



Full length article

# Mentoring as a way of integrating refugees into the labour market—Evidence from a Swedish pilot scheme

Jonas Månsson\*, Lennart Delander

Department of Economics and Statistics, Linnaeus University, S-35195 Växjö, Sweden



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## ABSTRACT

Despite the fact that mentoring is used as a mean to increase the speed of labour market integration for immigrants around the world there is little evidence of the impacts of this type of programme. This study investigates the impact of a Swedish mentoring programme on the labour market status of newly arrived refugees. The key finding is that mentoring as a universal 'quick fix' does not attract a great deal of support. However, mentoring does show promise for males for whom a positive and significant impact when the outcome is defined as a yearly income exceeding one basic amount (appx. 4200 euro). For females, no short-term effect is found, although it is suggested the absence of an impact may be due to lock-in effects in other labour market programmes.

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## 1. Introduction

Several studies have shown that, when compared to native inhabitants, immigrants and their children in general have lower incomes, lower labour market status in relation to their education, and are disproportionately likely to be unemployed.<sup>1</sup> There have been various explanations for these findings, including discrimination, a lack of language proficiency, and a lack of social and professional networks.<sup>2</sup> One causal factor that is put forward is that immigrant refugees lack country specific human capital (see e.g. Chiswick, 1978 and Borjas, 1985). One way of increase country specific human capital is to allow newly arrived immigrants to interact with native inhabitants. Recent studies have indicated that a variety of mentoring projects can be an efficient way of integrating immigrants and refugees into the labour market.<sup>3</sup>

Outside Sweden, such programmes have been implemented in, for example, the USA, Canada, Australia, France, Germany and Denmark. However, although mentorship programmes are suggested as an efficient route to labour market integration, there is surprisingly little empirical evidence for this being the case due to lack of rigorous impact evaluations. Further, despite a thorough literature search no counterfactual impact evaluation of mentorship programmes targeting refugees has been identified and only a few papers have been found that investigate mentoring impacts in general. Despite this, mentoring

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [jonas.mansson@lnu.se](mailto:jonas.mansson@lnu.se) (J. Månsson).

<sup>1</sup> For an overview of immigrant occupation and/or income in Sweden see e.g. Rooth (1999), Hammarstedt and Shukur (2006, 2007), Gustafsson and Zheng (2006) and Lundborg (2013). Examples of studies on employment and income among the children of immigrants are Rooth and Ekberg (2003), Behrenz et al. (2007) and Hammarstedt (2009). For an overview of the employment and income situation for immigrants and their children across countries see e.g. Zimmermann and Bauer (2002) and Zimmermann (2005).

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. To et al. (2017) for results concerning labour market integration in Australia. Delander et al. (2005) & Tam and Page (2016) for research on language proficiency and integration.

<sup>3</sup> OECD (2007a, b).

is held up as a policy tool appropriate for integrating refugees. The aim of our study is to investigate the impact of a mentoring programme targeting newly arrived refugees in Sweden. The questions for the study are: (i) Does mentoring of newly arrived refugees move them closer to the labour market? and (ii) Are there variations within the mentoring projects that influence the outcome?

The outline of this study is as follows. First we give a short description of the mentoring programme being evaluated. This is followed by a survey of previous evaluations of mentoring in general, with a focus on labour market outcomes. The evaluation design is then described, and a presentation of the data used is provided. In the next section the results of the study are presented. First, the results of the impact assessment for the whole population are described, together with a breakdown by gender. The impact assessment reveals that, over the short follow-up period, the programme seems to have the desired impact only for men. In the second part of the results section we therefore consider how the different aspects of the projects, such as mentoring intensity and the characteristics of the mentor, influence the outcome. We limit the analysis to males, since they are the only participants for which the mentoring programme is shown to be effective. In the last section our conclusions are stated.

## 2. The Swedish mentoring programme for newly arrived refugees

In 2010 the National Board for Youth Affairs (NBYA)<sup>4</sup> was commissioned by the Ministry of Employment to pursue an experimental programme of occupationally oriented mentorship. The budget allocated to the NBYA for this purpose was to be distributed among non-profit organisations for use in mentoring projects. The NBYA funded nine organisations that had applied for this funding. These projects started in the second half of 2010 and finished in 2012. One objective of the mentoring programme was to encourage designated categories of newly arrived and unemployed refugees to establish themselves in the labour market or to start a business. Another objective was to make it easier for non-profit organisations and associations in civil society to take part in social efforts that would give refugees a firm position in the labour market. Since the programme targeted refugees who were registered as unemployed, it was also an instrument of labour market policy. Therefore, the Employment Service had a central role in the programme.

The target groups of the programme were refugees, others deemed in need of protection and persons granted a residence permit because of exceptionally distressing circumstances.<sup>5</sup> Also included were people who had been granted a residence permit by virtue of their connection to someone belonging to one of these categories. For the sake of brevity, members of any one of these groups are called refugees in this study. The mentoring programme was designed for those who had lived in Sweden for a period not exceeding five years after having been granted a residence permit. The projects were carried out by the nine organisations referred to above, with each project targeting different groups. For example, one project targeted those with little education, another those with higher education, one addressed women's needs, and others were for the benefit of refugees from certain regions or countries, etc.

According to the government's commissioning document, a participant in a relevant target group should be matched to a mentor on the basis of the refugee's previous occupation, education or experience. The NBYA's instructions stated that the mentoring should be based on clearly formulated objectives as regards the roles of the mentor and the participant. The relationship should be aimed at maintaining the refugee's vocational identity and at establishing contacts with occupationally active persons in the same professional category. The Government instructed the NBYA to evaluate the mentoring programme. As was plain from this instruction, the question at stake for the evaluation was the extent to which participation in the mentoring projects had an *impact* on the probability of participants, when compared to non-participants, becoming employed or starting out in business. According to the commissioning document for the mentoring programme, projects that were aimed at women should be particularly supported and encouraged. Therefore, we also investigate differences between female and male participants regarding the probability of their being employed after having completed their participation in a project.

## 3. Previous research on and evaluations of mentoring programmes<sup>6</sup>

As mentioned in the introduction, we have not found any studies that look at the employment impact for the target group in this study—refugee immigrants. However, there are a number of surveys of mentoring programmes that target other groups. Among these, [Underhill \(2006\)](#) has the greatest focus on labour market outcomes.<sup>7</sup> [Underhill \(2006\)](#) presents the results of 106 studies of mentorship programmes, but only 14 of these studies use a control group design.<sup>8</sup> At first glance the results point towards there being positive impacts of mentoring on participants' careers and incomes which, to some extent, also could suggest that mentoring is used by refugees as a means for labour market integration. However, [Underhill](#)

<sup>4</sup> To reflect its broader role, this was renamed the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society in 2014. The original NBYA commissioning document was changed to refer to the new authority.

<sup>5</sup> Subsidiary protection in accordance with joint EU regulations as well as protection in accordance with national legislation.

<sup>6</sup> This section builds on [Hammarstedt and Månsson \(2011\)](#).

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. [Merriam \(1983\)](#), [Jacobi \(1991\)](#), [DuBois et al. \(2002\)](#), [Allen et al. \(2004\)](#), [Underhill \(2006\)](#) and [Eby et al. \(2008\)](#).

<sup>8</sup> [Fagenson \(1989, 1994\)](#), [Chao et al. \(1992\)](#), [Yoder \(1992\)](#), [Corzine et al. \(1994\)](#), [Mobley et al. \(1994\)](#), [Baugh et al. \(1996\)](#), [Chao \(1997\)](#), [Schwerin and Bourne \(1998\)](#), [Ragins and Cotton \(1999\)](#), [Seibert \(1999\)](#), [Nielsen et al. \(2001\)](#), [Wallace \(2001\)](#) and [Day and Allen \(2004\)](#).

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