother tongue, and devoting one day to Swedish language classes.

For this, the government proposes to earmark SEK 376 million for 2016, SEK 532 million for 2017, SEK 422 million for 2018 and SEK 339 million for 2019.

An important innovation of the Fast Track initiative is its acknowledgement that language skills need not be a prerequisite – either for recognition of qualifications and prior learning, or for bridging. To this end, the Fast Track initiative is building upon previous efforts to overcome language hurdles piloted in the field of RPL. Where language difficulties impede fast recognition and bridging, the PES alongside industry representatives have developed targeted programmes combining skills assessment with language support.¹⁹ It is this concurrent language tuition model that has been adopted in the Fast Track model.

A potential complement to the Fast Track initiative may be to adopt a career pathway approach similar to the alternative career approach adopted in Canada (see Box 5.11). Such an approach may be an important step towards reconciling the dual aims of early labour market entry with the need to top-up migrant skills through bridging. Career pathways can incorporate both bridging courses and bridging jobs. A bridging job can provide a flexible complement to bridging courses, enabling immigrants to identify employment that requires little or no upgrading upon arrival but that relates to the profession in which they were originally educated and trained. Such positions utilise the skills and experience the migrant has already developed in the field, and can be pursued alongside bridging courses. In this manner bridging jobs can put new arrivals on a pathway to work while building upon their existing skills, gaining professional work experience, learning work-related language and networking with individuals within the sector. In order that bridging jobs remain distinct from survival jobs, however, it is important that bridging courses are indeed pursued alongside bridging jobs and the goal of skilled employment is maintained.

Figure 5.12. Careers pathways into skilled employment



Source: OECD Secretariat analysis based on national legislation and regulations.

Box 5.11. Work alongside bridging in Canada and Germany

Combining work and participation in bridging courses ensures that early contact with the labour market does not impinge upon the ability of qualified migrants to eventually enter employment in which they are able to use their skills and qualifications. The most effective programmes that combine employment and bridging courses provide early work experience within a field that is closely related to the subject area of the bridging material.

In **Canada**, since only 20% of immigrants in licensed occupations obtain a professional license in their field, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) has been working with partners to explore alternative careers – to be pursued while working towards gaining the requisite license, or as a new career choice in itself. Since 2013 CIC, together with Settlement service provider organisations and provincial and territorial counterparts, has worked with over 800 highly-skilled immigrants in sectors including finance, biotechnology, health, accounting and engineering, to explore alternative career options and connect immigrants with employers.

The model brings together stakeholders – governments regulators, professional associations, educational institutions and employers – to provide information to internationally trained individuals on alternative career pathways, licensing practices and connects them with employers to discuss job options.

Figure 5.13. Alternative careers: Non-regulated alternatives to engineering

<p>Professional engineers (regulated)</p> <p>Are required by law to assume professional responsibility for the design, research and development, commissioning and field review and construction of engineering projects.</p>	<p>Technologists (non-regulated)</p> <p>Apply theoretical and practical methods to design, plan, develop, test, manufacture, construct, install & commission engineered products, systems and services.</p>	<p>Technicians (non-regulated)</p> <p>Assist with the design, development, manufacturing, testing, construction, installation, commission, operation & maintenance of engineered products, processes, systems and services.</p>
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Source: Canadian Council of Technicians and Technologists and Canadian Technology Immigration Network. See <http://www.engineeringcareerpathways.ca>.

In addition, a new programme in **Germany** called Early Intervention works to assist refugees and certain asylum seekers to determine what their skills are, how these are relevant to different occupations and how to apply them in sectors where there are shortages. Similar to the alternative careers model adopted in Canada, migrants may then begin working in a job that requires a lower level of qualifications than the job for which they are formally qualified (for example as a nursing assistant rather than as a nurse) with the aim of moving into a more qualified position when they have attained fluency in German and have experience of the German nursing sector. Importantly, migrants are given the opportunity to study language alongside their initial position in order to ensure they progress towards their goal and do not remain stuck in a position for which they are over-qualified.

Notes

1. Alongside Sweden, only in Belgium, Germany, Norway, and the Slovak Republic do the unemployed rely so heavily on the PES (see Figure 5.1).
2. Often as a result of family obligations women face longer delays before beginning introduction activities, and when they do begin, they are less frequently referred to subsidised wage programmes such as “Step-in Jobs” and “New Start Jobs”.
3. In the case of highly-educated migrants, PES caseworkers in some areas of the country report struggling to find the sufficient provision of appropriate activities in order to fill the 40 hours required by the introduction programme.
4. As of February 2016 the programme is no longer divided into three phases, instead participants will get support that is tailored to their individual needs.
5. The level of this support, for those who do not qualify for unemployment compensation, is marginally below the introduction benefit available to new arrivals on the Introduction Programme (see Box 2.3).
6. The total outflow – including those who leave to undertake education, and who leave for health insurance, is approximately 5% per month. This results in an expected duration of stay in the Job and Development Guarantee of approximately 13 months.
7. There are a number of explanations for this tendency. In the first place this is a sorting effect – as the most employable leave the programme the fastest and with the most ease leaving only those that are the most difficult to place. In the second place the slowing exit rate may, to some degree, result from the negative signal sent by prolonged enrolment in the programme. Finally the changing content of the programme as participants move from phase to phase may also be playing a role.
8. While in previous decades a recognition statement was only issued under the condition that a foreign qualification corresponded in detail to a Swedish qualification, today’s procedure puts a greater emphasis on the purpose for which education or training were sought (e.g. if it is vocational or academic), on the scope and content of the programme, and on the level of education in the foreign education system. In this manner the Swedish Council for Higher Education values foreign degrees, not only vis-à-vis the

Swedish qualification framework, but in relation to the education and training system of the country in which the qualification was obtained.

9. In addition agencies, particularly the Swedish Council for Higher Education, co-operate with stakeholders at the European level, and benefit from international agreements such as the EU Professional Qualifications Directive, and the Lisbon Recognition Convention, which has been incorporated in the Swedish Higher Education Ordinance in 2001.
10. Medical doctors were the single largest occupational group, accounting for more than 2 000 applications in 2014, 765 of these applications were made for qualifications from non-EU/EEA countries. Nurses followed with about 750 applications, of which more than 300 were for qualifications from non-EU/EEA countries, followed by dentists and pharmacists (Socialstyrelsen, 2015). Between 2014 and 2015, the number of applications for recognition of teaching qualifications increased by nearly 60%, from 1 200 applications in 2014 to 1 900 in 2015.
11. Along these lines, in the teaching profession, while the National Board of Education receives applications and issues licenses, the Swedish Council for Higher Education, facilitates this process by evaluating professional qualifications and advising the National Board, which then decides about recognition and supplementary training.
12. While migrants in this situation may be able to apply for admission to a university, college, or municipal adult education programme, where competences can be assessed in relation to the programme, this is a lengthy process and one which is not widely used.
13. In the Swedish context, RPL and the recognition of formal qualifications is often subsumed under the more generic umbrella term “validation”. Validation has been defined in the Education Act as a “process that involves a structured assessment, valuation, documentation and recognition of knowledge and skills that a person possess, regardless of how they were acquired” (Education Act, 2010:800).
14. These models were tested in a joint pilot project (“Win” project) by the Agency for Higher Vocational Education and the Swedish Public Employment Service during 2009 and 2011. A total of 160 newly-arrived immigrants had their skills assessed under the project.
15. In those sectors in which there is no sector specific validation model, the Public Employment Service has developed alternative procedures for skills assessment, generally known as “qualification portfolios” and “occupational assessments”. Qualification Portfolios serve as an entry point assessment and establish a person’s professional profile by identifying his or her knowledge and previous experience. These individuals may then be referred for occupational assessment, in the form of internships that provide an

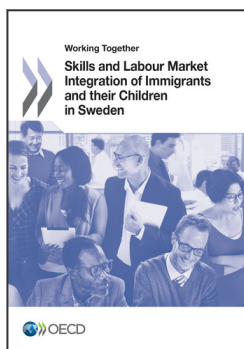
opportunity to showcase professional skills to tutors and employers at the workplace while gaining important insights about occupational practices in Sweden. However, despite efforts to overcome obstacles related to a lack of Swedish language proficiency, the number of new arrivals who participated in an occupational assessment remains limited with a total of 360 participants in 2014.

16. Bridging courses for advanced administrators are not covered by the recently allocated funds for bridging.
17. Among those that participate, migrants from Europe (outside EU15 countries) make up 38% of participants and are over-represented relative to the population of eligible candidates, while migrants from Africa are underrepresented in the programmes and account for just 1% of participants in bridging courses in the teaching profession. Aside from origin, women, younger migrants and more recent arrivals are more likely to participate in bridging courses when they are eligible.
18. Full-time participants of bridging courses are also ineligible for PES support. However, those working part time, or nights/weekends can still qualify for support.
19. A trial project, conducted by the PES, showed that assessment prior learning that took place alongside other integration activities aimed at language proficiency and labour market integration, was more successful in identifying immigrant's actual skills than the traditional assessment procedure (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2015).

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