

Bridging or Breaking the System?

Analysing Denmark's Transition Away from Jobcenters and Its Effect on
Immigrant Labour Inclusion



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Abstract

In 2025, Denmark is undergoing a significant transformation in its approach to labour market integration with the abolition of the Jobcenter system, a key institutional pillar responsible for administering employment services, particularly for immigrants and refugees. This thesis examines the institutional consequences of this reform by exploring what mechanisms are lost or introduced through the dismantling of Jobcenters under the April 2025 reform, and how these changes affect the effectiveness, risks, and benefits of integration efforts compared to previous models. The research is framed through Social, Cultural, and Human Capital theories and employs an interpretivist, exploratory case study approach. Empirical data is gathered through semi-structured interviews with municipal officials and stakeholders involved in the reform, alongside document analysis of policy materials and academic literature. The findings reveal that the removal of Jobcenters results in the loss of key integration mechanisms, including standardized access to support services, established relationships between immigrants and caseworkers, and institutional familiarity that previously helped immigrants navigate Denmark's bureaucratic and employment systems. These structures were instrumental in building bridging social capital; connecting newcomers to employers, unions, and wider support networks, while also supporting the development of cultural and human capital critical for long-term employment success. Conversely, the reform introduces a range of new institutional mechanisms, including greater municipal autonomy, increased involvement of private actors, a shift toward individualized support, and results-based governance. While these changes are designed to enhance flexibility and efficiency, they also raise significant concerns. The research highlights potential risks such as geographic inequality in service provision, inconsistent quality of support, and the marginalization of individuals with low system literacy or limited personal networks. For many immigrants, especially non-Westerners, the loss of structured, centralized guidance may significantly hinder their ability to access meaningful employment opportunities. Through a thematic analysis of interviews, the study underscores the importance of preserving access to critical forms of institutional, social, and symbolic capital during periods of welfare transformation. It argues that while decentralization and innovation hold potential, they must be accompanied by strong oversight, inclusive policy design, and investments in culturally responsive services. The research contributes to broader debates on integration policy and welfare reform by offering insights into the lived consequences of systemic change for vulnerable populations in liberal democracies.

Keywords: *Labour Market Integration, Immigrants and Refugees, Jobcenters, Capital Theory, Danish Welfare Reform*

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Chapter 1

1. Introduction

In recent decades, global conflict, political instability, and economic hardship have prompted the displacement of millions of people seeking safety and opportunity in more stable societies. Denmark, like many European nations, has responded to this humanitarian challenge by accepting growing numbers of immigrants and refugees, particularly since the Syrian and Ukrainian crises. Immigration into Denmark has steadily increased since 1984, shaping a more diverse social landscape and presenting both opportunities and challenges for national integration policies (Statistics Denmark, n.d.). These new arrivals often lack the social networks, labour market experience, and institutional familiarity that native Danes possess; factors that significantly hinder their ability to secure employment and fully participate in Danish society.

As of 2022, notable employment disparities remain: 83% of native Danes are employed compared to 76% of Western immigrants and only 66% of non-Western immigrants (Ministry of Immigration and Integration, 2024). Although employment rates have improved across all groups, particularly among non-Western immigrant men, the gap between immigrant and native employment persists. This ongoing disparity has prompted successive Danish governments to develop increasingly complex integration strategies aimed at improving labour market outcomes. Since the 1999 Integration Act, which designated municipalities as the primary agents of immigrant integration, Denmark has pursued an evolving suite of policies aimed at improving the socio-economic inclusion of newcomers (European Commission, 2024). These have included mandatory Danish language assessments, integration contracts, specialised employment programs, and comprehensive institutional frameworks to support participation in the labour market (Bredgaard & Thomsen, 2018). Central among these instruments has been the Jobcenter system, a municipality-based employment support centre tasked with helping individuals, both immigrants and native Danes, navigate the complex landscape of job-seeking, welfare access, and vocational training. Over the past two decades, Jobcenters have served as frontline institutions where caseworkers could offer tailored advice, connect clients to employers and unions, and support immigrants in adapting to Danish labour market norms and expectations (The Danish Agency for Labour Market and Recruitment, 2024). These centres not only provided practical services but also played a symbolic role,

representing the state's commitment to inclusive labour market participation and social integration.

However, Denmark now finds itself on the cusp of a structural transformation in its integration and employment services. The government has announced that all Jobcenters across the 98 municipalities will be phased out and replaced with decentralised, “expert-driven” support models (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2025). While the reform is positioned as a move toward increased flexibility, cost-effectiveness, and professional discretion in service delivery, it raises significant concerns, particularly regarding institutional continuity and equitable access to employment resources (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2025). For immigrants and refugees, who often lack informal social networks, fluency in Danish systems, or familiarity with bureaucratic procedures, the Jobcenter represented a vital bridge between their existing capabilities and the demands of the Danish labour market (Jensen & Skaksen, 2024). This shift from Jobcenters reflects a broader reconfiguration of the Danish welfare state, away from standardised, centralised services toward more decentralised, performance-based models (Fremtidens Beskæftigelsesindsats, 2024). While this may bring opportunities for innovation, it also necessitates rigorous scrutiny to ensure that equity, accessibility, and social justice are not sacrificed in the pursuit of efficiency. The implications for immigrant integration are particularly acute and warrant sustained public debate, comprehensive evaluation, and transparent policymaking.

The dismantling of these centers marks a profound shift in Denmark's integration architecture. This paper examines how the removal of Jobcenters may affect the labour market integration of immigrants and refugees. It also explores what new processes and resources are being proposed to replace the existing model, and how these changes align with or deviate from previous integration practices. Using an interpretivist, qualitative framework grounded in Social, Cultural, and Human Capital theories, the research evaluates the potential outcomes of this structural transformation and considers the broader implications for social equity and institutional accountability in Denmark's evolving welfare state. As such, the paper will examine both the previous labour market effort structures, the newly proposed reform, and finally, it will assess and answer the following problem formulation:

What institutional mechanisms are lost or introduced through the dismantling of Jobcenters under the April 2025 reform, and how do these changes impact the effectiveness, risks, and benefits of integration efforts for immigrants and refugees in comparison with previous models?

Chapter 2

2.1 Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Literature Review

Throughout the years, Denmark has implemented a variety of different employment-focused policies to integrate the immigrant and refugee community into the labour market. These efforts have evolved through national governance frameworks, later turned over to municipal initiatives, and public-private partnerships. While the ‘Flexicurity’ model of Denmark (Bredgaard & Thomsen, 2018) provides flexibility for employers and strong social safety nets, immigrants and refugees continue to face persistent barriers to labour market entry.

Denmark has, since The 1999 Integration Act, assigned the responsibility of implementing tailored labour market programs to the municipalities. These include job training, language courses, and subsidized employment schemes (Emilsson, 2015). From this, it is evident that there has been a shift towards the ‘work-first’ strategies by emphasizing self-sufficiency over prolonged welfare support (Bredgaard & Thomsen, 2018).

The Integration Basic Education (IGU) program, which was introduced in 2016, provides vocational training for refugees and family reunified immigrants for two years, and is designed as a public-private partnership to offer a combination of on-the-job training and Danish language education. This aims to improve the long-term employability of immigrants and refugees (Bredgaard & Thomsen, 2018).

However, despite these policies, Denmark’s labour market remains challenging for refugees. Studies show that while employment rates increase in the short term due to these activation methods, long-term outcomes are still uncertain (Bratsberg, Raaum, & Røed, 2017). The International Migration – Denmark 2024 Report (Ministry of Immigration and Integration, 2024) highlights that non-Western immigrants continue to experience an employment gap compared to native Danes. Moreover, the rate of employment for non-Western immigrants was only 66% in 2022, compared to the larger 83% for natives. I.e., 231.507 people of non-Western origin or descendants in employment, in contrast to 2.050.062 people of Danish origin in

employment in 2022. This proves a need for targeted labour market policies (Ministry of Immigration and Integration, 2024).

Table 5.1: Employment rates and persons in employment in the age bracket of 25-64 years old by origin, population category and gender, at November 2022 (persons and percentage)

	Employment rate			Persons in employment		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Non-Western origin						
Immigrants	70%	59%	64%	99,228	94,658	193,886
Descendants	74%	74%	74%	19,330	18,291	37,621
Total	71%	61%	66%	118,558	112,949	231,507
Western origin						
Immigrants	78%	73%	76%	86,037	70,021	156,058
Descendants	78%	76%	77%	3,304	2,996	6,300
Total	78%	73%	76%	89,341	73,017	162,358
All immigrants and descendants	74%	65%	69%	207,899	185,966	393,865
Persons of Danish origin	85%	81%	83%	1,057,227	992,835	2,050,062
Total	83%	78%	80%	1,265,126	1,178,801	2,443,927

Source: The Immigration Database of the Ministry of Immigration and Integration (IMRAS17), managed by Statistics Denmark.

(Ministry of Immigration and Integration, 2024, p. 22)

In this respect, Danish Jobcenters have played a crucial role in the labour market integration of immigrants and refugees. It is these centers, operated by municipalities, that provide employment counselling, job placement services, skill assessment, and coordination with employers. Additionally, the Jobcenters administer wage subsidy programs and activation policies, which are also aimed at getting refugees and immigrants into the labour market as quickly as possible (Emilsson, 2015).

Despite this, the planned abolishment of Jobcenters raises significant concerns. Without an institution such as the Jobcenter, people who recently arrived in the country may struggle to navigate Denmark's labour market independently, particularly given the complexities of language barriers, employer networks, and credential recognition. The Jobcenters function as a structural support system, and the removal of these could potentially reverse progress made in recent years and may potentially lead to higher unemployment rates among refugees and non-Western immigrants (Jakobsen et al., 2021, p. 166).

To this, a study conducted by Bækgaard et al. (2024) indicates that participation in labour market programs has a low positive yield for the least resourceful individuals. In contrast, the long-term effects of compulsory labour market interventions possibly have negative psychological impacts, particularly for individuals already facing mental health challenges. This, in turn, leads to higher reliance on antidepressants and other health-related support mechanisms (Bækgaard et al., 2024). The findings of this study thus suggest that discontinuing Jobcenters without a viable alternative could worsen existing vulnerabilities among immigrants and refugees.

In this regard, many scholars introduce a range of problems that immigrants and refugees face. Firstly, language proficiency remains a major determinant of employment success. Many employed immigrant and refugee workers still struggle with language requirements, which limit access to skilled jobs (Bratsberg, Raaum, & Røed 2017). Although municipalities provide language courses free of charge, many participants prioritize immediate employment over language proficiency, which results in lower long-term integration (Bredgaard & Thomsen, 2018). Secondly, studies suggest that ethnic discrimination in hiring practices remains a significant challenge. Immigrants often experience lower callback rates for job applications compared to native Danes, despite some possessing equivalent qualifications (Jensen, & Skaksen, 2024). Lastly, highly skilled immigrants often face barriers to having their foreign qualifications recognized under Danish standards, pushing many into low-wage jobs that do not match their expertise (Tranæs, Zimmermann, & Bauer, 2004).

Moreover, the long-term employment effects of active labour market programs (ALMPs) vary significantly among different groups. Bækgaard et al. (2024) found that ALMPs are beneficial for individuals with strong existing labour market ties, yet they often fail to improve employment outcomes for more disadvantaged groups. Further, the psychological strain inflicted by intensive activation measures can create long-term negative health effects, herein stress and anxiety, especially among individuals who already face barriers to employment (Bækgaard et al., 2024). This suggests that Denmark must reconsider the one-size-fits-all approach to labour market integration and ensure interventions that are better tailored to meet the needs of diverse immigrant populations.

As such, studies show that Denmark's labour market integration policies for immigrants and refugees prioritize rapid employment through activation measures, yet structural challenges such as language barriers, discrimination, and credential recognition persist. Jobcenters have played a crucial role in assisting immigrants with employment, and their abolition could create significant setbacks without functioning, innovative, and alternative employment strategies.

2.1.2 Social, Human, and Cultural Capital Theory

This study applies Social Capital Theory, Cultural Capital Theory, and Human Capital Theory to examine the role of Jobcenters in Denmark's labour market. These theoretical perspectives will provide a foundation for understanding the functions Jobcenters serve in facilitating employment opportunities, labour market access, and workforce development. The theory of capital allows for research to identify why some people have access to certain opportunities

while others are excluded. Capital theory examines all aspects of a person's resources, going beyond solely physical resources, including the social and generational benefits some people have that others lack. Using this theoretical frame, the research will be able to robustly identify the most affected people who will be disproportionately affected by the policy and physical change to the labour market.

Social capital, as conceptualized by Bourdieu (1986) and Putnam (1995), refers to the networks, relationships, and social connections that individuals and groups use to access resources, including employment opportunities. In labour market contexts, social capital is often associated with access to job referrals, employment programs, and structured career guidance. There are different aspects that encapsulate Social Capital Theory.

With bonding social capital, the bonds are typically between people of a similar background and interests (Claridge, 2018). Social capital with bonding involves a close-knit community, where similarities are strong and often shared mutually. Bonding happens within a village or company where people share a similar sense of belonging, understanding, and identity within the context (Claridge, 2018). Bonding capital is found when people are similar and within a close geographical area, where insiders stick together for physical and emotional support, and outsiders have a disadvantage.

Bridging Capital has broader social connections that facilitate access to new information and opportunities. Bridging Social Capital is a connection between people who potentially offer new and unique perspectives without offering emotional support (Ceci et al. 2020). Bridging happens between communities/companies as well as between social class, race, and gender can be considered bridging (Claridge, 2018). Bridging capital offers a wide range of benefits to the people, communities, and companies that leverage diverse social connections. Bridging social capital offers far-reaching benefits between networks, such as new resources, information gathering, and potential opportunities to help one "Get ahead" (Claridge, 2018).

Cultural capital, as defined by Bourdieu (1986), refers to the skills, knowledge, behaviours, and credentials that individuals acquire through education and socialization, which influence their ability to navigate institutional structures such as the labour market. Cultural capital shapes individuals' ability to engage with job-seeking processes, training programs, and professional development opportunities. Prieur & Savage (2013), identified that Cultural Capital has changed since the years of Bourdieu, however, it is still present in today's society. Highbrow and lowbrow culture have changed in appearance, however, knowledge of them is still identified as important, especially in the cases of knowing what the codifiers are in order

to either maintain or improve status in a group. Prieur & Savage (2013) examined different cultural frames and found that although tolerance was identifiable, higher culture groups showed less. Being able to identify what is lowbrow culture and what is highbrow is important to the labour market as it impacts how one presents themselves. Bourdieu (1986) discussed two major aspects of cultural capital that significantly affect people in the labour market: objectified capital and institutionalized capital. Objectified capital, such as job application materials, certifications, credentials, and institutionalized capital recognition of qualifications and skills by labour market institutions.

Human capital varies in definition; according to Fang et al (2009) a worker's skillset, experience, and ability to learn all add to the economic value and human capital. It is a key determinant of labour market productivity and economic growth, human capital is often linked to employability, earnings potential, and workforce participation. Formal education, work experience, and skill adaptability are all important aspects of human capital. The human capital perspective identifies that employers hire migrants for three major reasons: Human capital supply challenges, innovation, and cost effectiveness (Wright & Constantin, 2021). Human capital is expressed through a person's ability; companies value this ability and offer jobs and promotions to those who have the correct human capital. Human capital's ability to benefit the labour market is limited by the ability companies and organizations have to recognize its value.

This theoretical framework establishes the foundation for examining the role of Jobcenters in labour market participation by drawing on Social Capital Theory, Cultural Capital Theory, and Human Capital Theory. These concepts provide an analytical lens for assessing how labour market institutions contribute to employment access, workforce development, and labour mobility.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 Research Design

This research will utilise an exploratory case study model, in order to gather and analyse materials surrounding the ongoing transition from Jobcenters to "Other actors" in Denmark. This research will be examining this shift by using a qualitative methods approach, combining interviews with document analysis. The use of interviews and examining government documents about this transition will allow for a robust analysis of the transition period. The qualitative approach and the exploratory nature of this research are a benefit as the transition

is ongoing, allowing for a progressive analysis in real time and could lend new perspectives and options to future and developing policies.

Qualitative research allows for a more humanistic approach to issues and topics, allowing for a more flexible interpretation and methods to assist in gaining knowledge. Qualitative research enables researchers to explore people's beliefs, ideas, emotions, and behaviours in depth, providing a deeper understanding of their experiences and perspectives (Pathak et al., 2013). By using the more humanistic approach, studies are able to examine phenomena that otherwise would be missed or ignored by the quantitative methods. Qualitative methods have been hailed for the ability to be used as a means to gain knowledge that could not be obtained by numerical measurements alone (Pathak et al., 2013). Pope et al. (2002) discussed that three main categories exist in qualitative measures research, these being interviews, observations, and document or text analysis. This study will use interviews and document analysis to gather data on the humanistic aspects surrounding job centres being abolished.

This exploratory study will progressively examine how the transition from Jobcenters to "other actors" may impact refugees and immigrants accessing the labour market. Exploratory research examines phenomena that cannot be studied in a controlled environment and where not all influencing factors are readily identified (Singh, 2021). The impact of Jobcenters' closing in Denmark is not a phenomenon that can be explained away with experimentation and requires research to explore the potential outcomes of these decisions. Exploratory research aims to examine variables in the real world and examine the relationship between variables as well as the effects one variable has on the other (Singh, 2021). The decision by the Danish Government to abolish the Jobcenters may affect the access disadvantaged people have to the labour market. Through exploratory measures, this research will examine what those effects are. Exploratory research relies on the researchers searching for clues in the study in order to identify and examine the current phenomenon (Stevens, & Wrenn, 2013). Furthermore, exploratory research seeks out information in order to explain and explore current or past phenomena. In this study, the research will focus on the current labour market effort tendencies and will provide a junction of changes occurring with the April 2025 Agreement (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2025), and finally, argue what these decisions may lead to in the near future.

2.2.2 Research Strategy

A cross-sectional case study approach will be used to examine the ongoing Jobcenter transition in Denmark. As it is cross-sectional, the research will benefit from an in-depth analysis of current ideas and opinions of government officials, as well as the supporting documents that have been released on the transitional period. A case study approach will allow the study an in-depth analysis of the current happenings and allow for a robust analysis of an ongoing phenomenon. Martinsuo & Huemann (2021, p. 1) argue that case studies investigate phenomena in natural contexts, i.e., in a real-life context, where researchers allow the investigation to naturally progress without laboratory intervention. By utilising the cross-sectional approach combined with an in-depth case study, the research will benefit from a snapshot of what is happening and how policy and practice are unfolding in real time.

This research will be conducted in a cross-sectional manner, meaning it will not track individuals as they adapt to the new system. Instead, the analysis will be based on information gathered at a single point in time. Cross-sectional research is important to complete before longitudinal research in order to identify aspects that may benefit further from longitudinal research (Grujicic & Nikolic, 2021). This research will benefit from a cross-sectional approach and give future research the basis for potentially longitudinal research. The process of conducting a cross-sectional study involves defining the population (either the entire population or a representative sample), gathering data on exposure to potential factors, and analysing the collected data (Grujicic & Nikolic, 2021). Through capturing a snapshot of the transition, the study contributes to an initial understanding that can inform and guide subsequent longitudinal research.

Case studies are the in-depth analysis of a singular event that has happened or is happening. The case study approach is important for this research as it allows for the study and data to be collected and analysed thoroughly. The research will focus solely on Denmark and the current transition away from Jobcenters into a new system, this system can potentially affect the access one has to the labour market. Case study research is used broadly in order to advance understanding of a specific subject with in-depth analysis (Cousin, 2006). This research will utilize the case study approach in order to analyse this effect in depth, allowing the examination of aspects that may otherwise be overlooked. The most common types of case studies are exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory, where researchers are outside the cases they study and are seeking an understanding and an in-depth analysis of a phenomenon (Martinsuo &

Huemann, 2021). The use of the case study allows this research to explore the reaction and ongoing environment surrounding the transitional period in Denmark.

2.2.3 Interpretivist Epistemology

This study adopts an interpretivist research epistemology, which is well-aligned with exploring how stakeholders in Denmark understand and experience labour market integration, particularly in the context of the planned closure of Jobcenters. To this, interpretivism recognizes that reality is socially and contextually constructed rather than objectively measured (Endress, 2018).

Interpretivism is rooted in the philosophical traditions of hermeneutics and phenomenology, and emphasizes subjective experience, language, and the situatedness of knowledge (Lehman, 2021b). The goal is not to generalize findings across populations, but to gain deep insight into how individuals interpret their own experiences, specifically in this case, how stakeholders navigate institutional systems and perceive their support structures within the Danish labour market. This approach is particularly relevant when studying migrant integration because it allows the researcher to engage with complex dynamics such as identity, discrimination, and institutional access. Interpretivism acknowledges that immigrants may face structural barriers, such as language, recognition of credentials, or exclusion from networks, but also allows for analysis of how these barriers are understood and negotiated by individuals (Lehman, 2021b).

In contrast to positivist approaches that might rely solely on employment data or policy outcomes, the interpretivist approach allows this study to examine the experiential and symbolic dimensions of Jobcenter interactions (Lehman, 2021a). It also allows for critical engagement with broader neoliberal logic in policy design, which often determines integration in terms of individual economic output rather than community belonging or social equity (Lehman, 2021a). Furthermore, interpretivism supports a reflexive methodology, in which the researcher acknowledges their position and influence on the research process (Endress, 2018). Data will be collected using semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and narrative inquiry – all methods aligned with interpretivist epistemology, emphasizing co-construction of meaning between researcher and participant (Endress, 2018).

Finally, interpretivism provides a framework for challenging dominant narratives, particularly those that reduce integration to simple labour statistics. Instead, it highlights lived realities and their encounters with evolving public institutions (Lehman, 2021b). In the context

of Denmark's shifting policy landscape, interpretivism helps understand not only what changes are happening but also how those changes are perceived and internalized.

2.2.4 Social Constructivism Ontology

This study also draws on the ontology of social constructivism, a framework that emphasizes the co-construction of reality through human interaction, communication, and cultural context (Grundmann, 2018). Social constructivism is rooted in the seminal ideas of Berger & Luckmann from 1966 and has since been analysed by many scholars. One scholar is Martin Endress (2018), who emphasizes that reality is not objectively discovered but socially produced and maintained through language, communication, and shared practices. According to Endress, their work highlights three core aspects: the historicity of social structures, the inherently social nature of human experience, and the reflexivity of knowledge production (Endress, 2018, p. 58). These principles help frame integration not as a top-down outcome, but as a continual, negotiated process shaped by both individuals and institutions.

From this perspective, integration is understood as a lived and constructed experience, shaped by how immigrants interact with and interpret institutional structures, such as Jobcenters. As Grundmann (2018, p. 93) explains, socialization itself is a form of co-construction – a dynamic “space between” individuals in which shared meanings are created, contested, and transformed. Social constructivism thus allows this study to explore how to make sense of shifting integration policies, especially in the context of institutional withdrawal.

Moreover, the approach highlights the cultural dimension of social constructions, as discussed by Pfadenhauer (2018). Culture, in this sense, is not a separate domain but an integral part of all social action – the backdrop against which actors interpret signs, institutions, and one another. Immigrants' expectations of integration support, their understanding of employment norms, and their responses to structural change are all culturally mediated and historically situated. As such, a social constructivist methodology allows this study to move beyond surface-level indicators of integration and instead explore the deep, intersubjective processes through which immigrants construct meaning, navigate institutions, and position themselves within Danish society.

2.2.5 Ethical Considerations

This research requires interviews with individuals in government and private professions, officials, and organizational representatives. This study has ensured that, before each interview, the consent form is received from the interviewee. Written consent will be received from each

participant before any subsequent interview will be included in the research. This study will furthermore ensure that the participants are aware that they can revoke consent at any time.

Furthermore, this research will ensure that each participant will remain anonymous. Only the thesis writers will know which interview ties to the specific interviewees. Anonymity is important in this research as the transitional period is still happening, and anonymity ensures that all participants can feel safe from any repercussions or blowback from their expressed opinions. This anonymity ensures that all transcript material will be kept on a password-protected computer and only accessed through a password-protected Google cloud shared between the students conducting the research. The transcript will not be viewed, analysed, or otherwise accessed by the public or non-group members.

Through the use of the consent forms and the assurance of anonymity, the ethical concerns will be mitigated. There are no conflicts of interest that need to be reported in this research. This is a Master's Thesis, and therefore, no monetary or financial funding to disclose.

2.2.6 Limitations

All research has limitations, as there is never going to be a world where funds are limitless and everyone that you want to survey or interview will respond. Bias exists, and generalisability issues and questions of validity and reliability happen; this research will do its best in order to mitigate these limitations into a strong, valid, and replicable study.

This research will be using interviews and a case study approach, limiting the generalizability of the research to Denmark. This research will ensure that multiple interviews will be conducted to assess different viewpoints. Thematic analysis can be subject to researcher bias and coding issues. Through the use of strict coding outlines, a thematic analysis can offer important and reliable insights (Terry et al., 2017). This research will approach the analysis with strict coding and outlines to ensure consistency and reliability in any future replications.

This research, as well, is attempting to gather interviews and information from across Denmark, which offers limited access to stakeholders directly involved with the transition from Jobcenters. The research is attempting to mitigate this limitation by offering online, telephone, and video interviews; however, the limitation to in-person interviews does bring limitations to the research. As this research is not funded by any external party, travel costs limit the scope in which in-person interviews are feasible. Despite this, it is important to admit that online interviews have potential limitations, such as limited response or following up on questions. Additionally, speaking through the phone or an online meeting could remove the potential rapport developed between the interviewer and interviewee.

Though this research does have limitations, the research mitigates these limitations through the resources mentioned. The research remains effective and important to the field as well and will add invaluable information for future research.

2.2.7 Data Collection

This research employs a mixture of primary data collection with secondary, scholarly data in order to facilitate an authentic case study (Lamont, 2021). The case study examines the planned transition from Jobcenters to a new system with ‘other actors’ with expertise in labour market efforts in Denmark. However, this case study will specifically examine the transitional phase and how this transition will introduce new support structures for immigrants and refugees. The data collection strategy supports the interpretivist and social constructivist paradigms, as this type of study emphasizes the co-construction of meaning and context-specific understanding (Lehman, 2021a).

The *Secondary Data* consists of a comprehensive review of existing scholarly literature, publications by the Ministry of Immigration and Integration, Statistics Denmark, and the European Commission, all addressing labour market efforts, labour market integration, social policy, and activation programs. These sources serve as a foundational understanding of the historical and institutional context of labour market integration in Denmark. Moreover, as the abolishment of Jobcenters and, herein, the introduction of a new support system is yet to be implemented, scholarly studies on the topic are scarce if not non-existent at this time. Thus, this study will limit the scope of the research to studying how the introduction of a new system addresses the ‘wants’ and ‘needs’ of non-Western immigrants and refugees. All this will serve as a backdrop for evaluating the potentially extensive impact the abolishment of Jobcenters will have on the non-Western population of Denmark.

The *Primary Data* is collected through semi-structured interviews (Lamont, 2021) with key stakeholders who are involved or will be involved in the implementation and reform of labour market effort policies. Moreover, the interviews will be conducted based on an interview guide (see Appendix 1). These interviews are conducted with consent from all stakeholders involved, with the comprehensive understanding that these interviews were for a research thesis. The interviewees include municipal officials and other relevant stakeholders in the coming change in the labour market support system. The goal of the interviews is to capture the various perspectives on the role and effectiveness of the current system – the Jobcenters – the anticipated consequences of their closure, and the practicalities of transitioning to a new model of support structure. The interview questions were specifically designed to explore both

the structural and experiential dimensions of integration support, which further reflects the interpretivist paradigm this study draws on.

Thus, the data collection strategy of this study provides a robust, multi-layered examination of the ongoing policy shift, combining both institutional analysis with human-centred accounts (Lamont, 2021). By conducting the research as such, the research can offer a comprehensive understanding of how labour market access for immigrants and refugees may be affected during this pivotal transitional period.

2.3 Methods

2.3.1 Exemplary Case Study

This study employs a case study methodology to examine the Danish government's decision to abolish Jobcenters and replace them with a new, undefined structure led by "other actors" and 'municipal freedom to organize' (Danish Agency for Labour Market and Recruitment, 2025). The case is situated at the intersection of migration policy, institutional reform, and labour market access, with a particular focus on how this shift impacts immigrants and refugees. As such, it is an exemplary case in the Lamont (2021) sense – not because it seeks to test theory or generate statistical generalizability, but because it provides a unique opportunity to gain deeper, situated knowledge about institutional transformation and its consequences for a socially vulnerable population.

The case study method is especially suitable for research that aims to understand a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and within its real-world context. According to Lamont (2021), case studies are most appropriate when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are blurred, and when researchers seek to uncover the "how" and "why" of a process rather than simply the "what." In this study, the phenomenon is not only contemporary and context-bound. It is also evolving, ambiguous, and contested.

The case of Denmark's transition away from Jobcenters is thus methodologically appropriate for several reasons: Firstly, it involves a bounded event – a distinct policy decision made in 2024, with measurable institutional and societal impacts. Secondly, it focuses on a bounded time period – the immediate transitional phase before a new institutional system has been fully implemented. Lastly, it involves a bounded location – the Danish municipal system, where integration efforts are operationalized. In short, the case study offers a "real-time laboratory" to explore how systemic change is interpreted, contested, and implemented on the ground (Lamont, 2021).

Case study research is especially compatible with the interpretivist epistemology that underpins this study. Interpretivism is concerned with the co-construction of meaning, the subjective experiences of individuals, and the cultural and institutional contexts that shape human action (Lehman, 2021a). From this perspective, institutions are not neutral mechanisms but are experienced differently depending on one's position in the social field.

This study, therefore, does not seek to answer whether the new system will "succeed" or "fail" in an objective sense. Rather, it explores how actors within the system – municipal workers, consultants, and immigrants themselves – understand the change, and what meanings they attach to it. It investigates how social mechanisms such as trust, professional networks, institutional knowledge, and identity are affected by the policy shift, and how these mechanisms in turn influence potential access to labour market opportunities. By conducting interviews with important stakeholders within the transition, the research can provide adequate insight into how, or to what extent, the reform can ensure the safety of these social mechanisms.

Following Lamont (2021, p. 223), this study treats Denmark's Jobcenter reform as an exemplary case, not because it is representative of all integration systems, but because it allows us to explore a broader phenomenon: the tension between welfare retrenchment and social inclusion in liberal democracies.

This case study aims to deepen understanding, not only of Denmark's integration system but of how institutional transitions are experienced from below. It allows us to investigate the causal processes (Lamont, 2021) through which state policy decisions are implemented at the municipal level, and how these changes potentially affect access to key resources for marginalized groups. The case study enables the discovery of insights that are contextual, nuanced, and experiential – insights that are critical for shaping more inclusive and adaptive integration policies in the future.

As with all case study research (Lamont, 2021), this study does not aim to make broad generalizations about all integration systems. Rather, the case is limited in scope to the Danish context, and particularly to the early phase of institutional transition. However, by focusing on this pivotal moment, the study provides a meaningful foundation for future research, including possible longitudinal studies into the outcomes of policy change.

2.3.2 Thematic analysis

A Thematic analysis is a qualitative process that allows for a dataset to be examined through a lens of patterns and underlying meanings. "To sum up, thematic analysis involves the searching across a dataset – be that a number of interviews or focus groups, or a range of texts – to find

repeated patterns of meaning” (Braun & Clarke, 2006 p. 86). The dataset in this research will examine interviews conducted by the thesis writers and attempt to find patterns in the concepts used. This research will follow the six-phase framework for thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which provides a systematic and flexible approach to identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data. “The process starts when the analyst begins to notice, and look for, patterns of meaning and issues of potential interest in the data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86). A thematic analysis relies on consistent and strong themes that group dataset content together, allowing for thorough examination.

Step one of the process is to produce the data from the interviews, where the words are transcribed into a physical objective dataset. “As there is no one way to conduct thematic analysis, there is no one set of guidelines to follow when producing a transcript.” (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 88). These transcripts will be directly written from a recording taken during the interaction, and translated, if needed, into English. “What is important is that the transcript retains the information you need, from the verbal account, and in a way which is ‘true’ to its original nature” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 88). The importance of this first step ensures that all of the following steps have a solid and reliable foundation of information to draw from.

The second step concerns becoming intimately familiar with the dataset, ensuring that the researchers read and re-read the information: “Phase 2 begins when you have read and familiarised yourself with the data, and have generated an initial list of ideas about what is in the data and what is interesting about them.” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 88). The second phase will ensure that the researchers have gone in-depth regarding the dataset, examining the original interview and transcription. Braun and Clarke (2006) further critique that researchers must carefully examine the entire dataset in a systematic manner, ensuring that each data item receives equal attention, and identify noteworthy elements that could contribute to recurring patterns or themes throughout the data.

Step three ensures that coding and the initial themes are more broadly examined. During the second step, researchers examine phrases and potential patterns in speech and concepts, where now the lens widens to assume some may pair together in greater themes: “This phase, which re-focuses the analysis at the broader level of themes, rather than codes, involves sorting the different codes into potential themes, and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes.” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 89). This phase is intended to ensure that the researchers have identified overarching themes, if only temporary ones, but themes and sub-themes that connect throughout the dataset. According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 90), by the end of this phase, researchers should have gathered a set of

potential themes and sub-themes, along with the relevant data extracts linked to each. At this stage, an understanding of the importance and relevance of each theme within the broader dataset typically begins to emerge.

Step four focuses on verifying the themes and the sub-themes, ensuring that each has enough data and support to stand alone. This is where themes are removed and shifted. “Level two involves a similar process, but in relation to the entire dataset. At this level, you consider the validity of individual themes in relation to the dataset, but also whether your candidate thematic map ‘accurately’ reflects the meanings evident in the dataset as a whole.” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 91), This process ensures that the data collected is represented as a whole by the themes presented, ensuring that the data was not tailored to the theme.

The next step further critiques the themes that have been identified by the researchers, ensuring that the themes are strong and representative of the dataset. “At this point, you then define and further refine the themes you will present for your analysis, and analyse the data within them.” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). This step reiterates that the themes must be robust enough to be representative of the data while remaining clear enough to be described thoroughly. Braun and Clarke (2006) add that by the end of this phase, researchers must be able to define what the themes are, as well as what they are not. Clearly defined and robust categories will remain, where outcasts will be redefined or removed from the research by this stage.

The final step encompasses the final themes and the write-up of the analysis of these themes. “Your write-up must provide sufficient evidence of the themes within the data, i.e., enough data extracts to demonstrate the prevalence of the theme.” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93). This analysis will ensure that the reader is aware of the support from the dataset, as well as confirm that the themes have a robust and obvious support from the data presented. The final stage will conclude with the evidence of the theme's existence in the dataset.

As such, the research will benefit from the use of thematic analysis, as it allows researchers to identify patterns and context within interviews that may otherwise go unnoticed or ignored. “The extracts in thematic analysis are illustrative of the analytic points the researcher makes about the data, and should be used to illustrate/support an analysis that goes beyond their specific content, to make sense of the data, and tell the reader what it does or might mean...” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 94). Thematic analysis is flexible but remains a valid and reliable research method, allowing researchers to identify semantic and obscure patterns. The process that Braun and Clarke (2006) outline ensures that the themes are representative of the dataset and are carefully considered about which themes are considered strong and relevant.

This analytic approach to thematic analysis will ensure this research benefits from a measured and reliable analysis, grounded with strict outlines and steps. Furthermore, this six-phase process provides a clear, reliable, and rigorous framework for conducting a thorough and academically robust thematic analysis.

The case illustrates through a thematic analysis how institutional change impacts not just formal service delivery but also the social, cultural, and human capital needed to navigate the labour market. Social capital is disrupted when job seekers lose contact with familiar job counsellors and established municipal networks, thus limiting access to established networks and relationships (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital is reshaped when migrants must relearn how to interact with a new system, possibly without physical infrastructure or guidance (Bourdieu, 1986). Human capital may stagnate when tailored activation programs are paused or dismantled, affecting long-term employability (Wright & Constantin, 2021). This case also brings into focus broader theoretical debates around activation vs. support, efficiency vs. equity, and individual responsibility vs. structural opportunity. These debates are central to contemporary social policy, not only in Denmark but across the Global North.

Chapter 3

3.1 Analysis

3.1.1 Case Study Analysis

3.1.1.1 The Jobcenter System: Institutional Foundations and Labour Market Integration

The case of Denmark's labour effort approach offers a rich empirical context to explore the intersection of state-led labour market interventions and individual pathways to employment, particularly through the lens of social, human, and cultural capital. Central to Denmark's labour market architecture over the past two decades has been the Jobcenter system, which played a pivotal role in implementing active labour market policies (ALMPs) designed to promote employment, reduce welfare benefit dependency, and enhance integration, especially among immigrants and vulnerable groups.

The implementation of Jobcenters was part of a broader ideological and policy shift from passive welfare support to an activation-oriented welfare state. Beginning in the 1990s, Danish labour market policy evolved toward the so-called "flexicurity" model, combining labour market flexibility with strong social security and proactive employment services (Larsen

& Bredgaard, 2008). This early phase culminated in the 2002 reform package “More People into Work,” which introduced a work-first logic and increased use of activation measures, conditionality, and sanctions. This reform laid the ideological and institutional groundwork for the structural reorganisation that followed (Larsen & Bredgaard, 2008). This approach was rounded off in the 2007 structural reform that merged state and municipal employment services into a unified Jobcenter system. Each municipality became responsible for operating its Jobcenter, but within a nationally steered framework defined by centralized benchmarks, funding mechanisms, and activation requirements (Mailand & Larsen, 2018). This model was further consolidated in 2009 when municipalities gained full control over service delivery, albeit with continued national oversight. Jobcenters became the primary institutions for executing Denmark's labour activation agenda. Following their full rollout by 2009, they entered an operational phase in which implementation was deeply shaped by local municipal discretion, national benchmarks, and evolving political expectations (Danish Agency for Labour Market and Recruitment, 2020). These institutions were tasked with both ensuring rapid labour market reintegration and managing increasing administrative pressures, including digitalization, performance evaluation, and individualized service plans. Their responsibilities included job counselling, matching job seekers to vacancies, facilitating internships, and implementing tailored programmes for specific target groups such as youth, persons with disabilities, and newly arrived refugees (Danish Agency for Labour Market and Recruitment, 2020).

Key strategic interventions implemented by Jobcenters included a series of proactive policy tools aimed at enhancing labour market participation across diverse demographic groups. First, a "work-first" orientation became foundational to the Danish activation regime. This approach emphasized swift labour market re-entry, even into temporary or low-skilled jobs, rather than prioritizing long-term educational or vocational training (Larsen & Bredgaard, 2008). The aim was to ensure that job seekers remained active and connected to the labour market, thereby reducing dependency on welfare benefits. Second, integration programmes were introduced to support immigrants and refugees, combining Danish language instruction with practical work placements. These programmes gained momentum under the 2016 tripartite agreement between the Danish government, labour unions, and employer associations, which aimed to harmonize employment and integration policies for newly arrived migrants (Danish Agency for Labour Market and Recruitment, 2020). Third, the introduction of flex-jobs and rehabilitation schemes targeted individuals with reduced work capacity. These policies offered subsidized employment options and workplace accommodations to ensure that

people with disabilities or chronic illnesses could access the labour market under supportive conditions (Agergaard, Amby, & Kjeldsen, 2024). Fourth, youth-specific initiatives were developed to address the unique challenges faced by young people not in employment, education, or training (NEETs). These interventions often included individualized education pathways, vocational training, and job-readiness assessments to improve labour market attachment and future prospects (Schjødt, 2023).

While the Jobcenter system contributed to maintaining high national employment rates and improving immigrant labour participation, the model was not without criticism. The gap between its intended goals and actual outcomes became especially visible in its treatment of vulnerable groups, its over-standardized interventions, and its inability to account for structural inequalities across municipalities. Caseworkers – key frontline actors – were often burdened by bureaucratic tasks and performance-driven mandates, reducing their capacity to apply discretion or provide empathetic, tailored support (Amberg, 2015; Schjødt, 2023).

The performance of Jobcenters can be further illuminated by examining how they mediated access to different forms of capital that are essential for labour market integration. Jobcenters functioned as key sites for the development of bridging social capital, connecting individuals to broader networks of employers, unions, and municipal actors. This was particularly significant for immigrants, who often lacked the established networks necessary to navigate the Danish labour market (Jensen & Skaksen, 2024). Nonetheless, the quality and availability of such networks were uneven across municipalities, influenced by local partnerships and labour market dynamics (Jensen & Skaksen, 2024; Mailand & Larsen, 2018). While one of the intended goals of Jobcenters was to enhance employability, the strong emphasis on immediate employment limited the focus on education and upskilling. This was especially problematic for immigrants with unrecognised foreign qualifications who were often channelled into low-skilled jobs irrespective of their prior expertise (Mailand & Larsen, 2018; Amberg, 2015). Thus, while Jobcenters supported the development of basic employment competencies, they were less effective in facilitating the accumulation of robust, transferable human capital. Navigating the Jobcenter system required a level of bureaucratic literacy and familiarity with Danish institutional norms – forms of cultural capital often lacking among newly arrived migrants. The system often assumed a middle-class, native-born orientation in digital proficiency, communication expectations, and self-directed job searching. This presumption clashed with the realities of many individuals who lacked institutional familiarity or language competence (Olsen, 2008; Schjødt, 2023). Despite efforts to provide guidance and

translated resources, many individuals experienced the Jobcenter not as a supportive environment but as a disciplinary space marked by rigid monitoring and sanctions.

Additionally, critiques of the Jobcenter system point to the heavy reliance on conditionality and sanctions as tools for compliance. Particularly for youth and vulnerable individuals, these mechanisms often created an environment perceived as punitive rather than supportive. Schjødt (2023) highlights how many job seekers internalized a "conditionality mindset," leading to stress, reduced motivation, and adverse effects on well-being. Moreover, the inclusion of people with disabilities was hampered by vague policy goals and inconsistent implementation. As Agergaard, Amby, and Kjeldsen (2024) note, designated disability coordinators within Jobcenters were often reassigned to general administrative tasks, diminishing their intended function.

A further concern emerged from the decentralized structure of Jobcenters. Although municipalities had flexibility in service delivery, this resulted in significant geographical disparities in quality and access. Citizens' outcomes often depended more on their place of residence than on individual need or merit (Jensen & Skaksen, 2024; Mailand & Larsen, 2018). This decentralization was preceded by the 2002 "More People into Work" reform, which laid the ideological groundwork for the work-first paradigm and initiated the use of conditionality as a central labour market tool (Larsen & Bredgaard, 2008). Denmark's approach also illustrated policy learning in action. Following the 2008 financial crisis, iterative reforms and pilot programmes were used to test and adjust activation policies. Amberg (2015) describes this experimentalist model as a form of adaptive governance – one that evolved based on feedback from real-world implementation. Digitalization also played a role in the evolution of Jobcenter services. Platforms like Jobnet.dk became central to service delivery and labour market monitoring. However, this posed significant challenges for individuals lacking digital literacy, particularly older immigrants and those with limited formal education (Schjødt, 2023).

Moreover, issues of representation were notable. Ethnic minorities have historically been underrepresented within public institutions, including Jobcenters. This lack of representation, coupled with broader systemic discrimination, affected levels of trust and engagement with employment services (Baekgaard et al., 2024). Although trade unions contributed to national-level agreements, their influence at the municipal level varied significantly. In some contexts, unions were engaged in local implementation and helped shape programmes through dialogue. In others, they were sidelined from key decisions, limiting their capacity to advocate for equitable integration strategies or represent the interests of vulnerable groups (Mailand & Larsen, 2018).

In addition to these findings, randomized controlled trials conducted in Denmark provide further evidence of the long-term and uneven impacts of activation-based policies. Baekgaard et al. (2024) studied a series of trials initiated between 2005 and 2008, placing their intervention squarely within the early phases of the Jobcenter model. These trials involved intensified activation measures such as frequent compulsory meetings and early activation. Their results show that such interventions yielded long-term employment gains only for individuals considered more resourceful – those without pre-existing mental health issues or strong barriers to employment. Conversely, for long-term unemployed individuals on social assistance, especially those with a history of mental health challenges, these activation efforts produced no positive employment effects. Worse, they resulted in a lasting increase in antidepressant use, suggesting that poorly tailored activation policies can exacerbate psychological stress and reduce overall well-being. These findings reinforce critiques of the one-size-fits-all model of activation and underscore the necessity of designing ALMPs that align with individuals' capacities and vulnerabilities (Baekgaard et al., 2024).

While the study by Baekgaard et al. (2024) provides robust causal evidence, it is important to contextualize its findings. The randomized trials were conducted between 2005 and 2008, during the initial implementation phase of the Jobcenter model. Since then, significant policy, demographic, and technological changes have taken place, such as full municipal decentralization, digitalization of service delivery, and increased focus on user-oriented and differentiated support models. Moreover, the target groups served by Jobcenters have become more diverse and include a greater proportion of clients with complex needs. Consequently, while the findings remain theoretically and empirically valuable, their direct applicability to the current Jobcenter system should be approached with caution.

Taken together, the evidence reveals that while the Jobcenter model was a cornerstone of Denmark's active labour market policies, it evolved under the influence of competing priorities: promoting employment, reducing costs, and managing political narratives about benefit dependency. The result was a system that achieved notable employment gains for some, but left others further marginalized. Moving forward, any replacement system must incorporate these lessons by better balancing efficiency with equity, recognizing the differentiated needs of job seekers, and strengthening institutional capacity for long-term empowerment over short-term activation.

3.1.1.2 Expert Group Proposals for a New Employment Model

In response to long-standing critiques of the current labour market system, particularly regarding complexity, inefficiency, and its perceived lack of citizen focus, the Danish government initiated a major policy rethink in May 2023. This initiative was grounded in the ambition to fundamentally reimagine the organisation and delivery of employment services. At its core, the government's proposal placed the individual citizen at the centre of the system, promoting greater professional autonomy for caseworkers and enhancing flexibility for job seekers. Simultaneously, the reform aimed to streamline public expenditure and reduce administrative burdens across municipalities (Fremtidens Beskæftigelsesindsats, n.d.). To guide this reformation, an expert group was appointed, led by Professor Claus Thustrup Kreiner, a leading economist at the University of Copenhagen and director of the Centre for Economic Behaviour and Inequality (CEBI). He was joined by five additional experts, all recognised for their high-level expertise in economics, labour market policy, and public sector governance. The group's composition reflected a deliberate effort to ensure that the reform was informed by cutting-edge academic research and practical policy insight (Fremtidens Beskæftigelsesindsats, n.d.).

Over 13 months, from May 2023 to June 2024, the expert group conducted a thorough review of the existing system, consulted stakeholders, and analysed domestic and international policy models. The result of this process was a comprehensive 200-page report, comprising a series of reform recommendations intended to modernise Denmark's labour market policy. These recommendations have since formed the foundation for a national debate about the future of employment services and the institutional principles that should underpin them. The expert group's 2024 report (Fremtidens Beskæftigelsesindsats, 2024) represents a pivotal turning point in the governance of Danish labour market policy. With the decision to abolish Jobcenters, the group has proposed what it calls the largest simplification and reorientation of the employment system in Danish history (Fremtidens Beskæftigelsesindsats, 2024, p. 16). This section analyses the six central recommendations of the expert group, their projected impact on labour market efforts, and integrates Social, Cultural, and Human Capital Theory to interpret potential consequences, especially in light of existing integration challenges. The reforms are far-reaching and signal a shift in how Denmark envisions not only activation policies but also the values and principles underpinning welfare-to-work transitions. These insights help assess whether the proposed reforms are both desirable and feasible.

The recommendation to dismantle Jobcenters signifies a radical departure from two decades of centralized municipal employment service provision. Municipalities will retain

responsibility for the employment effort but gain full autonomy in organizing services (Fremtidens Beskæftigelsesindsats, 2024). This proposal aims to address the critique that the current model is over-bureaucratized and overly standardized. The new structure is envisioned as a leaner, more locally adapted model that enables faster and more flexible interventions. It is intended to empower municipalities to create bespoke partnerships with NGOs, companies, or insurance funds, potentially fostering innovative solutions that are better attuned to local labour market conditions (Fremtidens Beskæftigelsesindsats, 2024). However, it raises concerns about geographic inequalities. Historically, decentralization has led to disparities in service quality, with some municipalities offering robust employment support and others falling short (Jensen & Skaksen, 2024). Vulnerable groups may be especially affected by this variation, especially where local political priorities or funding levels limit ambition or capacity. From a Social Capital Theory perspective, dismantling a centralized system like Jobcenters can disrupt vital institutional relationships and networks that help marginalized individuals connect with the labour market (Putnam, 1995; Bourdieu, 1986). Immigrants and refugees, in particular, risk losing access to critical bridging capital, especially if municipalities are not proactive in rebuilding trust-based relationships and accessible local infrastructure.

The expert group envisions a more open and competitive market for employment services, wherein insurance funds and private actors play larger roles in supporting unemployed individuals (Fremtidens Beskæftigelsesindsats, 2024). The goal is to stimulate innovation, specialization, and outcomes-based delivery that enhances the efficiency and responsiveness of services. This marks a shift away from universal, municipality-led support. While the flexibility and expertise of private actors can bring efficiency, concerns arise over uneven quality, lack of regulation, and a tendency to serve only the "easiest" clients. Without strong oversight, private actors may prioritize high-performing clients to maintain favourable statistics, thereby neglecting those furthest from the labour market. Human Capital Theory highlights that market-oriented actors may prefer individuals with skills, education, or prior Danish work experience, i.e., characteristics many immigrants do not possess upon arrival (Fang et al., 2009; Wright & Constantin, 2021). This potentially creates a two-tiered service landscape, privileging those with recognisable capital and sidelining others. The commodification of employment services could erode equity unless counterbalanced by clear incentives to support complex cases.

The move toward individualized, needs-based support represents a significant cultural and operational shift (Fremtidens Beskæftigelsesindsats, 2024). It is designed to give caseworkers more professional autonomy and to create flexible pathways into employment that

reflect the real-life situations of job seekers. The reform aims to counteract the dehumanizing effects of standardization, where all job seekers, regardless of need, must follow the same rigid schedule (Fremtidens beskæftigelsesindsats, 2024). Personalized support should theoretically lead to more meaningful activation and long-term employment, enabling professionals to use discretion, empathy, and contextual knowledge. Yet, success depends on how municipalities implement this discretion. Without strong professional training, resources, and quality monitoring, the risk of inconsistent or biased service delivery increases. Moreover, individuals must be able to articulate their own needs and goals, something not all immigrants may feel empowered to do, particularly those who lack confidence, language skills, or institutional trust. Cultural Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1986) explains how unequal access to the norms, behaviours, and expectations of institutions can prevent equal participation. Migrants who lack system literacy, formal education, or digital proficiency may struggle to fully benefit from an individualized approach unless additional supports are provided (Prieur & Savage, 2013). Without these, the system may reproduce rather than reduce marginalization.

The current system requires extensive documentation and compliance with rigid activation schedules. The proposed reform shifts focus from process to outcomes, measuring success in terms of employment entry, duration, and employer satisfaction (Fremtidens Beskæftigelsesindsats, 2024, p. 171). This change aims to empower front-line staff and municipalities, reduce time spent on paperwork, and reorient the system toward real-world results. It has the potential to unleash local innovation and free up professional time for meaningful engagement. However, it also opens the door to potential perverse incentives. For instance, municipalities might focus on job seekers who are already close to the labour market to secure favourable statistics. According to Human Capital Theory, individuals who already have skills, education, or language proficiency will benefit most from result-oriented interventions (Fang et al., 2009). Similarly, Social Capital Theory suggests that those with stronger networks may be better placed to find jobs quickly, while more isolated individuals risk being ignored in the pursuit of performance targets (Putnam, 1995). These risks necessitate robust outcome indicators that consider fairness and inclusion alongside efficiency.

With over 13 target groups and 200+ special rules, the current employment system is often critiqued for being overly complex (Fremtidens Beskæftigelsesindsats, 2024, p. 7). The reform proposes a drastic reduction in segmentation, consolidating categories and eliminating many specialized provisions. The consolidation from 13 to 5 target groups simplifies administration and reduces complexity (Fremtidens Beskæftigelsesindsats, 2024, p. 40). However, critics warn this may obscure the needs of specific groups. Standardizing access can

marginalize people with complex barriers – e.g., young immigrants, the long-term unemployed, or individuals with disabilities (Bækgaard et al., 2024) – if their specific challenges are no longer acknowledged in the system design. Cultural Capital Theory is particularly useful here. It suggests that without tailored interventions acknowledging the diverse cultural resources and institutional barriers people face, immigrants may be pushed into generic programs that do not match their qualifications or experiences (Bourdieu, 1986; Prieur & Savage, 2013). The reform risks treating diversity as a bureaucratic inconvenience rather than an essential variable in effective integration policy.

The existing sanctions model is widely viewed as punitive, disproportionately impacting vulnerable groups and eroding trust in public institutions. The new system proposes a fairer balance, still conditional, but rooted in dignity and proportionality (Fremtidens Beskæftigelsesindsats, 2024, p. 107). This addresses growing research showing that harsh conditionality can reduce motivation and worsen mental health, especially among those with pre-existing vulnerabilities (Bækgaard et al., 2024). More supportive models are associated with greater long-term engagement and better labour market outcomes. The reform seeks to build a welfare system that commands legitimacy by balancing expectations with respect. Social Capital Theory supports the idea that fair and respectful treatment by public institutions helps build trust, which is essential for cooperation and long-term integration (Putnam, 1995; Claridge, 2018). A more human model, rather than bureaucratic, may encourage community members to stay engaged with the system rather than withdraw or become discouraged. Such a shift requires a cultural as well as policy transformation, where the ethos of support replaces that of suspicion.

The expert group aims to generate savings of 3 billion DKK by 2030 while maintaining current employment levels (Fremtidens Beskæftigelsesindsats, 2024, p. 193). This ambition, though politically attractive, is highly optimistic. Historical trends suggest that reductions in process requirements and administrative infrastructure do not automatically translate to improved employment outcomes. Moreover, cost-efficiency pressures may compromise service quality and equity. Another structural tension lies in balancing decentralization with the need for national coherence. While local tailoring is valuable, prior decentralization has resulted in significant disparities in service quality across municipalities, where outcomes often depend more on one's place of residence than on individual need or merit (Jensen & Skaksen, 2024; Mailand & Larsen, 2018). Without a strong national framework or oversight, there is a risk that inequalities will deepen, particularly in municipalities with limited resources or experience. Finally, the shift to a trust-based and user-oriented model represents not only an

institutional but also a cultural change. Implementing such a transformation requires sustained professional development, investment, and monitoring mechanisms that are not yet clearly articulated in the reform plan. From a capital theory perspective, the success of these reforms depends heavily on whether they strengthen or erode the social, cultural, and human capital of vulnerable groups. Long-term success requires a robust framework that accounts for institutional diversity, structural disadvantage, and differentiated support needs.

While the expert group's recommendations respond to long-standing criticisms of the Jobcenter model, their implementation will require navigating significant trade-offs between equity, efficiency, and local autonomy. Lessons from the previous model should inform a cautious but committed transition that safeguards the most vulnerable while simplifying and humanizing the employment system. It is also essential to draw on lessons from international experience. For example, according to the expert group, Sweden's reform of employment services, which expanded the role of private actors, led to significant market growth but also revealed limitations in supporting vulnerable groups and maintaining equal access. These were issues that ultimately required closer public oversight and adjustments to ensure broader coverage (Fremtidens Beskæftigelsesindsats, 2024). This suggests that Denmark must design strong accountability mechanisms and ensure equity in access across all regions. Stakeholder engagement will also play a critical role. Municipalities may welcome organizational freedom, while labour unions could resist the outsourcing of public roles. Immigrant associations and NGOs may call for stronger safeguards to prevent marginalization under a simplified or market-based model. Anticipating and addressing these concerns will be vital. Finally, if the reforms are to succeed, policymakers must ensure robust investments in training, data systems, and inclusive monitoring. Without such infrastructure, even well-intended policies may falter in practice. Policymakers must remain vigilant in ensuring that no one is left behind as Denmark reshapes the future of its labour market support framework.

While the six central reform pillars redefine the overall structure and logic of Denmark's employment system, several supplementary components of the reform merit further attention due to their significant, if less visible, impact on labour market integration. One such element is the dramatic reduction in mandated interactions between individuals and caseworkers, including approximately 500,000 fewer compulsory meetings annually (Fremtidens Beskæftigelsesindsats, 2024). While intended to ease administrative burden and enhance flexibility, this change could diminish engagement, especially for individuals who lack the institutional familiarity or initiative to seek support autonomously. For immigrants, in particular, reduced frequency of formal touchpoints may hinder trust-building and timely

intervention unless counterbalanced by proactive outreach. Another key innovation is the introduction of artificial intelligence and enhanced digital systems for job matching and case management (Fremtidens Beskæftigelsesindsats, 2024). While such tools may streamline services and improve targeting, they risk excluding individuals with low digital literacy, a challenge well documented among older immigrants or those with limited education (Jensen & Skaksen, 2024). From a Cultural Capital lens, the digitalisation of employment services must be accompanied by inclusive training or risk exacerbating systemic inequalities. The reform also introduces performance-based incentives in the form of municipal job bonuses, tied to the number of wage hours secured for long-term unemployed clients (Fremtidens Beskæftigelsesindsats, 2024). While this may focus attention on groups typically excluded from activation success, it could also create pressure to place individuals in low-quality or unstable jobs simply to meet targets. Without safeguards, this could reproduce patterns of precarious employment rather than support meaningful integration.

Moreover, the inclusion of a Social Investment Fund aims to catalyse long-term solutions for vulnerable youth and older workers (Fremtidens Beskæftigelsesindsats, 2024). Although positive in intention, the scale of investment is modest, and it remains unclear whether such initiatives will receive the sustained support necessary to deliver measurable labour market outcomes. Equally important is the professional upskilling of caseworkers and municipal leaders, backed by a 100 million DKK fund (Fremtidens Beskæftigelsesindsats, 2024). This measure is crucial given the increased discretion and complexity of the new system. However, without a strong implementation framework, this professional development may be inconsistently applied, especially in under-resourced municipalities. Additionally, municipalities now have the freedom to embed employment services within other departments, such as social or health services (Fremtidens Beskæftigelsesindsats, 2024). While this opens possibilities for holistic support, it may also diffuse responsibility for employment outcomes and complicate accountability if clear mandates are not defined. Lastly, the transformation of the Danish Agency for Labour Market and Recruitment into a learning-oriented support body (Fremtidens Beskæftigelsesindsats, 2024) reflects a shift from compliance control to collaborative governance. Though potentially empowering, this also raises questions about how national coherence, equity, and service quality will be ensured in a landscape defined by local experimentation.

3.1.1.3 The April 2025 Agreement: A Paradigm Shift in Danish Employment Policy

The April 2025 governmental agreement on the reform of Denmark's employment services marks a turning point in the evolution of Danish labour market policy. Anchored in the recommendations of the expert group led by Claus Thustrup Kreiner analysed above (See section 3.1.1.2), the agreement introduces a radically restructured system based on simplification, decentralisation, and increased professional discretion (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2025). The reform abolishes the longstanding Jobcenter regime and replaces it with a more flexible, locally anchored, and citizen-oriented employment support model. At the heart of the agreement, with more than 30 new policies, lie the six fundamental components introduced by the expert group's recommendations:

1. Simplification of Target Groups

One of the most significant structural changes in the reform is the consolidation of jobseeker categories from 13 to just 5. This simplification aims to reduce the complexity of navigating the employment system for both citizens and caseworkers (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2025). Previously, many individuals shifted between overlapping categories without meaningful changes in support. By streamlining the target groups, the reform seeks to ensure a more coherent and efficient service path, with fewer transitions, case handler changes, and benefit disruptions (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2025). This change is also intended to allow for the abolition of a range of special schemes, including resource courses, job clarification programmes, revalidation measures, and mentor guarantees, thereby cutting administrative workload and releasing time for citizen-focused efforts (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2025).

2. Individually Tailored Support

Replacing rigid procedural requirements, the reform introduces a more trust-based and individualized approach. Caseworkers are granted greater discretion to determine the most relevant forms of support based on the specific circumstances of the jobseeker (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2025). For individuals well-integrated into the labour market, this may mean fewer mandatory meetings and less activation. For those facing more complex challenges, municipalities can now opt to exempt them from activation requirements altogether for periods of up to six months, based on professional assessments (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2025). The aim is to provide support that is proportionate, purposeful, and responsive to real-world needs, rather than fulfilling process quotas.

3. A Dignified Sanctions System

The new sanctions regime emphasizes fairness, proportionality, and mutual trust. The prior system, which was widely criticized for being overly punitive, particularly toward vulnerable groups, is replaced with a more dignified approach. Individuals further from the labour market will no longer be sanctioned unless trust has been explicitly broken, and only after clear guidance has been provided (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2025). Meanwhile, job-ready community members will still face availability requirements, but these will be applied more consistently and transparently (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2025). For sick-listed individuals, the reform eliminates certain punitive rules, including automatic benefit loss due to missed paperwork deadlines, ensuring a more respectful handling of health-related absences.

4. Abolition of the Jobcenter Regime and Local Freedom of Organisation

A cornerstone of the agreement is the dismantling of the Jobcenter system (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2025). Municipalities will no longer be required to organize their employment services under a nationally standardized Jobcenter identity. Instead, they can integrate employment support into broader social or health departments or create new cross-sectoral arrangements that reflect local needs and organisational logic (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2025). This decentralised structure is intended to foster more holistic and coordinated interventions, allowing municipalities to align employment efforts with other local welfare services (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2025). However, as previous evaluations have shown (Bækgaard et al., 2024), such flexibility also raises the risk of geographic disparities unless balanced with appropriate oversight.

5. Greater Role for A-kasser and Private Providers

To further decentralise and diversify service provision, the reform opens up space for unemployment insurance funds (A-kasser) and private or civil society actors to take on greater responsibilities (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2025). A trial scheme grants eligible unemployment benefit recipients the right to choose their service provider: municipality, an insurance fund, or a private entity during the first four months of their unemployment period (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2025, p. 8). This is accompanied by a related pivot extending the insurance fund's responsibility from three to four months (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2025). The aim is to encourage competition, innovation, and user choice. However, it also underscores the importance of monitoring service quality and avoiding selection bias, where providers prioritise easy-to-place clients over those with complex needs.

6. Shift from Process Compliance to Results-Based Governance

A final and pivotal element of the reform is a reorientation of performance management in the employment system. The previous regime, dominated by process metrics, such as the number of mandatory meetings, is being replaced by a results-based model focused on real employment outcomes. Municipalities will now be evaluated based on their success in transitioning citizens into jobs or education, the sustainability of those placements, and satisfaction levels among both job seekers and employers (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2025). To support this shift, a municipal job bonus scheme is introduced, rewarding local authorities for securing wage hours for individuals who face significant barriers to entering the labour market (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2025). Meanwhile, the national employment agency will adopt a new role as a learning facilitator rather than a compliance enforcer (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2025).

This six-pronged structure, introduced in the expert group's recommendation and upheld in the April 2025 agreement, represents more than a policy overhaul; it signifies a profound cultural transformation in Denmark's approach to welfare and unemployment support. Where the previous Jobcenter regime emphasized standardization, control, and activation-based compliance, the current reform signals a deliberate shift toward localized discretion, trust-based governance, and outcome-focused performance measures (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2025). From the perspective of this research, such structural reconfiguration holds significant implications for how immigrants, particularly non-Western refugees and immigrants, interact with the Danish labour market and welfare state. Empirically, the abolition of Jobcenters and the delegation of organisational responsibility to municipalities introduces substantial variability in how support structures will be designed and experienced. The degree to which municipalities possess the capacity and political will to maintain inclusive practices will determine whether the reform enhances or restricts access to employment for immigrants and vulnerable groups. As highlighted in earlier chapters, labour market participation for these groups is strongly conditioned by access to social capital, such as networks, guidance, and institutional trust, which was often facilitated through the Jobcenter as a centralized and physical point of contact (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 1995). The potential dismantling of these relational infrastructures raises concerns that migrants may face increased isolation, particularly if new services rely heavily on digital platforms or abstract eligibility criteria.

From the vantage point of cultural capital, the reform further underscores the unequal distribution of bureaucratic and institutional literacy by limiting the target groups from 13 to

5, thus ensuring that individuals who today shift between the target groups attain more coherence and consistency with the new reform. (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2025, p. 2). The ability to navigate a newly decentralized and less prescriptive system assumes a degree of familiarity with Danish administrative culture, employment norms, and communication expectations – capacities that many newly arrived migrants have not yet acquired (Bourdieu, 1986; Prieur & Savage, 2013). If the physical and symbolic presence of the Jobcenter is not replaced with equally accessible, culturally responsive structures, the shift risks exacerbating pre-existing inequalities in service access and labour market outcomes.

Furthermore, human capital development, which includes long-term employability, skills acquisition, and professional growth, may also be affected. While the agreement introduces new initiatives such as increased municipal flexibility, job bonus schemes, and an upskilling fund (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2025), it simultaneously involves the removal of guaranteed activation programmes and significant cuts to Jobcenter operating budgets. The assumption appears to be that municipalities will reallocate resources efficiently; however, in practice, this could lead to lower-quality or fragmented services, particularly for those already furthest from the labour market. Previous evidence has shown that individuals with complex needs do not necessarily benefit from broad activation measures and may even experience adverse psychological consequences from ill-suited interventions (Bækgaard et al., 2024). As such, it is not merely a question of institutional redesign, but of how these changes resonate with the lived realities and subjective experiences of vulnerable populations.

This research, grounded in an interpretivist and socially constructivist framework, emphasizes that the perceived legitimacy, trustworthiness, and accessibility of employment services are not static characteristics but are co-constructed through daily interactions between individuals and institutions (Endress, 2018; Grundmann, 2018). As institutions withdraw, evolve, or shift their mode of engagement, these interactions are disrupted, redefined, or dissolved altogether. In the context of immigrant integration, this poses a risk of perceived abandonment, particularly if the new system does not adequately consider the symbolic and practical role Jobcenters have played as navigational anchors in the Danish welfare landscape.

Ultimately, while the reform introduces mechanisms to promote individual agency and institutional flexibility, its success will depend on the implementation practices of municipalities, the availability of inclusive support systems, and the state's ability to monitor equity and accountability. If these conditions are not met, the reforms may inadvertently reproduce the very disparities they aim to resolve. In this sense, the April 2025 agreement must be seen not as an endpoint, but as a critical juncture in Denmark's evolving labour market

regime, one that will either deepen or dismantle the structural inequalities embedded in immigrant integration. The reform is set to be rolled out in two phases, with the first phase of changes entering into force on February 1st, 2026, and full national implementation scheduled for January 1st, 2027 (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2025, p. 13). These dates are not merely administrative milestones; they represent the beginning of a tangible shift in how integration and employment support are experienced by immigrants and vulnerable populations across Denmark. As the transition unfolds, the symbolic and material consequences of dismantling a central institution such as the Jobcenter will come into sharper focus, particularly for those whose labour market participation has long depended on its structure. Whether the new system can build an inclusive framework that equitably distributes access to social, cultural, and human capital will be a defining test of this reform's long-term impact. To better understand how these changes will be implemented, various municipal officials across Denmark have been interviewed. The next analysis will underline the key differences or similarities between the different municipalities' approaches to the reform. Although six months remain until the first phase of reform implementation, it is important to understand how, or to what extent, the changes will impact community members across the different municipalities.

3.1.2 Thematic Analysis

3.1.2.1 Community Engagement

The first theme that this research approached was “Community Engagement”. This examines how each of the interviewees' answers included a reference to new or improved outreach strategies, community forums, and feedback mechanisms. This theme explores how the interviewee talks about the reform and the way it will impact and engage the community, and which programs/policies may be changed or left in order to tackle community engagement. Statements made that allude or blatantly identify the programs and policies that will affect how the community will be engaged are examined and categorised here. The indications, such as new or improved outreach strategies, community locations, or engagement-specific programs, and ways that allow the members of the community to participate and give feedback in the reform, will be categorized into this thematic structure. This theme was broken down further into three sub-categories to assess how strongly each municipal representative interviewed referenced this theme. The “low” bracket was identified as having one or fewer references to community engagement/participation, while the “medium” category was identified as having two to three references (Appendix 3). Finally, the “high” bracket in the category was identified

as having four or more references to how the municipality plans to engage the community and incorporate the theme of communal participation (Appendix 3).

The “low” bracket of this theme identifies that the interview only contains one or fewer references to community engagement/participation. Two of the interviews fall into this low category, Copenhagen and Esbjerg reference policy or programs that engage the community one or fewer times in the responses given. When asked *Who determines which actors are included in the new program*, the representative from Copenhagen responded, “We assume, you are referring to the so-called “free choice model”. At this point in time, it remains unclear in what way this model will be implemented.” (Appendix 1.A). The response identifies that there is a “free choice” trial for entering the labour market, accessing help from whichever resources the person chooses. There is no description of what the “free choice” specifically references, however, this is a reference to a community program, which Copenhagen’s representative believes will assist community members to gain access to the labour market. The representative from Esbjerg was quoted as saying, “Based on the available information, we understand that a three-year trial scheme will allow selected unemployment benefit recipients, who are close to the labour market, to freely choose between the municipality” (Appendix 1.C). Although this statement again remains vague, it can be clearly identified that there is a reference to potential programs allowing individuals to access the labour market however they want, through different municipal programs or through their own municipality. Each of these interviews identifies potential programs that the municipality will offer resources for individuals to enter the labour market.

The “medium” bracket of this theme identifies between two to three references to programs that allow community engagement. Odense’s representative is the only interviewee who responded in this category, allowing for a stronger identification of this theme and potential future outcomes. The first statement from Odense’s representative “which suggests that municipalities should have the freedom to organize employment initiatives as they wish.” (Appendix 1.B) This was a statement made to explain how the recommendations made by the expert group and further implemented by the government may impact this municipality. The interviewee acknowledges that this change will allow municipalities more freedom to create programs and opportunities for the community. Furthermore, “Likewise, I think it is very positive if the reform brings greater freedom of choice for the individual citizen to choose employment initiatives from ‘Other Actors’.” (Appendix 1.B). This statement reinforces this theme that the reform will positively affect the programs and policies, allowing for smooth and constructive programs to be made for the community. These two statements allow for this

research to examine how this reform is being discussed and how the community will be affected.

The “high” bracket identifies that community engagement/participation was referenced a minimum of four times. Roskilde, Aarhus, and Horsens all fall into the “high” category. “The whole talk about that we're going to eliminate the Jobcenters, I don't believe that. I believe it's just a term.” (Appendix 1.E). The representative of Roskilde stated that they believe the Jobcenters will not purposely be affected by this reform, and these communal resources will remain for people. The statement outlines that the Jobcenters will potentially remain a resource provided by the municipality to the community. “I'm sure of it. But how they're gonna brand it I don't know, because they have talked so much about it.” (Appendix 1.E). The Roskilde representative further identified that they believe the Jobcenter will be rebranded rather than dismantled or abolished. This further provides evidence that the community engagement will be, at least in part, through some of the old programs, provided by the Jobcenters. “So we try to use the private parts to make them take a bigger role. And take responsibility. So we can get our citizens out there” (Appendix 1.E). The statement here from the Roskilde representative identifies that the reform will allow programs and policies to intensify the resources the community will have. Furthermore, identifying that potentially allowing private actors to take a larger role and by increasing responsibility in private parties, individuals will benefit.

“The municipality has free hands to make their own rules regarding to how they want to have a Jobcenter in the future. But for example, the people who have insurance and coverage in ‘a-kasser’, they're going to take the first six months, about the citizens who lose their jobs, their responsibility will be in ‘a-kasse’.” (Appendix 1.D).

The statement from Horsens’ representative identifies that people who are part of a union and those who have been in the labour market before will have potentially new resources from the unions to help ease the load from municipal resources. Furthermore, the representative explained, “But we could, if we want to, have private companies who has this job, doing it for us if we wanted to.” (Appendix 1.D). This statement identifies that although currently the municipality does not employ private companies to help with labour market integration, that in the future this could potentially become an option for their community members. This statement identifies how new programs can be introduced from private actors for the benefit of the community members and those that are otherwise not supported by unions or labour market experience.

“Aarhus Municipality, for instance, has a large employment administration, and authority work... the dialogue with the unemployed is not something that’s traditionally outsourced because it’s a matter of official decision-making.” (Appendix 1.F). This statement from the representative of Aarhus identifies that the programs and policies around employment and the labour market will remain strong and accessible to the public from the municipality rather than the private. The reform potentially allows for more freedom, however, Aarhus will potentially retain strong municipal programs and communal engagement as it currently stands. “So broadly speaking, municipalities have a vested interest in continuing to provide active efforts for newcomers, refugees, and immigrants.” (Appendix 1.F). This statement remains broad, however allows for the identification of supporting programs and policies that include and uplift refugees and immigrants. This statement directly identifies how the municipalities affected by this reform benefit from incorporating programs and policies that help refugees and immigrants integrate into the labour market. The representative continued: “From a financial standpoint, if municipalities don’t make an effort to get people into work, their expenses in the employment area become too high. So, I don’t think we need to be too concerned about that.” (Appendix 1.F) This statement further solidifies how these programs and policies are financially beneficial for the municipality and how Aarhus municipality supports the development and implementation of programs fostering communal engagement. This statement solidifies how not only is this beneficial for the people these programs are targeted at, but the community itself. “The strategies may vary. In Copenhagen, they want to get all the academics into ministries. In Nørre Snede, they want to get people into factories. It depends on local labour markets and populations.” (Appendix 1.F). The representative from Aarhus identifies that strategies and policies may change between municipalities; however, the reinforcement is that policies surrounding community engagement are important for success.

The theme of “community engagement” was present in all of the interviews that this study conducted. Each interviewee portrayed this theme to different extents, where Copenhagen and Esbjerg’s representatives mentioned it once, Odense’s representative identified it two to three times, and finally, Roskilde, Horsens, and Aarhus’ representatives had the strongest presentation of the theme. Copenhagen and Esbjerg municipalities’ representatives identified loose and unclear ideas of what programs and policies may affect their community members with this reform, and how these changes may affect the communal engagement that Jobcenters currently produce. Odense falls into the “medium” category with two statements about communal engagement, supporting that programs and policies will be implemented or developed to ensure that the community will be engaged and remain engaged

during this reform. Emphasising that this reform will allow greater freedom for municipalities to create and improve these programs for the individuals involved, while remaining vague about specifics. Roskilde, Aarhus, and Horsens' representatives encapsulate this theme at the "high" bracket, mentioning this theme a minimum of four times. These municipal representatives identified how programs and policies related to this reform will specifically affect community engagement. Aarhus's representative, unlike the others, specifically commented on how programs directed at immigrants and refugees' communal engagement will benefit municipalities financially. In general, these three municipality representatives push the concept that private organizations will take a potentially greater role due to the reform, allowing for greater engagement from community members, outreach from labour market experts, and communal feedback ability. All of the interviews allowed for the theme of community engagement to be examined; the research identified that this theme was present, but in different intensities. Communal engagement is imperative to assessing the social capital community members might have access to; the programs and policies that the municipality representatives have discussed in these interviews affect the networks and relationships job seekers can develop. Aarhus and Horsens' representatives both identified that immigrants and refugees in Denmark benefit from programs that foster communal engagement and assessed that these programs will be affected by the reform. The theme of community engagement further identifies that community engagement programs are constructive to the social capital of job seekers (Claridge, 2018) and greatly beneficial to immigrants and refugees by ensuring network-building opportunities and increased trust in local programs and initiatives (Appendix 1.F).

3.1.2.2 Equitable Service Access

The second theme that this research examines is "Equitable Service Access" and the ability for job seekers to have fair and inclusive access to the labour market. This theme encompasses the remarks and statements made in regard to how municipalities will make job seeking accessible to everyone and tackle potential barriers to people seeking new jobs. This theme specifically examines equal treatment of job seekers, and programs or policies that relate to ensuring that each job seeker receives helpful and constructive resources and assistance to the job search. Furthermore, discussions of regional access and flexible funding, for job seekers, specifically concerning the availability and access to labour market officials in the local area and the funding allowing for these services to be affordable or free for the consumer. This theme was broken into two categories, whether this equitable access was "mentioned" or "not". This

allows the research to identify how municipalities are discussing how this reform will affect fair and equitable access to labour market experts and resources.

All of the interviews mention equitable access to the labour market as a theme. The Copenhagen interviewee stated, “Directly affected citizens in the City of Copenhagen will be informed by the Jobcenter. The remaining public will be informed by state information channels.” (Appendix 1.A). The statement identifies that due to this reform, the municipality will use the current structure of the Jobcenters to inform job seekers of the new system or programs being implemented, and new people will be informed of labour market resources through official channels, ensuring everyone is given the important information. “It’s going to free up time from paper to actually taking care of the citizen. For every hour we use regarding a citizen’s case, 45 minutes goes to paperwork and 15 minutes goes to talking to the citizens.” (Appendix 1.D). The interview with Horsens’ representative identifies that this new reform will potentially free up resources and time for caseworkers to take a more active role in helping their community members find jobs and opportunities. This statement identifies how Horsens will use this reform to benefit job seekers and make the search more equitable for all candidates through increased case worker time and resources.

“So if the government makes fewer laws, so we can actually make appointments and agreements with the citizens that are one-to-one, what do we need to do to make you go somewhere? Then it would be far better. And we can already see that.” (Appendix 1.E).

This statement from the Roskilde municipality’s representative reinforces that this reform will allow for more resources to be dedicated to job seekers and will increase equitable access to the labour market. The statement outlines how the reform will benefit job seekers by lessening the load of paperwork required, caseworkers and officials will be able to provide greater and more effective resources to those who need it.

“There are framework levels, but municipalities can prioritize target groups they particularly want to focus on. This has always been possible, but now it’s easier. The aim is also to foster stronger local ownership of how the effort is planned and executed.” (Appendix 1.F).

Aarhus’ representative identified that the reform will allow the municipality a greater ability to focus on groups that need greater help. The reform is identified here as attempting to foster a local ownership of labour market access, potentially increasing the resources and dedication to help job seekers. Here, the statement identifies that although policies have attempted to do this

before, the new reform will make it easier to free up resources to benefit vulnerable groups. “Both measures are initiatives that increasingly place the individual at the center.” (Appendix 1.B). This short statement from Odense’s representative was incorporated while talking about how this new reform will place the person at the centre of the process. The shift away from paperwork and more to a person is where this statement is directed, producing more personal resources for job seekers. By placing people at the centre of the process as Odense’s representative suggests, allows for resources to be more accurately and effectively distributed to people who need help. “how the public will be informed, and whether there will be a centralized platform for comparing providers, these matters fall outside the municipal scope.” (Appendix 1.C). Finally, the statement from Esbjerg’s representative identifies that the information will potentially not be conveyed from the municipal offices. This statement alone identifies that information about regional changes, such as how job seekers will be able to access resources, will be informed by the state. Although this statement identifies a limited ability for municipalities to communicate changes to the public and potential new resources from this reform, it does identify that the state will potentially remain an important stakeholder, ensuring that people have equitable and regional access to labour market resources.

All of the responses from interviewees contained the theme of equitable access to services, however, the statements varied in degrees of responsibility. Where Copenhagen and Esbjerg’s representatives believe that the current system and state will dispense the information regarding new systems and regional access, Roskilde, Aarhus, Odense, and Horsens’ representatives identified that the new system will allow for greater resources to be directed at the job seeker. “Equitable Access to Services” is an important theme as new systems may change resources, local access, and funding concerns. These interviews have allowed the municipal representatives to identify how resources will be allocated and better spent on job seekers rather than on paperwork and bureaucracy. Four of the six interviews specifically identified that caseworker resources, such as time and energy, will be freed to allow job seekers better access to resources and, in turn, potentially have better results in the labour market. These interviews have shed light on the potential new avenues municipalities will venture down during this reform to improve the equality candidates have for labour market services.

3.1.2.3 Cultural Competence and Sensitivity

The third theme that this research examined was “Cultural Competence and Sensitivity,” where the programs discussed are identified as culturally inclusive and understanding of the individuals in the labour pool. Cultural competency is, in this research, identified as supports

and programs that have been produced or conceptualized in order to give diverse groups certain resources. These programs will ensure that diverse groups will not be left out or discriminated against in the labour market. As this research is being conducted during the reform preparation, mentions of the programs are examined to identify how these municipalities plan to implement programs for these groups. This theme encapsulates identifications of cultural training, where the case workers and private programs will be properly trained to ensure respect and dignity are maintained for labour pool members. Indications of community liaison roles and adapting services to better support are also important within this theme. It may help improve the integration of a culturally diverse group into the labour market by adjusting how the resources are presented to be more culturally acceptable and having specific members trained to reach out to the community. This theme is broken into three sub-categories, of “low”, “medium”, and “high” (Appendix 3); this is to encapsulate the intensity to which municipal representatives referenced these potential programs.

The “low” sub-category in this theme is identified as having less than 1 reference to cultural competency program development. This sub-category identifies Copenhagen and Esbjerg’s representatives as having no references to developing new cultural competency programs with the reform. Copenhagen’s representative specifically directed the interview to the immigration law without continuing and explaining any actions the current reform would bring to develop cultural outreach. The immigration law will not change with this reform; the “low” sub-category identifies that these municipalities may be focused on grouping all labour market candidates into one box without directing specific help to specific communities.

The “medium” sub-category identifies when the theme of Cultural competency has been mentioned between one and two times. This category identifies that the concept has been discussed and thought about by the municipality to some extent. The Odense municipal representative mentioned cultural competency/sensitivity two times and identified that programs and initiatives need to be created to ensure marginalized people are not left behind. “Experience shows that these individuals need very hands-on help to benefit from employment-oriented initiatives” (Appendix 1.B). When speaking about the marginalized population in Odense, the representative pinpoints that these people need extra help, that is, more hands-on. Furthermore, they state, “Overall, I think it is very positive if municipalities actually get more autonomy to organize employment initiatives locally” (Appendix 1.B). This statement from the representative identifies that the reform will allow for the municipality to be more specialised to the local needs. This broad statement does not only speak about marginalized peoples and

the specific cultural outreach; however, the statement acknowledges that the municipality will now have the resources and ability to specialise services for the local labour pool.

The “high” sub-category contains Aarhus, Horsens, and Roskilde’s representatives, which acknowledged cultural competence/sensitivity a minimum of three times. This sub-category identifies a high level of acknowledgment that this theme is important in the reform. “The important thing is the substance, what happens in the public administration if someone is unemployed, or has reduced work capacity and needs a flex job or early retirement pension.” (Appendix 1.F). This statement from Aarhus’ representative identifies that the important thing about this reform is the substance, the freedom municipalities have to make new programs and incentives. The interview with Aarhus discussed how this reform will potentially affect gender-based differences in refugees’ integration into the labour market. “It’s an intensive, comprehensive effort aimed at the entire family. That way of thinking will be even more feasible under the reform, allowing for local freedom to design such approaches” (Appendix 1.F). The Aarhus representative identified that new programs and incentives will be targeted at the entire family, attempting to diminish the gendered gap in labour market inclusion (Appendix 1.F). Furthermore, the statement identifies that due to the reform, the municipalities will have a greater ability to achieve these goals.

“So here in Aarhus, we’re already exploring solutions tailored to this group. Take the “Staircase to Staircase” project [Opgang til Opgang], where we work holistically with the most vulnerable families in areas like Gellerup, Tilst, and Viby.” (Appendix 1.F).

This is an example given by Aarhus’s representative as to programs and incentives that are more likely to develop due to this reform. Aarhus has taken important steps to reach out to minorities and attempt greater inclusion of these families and communities to be successful in the labour market. Roskilde’s representative stated:

“So more or less, can they work? Do they want to work? We need to do something to make them able to work. It could be the language, or the culture, or stuff like that. So that’s a group we need to work with. So I think that the first group, they’re going to say, don’t even go there. And they’re going to make it more efficient that the unions have to deliver.” (Appendix 1.E).

When speaking about refugees and immigrants, the representative identified that these groups may need better support, potentially in language and cultural integration. They further suggested that individuals already established within the labour market should not be the sole

responsibility of the municipality, and this could free up the resources to introduce these culturally inclusive programs.

“And that's a lot of people. And then the other groups. Some of them are also in the social area. We see them other ways than we of course know already. So they're going to stay in the queue. Of course they are. Because they need support, and they need physical help often.”

(Appendix 1.E).

Roskilde's representative identifies that the municipality offers selective programs to ensure that groups receive the proper support. This statement identifies that marginalized communities as well as disabled and underprivileged peoples receive resources and support from the municipality to ensure success when seeking job opportunities.

“The kind of citizens you are talking about, will still be in the municipality's responsibility to take care of them when they arrive in the municipality, so that would say that it has to go to Horsens municipality, to the department that we are having, who takes care of the effort to bring those citizens, both regarding integration, but also regarding jobs and schools and education” (Appendix 1.D).

This statement from Horsens' representative identifies that the municipality will maintain the responsibility to integrate refugees and immigrants into the local community, mentioning schools and education as examples of current outreach programs.

“It could be an immigrant who has had a terrible journey here, discovered a lot of things, who needs a psychological treatment. So we have tried here to see our Jobcenter also as a health care center.” (Appendix 1.D). This statement examines how Horsens values the resources that the current Jobcenter provides for people new or old to the community, ensuring that the jobcenter is also a centre for treatment and healthcare. This statement is also important to consider how resources have been centralized already to ensure easy access to refugees and migrants. This identifies that programs have been specialised for immigrants and refugees to ensure that proper care and support are given before and during employment searches. Additionally, Jobcenters are not only a pathway to access the labour market but also a place that develops support and care for new community members.

“Cultural competence and sensitivity” has proven to be a theme that has a vast scale between each municipal representative interviewed. Copenhagen and Esbjerg's representatives both do not mention this theme at all, whereas Odense's representative identifies twice how

this new reform will help develop programs and policy. Aarhus, Horsens, and Roskilde's representatives, however, all mention this theme in great detail, with a minimum of three mentions, and these municipal representatives identify the development or improvement of cultural competency programs. The "cultural competency and sensitivity" theme is important to identify how cultural capital is affected by this reform and how this reform can benefit the immigrants and refugees entering the community. Language programs, cultural liaisons, and community engagement programs are important to this theme to identify how individuals' cultural capital is being developed. Copenhagen and Esbjerg's representatives both identify no new culture or language support programs; whereas Odense, Aarhus, Horsens, and Roskilde's representatives all mention programs that will potentially be implemented during this reform to promote and develop individuals' cultural capital. Relying on the current social laws as well as developing new programs to better reach out and support marginalized peoples and communities. In these communities, refugee and immigrant cultural capital may be better respected and considered when entering the labour market due to these programs. Furthermore, these may help them gain knowledge and experience about Danish labour market culture.

3.1.2.4 Understanding Systemic Norms and Practices.

The next theme that this research identified was "Understanding Systemic Norms and Practices", and ensuring that these new systems and programs are employed in a way that encourages understanding from community members. This theme encapsulates the municipal representative's understanding of how one might navigate the new system, and the support or resources in place to assist people in navigating it. This theme uses indications of guidance tools, onboarding support, and orientation programs to determine if a statement falls into this theme. Guidance tools are considered to be resources and programs that municipalities have implemented to ensure people are able to correctly choose and seek employment in the correct area of expertise, interest, or need. Onboarding and orientation support are considered resources and supports that help individuals acclimate to the job that has been successfully obtained. These resources allow for individuals who may be confused or inexperienced in the local labour market to potentially better navigate the norms and practices that current working professionals may excel at. This theme is to identify how the municipalities are supporting people who otherwise may be lost in the labour market process, and how this new reform may affect the avenues municipalities take. This theme is broken into three sub-categories: "clear", "partial", and "absent", in reference to the mentions a representative has made about this theme.

The “absent” sub-category identifies that no mention of these tools appeared. Esbjerg is the only municipal representative that falls into this sub-category. The representative did not mention any tools or resources that the municipality will use in order to assist people to navigate the labour market, new or old. This absence does not mean there will be no systems or resources, however, the interviewee did not mention in any way that their community members will be helped in their labour market navigation.

The next category is “partial”, where one or two mentions of systems or programs are mentioned. Copenhagen and Odense municipalities’ representatives fall into the “partial” category, with one mention of navigation tools by their respective representatives. In response to a question about how this reform will impact immigrants’ participation in integration programs, Copenhagen’s representative stated: “The new reform contains no indications that it will affect the Danish integration law” (Appendix 1.A). This is not a direct statement about specific programs or tools that immigrants and refugees may use to navigate the labour market. However, this statement is directed at the immigration law that is currently in place, which has programs that are already concerned with immigrants entering the labour market and integrating, and Copenhagen’s representative does not mention developing these any further. “In Odense, we will focus on ensuring that this group of citizens will not be lost” (Appendix 1.B). This statement from Odense’s representative is vague, however, it is a clear statement that an emphasis will be made to ensure refugees, immigrants, and minorities will be helped. This statement identifies that guidance support will be created and developed in Odense; however, these avenues are not specifically mentioned. This “partial” sub-category identifies how Copenhagen will rely on existing laws and systems, and Odense will ensure that people will not be lost in the cracks of the reform without specifications.

“Clear” is the final sub-category where municipal representatives mention understanding norms and practices a minimum of 3 times during the interview. Roskilde, Aarhus, and Horsens’ representatives all fall into the “clear” category, where they have discussed in some detail how systems and programs will be employed to ensure that their community members will be capable of navigating the labour market after the reform. “And the social law and the effort to get the refugees regarding job or education or language, we will do a lot of new programs there..” (Appendix 1.D). In reference to the new system, Horsens intends to employ “Arbejdsformidling”. The representative identifies how new programs will be directly implemented within their municipality. This does speak about language and educational resources that will be available there; however, it also identifies that a physical place and physical resources will be available for people to seek help during their search,

including help in navigating all the resources that this centre and organization will contain. “But I don't know... You have a special law in Denmark regarding refugees, so I can't go so specifically into that group of people. (Appendix 1.D). When asked about potentially new programs to help refugees and immigrants adjust to the labour market, Horsens’ representative also mentioned the special law that concerns immigrants and refugees. This does identify that Horsens will potentially develop a combination of new programs as well as improve or use existing programs to help immigrants and refugees navigate the labour market. “So if you expect that 90% gets a job within the first year. That's the goal. And however you get there, it doesn't matter. But you need to get them there.” (Appendix 1.E). In this statement there are clear indications that Roskilde plans to take a very active role in ensuring people can effectively navigate the labour market. Having a goal is clearly an important aspect in this statement, as this gives an important milestone to hit and helps gauge how the efforts are working. “We also just with all our social area. The handicapped people. People who has different difficulties. We talk a lot to the companies about how can we make that a bit better. We have had some small things we've been trying to do.” (Appendix 1.E). A further statement from Roskilde’s representative identifies again how hands-on the personal resources currently are to help people navigate the labour market system. Current programs are already in place in Roskilde to help disadvantaged people enter and navigate the employment programs and systems the municipalities are developing. Roskilde’s representative has explicitly identified that current physical resources are effective and will continue and progress as the reform continues. “Remember, the people engaging with the unemployed are educated professionals like yourselves. They’re not robots demanding things that people can’t deliver. I believe most receive good treatment.” (Appendix 1.F). When discussing how refugees and immigrants will be incorporated into the labour market and avoid falling into a parallel society, Aarhus’ representative identifies that trained social workers are employed to ensure people are accurately informed on options. Aarhus’ representative also identifies that the current system is, in general, good and works to ensure people are capable of navigating the labour market. “If we’re being honest, we’ve already experimented with different approaches here in Aarhus. But some of the smaller municipalities may face a bigger task figuring out what they want to do and how they want to do it.” (Appendix 1.F). This statement is clear that Aarhus has attempted different ways to ensure good communication and access to labour markets for the candidate. This is an example of how Aarhus has effective programs in communication with the labour pool, which was achieved through trial and error.

The theme of “navigating norms and practices” was identified in this research as important to identifying how this reform is impacting communication between labour market officials and candidates. For refugees, immigrants, and other marginalized groups, navigating the norms and practices of the labour market can present significant challenges. Without targeted support programs and assistance, these barriers may become insurmountable. This theme is intended to identify how each municipal representative is talking about potential resources and supports to help navigate and onboard new companies and become part of the Danish workforce. Esbjerg’s representative did not mention programs or support, but Copenhagen and Odense’s representatives mentioned current laws and potential improvements to help minorities. Roskilde, Aarhus, and Horsens’ representatives all mentioned in some detail how new programs will be developed or are being developed to help people enter and maintain access to the labour market. Understanding system norms and practices is important to assess how municipalities are ensuring people are aware and are capable of coping with the Danish labour culture. This development of guidance and onboarding programs will ensure that people have the knowledge and education to effectively ingrain into the labour culture. Ensuring that people have the resources to navigate the labour market will ensure that they are competent enough to develop further labour market skills. There is a wide range of responses that fall into the theme of “Understanding Norms and Practices”, where each municipality has the ability to shape how a candidate can navigate the labour market. This support or lack thereof may drastically affect the ability of people with low cultural knowledge to be able to navigate the labour market norms. Refugees and immigrants may lack certain knowledge about norms in the Danish labour market, which affects the ability to find effective employment. Guidance programs proposed by municipalities may help bridge this gap and help to increase individuals' cultural capital in the Danish market. As discussed in the “high” sub-category, these municipalities are attempting to increase the amount of guidance and support given to minorities, refugees, and everyday citizens to ensure a smaller cultural knowledge gap and potentially improve employment outcomes.

3.1.2.5 Bias and Discrimination Prevention

“Bias and Discrimination Prevention” is a critical theme for assessing how multicultural capital influences individuals' experiences within a changing labour market. Language proficiency, digital literacy, and knowledge of professional norms are important aspects of cultural capital where minorities and immigrants may require extra resources. Individuals whose backgrounds align with the dominant culture may be privileged, while those from marginalised communities

may suffer systemic barriers. This theme assesses how the municipal representatives speak about how programs and policies will ensure that bias and discrimination are mitigated as this labour market reform continues. Discussions about diversity training, anti-discrimination protocols, inclusive hiring, language classes, and integration programs. The discussion of these programs helps to identify how municipalities will use this reform to combat discrimination in the labour market. Ensuring that equitable treatment is given to all people in the labour market and that the potential cultural divide does not impact opportunities. There are three categories in this theme: strong, weak, and none. These are to identify how much each municipal representative mentioned an existing or future program.

The first category that will be discussed is “none”, which is where there is no reference from the municipality about existing or new programs for discrimination prevention. Esbjerg, Copenhagen, and Aarhus fall into this category, where neither municipal representative mentioned programs to ensure bias and discrimination prevention. Copenhagen’s municipal representative did mention that this reform will not affect the immigration law; however, they never mentioned how this reform will provide adequate resources for immigrants in the labour market (Appendix 1.A). Aarhus’ representative mentioned in their statements as well that programs to combat this will fall to the specific municipalities to develop and implement, however, they never mentioned how or what measures would be in place for Aarhus (Appendix 1.F).

The next sub-category is “weak”, where the municipal representatives mention new or existing programs to mitigate bias or discrimination in the labour market. This sub-category is useful to identify how much effort the municipal representative expresses on the importance of these programs. The “weak” category mentions current or potentially future programs between one and two times. “We know [what] works. And we’ll not do so much paperwork. We try to get this citizen out on the factories or getting them to learn the language or educate them and also take care of them regarding to the social law.” (Appendix 1.D). The representative from Horsens identifies that existing social laws will be the guiding light for bias and discrimination prevention; however, they also emphasise how general education and language skills will be important for the integration of outsiders to the labour market.

“But there's a new law now which sets the terms of what you can. But in Denmark, I believe that there's so much control with private operators that of course somebody will cheat or do something that you don't want them to do. But they will often be discovered rather fast.”

(Appendix 1.D).

While discussing how private companies may be regulated to ensure no discrimination, the Horsens representative identified that the laws in Denmark are already strong and effective in discouraging such acts. This statement identifies existing laws that the reform will not interfere with regarding bias and discrimination prevention. With the potentially larger role of private organisations in labour market recruitment, there is a belief that existing laws will ensure proper treatment and inclusion.

“Regarding your questions about the reform's consequences for immigrants and refugees, you should be aware that the vast majority of these citizens will not be included in the reform. They are instead included in the reform on “kontanthjælp” and “arbejdsplicht”. (Appendix 1.B).

Odense’s representative identified here that the labour market reform will, in some aspects, not affect refugees and immigrants; rather, there are other reforms and policies that are in place to ensure correct treatment. This statement specifically identifies that “kontanthjælp” and “arbejdsplicht” will be important during this labour market reform process for refugees and immigrants in Odense.

The “strong” sub-category represents when a municipality identifies a minimum of three statements referencing how bias and discrimination will be managed or mitigated. Roskilde was the only municipality to have fallen into this sub-category, where there were ample discussions from their representative regarding the resources directed at community members, native as well as new, to ensure treatment was fair and equal for all.

“When they get here they get housing and all this stuff. They get a person. All the kommuner will be their contact person....Because they had experience in how to handle these people. And what do they need. And how do we need to do this. To get them the best life possible” (Appendix 1.E).

When asked how this new reform would help refugees and asylum seekers when they arrive, the representative from Roskilde answered this, directly identifying that there will be people on hand for those people. This statement states that people will be given a direct contact person to help transition and navigate a new living system, language, and culture.

“I think she was Bosnian herself or had been or something and she told them about it so that all the personnel who works with these people try and see it from another perspective because

it's easier to just say, oh, it's not that bad and everything is good and there's no social control and all this stuff, but it is there and it's there everywhere” (Appendix 1.E).

This is a further statement that identifies how the specific people working with these groups will be given training to approach these groups of people with cultural knowledge. Identifying that professionals will receive cultural training as an important step to ensure refugees and immigrants are given fair and effective treatment in the search to fit into the labour market.

“And then we have the entire big group in the middle who has bigger problems. So more or less, can they work? Do they want to work? We need to do something to make them able to work. It could be the language, or the culture, or stuff like that. So that's a group we need to work with.” (Appendix 1.E).

The statement does not directly identify how the resources will be distributed to ensure bias prevention. However, the statement does identify that the municipality is aware of a large group of people who will need extra resources and help to ensure that they are capable of entering the workforce without discrimination. In order to mitigate this, learning the language and bridging the gap between cultures have been identified as possible avenues. Roskilde’s representative has extensively discussed physical and human resources that will be dedicated to vulnerable populations in the labour market (Appendix 1.E). These resources will be beneficial to those vulnerable populations in order to mitigate potential bias and discrimination from local employers.

The overarching theme of “bias and discrimination prevention” is an integral idea, to ensure that all peoples are treated equally and that resources will be used to ensure the labour market is beneficial to all. Within this theme, it is equally essential to explore how variations in cultural capital can shape individuals’ access to and attainment of opportunities in the labour market. Ensuring that bias and discrimination prevention programs are in place is an important step to ensure that cultural capital is not a negative factor for job seekers. Having specific contact people, introductions, and language programs will help to ensure refugees and immigrants are not segregated out of the labour market but given proper resources to be productive and important members of a growing market. Copenhagen, Esbjerg, and Aarhus’ representatives made no specific reference to policies or practices that will be used in this upcoming reform to ensure bias prevention, whereas Odense and Horsens’ representatives mentioned the current social law to ensure equality. Roskilde’s representative, however, stated that efforts are underway to provide support through designated contact persons, educational

programs, and organized meetings, intending to ensure that assistance reaches those who need it most. Particular emphasis was placed on addressing language and cultural barriers, which are recognized as significant obstacles to effective integration (Appendix 1.E). Ensuring that bias programs are implemented is important, as people enter the workforce with differing backgrounds, there must be systems to ensure equal treatment. One's cultural norms and knowledge may differ; however, programs should ensure that job seekers are able to access the market equally.

3.1.2.6 Access to Financial and Structural Resources

“Access to Financial and Structural Resources” is a critical theme in this research, as it offers insight into the development and application of human capital within the context of labour market reform. This theme highlights the extent to which job seekers are supported by enabling resources necessary for labour market participation. Structural supports such as transportation, internet access, childcare, and financial assistance are essential for individuals to engage effectively in job-seeking activities and skill development. The ability to afford basic needs – such as travel, childcare, and living expenses – directly influences an individual's capacity to pursue employment opportunities and sustain participation in the workforce. Limited access to these resources can act as a significant barrier to entering or remaining in the labour market, particularly for vulnerable or disadvantaged groups. This theme also examines how the reform impacts individuals' ability to access welfare services and related structural supports, thereby influencing their human capital development (Fang et al., 2009). To facilitate analysis, this theme has been categorised into two sub-groups: one in which access to financial or structural resources is acknowledged or provided, and another where such access is absent or unaddressed. This classification enables a clearer assessment of whether the reform contributes to reducing or reinforcing existing inequalities in labour market access and opportunity.

The “no” sub-category encompasses interview responses in which representatives do not refer to financial or structural resources when discussing this labour market reform. Copenhagen, Esbjerg, and Odense fall into this sub-category, where there is no mention of how the welfare system will be affected or if greater resources will be available to benefit marginalised communities and vulnerable individuals, by their respective representatives. These welfare resources allow for underprivileged and marginalized people to access skill-building and support resources to make them competitive in the labour market. Many of the welfare support systems that are offered by the Jobcenter benefit these communities. This

category is meant to acknowledge a lack of change from that, rather than these municipalities not offering these supports.

The next sub-category of “yes” captures interview responses that recognise financial and structural supports, particularly welfare benefits, as essential foundations for individuals to invest in and apply their human capital. Human Capital Theory posits that individuals enhance their employability and productivity through education, training, and experience (Fang et al. 2009). However, such investments are contingent on having sufficient material and institutional support. Representatives across several municipalities reflected on how the current welfare infrastructure either supports or complicates this process. As the interviewee from Horsens noted, “The amount of social care and money will be the same as it is today. But the government... haha... is often, no matter who is in the government, often changing the law in that area.” (Appendix 1.D) This statement highlights the uncertainty and instability of financial supports, which can undermine long-term planning and self-investment by job seekers. The representative from Roskilde similarly pointed to the structural complexity of the current system, stating: “One of the problems we have had is that we have so many different... benefits... there has been a lot of talk for a couple of years about making it more simple.” (Appendix 1.E) This complexity can act as a barrier to accessing resources needed for skill development or job preparation. Although the representative from Aarhus clarified that: “This reform does not include changes to benefit levels... However, some follow-up legislation may occur,” (Appendix 1.F), the possibility of future changes introduces further uncertainty into the support landscape. These reflections collectively underscore that while human capital is often framed as an individual responsibility, its development is deeply dependent on structural and financial conditions (Wright & Constantin, 2021). Without stable and accessible welfare systems, individuals may lack the means to invest in themselves, limiting the effectiveness and inclusivity of broader labour market reforms.

In comparing the “yes” and “no” categories within the theme of access to financial and structural resources, a clear divide emerges in how different actors conceptualise the relationship between structural support and labour market participation. Roskilde, Aarhus, and Horsens’ representatives’ responses reflect a recognition that financial stability and access to enabling services, such as welfare benefits, childcare, transportation, and simplified administrative systems, are essential preconditions for individuals to invest in and apply their human capital. The benefits mentioned remain vague, however, monetary support from the reform can help to access other benefits such as transportation, internet, and childcare. These perspectives align with Human Capital Theory by acknowledging that individuals require a

minimum level of economic security and institutional support to develop skills and engage in employment effectively (Wright & Constantin, 2021). Conversely, the “no” category is defined by the absence of such references, often focusing instead on institutional structures or procedural elements of reform without consideration for the material conditions that shape individuals’ capacity to participate. This silence risks reinforcing the assumption that all job seekers operate from an equal starting point, thereby obscuring the uneven distribution of resources that underpins labour market inequality. The contrast between these two categories underscores a key tension in the implementation of reform: while policy may aim to enhance individual agency and choice, its success depends fundamentally on the degree to which systemic barriers to human capital development are acknowledged and addressed.

3.1.2.7 Long-term Integration and Career Pathways

The theme of “Long-term Integration and Career Pathways” plays a central role in evaluating how the Danish labour market reform supports or constrains the development of human capital over time. Not only for immediate employability but for sustained labour market participation and upward mobility. Within this framework, reform efforts will be assessed on their ability to provide individuals with more than just rapid entry into employment; they must also facilitate access to meaningful career trajectories, skill-building opportunities, and long-term economic security. This theme captures whether interview participants view the reform as promoting structured pathways for job seekers to develop competencies, transition into stable roles, and avoid precarious or cyclical unemployment. It considers whether policies encourage investment in lifelong learning, vocational training, and industry alignment – essential components for enhancing human capital in a durable way (Fang et al., 2009). Where such pathways are absent or undervalued, the reform risks prioritising short-term activation over long-term integration, thereby limiting individuals’ capacity to adapt to changing labour demands and fully realise their potential within the workforce. As such, this theme provides a critical measure of how reform outcomes align with broader goals of economic inclusion and skill-based growth in the Danish context. This theme is further broken into three main sub-categories: “strong”, “weak”, and “absent” (Appendix 3), based on the amount of referencing that each representative made to projects or policies that specifically encourage long-term employment goals.

The first category is where there are no references to these programs or policies, and where the municipalities have not indicated any new programs where individuals will be provided resources to ensure long-term success. The absence of such references does not

indicate that this theme will not be present in the future, however, there has been no indication from the interviews of Copenhagen, Esbjerg, and Odense that there are currently no new programs that will work to ensure candidates will be given resources to better their long-term success chances.

The second sub-category to “long-term success programs and career pathways,” is where one or two statements are made. The Aarhus representative highlights a crucial, often underemphasised, dimension of human capital development: relational and advisory support.

“But the savings don’t necessarily have to come from cutting meetings, if you’re no longer required to do as much bureaucratic work, and if half the time a caseworker or job consultant spends with a citizen was previously used on paperwork, then you free up time to talk to the citizen.” (Appendix 1.F).

Rather than viewing cost-saving measures as a loss of contact time, this perspective reframes reform as an opportunity to reallocate existing resources toward deeper, more meaningful engagement between caseworkers and job seekers. The quote suggests that by reducing administrative burdens, caseworkers can shift their focus toward mentorship and strategic career planning. This reflects a shift in practice, from managing unemployment as a compliance issue to viewing it as a developmental process and offers a potential pathway for municipalities to enhance long-term employment outcomes without requiring additional investment.

The final sub-category is where three or more quotes have been identified as indicating the theme of “long-term integration and career pathways”. Roskilde and Horsens’ representatives both mention pathways that have been intended to assist job seekers in finding effective and long-lasting employment (Appendix 1.E; Appendix 1.D). Language skills have been highlighted by Roskilde’s representative as an important step for individuals to be employable in the long term: “They need to learn the Danish language from day one... Most of them would be better off if they had learned the Danish language.” (Appendix 1.E). This reflects an understanding that language is not merely a cultural tool but a key form of human capital, enabling participation, communication, and eventual mobility in the Danish labour market. The value of personalised, one-to-one interaction was reinforced through the observation that “if you actually look one-to-one, you’ll get better results. But we have not been able to do that because there’s been rules.” (Appendix 1.E) This indicates that administrative constraints have historically limited the quality of individualised support, but that there is

institutional awareness of the importance of tailored career planning in supporting long-term outcomes.

“And they find out that maybe I can do more now. Maybe I just needed a couple of years to get my body right back on track. And now it feels strong again. So they need to be able to come back. So they need to make that system more simple.” (Appendix 1.E).

Finally, the representative from Roskilde identified that there may not always be a linear direction for members in the labour market (Appendix 1.E). As the representative acknowledged, these resources may need to be adjusted as candidates' abilities and skills adjust and stabilise. The representative from Horsens demonstrates a clear commitment to long-term integration and career development, as reflected in several key statements from the interview. The quote, “So we're very happy that they've changed the law... to take care of the citizen and not use a tremendous time of paperwork,” (Appendix 1.D) underscores a strategic shift toward a more human-centred model of employment support. By reducing bureaucratic burdens, caseworkers can reallocate time and attention to meaningful, sustained engagement with community members – an essential condition for fostering human capital over time. Further, the declaration that “We will do a lot of new programs there,” (Appendix 1.D), particularly in relation to refugee integration, indicates a forward-looking investment in education, language learning, and employment preparation. These elements are foundational to building long-term career pathways and reflect an understanding that labour market integration is a gradual, multifaceted process. Perhaps most significantly, the assertion that “In Horsens, we have not seen the Jobcenter as just a place you go to get a job. We actually have all of our health care system inside the job,” (Appendix 1.D) illustrates a holistic model that recognises the interconnectedness of health, social care, and employability. By embedding health services within employment support, Horsens' representative addresses barriers that often prevent individuals from maintaining long-term labour market participation.

Roskilde and Horsens emerge as municipalities with a strong, articulated commitment to supporting job seekers beyond immediate employment. Roskilde's representative emphasises early language acquisition, simplified welfare processes, and personalised support, recognising that long-term labour market integration requires foundational skill development and psychological preparedness (Appendix 1.E; Wright & Constantin, 2021). Horsens' representative similarly reflects a holistic model, embedding healthcare services within employment support and reallocating administrative time to direct citizen engagement. These

municipal representatives have made many remarks that identify long-term integration and career pathways as a major goal for this reform to check off. Aarhus' representative mentions this theme in passing; however, they clearly identify that there is potential to build and develop programs and policies that will help achieve the long-term goal (Appendix 1.F). Copenhagen, Esbjerg, and Odense's representatives do not mention this theme in the responses. This potentially identifies an area where the municipalities need further development. These programs and resources are important for municipalities as they directly affect the human capital of individuals in the labour market. By closing this wide gap between municipalities, a more sustainable employment market can be fostered; one that prioritises long-term, meaningful integration over quick, short-term placements that often fail to address individuals' real needs or potential.

3.1.3 Comparative Insights from Case Study and Thematic Analysis

Based on the thematic analysis and case study data, several important similarities, differences, and tendencies emerge in how Danish municipalities are responding to the forthcoming labour market reform. These variations have direct implications for the integration of immigrants and refugees, particularly in terms of access to support, local implementation capacity, and the continuity of culturally sensitive services. The analysis is structured around the key patterns that emerge when comparing municipal perspectives, with a particular focus on the implications for immigrants and refugees. The following subsections examine three interrelated dimensions: first, the similarities observed across municipalities in terms of institutional outlook and general reform expectations; second, the differences in local interpretations, implementation strategies, and resource capacities; and third, the broader tendencies that appear to be shaping how municipalities prepare for and enact the reform. Together, these insights provide a comparative foundation for understanding the potential effects of decentralisation on equitable labour market integration outcomes.

3.1.3.1 Similarities Across Municipalities

Municipalities broadly acknowledge that Jobcenters played a critical role in offering accessible, in-person support, especially for individuals who had recently arrived in Denmark and were in the process of navigating an unfamiliar institutional landscape (Appendix 1.D; Appendix 1.E; Appendix 1.F). For many immigrants and refugees, these centres served not only as administrative offices but also as crucial points of orientation within the broader Danish welfare and employment systems (Appendix 1.B; Appendix 1.D; Appendix 1.E; Appendix

1.F). The physical presence of Jobcenters enabled direct interaction with caseworkers, which often proved vital in building trust and ensuring that users received timely and comprehensible guidance. This was particularly important for individuals with limited Danish language skills or little prior experience engaging with public authorities (Appendix 1.F; Appendix 3). In addition to offering practical assistance with job searching and benefit entitlements, Jobcenters also functioned as structured environments through which individuals could access employment pathways and develop vital institutional relationships. These settings often facilitated the establishment of bridging social capital, that is, links to actors and networks beyond one's immediate social circle, such as employers, caseworkers, trade unions, and educational institutions (Putnam, 1995; Bourdieu, 1986). For immigrants and refugees, many of whom may lack existing professional or community ties in Denmark, such relationships are often indispensable to navigating the labour market and establishing economic independence. Moreover, these initial points of contact with public employment services were instrumental in helping recent arrivals begin to understand the normative and procedural expectations embedded in Danish integration and labour market policies (Appendix 1.F). Through participation in activation programmes, consultations, and language-sensitive guidance, individuals were gradually introduced to the values and responsibilities expected of them, including self-sufficiency and active job-seeking. In this sense, Jobcenters provided not only services but also structure, something municipalities viewed as particularly beneficial for individuals in the early stages of their integration process (Appendix 1.F). At the same time, there is widespread support among municipalities for the increased organisational flexibility and professional discretion introduced by the labour market reform (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2025). This perspective is especially prominent in municipalities such as Odense and Roskilde, where interviewees expressed optimism about the potential to reorganise employment services in a manner that better reflects local conditions, institutional capacities, and demographic profiles (Appendix 1.B; Appendix 1.E). The move away from rigidly standardised procedures is seen by some as a necessary step toward developing more context-sensitive approaches, which are particularly relevant for individuals who face complex or intersecting barriers to employment (Fremtidens Beskæftigelsesindsats, 2024).

The opportunity to implement more needs-oriented and holistic interventions is understood by several municipalities as beneficial not only from a service delivery perspective, but also in terms of integration outcomes (Appendix 1.F). By enabling frontline staff to exercise professional judgement, the reform is perceived as creating space for differentiated solutions, particularly for those who may require longer-term support due to linguistic challenges,

interrupted education, or mental health concerns. In this light, flexibility is not seen as merely a managerial tool, but as a mechanism to enhance the responsiveness and relevance of public employment efforts.

3.1.3.2 Differences Between Municipalities

At the same time, municipalities consistently express concern that removing the Jobcenter system may lead to increased territorial inequality, especially if differences in financial and administrative capacity are not addressed. Interviewees from Aarhus and Horsens both highlighted the risk that service provision could become uneven across municipalities depending on local political priorities and resources (Appendix 1.D; Appendix 1.F). This concern aligns with existing scholarship, which notes that decentralisation often results in inconsistent access to services, disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups, such as immigrants (Mailand & Larsen, 2018). Although most municipalities share core concerns and values, clear differences emerge regarding their strategic orientation and implementation capacity. Municipalities such as Roskilde and Horsens demonstrate openness toward involving private actors in service delivery, with Roskilde noting ongoing efforts to increase the role of private companies in placing individuals into jobs (Appendix 1.E), and Horsens indicating that such outsourcing could be considered in future integration initiatives (Appendix 1.D). In contrast, Aarhus Municipality emphasised the importance of retaining public sector control over integration efforts, explaining that authority and responsibility must remain with the municipality, particularly when it comes to decision-making that affects community members' access to benefits and support (Appendix 1.F). This distinction highlights a key difference in how municipalities interpret the reform's decentralisation mandate: some view it as a push toward outsourcing, while others see it as an opportunity to reinforce public service provision.

There is also divergence in how municipalities approach the continuity of integration-specific services. Aarhus indicated an intention to maintain targeted support for refugees and immigrants, pointing to both a moral imperative and a long-term economic rationale for ensuring their successful integration (Appendix 1.F). By contrast, municipalities like Horsens and Roskilde are exploring the possibility of embedding integration support within broader employment services, which may dilute the focus on cultural competence and non-native-specific needs (Appendix 1.D; Appendix 1.E). This reflects broader concerns raised in the thematic analysis under “Cultural Competence and Sensitivity” (see Section 3.1.2.3), where only a few municipalities demonstrated strong alignment with culturally tailored practices (Appendix 3). Differences also exist in terms of digital infrastructure and readiness.

Municipalities such as Odense and Roskilde are integrating digital tools for job matching and service delivery and view these technologies as opportunities to streamline support (Appendix 1.B; Appendix 1.E). However, concerns persist in municipalities like Horsens regarding the exclusion of individuals with low digital literacy, including many older immigrants or those with limited education (Appendix 1.D). These challenges align with findings in the theme “Understanding Systemic Norms and Practices” (see section 3.1.2.4), which identifies a risk of exclusion due to assumptions about user familiarity with bureaucratic and digital norms (Appendix 3).

3.1.3.3 Emerging Tendencies

An emerging tendency across municipalities is a broad acceptance of trust-based governance, with many expressing support for moving away from a control-oriented model toward one that emphasises discretion and professional judgement (Appendix 1.B; Appendix 1.F). However, interviewees also acknowledged the risk that this discretion could lead to inconsistency, particularly if there is insufficient training or quality assurance in place (Appendix 1.D). In this context, immigrants, who may not possess the same capacity to articulate needs or assert themselves in bureaucratic settings, are particularly vulnerable to uneven outcomes (Bourdieu, 1986; Prieur & Savage, 2013). Another tendency is the growing complexity of institutional navigation as responsibilities become more fragmented. With the dismantling of Jobcenters, employment services may now be embedded in departments such as social or health services (Fremtidens Beskæftigelsesindsats, 2024). While this allows for holistic support models, it also risks creating confusion, particularly for newly arrived people unfamiliar with Danish public administration (Appendix 1.D; Appendix 1.F). This risk is exacerbated when service delivery becomes decentralised and digitalised without appropriate guidance mechanisms in place (Fremtidens Beskæftigelsesindsats, 2024). Lastly, municipalities appear to be moving toward increased experimentation and local adaptation, interpreting the reform as an opportunity to redesign systems in accordance with their strategic priorities and demographic needs (Appendix 1.B; Appendix 1.E). While this flexibility is seen as a strength, it also underscores the need for coordinated national oversight to prevent the emergence of a patchwork system where the quality of support varies significantly depending on geography (Mailand & Larsen, 2018).

Thus, while Danish municipalities are broadly supportive of the reform’s goals of simplification and flexibility, their responses and preparations are far from uniform. Differences in financial capacity, strategic orientation, and existing integration infrastructure

mean that some municipalities are better positioned than others to implement inclusive and equitable employment support. These findings reinforce the need for targeted support, inclusive monitoring mechanisms, and clear national benchmarks to ensure that decentralisation does not deepen structural inequalities, especially for immigrants and refugees, whose integration trajectories are highly sensitive to the quality and accessibility of public services.

3.2 Discussion

The abolition of Jobcenters marks a major shift in how the Danish state supports immigrants and refugees seeking access to the labor market. Traditionally, Jobcenters have served as structured hubs coordinating employment initiatives while also connecting individuals to broader social networks and public services. From the perspective of Social Capital Theory, these centers helped immigrants build both bonding and bridging social capital, the latter being especially important for those with limited pre-existing connections in Denmark (Putnam, 1995).

“...they know that they actually work, the Jobcenters. They actually do great work. But they have gotten a terrible reputation. Because everybody is saying that they don't work and there's just too many calls and too much talk and too little action.” (Appendix 1.E)

As this quote shows, municipal officials recognize that, despite bureaucratic flaws, Jobcenters provided a consistent and familiar physical space where individuals could seek help, establish routines, and build trust with frontline workers. The municipalities will gain more freedom and ability to reorganize and reinvent the labour market effort with this reform. The Jobcenter structure is changing, which will inevitably affect immigrants and minorities entering the labour market. Removing this centralized support risks fragmenting these institutional relationships. This disruption is especially harmful for individuals who rely on public institutions not only for job support but also to navigate complex bureaucracies and access welfare services. The symbolic and practical role of Jobcenters as intermediaries between the state and immigrants is significant. As Claridge (2018) points out, social capital is embedded not just in individual connections but also in institutional and geographic contexts. Without a physical anchor like Jobcenters, immigrants may feel less supported and included in Danish society.

Decentralized governance could also worsen inequality. While some municipalities might create innovative and inclusive programs, others, particularly those with fewer resources

or less political commitment, may underinvest in immigrant integration. Without a strong national framework to ensure fairness, immigrant outcomes could vary dramatically by location, creating a postcode lottery that contradicts the principles of the Danish welfare state. This shift away from the national insight can lead to gaps where immigrants and minorities fall due to oversights in implementation. Offering municipalities more freedom may be a good choice, where specific efforts can be developed as needed; however, no oversight may create an unequal system. Cultural Capital Theory further explains why these changes may unintentionally increase exclusion. Bourdieu (1986) describes cultural capital as the skills, knowledge, behaviours, and institutional literacy that people use to navigate formal systems. Many immigrants, especially from non-Western countries, arrive with qualifications that do not easily translate into Danish norms. Jobcenters, while sometimes seen as rigid, offered structured guidance to help immigrants understand local labour market expectations. Several interviewees noted that counsellors played an informal educational role, explaining the “unwritten rules” of job applications, workplace behaviour, and employer expectations.

“Remember, the people engaging with the unemployed are educated professionals like yourselves. They’re not robots demanding things that people can’t deliver. I believe most receive good treatment.” (Appendix 1.F) Without these institutional guides, immigrants may struggle more to convert their existing cultural capital into job opportunities. Prieur and Savage (2013) highlight that institutional engagement remains highly stratified, even in egalitarian societies. The reform risks deepening these inequalities under the guise of simplification. Without tailored support, immigrants may become misdirected, misinformed, or excluded from new employment services. Institutional knowledge may be seen as unachievable as the physical municipal resource is reimagined from the Jobcenter to something else in this reform. Human Capital Theory emphasizes the importance of investing in education, training, and personal development to improve employment prospects (Wright & Constantin, 2021). Jobcenters offered language classes, vocational training, and subsidized internships designed to build immigrants’ skills. These programs provided regular opportunities for skill refinement and learning, which are crucial for long-term employment success. The proposed decentralization threatens to disrupt these pathways, potentially reducing immigrants’ ability to develop the human capital needed for sustainable integration.

A major concern raised by both empirical data and policy literature is the risk of uneven implementation across municipalities. While decentralization promotes local innovation and responsiveness, it also shifts responsibility without always providing equal capacity.

Municipalities differ widely in resources, expertise, and political will, raising questions about horizontal equity. Two immigrants with similar needs may receive vastly different levels of support depending on their municipality. This territorial inequality conflicts with Denmark's traditional universal welfare principles. Additionally, outsourcing services to NGOs, private companies, or insurance funds (A-kasser) introduces further accountability challenges. The legal responsibility remains with the municipality, while the organizations gain greater ability to interact with labour market candidates.

“The agreement that’s just been made doesn’t assign additional legal responsibilities to the insurance funds. Insurance funds know the labor market well, but they’re private associations, and municipalities are the official authorities responsible for labor market availability and job placement” (Appendix 1.F).

Without clear performance standards and national oversight, service quality may become inconsistent. The municipality may need to develop new regulations for private organizations that partake in these programs to ensure that responsibility and treatment are equal and fair. Another unintended consequence is the potential loss of institutional memory and expertise. Many employment counsellors have developed years of specialized knowledge about immigrant needs, local labour markets, and effective interventions. Dismantling Jobcenters risks scattering this knowledge, especially if municipalities fail to retain or reintegrate experienced staff. This restructuring may cause instability with current caseworkers and staff, as well as confusion with current clientele. Without incorporating lessons from two decades of operation, new systems may repeat past mistakes or overlook key client engagement strategies. This loss could delay effective service rollout, particularly in smaller municipalities with limited integration experience. Investments in professional development, knowledge transfer, and inter-municipal collaboration will be essential for successful reform.

Denmark's reform should also be viewed in an international context. Countries like Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden have undergone similar employment service transitions with mixed results. Comparative studies show decentralization alone does not guarantee better outcomes and can increase disparities without strong central oversight. For instance, Sweden's privatized job matching services initially led to lower quality and greater inequality until regulatory reforms were introduced (OECD, 2022). Germany's dual vocational training system only effectively served immigrants after comprehensive reforms addressing language barriers, credential recognition, and employer engagement (International Labour

Office, 2017). Denmark can learn from these experiences by maintaining quality control, ensuring equity, and investing in tailored programs. This reform remains a massive shift from the system that is currently in place; examining similar shifts, such as from Sweden and Germany, may allow Denmark to speed up the transition while also lowering the risk of failures seen in the other countries. A municipal representative stated, “So when you make such a reform, you have to have the patience to get it out to live, but also the courage to adjust it when you see something is not working.” (Appendix 1.D) Policymakers must treat reform as an ongoing process of evaluation, adaptation, and dialogue.

An important remark to make in this study was the limited response from municipal officials. Despite reaching out to over 50 municipal representatives and officials across Denmark, only six agreed to participate in interviews or provide written responses. This low level of engagement in itself signals uncertainty and concern to some degree. Several declined to participate in discussing how the reform, which is set to take effect in early 2026, will be implemented locally. Many others, however, outright explain that it simply is not possible to answer the questions prepared, since the planning phase for the implementation is still undergoing. With less than half a year left until the reform is implemented, this hesitation reflects both the novelty and the complexity of the policy shift. It underscores a broader issue: the absence of clarity and preparedness among some local institutions expected to carry out the reform. The reluctance to respond suggests gaps in communication, planning, or confidence, each of which raises questions about whether municipalities currently possess the knowledge and capacity needed to ensure a smooth transition from the Jobcenter model. As the analysis warns (See section 3.1.1.3), some municipalities appear to have limited resources to adequately prepare for the forthcoming reform. Such disparities in capacity may negatively influence the quality of implementation during the initial phases, potentially resulting in geographic inequalities in service provision between municipalities.

Finally, the ethical implications of these reforms deserve careful attention. Employment policies reflect societal values and priorities, and dismantling a key welfare institution should be judged not only by efficiency but also by justice and inclusion. The Jobcentre has provided a physical space for people to join the labour market without insider knowledge of working systems or norms. Abolishment of this system may create gaps that individuals may fall into if procedures and programs are not developed and monitored. Who benefits from the new system, and who is left behind? Are vulnerable voices heard, and are harms addressed? These questions require transparent monitoring, participatory evaluation, and accountability. Ensuring that there is some governmental oversight and communication may also ensure that municipalities

avoid the same pitfalls others may face. Ethical governance demands a commitment to dignity, fairness, and responsiveness, especially for populations that have faced displacement and discrimination.

Chapter 4

4.1 Conclusion

The abolition of Denmark's Jobcenter system and its replacement with a decentralized, municipality-led employment support model marks a significant institutional shift in how the state engages with labour market integration, particularly for immigrants and refugees. This study has shown that while the Jobcenter model was limited by over-standardization and administrative rigidity, it nonetheless served as a vital infrastructure for mediating access to employment, institutional knowledge, and social support. Jobcenters provided a consistent and physical point of contact for immigrants, offering employment counselling, language training, and social guidance (Jensen & Skaksen, 2024). For many immigrants, Jobcenters functioned not merely as bureaucratic gateways, but as physical and symbolic points of connection to the Danish labour market and welfare state.

The 2025 reform offers the potential for greater flexibility, professional discretion, and locally tailored solutions. If implemented with sufficient oversight, resources, and inclusive design, it may address long-standing critiques of the activation regime and improve employment outcomes. Municipalities now have the autonomy to reshape services based on local needs, potentially fostering innovation, user-centred design, and cross-sector collaboration. Municipalities now decide how to organize employment services, allowing for locally tailored solutions (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2025). The reform also emphasizes dignity in sanctions and responsiveness in support, an important normative shift in how job-seeking is governed. However, these benefits are not automatic. The dismantling of centralized services introduces real risks of fragmentation, inconsistent service quality, and increased inequality, particularly for individuals with limited social capital, digital literacy, or institutional familiarity. The national framework ensured some degree of uniform service quality across municipalities. Its removal may worsen geographic disparities (Mailand & Larsen, 2018). For immigrants unfamiliar with Danish norms or digital platforms, navigating a less standardized system may become significantly more complex.

From a capital theory perspective, the reform risks disrupting bridging social capital, eroding cultural competence in service delivery, and diminishing long-term human capital

development unless compensatory structures are put in place. Without a stable institutional anchor, newcomers may lose access to the networks and guidance that previously helped translate formal credentials and informal competencies into meaningful employment. Immigrants may feel more isolated without familiar support networks or interpretable service environments (Putnam, 1995). In addition, the diversity in municipal capacity and political will means that access to culturally competent, high-quality services may become uneven across regions. A municipality's approach to integration may reflect local ideologies, funding priorities, or demographic pressures, resulting in varied experiences for similar individuals depending on where they live. Private actors may prioritize "easier" clients, sidelining those with fewer qualifications or language skills (Wright & Constantin, 2021). These disparities are particularly concerning given that non-Western immigrants already face systemic barriers such as discrimination, credential non-recognition, and language hurdles.

A successful transition will depend not only on innovative local practices but also on sustained national investment, professional capacity-building, and mechanisms to ensure equity across municipalities (Fremtidens Beskæftigelsesindsats, 2024). National-level monitoring, funding redistribution, and technical support will be critical to avoiding a postcode lottery of integration outcomes. Furthermore, strong mechanisms for user feedback, inclusive design, and collaboration with civil society actors (Fremtidens beskæftigelsesindsats, 2024; Appendix 1.D; Appendix 1.E; Appendix 1.F), including immigrant associations, will be needed to ensure that new systems do not replicate the same exclusionary patterns under a different institutional label.

Ultimately, the future of immigrant and refugee labour market integration in Denmark will depend less on the structure of the employment system itself and more on how well that system responds to the everyday realities of those it seeks to serve. This includes ensuring that new support frameworks remain accessible, culturally competent, and oriented not merely toward short-term job placement, but toward meaningful, sustainable inclusion in Danish society. Integration is not achieved through policy design alone; it unfolds in the daily interactions between people and institutions, in the trust they build, and in the opportunities they are given to belong and contribute.

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