Young unemployed migrants in Iceland

Opportunities on the labour market and situations after the economic collapse with regard to work, social and financial aspects

Kristín Ása Einarsdóttir

Lokaverkefni til MA-gráðu í Félagsfræði

Félagsvísindasvið

HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to see what factors impact on young unemployed migrants´ opportunities on the Icelandic labour market, and determine their situation after the economic collapse with relation to work, social and financial aspects. In this qualitative research interviews were taken with 14 people, including two focus groups with eleven unemployed migrants living in Iceland, and three individual interviews with specialists involved in migration issues.

The results indicate that a limited ability in the Icelandic language is the factor that has the greatest impact on migrants´ opportunities on the Icelandic labour market. All interviewees placed particular emphasis on this matter. Additional factors such as prejudice, racism and negative media coverage are also linked to restricting opportunities on the labour market. It also appears that the situation concerning courses in Icelandic for foreigners is not good enough and official support to learn the language has been lacking in comparison with neighbouring countries.

Results also indicate that after the economic collapse job requirements changed, with demands for good fluency in Icelandic becoming a necessity. Migrants have less chance of getting a job after the crisis hit than do Icelanders, with Icelanders rather hiring their compatriots. Moving back to the home country is not a solution, according to the participants, as the situation is no better there. The research shows that the situations of those migrants interviewed has changed for the worse after the economic collapse, based on the factors mentioned above.

Abstract in Icelandic

Markmið þessarar rannsóknar er að sjá hvaða þættir hafa áhrif á tækifæri ungra atvinnulausra innflytjenda á íslenskum vinnumarkaði, og hvernig staða þeirra er eftir efnahagshrunið í tengslum við atvinnu, félagslega og fjárhagslega þætti. Í þessari eigindlegu rannsókn voru tekin viðtöl við 14 manns, þar af tvo rýnihópa, með ellefu atvinnulausum innflytjendum sem búa á Íslandi og þrjú einstaklings viðtöl við sérfræðinga sem tengjast málefnum innflytjenda.

Niðurstöðurnar benda til þess að takmörkuð íslenskukunnátta sé sá þáttur sem hefur mest áhrif á möguleika innflytjenda á íslenskum vinnumarkaði. Allir viðmælendurnir lögðu mikla áherslu á þennan þátt. Þættir eins og fordómar, kynþáttafordómar og neikvæð umfjöllun fjölmiðla er einnig tengd takmörkuðum möguleikum á vinnumarkaði. Það kom einnig fram að málefni tungumálakennslu fyrir útlendinga á Íslandi er ekki nógu góð, og stuðningur frá yfirvöldum til að læra tungumálið kom illa út í samanburði við nágrannalönd.

Niðurstöður gefa einnig til kynna að eftir efnahagshrunið hafi atvinnuauglýsingar breyst, þar sem kröfur um góða íslenskukunnáttu varð skilyrði. Innflytjendur hafa minni möguleika á að fá vinnu eftir að kreppan skall á en Íslendingar, þar sem Íslendingar ráða fremur samlanda sína til starfa. Flutningur til heimalands er ekki lausn við atvinnuleysinu að mati viðmælenda þar sem ástandið er síst betra þar. Rannsóknin sýnir að aðstæður þeirra innflytjenda sem viðtölin ná til hafa breyst til hins verra eftir efnahagshrunið, byggt á ofangreindum þáttum.

Foreword

This research is a 60 ECTS master thesis in social science at the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences at the University of Iceland. The main purpose of the project is to shed light on migrant issues in Iceland.

It is my hope that the results of the research will be of benefit to the authorities and professionals responsible for migrant issues in Iceland. It is my wish that this field will be given more attention and greater resources used to support and encourage foreigners in Iceland to learn Icelandic and so improve their integration into Icelandic society. Not much research is available on this subject and this study aims to improve that.

I am myself living in Copenhagen, which has increased my interest in migrant issues. As an exchange student at Copenhagen University for one year, I also had the opportunity to take courses in Migration and Conflicts issues, which further added to my interest. Language courses I have attended in Denmark have also aroused my curiosity as to how, or if, language teaching for foreigners in Iceland is organized or supported.

The thesis was written under the supervision of Guðbjörg Linda Rafnsdóttir, Professor in sociology and Head of the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences at the National University of Iceland. I would like to thank her for her untiring assistance, encouragement and advice throughout this process. I also want to thank Neil McMahon for his proof-reading and suggestions. Then I would like to thank Ösp Árnadóttir for her help, the Red Cross for facilities and all the interviewees for their time and invaluable contribution. Special thanks go to my brother, Ólafur Magnús Einarsson, for his invaluable technical assistance. Last but not least, I would like to thank my daughter, Fanndís Sara Guðjónsdóttir, for her love and joy, and my family and friends for their support, their belief in me and their patience throughout the last year.

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1 Introduction

Iceland is a rather young country when it comes to migration issues and is therefore not very experienced in receiving migrants or integrating foreign newcomers into its society. Within a few years during the last decade, there was a sharp increase in migration to Iceland due to a demand for labour in the economic upswing. The more developed countries in the world have experienced significant increases in migration and are expected to experience even greater increases in the coming years. Europe is hosting the largest number of international migrants, or one-third of the global total. Consequently, it is very important to give proper attention to migration affairs in Iceland, and all the other related issues.

Scholars in the field of migration studies have pointed out the importance of giving migrant issues more attention. Migrants are more likely to suffer from economic downturns and they have borne the brunt of restructuring and recessions in Europe (Castles & Miller, 2009). Those who are visitors in a country and/or from a minority ethnic group run the risk of social exclusion. In societies having a dominant ethnicity and marginal 'others', the others do not have the same opportunities as the dominant ethnicity (Wallerstein, 2004). Because of numerous factors that have significance, it has also been pointed out that it is very important for countries to have the integration of migrants as a priority in their policies (OECD, 2009a). If these matters are not addressed properly it can be a cause for serious social conflict (CIRRA, n.d.).

The goal of this research is to examine what factors impact on young unemployed migrants´ opportunities on the Icelandic labour market, and evaluate their situation after the economic collapse in relation to work, as well as social and financial aspects. By interviewing 14 people, including eleven unemployed young migrants in Iceland and three specialists involved in migration issues, each in a different way, it is sought to gain an insight into and a deeper understanding of these matters.

This research has both scientific value as well as practical benefits. Through this study, migrants in Iceland get a voice and specialists in migrant issues get to express their views based on their experiences on the matter. Icelandic society is seen through the migrant 'eye of the outsider'. They get to identify the challenges they have encountered in Iceland, how they experience Icelandic society as foreigners and what they think is important in relation to integration into Icelandic society. They get to tell about how they have been coping with the reality of living in Iceland and to criticize things that could be better regarding the predicament of being a foreigner in Iceland. Hopefully this study can be advantageous for Icelandic society, which can learn from the results.

The reference management, 'Citation and Bibliography' in Word 2007 was used in APA style for all references in this essay and in outlining the bibliography chapter at the end.

In the second chapter the focus is on theoretical background and presents a discussion of worldwide migration, migration to Iceland, worldwide consequences after financial crises, research in this field in Iceland, the World Systems Theory and the power of language.

The third part describes the study's methodology, outlines the research questions, the participants, the methods, data collection, processing and analysis. Finally, there is a discussion of the strengths and limitations of the research.

The fourth section describes the main conclusions of the interviews with the migrants and the specialists. They contain the major determinants that impact on young unemployed migrants´ opportunities in Iceland and their situations after the economic crisis. At the end of each chapter there is a summarized discussion.

In the final section there are discussions, findings and the research questions are addressed. The main results are analyzed, the validity of the research discussed and suggestions for improvements are submitted.

2 Theoretical tools

2.1 Migration

In different ways, depending on time periods, people have always moved across borders in search of a new life, adventure and to seek new opportunities. In many cases they also move to escape difficult situations in their homeland, sometimes it is a matter of life or death. Developments in transport and communication technologies have also made mobility much easier after the mid 20th century, enabling people to migrate in an easier way than before (Edgar, Doherty, & Meert, 2004; Castles & Miller, 2009). A consequent decline in the cost of transportation has further reduced the effects of distance during the last decades (Pytlikova, 2006). Greater freedom in labour movement, e.g. within the EU and EEA countries, as well as initiatives for students, have made mobility in Europe even more effortless (Kunz & Leinonen, 2001), as well as in OECD countries where international study has become more attractive with various forms of benefits for students (OECD, 2010). Migration can both refer to moving between countries and regions; in this study, however, migration in relation to moving across national borders is the focus point.

In discussions on migration there is frequent reference to the push and pull factors that affect people's decision to migrate. These factors are rooted in neoclassical theory where something pushes one away from the home country and draws one towards the receiving country (Borjas, 1989; Chiswick, 2000). These theories have though been criticized for being all around beneficial effects where economic or other beneficial reasons are said to explain the people

migrating (Ghosh, 2007), but the matter is more complex than this. For example, it is rare that the poorest people of the developing countries are moving to richer countries where research on immigration has confirmed that most commonly migrants are middle-class people, from countries where economic and social changes are taking place (Wallerstein, 2004; OECD, 2010). These theories have thus failed to explain why so few people move, given the huge differences in wages across the geographical space (Pytlikova, 2006), as persons from the poorest countries show the lowest propensity to migrate (OECD, 2010). The actuality is that it is not the poorest people that migrate, though they may need it the most, because they lack the money needed to travel, do not have the alternatives needed to become aware of opportunities elsewhere, and lack the social capital and networks needed to successfully find work and to cope in a new environment (Castles, 2000).

2.1.1 Migrants

There are several different kinds of migrants and migration in itself is a dynamic social process and in many cases the root of many political and social problems. Let us classify the major migrant groups in brief. First there are forced migrants, people who flee their homes to escape persecution or conflicts. Second, you have asylum seekers, i.e. people who have crossed an international border in search of protection, but whose claims for refugee status have not yet been processed. Third, there is resettlement where refugees are permitted to move from countries of first asylum to countries able to offer long-term protection and assistance. And then the forth, voluntary migrants, who move for economic or other beneficial reasons (Castles & Miller, 2009), voluntary migrants is the category discussed in this thesis.

In this research the term migrant is mainly used as Castles and Miller (2009) choose to do. The term immigrant is also used by some scholars and is also used

in this paper. There is no attempt to distinguish between the meanings of these two terms here, and they are used to describe the same category (voluntary migrants), as explained above.

The common original plan of numerous migrants is to stay for a short-term period in the receiving country, in many cases to earn money and then move back home or to another destination. Whether the migrant's initial intention is temporary or permanent movement, actuality has shown that many migrants become settlers in the migrating country (Glick Schiller, 1999; Jones, 1990; Castles & Miller, 2009). Many factors can transform the initial plan to stay for a short time. People have in many cases found spouses in the host country or sent for their spouses from home and so put down roots in that way. Migrants' children connect to social networks through school, hobbies and friends and the settlement takes on a more permanent character. Relatives from back home even move to join the family in the receiving country (Jones, 1990; Castles & Miller, 2009), a family reunion that makes moving back home more unlikely. Financial obligations due to property purchase or other investments in the host country can also make it difficult for migrants to leave (Castles & Miller, 2009).

2.1.2 The extent of migration

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2009), the estimated number of people migrating in 2010, approached 214 million, or 3.1% of the world's population of 6.5 billion people. An international migrant is considered by the UN to be a person living in a country other than that in which he or she was born. Figure 1 shows the estimated number of international migrants divided by the total population in each country, expressed as a percentage.

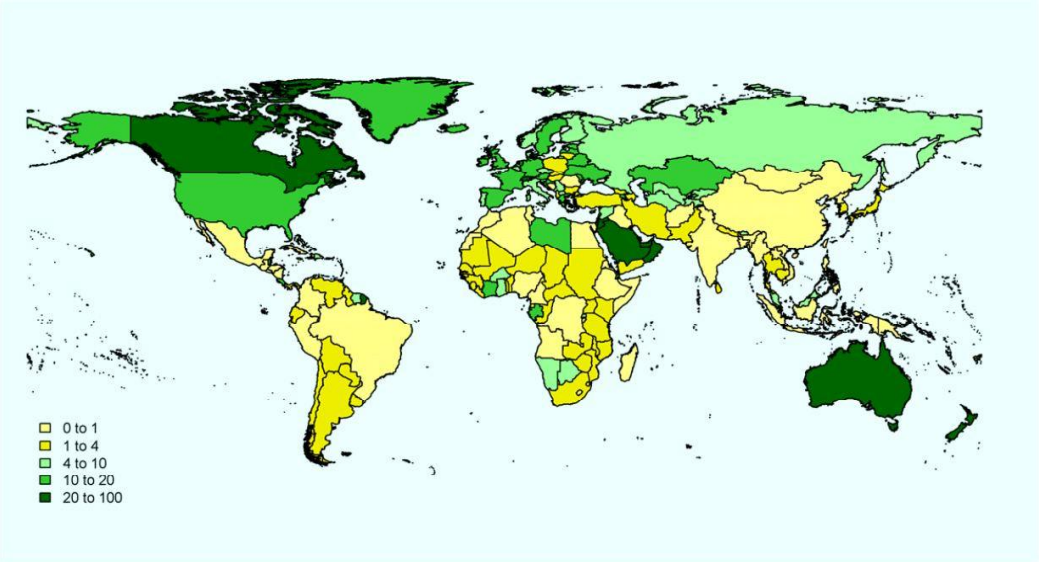

Figure 1 - Migrant stock as a percentage of total population, 2010 (United Nations, 2009)

The more developed countries are expected to experience the largest increase in the migrant stock and between 1990 and 2010 those areas are assumed to have gained 45 million international migrants, an increase of 55%. This means that a huge number of individuals and families move between regions and countries every day. Figure 2 shows the estimated average exponential growth rate of the international migrant stock in 2005-2010, expressed in percentage terms.

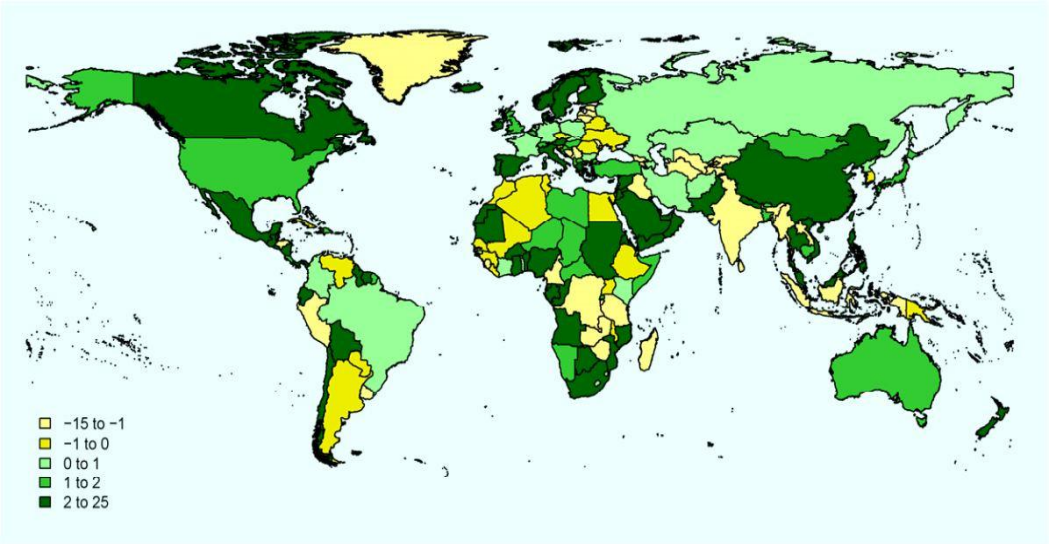

Figure 2 - Average annual rate of change of the migrant stock, 2005-2010 (United Nations, 2009)

In 2010, international migrants are projected to account for 10% of the total population residing in the more developed regions, up from 7.2% in 1990. Europe is hosting the largest number of international migrants, and is expected to host almost 70 million international migrants in 2010, one-third of the global total. Asia has the second largest migrant population (61 million), followed by North America (50 million), Africa (19 million), Latin America and the Caribbean (7 million) and Oceania (6 million), as shown in Figure 3.

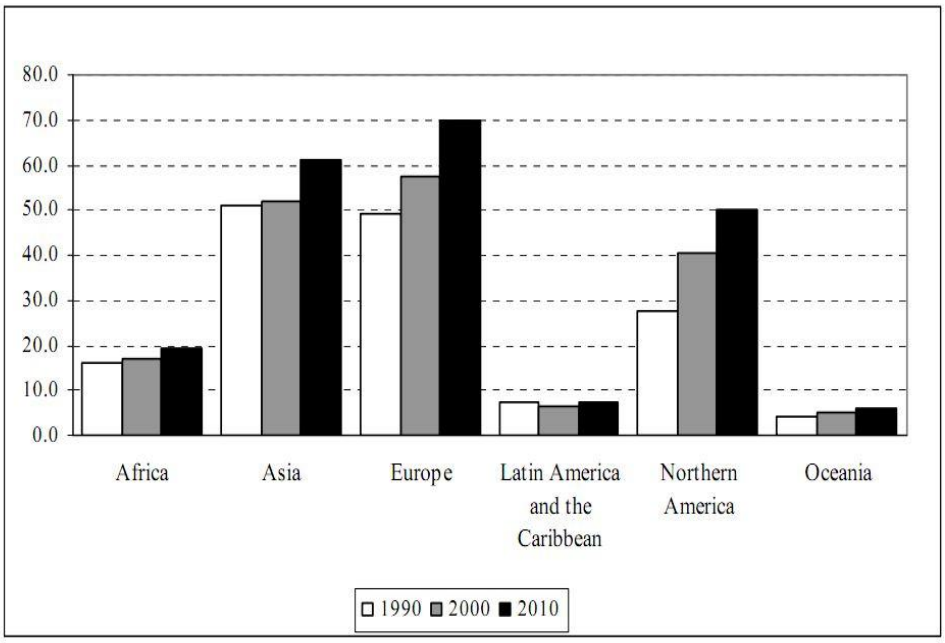

Figure 3 - Estimated number of international migrants by major area, 1990-2010 (millions) (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2009)

The number of countries with more than one million inhabitants, and where international migrants constitute more than 10% of the population, is expected to rise from 29 countries in 1990 to 38 countries in 2010. Only 29 countries will account for 75% of all international migrants worldwide in 2010 (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2009). This clearly shows that some countries are more popular than others regarding migration, but many factors can affect that decision, and they will be discussed further below.

2.1.3 Factors controlling migration and development

Economic, social and political factors are the fundamental factors that shape today's world, according to Castles and Miller (2009). Millions of people are seeking work outside their countries of birth. Supply and demand, quality of life

and transportation are among the factors that control migration. Some sociologists have in fact linked the new global migrations and their consequences to the increasing move into the capitalist mode of production, arguing that the new international migration is a direct consequence of globalization, including economic markets, cultural transfers and social ties. In this view the movement of labour is linked to the capitalist mode of production in peripheral countries, accompanied by new demands for cheap labour in the core countries, and this is identified as the chief source of mass migration (Heisler, 2008).

Castles and Miller (2009) also argue that globalization is the crucial context for twenty-first century migration. They maintain that to fully understand changes in the world order and the social position of workers in advanced economies, we have to analyze the global restructuring of investment, production and trade, and the way this has changed economic and social conditions in migrant-sending, transit and receiving countries. When the economies of Western Europe and North America faced little international competition, workers´ unions were strong. Trade unions were able to negotiate better wages and conditions, while social democratic political parties could introduce welfare state provision to protect workers and their families. Migrants benefitted from this also as they got work in unionized factories and thereby received high wages and strong welfare provisions, though they still were vulnerable to exploitation and their economic and legal situations were worse than the natives, as is invariably the case.

When more international competition emerged in the 1970s with the decline in profit margins, it led to a new international division of labour called the second phase. Labour intensive production was moved to low-wage economies, while migrant labour recruitment for the North was stopped. This led to the closure of many factories and the weakening of unions. With the 1980s new right-wing governments, restructuring was pushed forward, which opened the way for a reduction in workers´ rights. The third phase came after the success of neoliberal globalization in the 1990s, which brought a new demand for migrant workers;

but now, unlike in the 1960s - 1970s, with little protection for workers, weak unions and fragmented labour markets. This opened the door for exploitative employment practices and the existence of ethnic communities with a varying capacity to help newcomers in the job search (Castles & Miller, 2009).

There are several reasons to expect the migration to endure, along with an ever-growing inequality in wealth between the North and South, which again is likely to encourage increasing numbers of people to move in search of better living standards. In addition, political or ethnic conflict in a number of regions could lead to future mass exoduses, and the creation of new free trade areas can also cause movements of labour (Castles & Miller, 2009). Economic crises in the past have shown that financial reasons alone do not stop migration flows and are attributed to the conditions not being any better in the sending country, as it also is experiencing economic difficulties (Martin, 2009). Migrants can therefore hesitate as to moving back to conditions that made them leave their country in the first place (Wojtyńska & Zielińska, 2010).

But even though migration today is becoming easier, migration between countries is generally more complex than a single decision by an individual to uproot himself or herself in search of a better life and so cut family and cultural ties with home. And even though the transfer itself goes very well and the integration to the new country happens quickly, it is a long process that affects this person for a lifetime, the relatives, friends and his or her future generations. This is a complex process that is rooted in social change and affects both the country moved from and the country of destination (Castles & Miller, 2009).

2.1.4 Worldwide consequences after the economic collapse

When studying the effects of the world economic and financial crisis that begin in 2008, it is clear that the economic downturn has substantially changed

migration and lessened labour market pressures. Countries first hit by the crisis now show large increases in unemployment rates and decreases in employment rates amongst immigrants, both in absolute and relative terms. Net migration has tended to decline during past economic downturns, because employers need fewer workers, there are fewer job opportunities to attract immigrants and because governments themselves modify policies to reduce entries, for example by setting lower numerical limits on labour migration where these exist or by removing certain occupations from labour shortage lists (OECD, 2009b).

In the early stages of migration, most migrants got jobs and were rarely unemployed. Today this is more mixed, in Southern Europe (apart from Italy), unemployment rates for the foreign born are only slightly higher than for the native born. But in Western Europe migrant workers have borne the brunt of restructuring and recessions, and have much higher unemployment rates than local workers (Castles & Miller, 2009; OECD, 2010). There are a number of possible reasons for migrants´ greater sensitivity to changing economic conditions, including the types of jobs that immigrants perform, often less stable and low-skilled employment on the margins of the labour market. Such employment tends to be more affected by the economic situation. Likewise, immigrants, in particular immigrant males, are more often employed in cyclically-sensitive sectors, such as construction (OECD, 2009a, 2010), as was the case in Iceland (Vísir.is, 2006).

Migrants are also harder hit than native-born workers because they are over represented in delicate industry and other unstable jobs, they have less secure contractual arrangements and they are subject to selective hiring and firing. In addition, both immigrants arriving and those who lose their jobs during the downturn seem to have particular difficulties entering or re-entering the ranks of the employed on a stable basis. For example, it is now for the first time in many years that the percentage of immigrants employed in the United States has dropped below the comparable figure for the native-born (OECD, 2009b).

An OECD (2009a) report on migrants and labour market integration of immigrants and their children in Norway, demonstrates that evidence from many OECD countries shows that immigrants, in particular recent arrivals, tend to be especially affected by an economic downturn. The available tentative evidence on unemployment suggests that this is also the case in Norway in the current downturn, particularly with respect to the many recent labour migrants from the new EU member countries. Since this can have a lasting effect on their labour market outcomes, it is important that the integration of immigrants remains a priority in policy-making.

2.2 Migration in Iceland

Over the last decade, or even decades, there was enough work to be had in Iceland. There was a big economic upswing, the construction industry was blooming and huge projects, particularly in hydro construction, were in progress. Companies needed more and more workers and in fact the demand for labour far outstripped availability. The lowest paid jobs, for example in the fishing industry, care, cleaning, construction and various service jobs were having difficulties in finding manpower. In addition, Icelanders in the middle of an economic boom seemed unwilling to work certain types of jobs, let alone poorly paid ones (Skaptadóttir, 2004). There was a massive demand for workers and large numbers came from abroad answering the call of Icelandic employers. Businesses in rural areas were also a gateway, currently open to people who wanted to move to Iceland (Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security, n.d.).

When Iceland joined the European Economic Area (EEA) in 1994 the inner market of the European Union (EU) was also extended to Iceland. This meant freedom of movement of labour between European countries including Iceland. The EEA membership thereby gave citizens in countries in the EU employment

and residence rights in Iceland. These rights also apply to the population of Eastern Europe, whose countries joined the EU in the spring of 2004 (Bergmann, 2008). Since 2005 when the increase in migration to Iceland began to grow markedly, most came to work in construction. The following years increasing numbers also came to seek employment in various service sectors, particularly cleaning and care (Directorate of Labour, 2008).

Most of the workers that came to Iceland in relation to the upswing were voluntary migrants. In the middle of the financial bloom many companies in Iceland were composed of more foreign workers than Icelandic. This financial expansion was, at least partly, because of a political policy pursued in Iceland for years, a right-wing policy that adopted neo-liberal economics, beginning in the 1990s (Sanger, 2008). Taxes on companies and capital were low and the banks were deregulated in 2001, which lead to very easy access to money through credit markets. This created, what today is called an economic bubble that led to the Icelandic banking system becoming much larger than the national economy (O'Hara, 2009). The Central Bank of Iceland and the government could therefore not guarantee the repayment of the banks´ debts, leading to the collapse of all three of the country's major banks in late September and early October 2008 (Haarde, 2008).

Associated with the previously-mentioned financial upswing, Iceland experienced strong growth in immigrant population. From 2000 to 2008 the number of inhabitants in Iceland went from 279 thousand to just over 315 thousand, an increase of about 13%. The greatest increase was on average 2.4% per year in 2006-2008, and bear in mind that a population growth of 2% per year is considered to be very fast. Migrant workers are the main reasons for this rapid population growth (Garðarsdóttir & Bjarnason, 2010).

2.2.1 Changes in Iceland

An immigrant is defined by Statistics Iceland (2010) as a person born abroad with two foreign born parents and four foreign born grandparents, whereas a second generation immigrant is born in Iceland having two immigrant parents. In 1996, 1.8% of the Icelandic population were immigrants (Statistical Series: Population, 2009), but by 1 January 2010, the figure had risen to 8.2%. This is an increase of 6.4% in only fourteen years. The number of immigrants fell from 2009 to 2010, being 9.6% of the population 1 January 2009 (Statistics Iceland, 2010). The changes in proportion of immigrants in Iceland are shown in Figure 4.

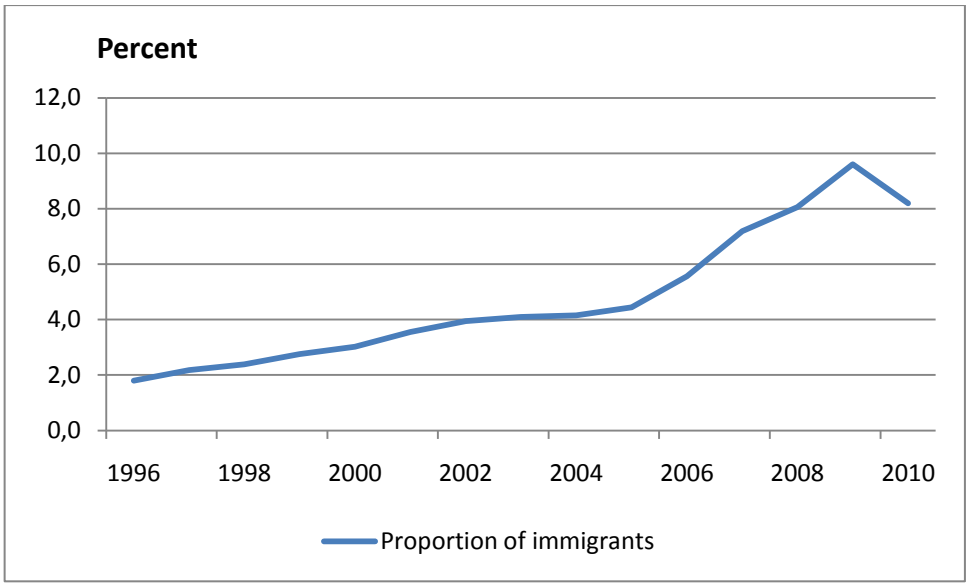

Figure 4 – Immigrants in Iceland 1996-2010 (Statistical Series: Population, 2009; Statistics Iceland, 2010)

The proportion of Icelanders with no foreign background and first and second generation immigrants are shown in Figure 5.

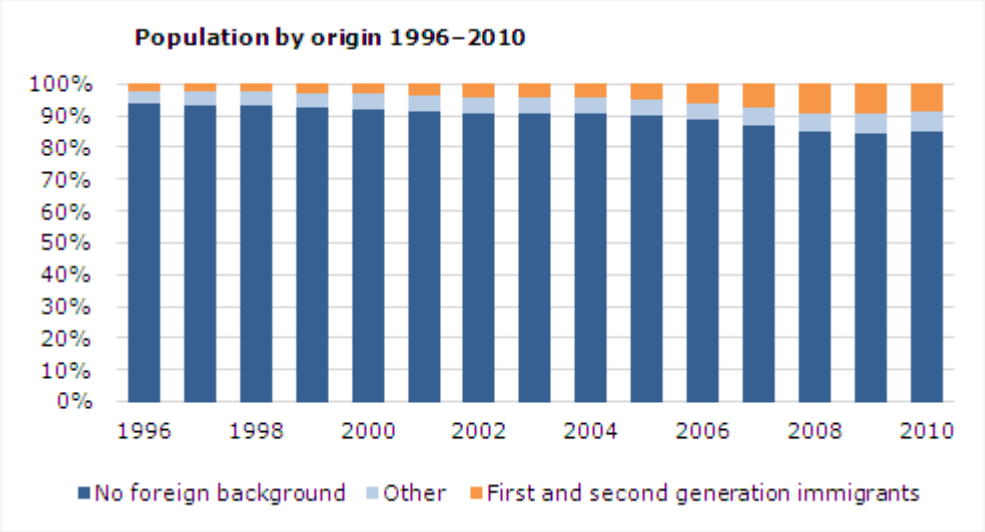

Figure 5 – Population by origin 1996-2010 (Statistics Iceland, 2010)

Until the 1990s, the Icelandic population was very homogenous and a vast majority of immigrants came from the neighboring Nordic countries. As late as 1996, 30% of all immigrants were from one of those countries, but this dropped to 7% in 2008. The vast majority of immigrants came from Europe and so outside the Nordic countries in 2008, or 68% compared to 40% in 1996. People born in Poland are indeed the most numerous group of immigrants in Iceland or 10.058 in 2010, which is 38.4% of the total immigrant population. Other large immigrant groups are born in Lithuania, a total of 1.427, and in the Philippines, a total of 1.317 (Statistics Iceland, 2010). Comparing the years 1996 and 2008 in Figure 6 demonstrates the changes described above.

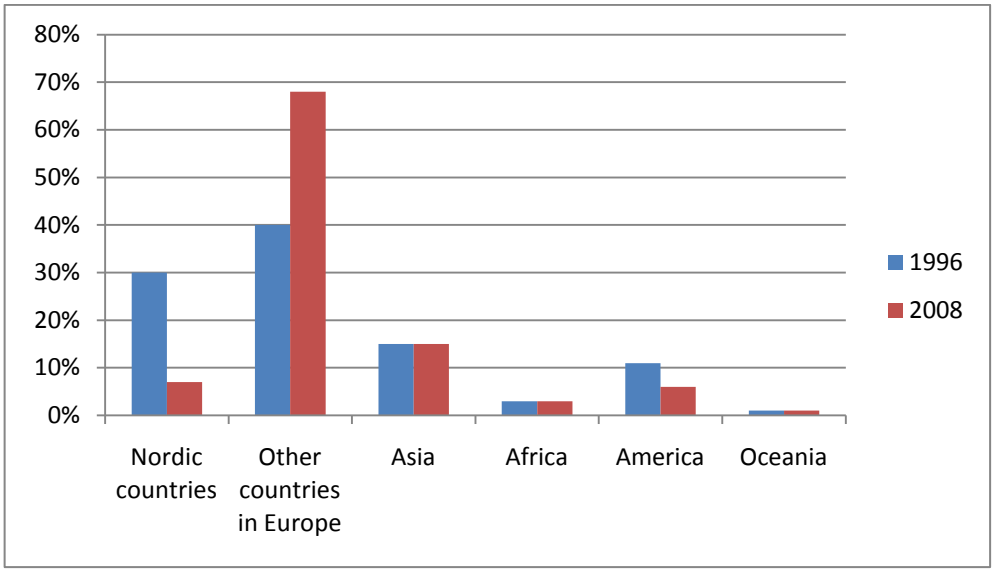

Figure 6 – Immigrants by country of birth 1996 and 2008 (Statistics Iceland, 2009a)

2.2.2 Division development by gender

There has also been a marked change in the division of immigrants by gender since 1996. Up until 2006 foreign women who moved to the country were more than foreign men. But increased activities in construction, heavy industry and hydro construction led to more foreign men moving to Iceland than women from 2006. Sex radio among immigrants was greatest in 2007, when there were 1.353 males per 1.000 females (Statistics Iceland, 2010). At the beginning of 2009, however, foreign men dropped from the year before, but foreign women increased again from the previous year (Statistics Iceland, 2009b). In January 2010 the number of males per 1.000 females is 1.012, which is the same level as among people with no foreign background (Statistics Iceland, 2010) so there is no longer an influence from the construction industry. The peaks in males coming to Iceland in 2006 – 2009 are obvious in Figure 7.

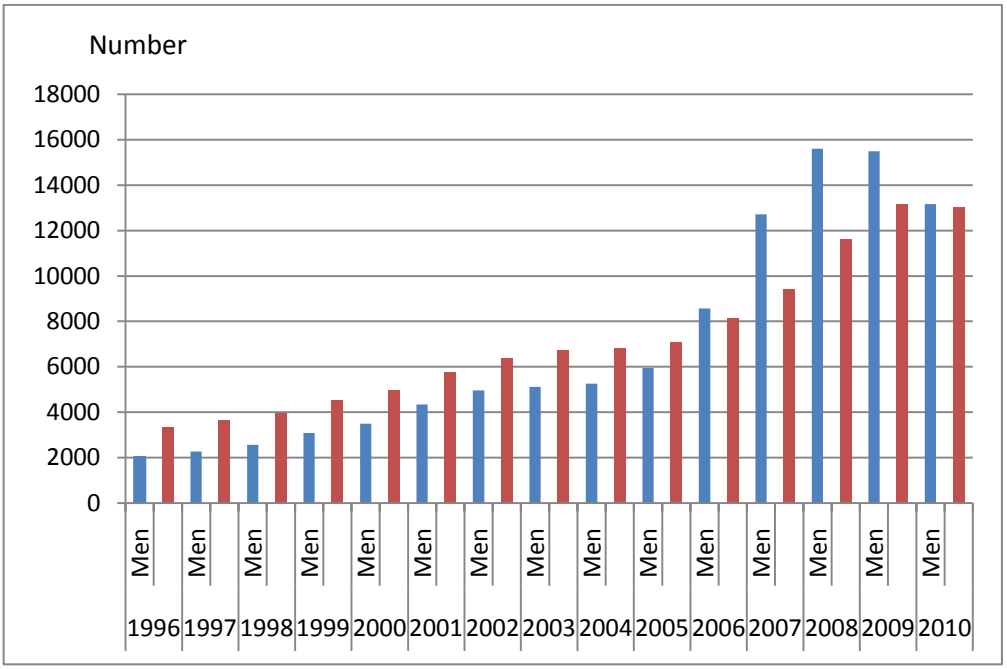

Figure 7 –Number of immigrants by gender (Statistics Iceland, n.d.)

Figure 8 shows how the number of males per 1.000 females has fluctuated in recent years among immigrants, going from 607 males per 1.000 females in 1996, up to 1.353 males per 1.000 females in 2007, but then leveling out in January 2010, when the gender ratio among immigrants is the same level as among people with no foreign background (Statistics Iceland, 2010).

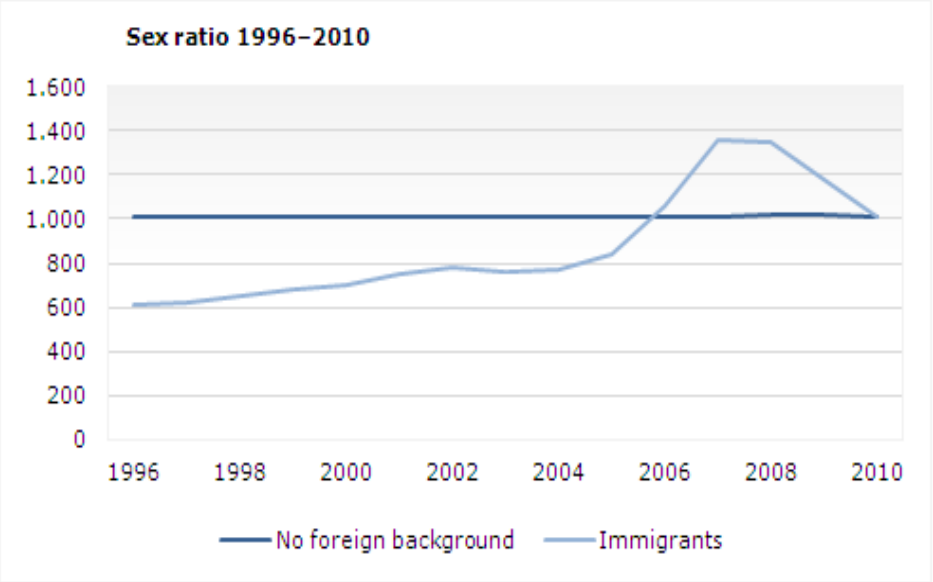

Figure 8 – Sex ratio, the number of males per 1,000 females from 1996-2010 (Statistics Iceland, 2010)

In 2010 the population of Iceland had decreased for the first time since 1889. This decrease is due to a record negative net migration in 2009, which means that more people moved away from the country than to it, i.e. 4.835 more people moved from the country than to it. Never before have so many people left the country in one year or the total of 10.612. From Iceland most of the people moved to Europe or 9.546, which is 9 out of 10. Most moved to Poland or 2.818 (26.6%), 1.576 to Norway, 1.560 to Denmark and 733 to Sweden (Directorate of Labour, 2010a).

On 1 January 2010 there were 317.630 people with a permanent residence in Iceland, compared to 319.368 a year earlier, which makes for a 0.5% reduction. This is a big change from four years earlier when the average annual growth was 2.1%. In 2006 and 2007 the population reached a record high when the country grew by almost 7.800 people each year. Despite the reduction in last year's population, the growth over the past five years, from the beginning of 2005, still

was very high in historical terms, or 1.6% on average per year (Statistical Series, 2010).

In 2005-2007 the net migration to Iceland was positive, and higher than in any other European country (Garðarsdóttir & Bjarnason, 2010). Foreign nationals as a proportion of the whole population was the lowest In Iceland in 2005 compared with Denmark, Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands, but the highest three years later in 2008. This reveals the very fast increase in migration to Iceland in only three years as shown in Figure 9.

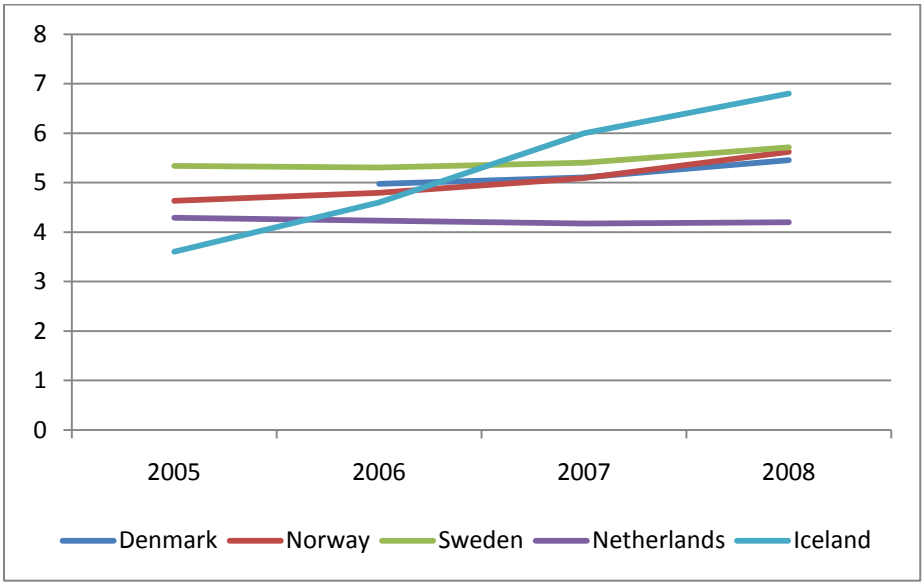

Figure 9 - Proportion of foreign nationals 2005-2008 (number missing from Denmark year 2005), (Guðjónsdóttir, 2009)

The percentage of people moving from the country in 2009 was fairly equal among Icelandic nationals and foreign nationals, or 7.7 in every 1.000 were Icelandic citizens and 7.4 in every 1.000 foreign nationals. Given how many foreign nationals came to Iceland before the economic collapse, it is considered remarkable by Garðarsdóttir and Bjarnason (2010) how relatively few foreign

nationals have moved from Iceland. This seems to suggest that only a small number of them who came here in the years before the crash have left, at least yet (Garðarsdóttir & Bjarnason, 2010).

2.2.3 First and second generation immigrants

The low rate of second generation immigrants is also part of the brief history of immigration in Iceland. In 1996 second generation immigrants were 0.1% of the population and 0.5% in 2008, which is not much of an increase compared to the increase among immigrants.

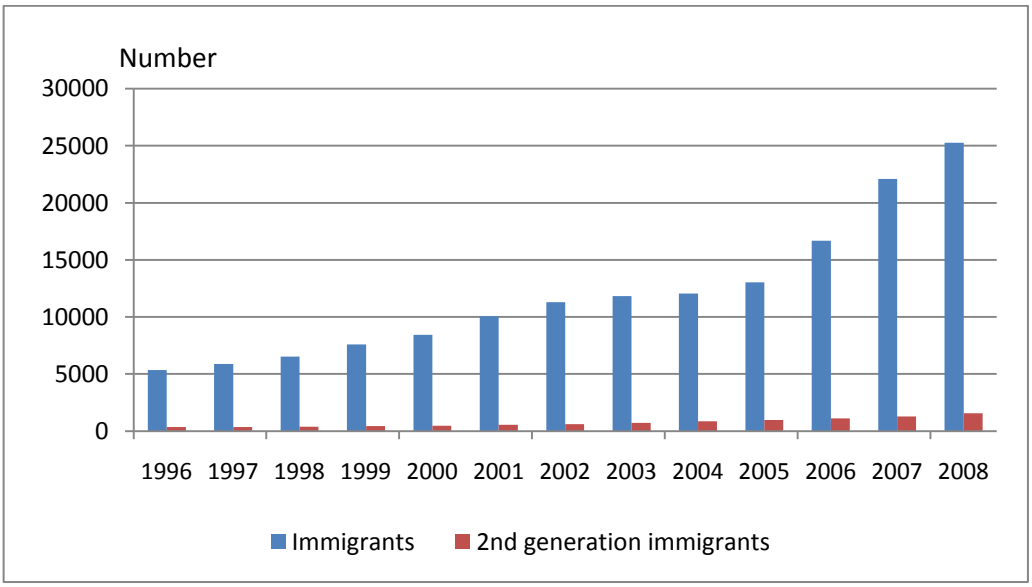

Figure 10 - Immigrants and second generation immigrants in Iceland 1996-2008 (Statistics Iceland, 2009a)

Although immigrants and their descendants have grown substantially in Iceland over the past decade, the aggregate number is relatively smaller than in most

neighboring countries. This is primarily because there are prominently fewer second generation immigrants in Iceland compared to other countries. If only considering immigrants themselves, there is a similar ratio in Iceland and Norway or 8%, while Denmark has about 7%. In the Netherlands however the proportion is much higher or nearly 10% (Statistics Iceland, 2009a).

The percentage of second generation immigrants is however much higher in the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway than in Iceland. The Netherlands has a long history of a large number of immigrants and the proportion of second generation immigrants is over 4%. In Denmark and Norway this proportion is about 2%, but only 0.5% in Iceland (Statistical Series: Population, 2009).

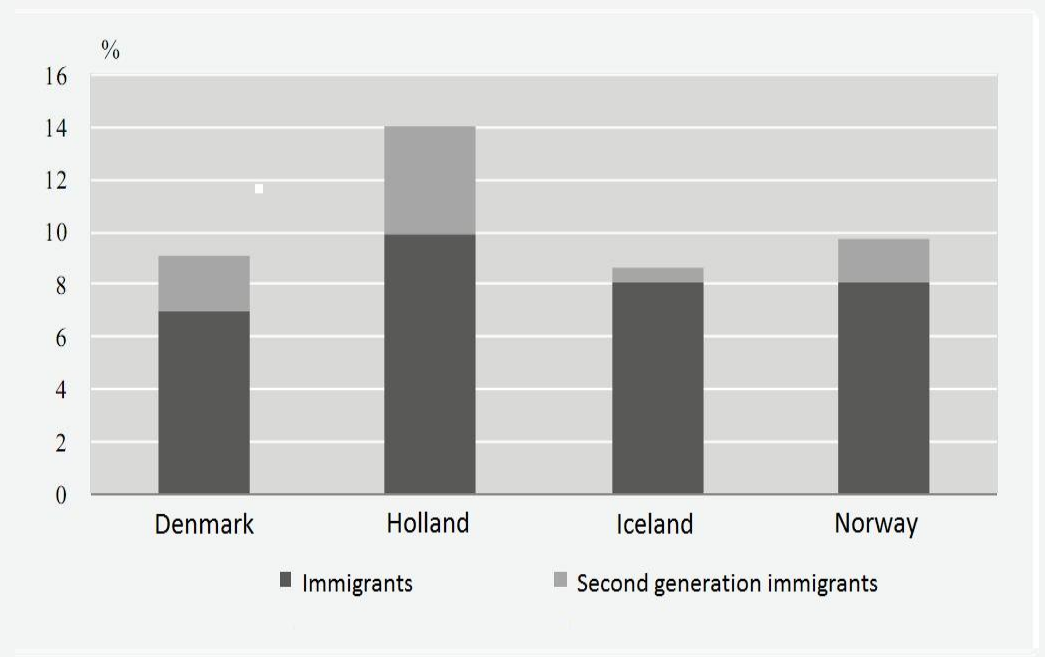

Figure 11 - First and second generation immigrants 1 January 2008 in Iceland, Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway (Statistical Series: Population, 2009)

This low rate suggests that the high percentage of foreigners that have applied in recent years have primarily moved to Iceland in search of employment. Families comprise a rather small group of people who have moved to Iceland in the last years and the marked difference in gender rate is a further indication on this issue. In addition, the overwhelming majority of immigrants are between 25 – 35 years old, an ideal working age. Second generations immigrants are, however, nearly all under ten years of age; in 2008, 77.9% of all second generation immigrants were within this age category. However, when taking immigrants, only 3.1% are in this age category (Statistical Series: Population, 2009). Figure 12 shows the age distribution.

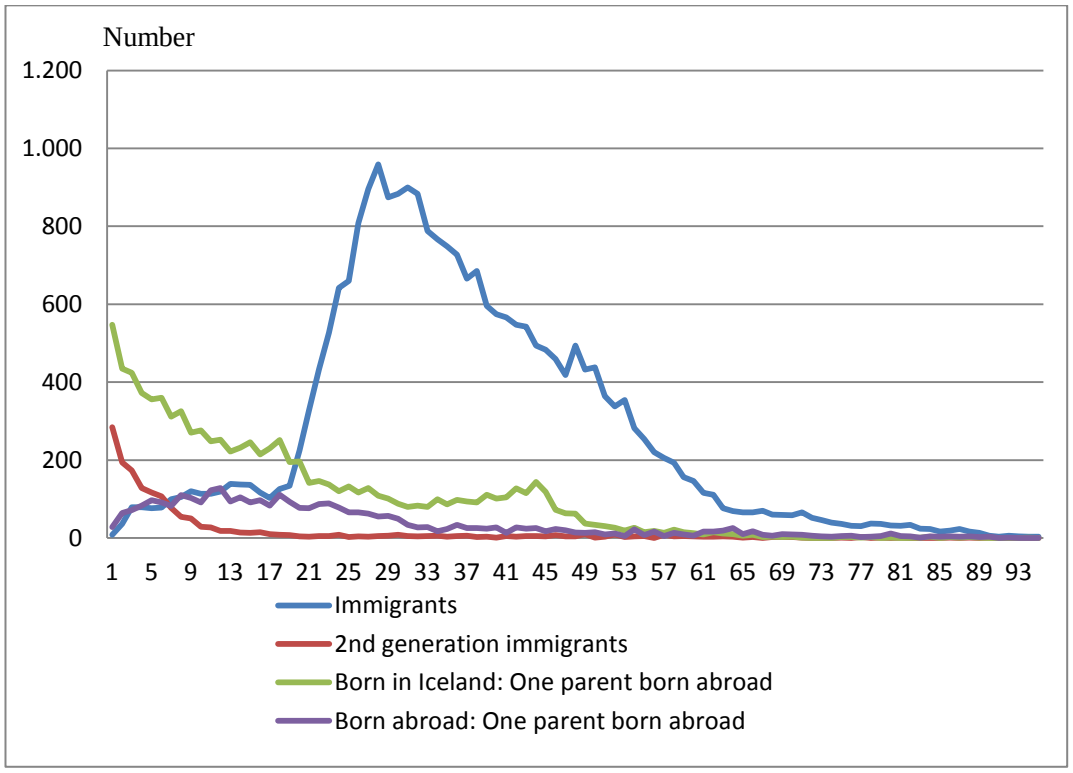

Figure 12 - Immigrants and people with foreign background by age 2008 (Guðjónsdóttir, 2009)

The number of second generation immigrants has increased a little the last year, or from 1.898 in 2009 to 2.254 1 January 2010 (Statistics Iceland, 2010).

2.2.4 Unemployment

Overall unemployment in Iceland in November 2007 was 0.8%, but after the economic collapse and the related consequences, the number rose to 8.0% in November 2009, which is a 7.2% increase in only two years. In February and March 2010, unemployment reached its highest point of 9.3% or an increase of 8.5% since November 2007. In the years from 1991-2007, unemployment in Iceland was on average 3.3%. By the end of Mars 2011, the overall unemployment in Iceland was 8.6% and expected to be between 8.1% - 8.5% in April 2011 (Directorate of Labour, 2011). Figure 13 shows unemployment from 1999 – 2009.

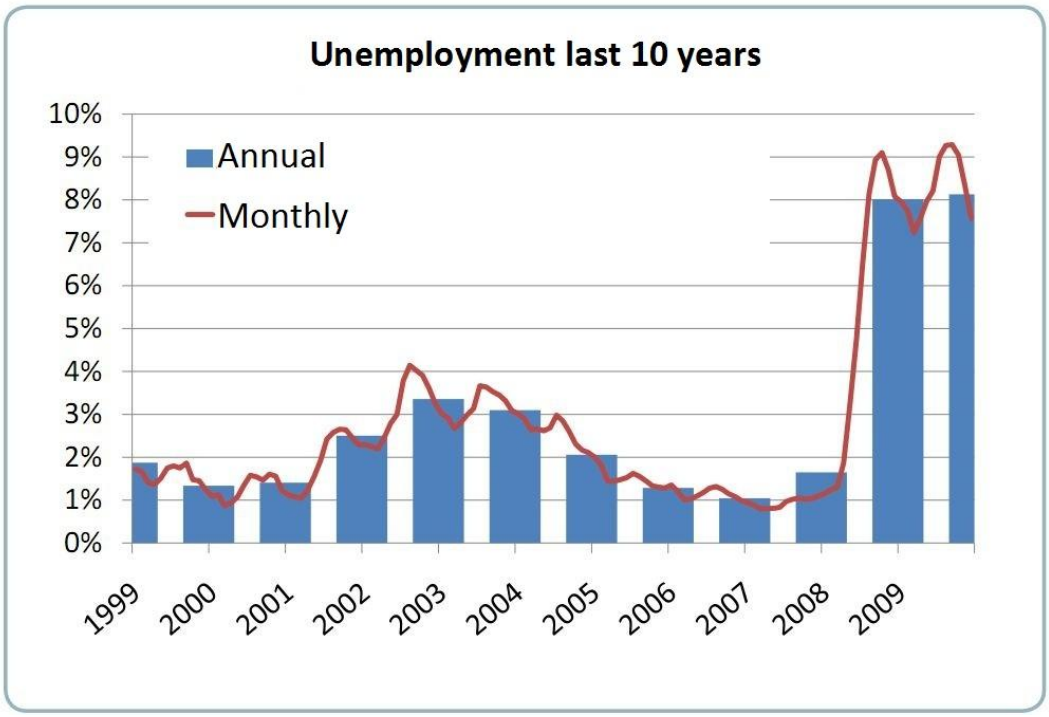

Figure 13 – Unemployment in Iceland in percentages from 1999 – 2009 (Directorate of Labour, 2009)

Unemployed foreign citizens were 2.394 in Mars 2011, of those 1468 were from Poland, or about 61% of all unemployed foreign citizens in Iceland. Most unemployed foreign citizens were, before they lost their jobs, employed in construction or about 534, which is about 25% of all foreign citizens on the unemployment register (Directorate of Labour, 2011).

Foreigners were around 9-10% of the entire labour force in Iceland in 2007-2008, reaching and even exceeding 10% in late 2007 (Directorate of Labour, 2008). Unemployment among foreign nationals in Iceland has been very little in the past and has been lower among foreigners than Icelanders, as most foreigners came to Iceland to work. However, the number of unemployed foreigners has increased rapidly since autumn 2008 and has increased faster than among Icelanders after the economic collapse, rising from about 1% in mid-2008 to about 17% in November 2010, while at the same time the total unemployment rate was 7.7% (Directorate of Labour, 2009, 2010b). That is a considerably larger increase in unemployment among foreigners than the average, as shown in Figure 14.

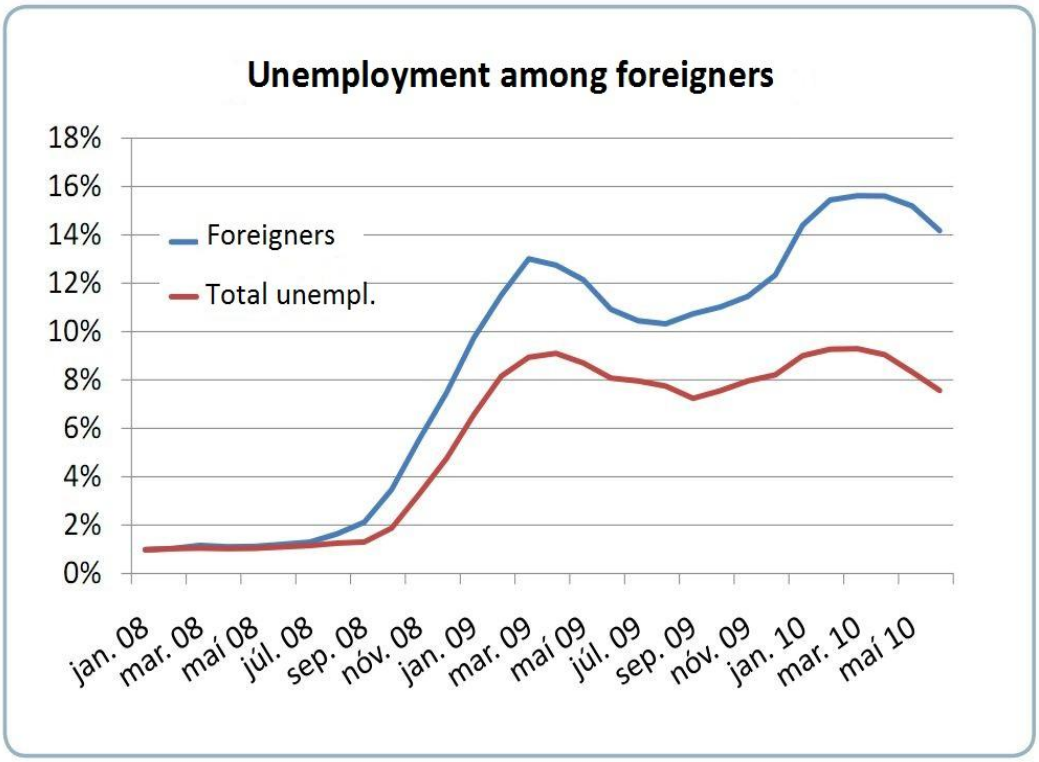

Figure 14 – Unemployment among foreigners (blue line) compared to total unemployment in Iceland (red line) from January 2008 – May 2010 (Directorate of Labour, 2009)

These unemployment figures are in line with an OECD (2009b) report which indicates that the unemployment rate among immigrants is higher and more rapid than among natives. Based on the sudden decline in the construction industry in Iceland after the economic collapse, these figures are not so unexpected as in years 2005 - 2007 it was estimated that about 40% of all employees in construction work in Iceland held foreign citizenship (Directorate of Labour, 2007). According to Castles and Miller (2009), high unemployment rates, often twice the average for natives, and low activity rates reveal that migrant workers often have a disadvantaged position. Since the economic collapse in Iceland there has been a huge decline in industries relying heavily on foreign labour, such as construction, manufacturing and services. Unemployment due to the economic crisis has particularly adversely affected people of foreign

nationality, people who do not have full rights in a new country (Skaptadóttir, 2010).

2.2.5 Work permits

New temporary work permits granted in Iceland in 2006 were 2.833, and then reduced to 534 in 2007 and 503 in 2008, while in 2009 and in 2010 the number was 193 and 255 respectively. In 2005 this number was 3.897, so there has been a major reduction in temporary employment permits granted since 2005 (Directorate of Labour, 2010b, 2010c, 2011). Figure 15 shows the development in issued work permits from 2005 – 2010.

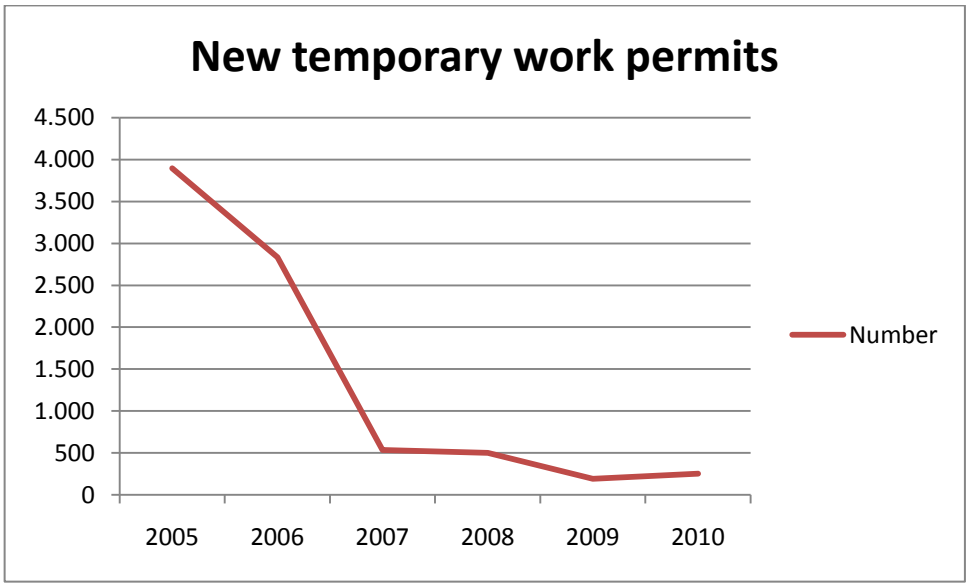

Figure 15 – New temporary work permits from 2005-2010 (Directorate of Labour, 2010b, 2010c)

All residents of countries outside the European Economic Area (EEA) are required to have a work permit to work in the Icelandic labour market (Lög um atvinnuréttindi útlendinga nr.97/2002).

2.2.6 Prejudices and misuse

Icelandic research showed that at the same time as migrants have increased in Iceland, the attitude towards them amongst Icelandic people has become more negative. About 40% believe that when work is scarce, employers should rather hire Icelanders than others. In addition, 56% of Icelanders consider immigrants to be in competition with Icelanders for jobs in the Icelandic labour market and still more believe that immigrants cause a lower salary average in Iceland (Önnudóttir & Sigurjónsson, 2008). It should be noted that this study was carried out before the economic collapse and before the resulting rise in unemployment and financial hardship hit the country, so there is reason to believe that this attitude is even more marked today.

In another Icelandic study results showed that the attitude towards Polish immigrants changed after the economic crisis and became more negative (Bereza, 2010). Castles and Milles (2009) assert that racism has increased, due to fundamental economic and social changes, which questions the optimistic view of progress embodied in Western thought. Economic restructuring and increasing international cultural interchange since the early 1970s, have been seen by many sections of the population as a direct threat to their livelihood, social conditions and identity.

In Iceland there has been criticism about discrimination against many of the foreign workers that came to work in Iceland. The media published news about substandard facilities where many foreign workers shared crowded homes with very poor living conditions, sometimes many sharing unsuitable sleeping facilities on industrial premises. Unions also highlighted the bad living conditions of foreign workers housed in caravans, unapproved industrial premises, or above workshops or on construction sites where they were employed (Vísir.is, 2005a, 2007b; Mbl.is, 2006, 2008; Stephensen, 2007). The Parliamentary Social Affairs Committee took the matter into consideration after news reports highlighting

the existence of foreign worker ghettoes. Along with the bad living conditions the danger of living in such facilities was also discussed, for example the risk of fire breaking out in an industrial premises where people are living above (Vísir.is, 2006).

There was also a debate about abuse when it came to the question of salary and claims as to violations of trade union agreements against foreign workers (Icelandic Human Rights Centre, n.d.; Icelandic Confederation of Labour, n.d.; Mbl.is, 2005, 2007; Vísir.is, 2005b, 2007a). In a study on immigrant women working in Icelandic hotels, a question was raised about how immigrant women experience the Icelandic labour market. The research showed the low status and often unfavorable working conditions that these women face (Guðjónsdóttir, 2010).

2.3 Icelandic migration research

The sudden increase of migrants in Iceland has brought about unprecedented changes. Experience in other neighbouring countries shows that immigration is often a cause of deep political conflicts and if not handled carefully a cause for serious social tension (CIRRA, n.d.). Research studies in related fields to this one concerning migrants in Iceland are rather few, but have increased in recent years as migration to Iceland has increased. Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir, professor at the University of Iceland, has done research and written several articles on this subject. In one of her articles, which is based on interviews taken 2002-2005 with people of different origin living in Iceland, she looks at the attitude of immigrants towards the Icelandic language (Skaptadóttir, 2007).

Most of the participants originally came to Iceland only to work for a certain time period and therefore their interest in learning Icelandic was limited. Still they talked a lot about how their limited knowledge of Icelandic prevented them from

integrating into Icelandic society. Their knowledge of Icelandic was of varying degrees and some spoke very little Icelandic, despite having lived in Iceland for years. Their knowledge among other things depended on their education in their home country and the opportunities they had available to them in Iceland (Skaptadóttir, 2007).

Skaptadóttir writes that participants´ lack of Icelandic skills led in some cases to misunderstandings in the workplace, as well as insecurity concerning their position and their status. Not everyone liked being dependent on the few individuals who were able to translate for them. Some were very isolated from Icelandic society even after several years of stay, others spoke of having been isolated the first years. Some lived in a village out in the country and knew little about what happened outside the workplace or the village and most relations beyond the village were with people from the home country (Skaptadóttir, 2007).

The article states that because the participants´ stay in Iceland was based on a work permit, they had no opportunity to take language courses until they had worked for some time (Skaptadóttir, 2007). This is because the Icelandic state does not offer free language courses to help migrants learn the language (see answer from a representative at The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, page 79), which in turn would help them integrate better into society. The trade unions do support people with part of the cost of taking language courses, but people first have to work for a certain time to qualify for this benefit.

It is easy for migrants to become isolated inside the receiving country, especially if they do not speak the national language. An example of a male from Poland in Skaptadóttir´s (2007) study confirmed this intense sense of isolation. He lived in a village in Iceland where a large proportion of the population was also Polish. His co-workers were almost exclusively Polish, and they worked very long hours. In his free time he read Polish newspapers and magazines which were sent to

him and he watched Polish television. He had good communication with relatives in Poland and had a Polish girlfriend so he also spoke Polish at home.

It was not until the interviewed Poles decided to stay longer in Iceland that their interest in learning the Icelandic language began. Reasons for changes of plan and decisions to stay longer were for example that the employment situation in their homeland had not improved, some had invested in property and the children had started Icelandic schooling. Some had found an Icelandic partner (Skaptadóttir, 2007).

Wojtyńska and Zielińskas (2010) have pointed out that the decision Polish migrants take about whether they want to stay in Iceland or return to Poland is not only influenced by the situation in Iceland, but also by the situation in Poland. There is more unemployment in Poland than in Iceland. Earnings received in Iceland are often better than in Poland, even in times of crisis in Iceland, and unemployment benefits are lower in Poland than in Iceland. So, in essence, there is no reason for Polish nationals who have earned their rights to unemployment benefits in Iceland to return to Poland.

The effects of the economic crisis have wide-ranging global effects and therefore there may be limited opportunities in the country of origin as well (Skaptadóttir, 2010). Thus, globally many migrants prefer to wait out the crisis in the host country, as the situation at home is worse (Castles & Miller, 2010).

As has been shown in Iceland, even though foreign nationals have declined by 10% after the economic collapse, most have preferred to remain after the crisis hit. Although unemployment has soared, most people have work and enough to live off (Garðarsdóttir & Bjarnason, 2010). However many workers in the construction industry, especially those who had lived in Iceland without their families and had been in Iceland for a short time, went home right after the crash, but the majority remained and are not about to leave (Þórarinsdóttir, Georgsdóttir, & Hafsteinsdóttir, 2009).

Participants in Skaptadóttir´s (2007) research said the reason for their limited knowledge of Icelandic after years of stay was mainly the difficulty attending language courses. Some of them worked shifts, others lived in a small village where only a few beginner courses had been available. Several said it was difficult to attend classes after a long and hard working day. Some said the teaching material was difficult to understand, and a number talked about it being hard to have to learn Icelandic through the medium of English, because their English skills were also limited. Others spoke of having learned very little or nothing during these language courses (Skaptadóttir, 2004, 2007). And despite the financial support from trade unions, some considered the price of the language courses to be high (Skaptadóttir, 2007). This was also reflected in the Jónsdóttir, Harðardóttir and Garðarsdóttir´s (2009) survey, as many participants mentioned the lack of availability of language courses and that the courses were too expensive.

Kristjánsdóttir (2010) did a research based on interviews with seven immigrants in Iceland who were learning Icelandic. The research was done to explore what motivates immigrants to learn Icelandic as well as exploring potential barriers. Results showed that extrinsic influences, such as the workplace and social networking, had a major impact on the drive to learn Icelandic. The results suggest the conclusion that in order to support the learning of Icelandic for adult immigrants, it is important to ensure there are opportunities in society, in the workplace and in study courses to add to their social capital, thus allowing them to maintain their cultural capital and to support their self-efficacy on their own abilities within a new society.

In Wojtyńska and Zielińska´s (2010) research on Polish migrants in Iceland facing the financial crisis, they assert that Icelandic employers preferred to lay off foreign workers on the premise that they can find employment back in their home countries. But the matter is not that simple as they point out, because not everybody has an easy way to return. Therefore some migrants are both facing

unemployment in Iceland and no hope of work in Poland. Also with limited access to social networks in Iceland, some immigrants in the research found themselves in quite a difficult position.

Since 2003 there have been changes in attitudes towards immigrants. The main change occurred during the greatest financial upswing period when the flow of foreign workers to Iceland increased rapidly. After the economic crisis the attitude changed and became even more negative than before (Skaptadóttir, 2010). Discussions in Icelandic society regarding women's importation to work in the sex industry in Reykjavík, seems to have shaped the attitudes of some Icelanders. This for example sometimes led to foreign women living in Iceland being asked if they belonged to this group and being offered a job in a strip club. Moreover in the media, immigrants are presented primarily as occupying low-paying jobs, which in turn can make it harder for them to get better jobs (Skaptadóttir, 2004).

According to an Icelandic study, there are various indications that people from Poland have a harder time in Iceland than other migrants. An Australian woman in the research, living in Iceland, described for example how Icelandic people treated her rudely thinking she was Polish. The attitude however towards her changed completely when they found out she was from Australia. In the same research participants described phrases yelled out at them, for example "fucking foreigner" or "Polish, are you not going?" The reason for this bad attitude towards people from Poland is mainly thought to lie in how many Polish people live in Iceland and to negative news coverage about Polish people in the Icelandic media (Þórarinsdóttir, Georgsdóttir, & Hafsteinsdóttir, 2009).

A survey of various factors related to immigrants living in Iceland showed that amongst nearly half of the respondents that had been working in Iceland, their education was not fully taken advantage of. Respondents believed the main reason for this is that they lacked skills in Icelandic. Many felt that they did not

get employment that was in line with their education (Jónsdóttir, Harðardóttir, & Garðarsdóttir, 2009). In Skaptadóttir´s (2004) research, where most participants were from Poland, other Eastern European countries, the Philippines and Thailand, it showed that these nationals were classified as being more foreign than many other foreign-born residents, such as people from England or the Nordic countries. Even though they spoke English and had a college degree before arriving to Iceland, their position on the labour market, and in regard to residence permits, was different to that of people from the Nordic countries and the EU and EEA. And despite their education, they had all spent much of the last ten years in Iceland working in low-paying jobs in factories or in cleaning.

Half of the respondents in Jónsdóttir, Harðardóttir, & Garðarsdóttir´s (2009) survey sent a portion of their wages to their homeland, and the less educated respondents were, the more likely they were to send their salary to the home country. Some migrants in Wojtyńska & Zielińska´s (2010) research said they could no longer afford to help their relatives in the homeland after the crisis, so in turn it also affects those families that have depended on the remittances. This forces the migrants to reduce their expenses in Iceland in order to keep the amount of money sent home the same. In this way the crisis affects not only the migrants, but has much wider implications that extend to the home country (Skaptadóttir, 2007), something that may not be obvious at first glance.

It is clear that for many it is impossible to continue to send remittances due to the economic collapse, the ensuing devaluation of the Icelandic króna[1] and the fact that they are now on reduced income. This is very hard emotionally for the people involved as they no longer can support their family in the home country. In some cases it is to support the education of family members, or to support sick

[1] Króna is the currency in Iceland

and impoverished parents or in some other way help family members in the home country (Þórarinsdóttir, Georgsdóttir, & Hafsteinsdóttir, 2009).

According to Skaptadóttir and Wojtyńska´s (2007) research, a large number of the participants sent remittances and in fact said their main goal for coming to Iceland was to be able to send money home. This shows that many work in Iceland mainly to support their families back home. Even those who had decided to stay in Iceland for good talked about someone back home that they felt they should continue to support. According to one Polish woman interviewed in the study, Polish people that work in Iceland and send remittances back to Poland are looked at as the rich people by their compatriots living in Poland. She took the example of a Polish woman living and working in Iceland, even though she has four children and a husband back in Poland. She said people were generally surprised about this, but the reason is that the woman is paying everything for her family back home.

The status and respect level a person enjoyed in the home country usually changes and becomes less in the receiving country. Many have to take work which is not necessarily related to their education and capability. It is quite common that well-educated people are working in low-paid jobs in the receiving country. It takes some people a long time to learn a new language, but the language is the key to successful integration in the new society. It also helps people to get to the position they want, for example to obtain suitable employment (Hauksdóttir, 2008; Berger, 2004).

In Skaptadóttir and Wojtyńska´s (2007) study some participants talked about that even though they had a job that placed them in a lower social status than the job they had in their country of origin, it was better paid and that it did not really matter what Icelandic people thought of them. They were though glad to be considered hard working.

2.4 World Systems Theory

The World Systems Theory has its academic roots in Marxist economic theory. Marx argued that labour was the source of all wealth and the profit of the capitalist was based on taking advantage of the workers. By paying the workers less than they deserved capitalism exploited them because they received less pay than the value of the product of their labour. The difference, the surplus value, went to the capitalists. The basis of the capitalist system was this surplus value, which was kept and reinvested by the capitalists. Then by consistently increasing the level of exploitation of the workers, and thereby the surplus value, and investing the profits for the expansion of the system the capitalist system grew (Ritzer & Goodman, 2004a).

After Marx´s death Marxist theory was first dominated by those who saw in his theory scientific and economic determinism. Immanuel Wallerstein was one of these and he calls this the era of 'orthodox Marxism', explaining the structure and functioning of capitalism as a world economic system (Wallerstein, 1986). Wallerstein has continued his historical analysis from this Marxist viewpoint of the various roles played by different societies within the division of labour in the world-economy. Although he has paid close attention to political and social factors, his main focus is the role of economic factors in world history. Wallerstein´s first volume on the World Systems Theory was published in 1974. Wallerstein now focused on the development where there was a shift from the political and military, to an economic dominance in the world. He sees economics as a far more efficient and less primitive means of domination than politics (Ritzer & Goodman, 2004b).

Wallerstein´s World Systems Theory focuses on the way less developed regions are incorporated into a world economy controlled by core capitalist nations. The entering of multinational corporations into less developed economies hastened rural change, leading to poverty, displacement of workers, rapid urbanization

and the growth of informal economies (Castles & Miller, 2009). Then within given state boundaries, Wallerstein (2000) argues that though all labour is exploited because it creates surplus-value that is transferred to others, some labourers lose a larger proportion of their created surplus-value than others, depending on location inside communities divided on the basis of ethnicity (Wallerstein, 2000).

The World Systems Theory is a macro approach, examining the structural conditions, e.g. economic, political and legal, which determine the flow of migration. The micro level however focuses on how these larger forces shape the decisions and actions of individuals and families, or how they affect changes in communities. The logic of the World Systems Theory is heavily sociological and structural (Brettell & Hollifield, 2008). Wallerstein sees the international division of exploitation as not being defined by state borders but by the economic division of labour in the world.

According to Ritzer & Goodman (2004b) Wallerstein's argument is that the unity around the capitalist system ultimately was based on its unequal development. That the key to capitalism lies in a core dominated by a free labour market for skilled workers and a coercive labour market for less skilled workers in peripheral areas. Such a combination is the essence of capitalism. This is similar to the Dual or Segmented Labour Market Theory that attempts to introduce a wider range of factors into economic research, like neoclassical theory. It contends the existence of two separate and distinct labour markets. First the primary labour market, with good jobs, decent wages and secure employment, and then the secondary labour market of unskilled jobs, poor wages and insecure employment (Piore, 1979).

Migrants are typically confined to employment in the secondary labour market because they lack the necessary skills for primary labour market employment and they also face discrimination. They are therefore used as cheap labour, and

have few opportunities for social mobility. International migration in this way is caused by structural demand within advanced economies (Piore, 1979).

As the key role of migrant workers in northern economies became more obvious in the mid-1970s, World Systems theorists began to analyze international labour migration as one of the ways in which relations of domination were forged between the core economies of capitalism and its underdeveloped periphery (Castles & Miller, 2009).

In the early 1980s, analyzing more from the perspective of the World Systems Theory, some sociologists linked the new global migrations and their effect to the increasing penetration of the capitalist mode of production, meaning that the new international migration is a direct consequence of globalization, including economic markets, cultural transfers and social ties. The dislocation of labour in semi-peripheral and peripheral countries, created by the increasing encroachment of the capitalist mode of production in peripheral countries, accompanied by new demands for cheap labour in the core countries, are identified as the chief sources of mass migration (Schmitter Heisler, 2008).

Even though in a globalized economy the causes of migration may be primarily economic, once set in motion migration patterns are maintained and sustained by well-established regional networks of trade, production, investment and communication (Massey et al., 1998).

Wallerstein talks about there being a social ranking for each kind of identity where there is always a group on top in the ranking, and one or several at the bottom. Such classifications are both worldwide and more local, but both have huge consequences in the lives of people and in the operation of the capitalist world-economy. Familiar rankings in the world-system are for example men over women, whites over blacks, heterosexuals over gays and lesbians, the bourgeois and professionals over workers and more. Ethnic ranking exists in every country, there is a dominant ethnicity and then the others. Then nationalism often takes

the form of mixing from all the categories where for example one might create the norm that adult white heterosexual males of particular ethnicities and religions are the only ones who would be considered 'true' nationals (Wallerstein, 2004).

Wallerstein (2004) also addresses universalism, which is the priority to general rules applying equally to all persons, and therefore the rejection of particularistic preferences in most spheres. The norm of universalism gives an enormous comfort to those who are benefiting from the system. It makes them feel they deserve what they have. They who have attained the status of cadre[2] feel justified in their advantage and ignore the ways in which the so-called universalistic criteria that permitted their access were not in fact fully universalistic, or ignore the claims of all the others to material benefits given primarily to cadres.

In today's world nearly all country's claim that all their citizens are equal, through a system of suffrage. In reality this is not so because only part of the population exercises the full rights of citizenship in most countries. If people are sovereign, it must be decided who falls within the category of the people and when doing so many turn out to be excluded and the concept of inclusion as people turns rather quickly into a concept of exclusion. Those for example who are merely visitors to the country and persons from minority ethnic groups can be part of this exclusion. The list of people in the same category is much longer, but here the focus is on the ethnic groups.

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[2] In Wallerstein's glossary definition the term *cadres* is used in his text to refer to all those persons who are neither in the top command positions of the social system nor among the vast majority who fullfill the bottom tasks. Cardes perform managerial funcitons and usually receive remuneration somewhere between that for the top and that for the bottom. In his view, worldwide today 15 to 20 percent of the world's population are cadres (Wallerstein, 2004).

2.5 The power of language

Icelanders are known for placing a heavy emphasis on the correct spoken and written use of their language. Icelandic has many grammatical features and is a heavily inflected language with four cases. Nouns can have one of three grammatical genders and then there are two main declension paradigms for each gender, which are furthermore divided in sub-classes of nouns. It is probably safe to say that the Icelandic language can be complex for those who have not learned it during childhood. Moreover, Icelandic has been developed with new vocabulary, based on native roots, rather than borrowings from other languages, which makes it quite unique and even more difficult to learn for foreigners. In Iceland there is a special Language Council, whose brief it is to continue the preservation of the language and to effect the development and ensure the use of Icelandic in as many areas as possible (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2001).

Concerns about the future of the Icelandic language are common and many have feared changes in the language because of outside influences or even the deterioration of the language. It has a long history of being seen as a major emblem of the Icelandic nation and an instrument in the battle for the country's self-determination. A language is certainly crucial for people's social and political identity and there is a relation between national identity and language. Languages are often regarded as being central to what defines a nation and the most efficient cultural means by which to integrate national communities. Icelandic is a source of much pride among Icelandic intellectuals, who view it as the purest of all the Nordic languages (Hálfdánarson, 2005).

In societies all around the world language is a powerful tool and has a key role in the homogenous space of the nation (Wright, 2000). Language has an especially important part to play in an individual's integration into society because of its importance to everyday communication, and also because access to resources

and opportunities in education and on the labour market depend on the ability to effectively communicate. This in itself makes language a highly influential device and furthermore languages and accents can act as symbols of belonging to or being separated from and lead to distinction and discrimination (Esser, 2006). Knowledge of the national language in a migrant´s receiving country therefore plays a crucial role in the formation and continuity of ethnic stratification, though this part is not exclusive and not independent of other possible influences such as social distances and discrimination. Language skills are crucial for the assimilation of migrants into the receiving societies (Bade, et al., 2006).

Skaptadóttir (2010) indicates that during the crisis in Iceland nationalism changed from being all about Icelandic people being able to beat the world, to the 'good old values', which include a strong focus on all that is Icelandic and Icelandic products. That kind of debate is considered to be more excluding than the previous national debate. When the financial upswing was at its highest there were few or even no demands for language skills or any other skills when people were hired for work. After the economic collapse however it is much more common that some demands are made as to Icelandic language skills in most industries.

A linguistic skill in the relevant national language determines notably access to education, institutions, social contacts, societal recognition and inequalities in income. Linguistic diversity can like cultural diversity lead to problems of equality and understanding, for example when it comes to jobs and social situations. This gives immigrants a strong incentive to learn the national language in most cases. But consequences can also be innovative stimulation and inter-cultural exchange in the migration groups (Esser, 2006).

Networking in the receiving country is very important for immigrants when it comes to getting information, links to local people, getting jobs, etc. There has in

addition been shown to be a relationship between language knowledge and networking, where lack of language skills can lead to difficulties in networking (Milroy, 1987). Whether individuals have particular linguistic skills or not is always one of the factors of inclusion or exclusion in a number of fields, such as access to knowledge, employability, participation in the democratic process, active citizenship, etc. (Wright, 2000). Along with obvious factors, such as education and professional experience, a general knowledge in the national language is also enormously important when it comes to opportunities in the labour market. Without being able to communicate, a migrant's chances of finding a job are reduced and also the possibility of getting promotion in the company they work for. Then there has also found to be a link between a lack in language skills and lower income (Esser, 2006).

Research from several migrant receiving countries has shown that a greater proficiency in the destination language increases labour market earnings (Chiswick & Miller, 1995). Effects of language ability on earnings among adult male immigrants in Canada showed that proficiency in the official language increased earnings (Chiswick & Miller, 2003). Beenstock´s (1996) research on the acquisition of language skills by immigrants in Israel also revealed that language skills influenced earnings. He suggests that the similarity of the findings with other immigrant receiving countries would seem to indicate that the processes determining Hebrew language usage in Israel and its effect on earnings are the same as elsewhere. Further studies have reached the same conclusion and argue additionally that language acquisition is found to interact positively with occupation levels (Berman, Lang, & Siniver, 2003).

The wide ranging influence that language skills have on earnings and occupational levels indicate its importance in the labour market and for a successful integration of immigrants. It seems like education and language skills are complementary inputs in the formation of earnings (Beenstock, 1996). Even though there is an increasing international connection and an actuality of a

broad unity regarding the appreciation of cultural exchange and plurality in general, national language skills, both oral and written, remain crucial for education prospects and opportunities on the labour market (Bade, et al., 2006).

Language also has to do with people's identity and studies of the relationships between language and identity can deepen the understanding between dominant and dominated ethno-linguistic groups. People speaking a foreign language in a society are clearly marked as the 'others'. Ethnic and cultural identity can be considered from the language diversity perspective, and the diversity concept can then be used to maintain, confirm or defend power interests. Linguistic ideologies give rise to the close ties between the influence or stigma of the language and resulting social power (Carli et al., 2003).

Even though language matters enormously when it comes to migration and integration, Wright (2000) rightly brings up the actuality that in writing about European integration the question of language simply is not raised. She also points out that the language matter is not discussed much in the literature on integration theories. This is odd when bearing in mind the clear problems in communication that can impact at every step in the integration progress. An individual's language ability matters when moving across national borders, which also are linguistic borders as many communication difficulties will arise.

In the receiving countries better language proficiency among migrants needs to be encouraged and financed. And though good labour market oriented training is costly, it is a wise investment for the future. Good labour force outcomes for immigrants are not just desirable, but also necessary and something the OECD countries´ economies cannot afford to ignore (Martin, 2010).

In research done on Polish immigrants in Iceland, the language skills were the main hindrances to be overcome on the way towards achieving better communication and in general life prospects (Bereza, 2010). As stated by Skaptadóttir (2004), language was given as a reason for not hiring a participant in

the study even though she spoke fluent Icelandic. Accent alone can be clarified as not good enough Icelandic, which obviously gives migrants a difficult time finding employment.

In Jónsdóttir, Harðardóttir and Garðarsdóttir´s (2009) survey among 797 foreigners living in Iceland, most from Poland (42,7%), but also from other countries all over the world, it was revealed that more than half of the respondents found it fairly or very difficult to learn Icelandic. The reason was that most felt that Icelandic is very different from their native language. One quarter had never attended Icelandic language courses and some had difficulties attending because of work or family obligations. Three-quarters had attended a course in Icelandic. It was most common that respondents had attended a course at Mímir (a comprehensive educational centre that offers language courses for foreigners), or at their workplace. Most of the participants had moved to Iceland in the years 2004-2009, and had therefore been living in Iceland for 0-5 years.

Courses were usually paid for by the migrants themselves, some had them financed by their employer. About 40% of the participants said they had rather or very good understanding of Icelandic, while 33% registered rather or very bad understanding of the language. One-third of respondents could express themselves rather or very well in Icelandic, while 39% of them believed that they could only express themselves rather or very badly. More women than men found that their lack of Icelandic resulted in their not getting employment in their profession (Jónsdóttir, Harðardóttir, & Garðarsdóttir, 2009).

3 Methodology

This chapter is about the methodology used in the research, as well as the primary purpose and research questions. In the chapter there is also a discussion about the participants, the data collection and the processing of data. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the strengths and limitations of the research.

3.1 Aim and research questions

The aim of the research is to examine with qualitative methodology what aspects mostly affect migrants´ opportunities in Icelandic society, and how their circumstances are after the economic collapse. The points of views considered focus primarily on certain themes and related factors, which could be detected on the basis of experiences, views and feelings of the migrants interviewed. The analysts´ perspective focused more on the external aspects of Icelandic society that affect foreigners in Iceland, and their experiences in the field. The main research questions are two:

1. What factors have the greatest impact on young migrants´ opportunities on the Icelandic labour market according to the interviewed individuals?
2. What is the situation of young migrants in Iceland after the economic collapse with regard to work, social and financial aspects?

3.2 Method

Qualitative methods were used in this research. The method is aimed at discovering respondent's beliefs, attitudes and situations (Babbie, 1986). It is an approach to the empirical world and by this method participants relate stories about their lives that enable the researcher to generate hypotheses and themes. The researcher also empathizes and identifies with the participants, in the interests of understanding how they see things. With qualitative methods the researcher studies participants in the light of their pasts and the situation they find themselves in (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). It relies on open–ended exploration of people‘s words, thoughts, actions and intentions (Hoyle, Harris, & Judd, 2002).

The advantages of a qualitative method over a quantitative one are that by reducing people's words and acts, there is a risk of losing sight of the human side of social life. A qualitative method gives the researcher a chance to get to know his interviewees and personally experience what they experience in their daily struggles in society. Moreover, some concepts cannot come through without this method, such as suffering, frustration, pain, faith, etc. (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

A face-to-face interview between two or more persons is a form of social interaction, where there occurs an evaluation of meanings, expressions and gestures. Group interviewing in the social sciences is a method that has become increasingly popular over time and is becoming more used. This is where a group of people is brought together by the researcher to talk about their perspectives and experiences in an open-ended discussion. Focus group interviews are a more formal approach to group interviews and have become particularly popular in the last two decades (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

Depth and specifics of experiences and feelings are revealed in open-ended discussions. The qualitative findings are longer with open-ended questions, more detailed and varied in content. Analyses are more complex because responses

are neither systematic nor standardized. The open-ended responses give the researcher a chance to understand the world of the participants (Patton, 1999).

Focus groups are designed to use the group dynamics formed to gain the ability to understand and reason what might not be accessible without this kind of interaction that is only found within a group (Morgan, 1988). Focus group interviews, according to Krueger and Casey (2009), explore aspects of people who possess certain characteristics and provide qualitative data in a focused discussion, which in turn helps one better understand the topic of interest. The purpose of conducting a focus group is to listen and gather information. It is a way to better realize how people feel or think about an issue and at the same time collect information and opinions. Focus groups are especially useful to examine people's knowledge and experiences and can be used to analyze what and how people think and why.

In focus groups the purpose is to let the participants motivate each other, suggesting the range and essence of the original problem that any one individual might not have thought of. Sometimes a totally different understanding of a problem emerges from such group conversations (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Focus group participants are usually selected because they share something in common that is relevant to the research subject. The discussions range from unstructured group discussions to questions taken from a guide list. The list consists of the major topics and questions that will be raised in the focus group discussion (Hoyle, Harris, & Judd, 2002). By bringing together a group of interacting individuals who discuss under the guidance of the researcher, the topic of interest can float in the discussions.

Focus groups as well as individual interviews were taken in this research, using the semi-structured interview method. In semi-structured interviews the communication between the researcher and participants is flowing and normal. A standard questionnaire is not used and the participants use their own words to

express themselves (Esterberg, 2002). Questions can be flexible and not all predetermined, the researcher asks appropriate questions in the right way by perceiving what is important to the participants (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

3.3 Participants

Purposive sample is the method used to select the interviewees in this research. The purpose is to get as diverse an impression as possible of the study's subject. With this approach, participants are handpicked so as to be suitable to the needs of the study. The strategy is to pick individuals that are typical of the population which the researcher is interested in (Hoyle, Harris, & Judd, 2002).

Interviews were taken with 11 migrants and 3 specialists in this research. The participants in the focus groups were eleven unemployed migrants aged 18-24 and were selected because they had certain characteristics in common as unemployed foreigners living in Iceland. They all had been previously employed in Iceland, but were unemployed when the interviews took place just over a year after the economic collapse. The focus group´s participants consisted of five women and six men; the three individual interviewees, who are experts in migration issues, consisted of two women and one man.

In selecting the interviewees, the researcher and her instructor contacted people in Iceland working in the area of the research topic. Soon afterwards an invitation was extended to speak to a group of young foreign individuals who were unemployed. Requests in the field also led to the selection of the specialists. The goal was to get a picture of what affects young unemployed migrants´ opportunities on the Icelandic labour market and how they are faring after the financial collapse in relation to language and work, as well as social and financial aspects. In addition, the aim was to get the impressions of the specialists on these same issues.

3.4 Data collection

As stated earlier, interviews were taken with eleven migrants and three specialists in this study. One e-mail request was also sent to the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture to gather information. Focus group interviews were used to interview the migrants in two different groups: One English speaking, the other one Icelandic speaking. Participants could choose which group they attended depending on their language skills. Seven joined the English speaking group and four the Icelandic speaking.

Most of the participants were from Poland but also from Lithuania, Vietnam and Portugal. They had been living in Iceland for 1 - 12 years when the interviews were taken, most of them had stayed in Iceland for around 3-4 years. The focus group interviews and the individual interviews were taken 8th and 9th of April 2010.

The focus groups interviews took place in the Red Cross House in Reykjavík. The individual interviews were taken at a participant's work place in two cases and one in a restaurant. All the interviews took a little over an hour. All participants were promised full confidentiality and anonymity at the beginning of the interviews. Names used in this research are not the real names of the participants, rather nicknames were given afterwards to ensure anonymity. Grammar is not corrected in the text when quoting directly from conversations with interviewees.

An interview guide list was used to keep track of the main themes in the research, a reminder for the researcher to remember to inquire about specific topics. It was not a detailed document, rather a list of general items that the research was to cover (Kvale, 1996). In this way the researcher decides how to phrase questions and when to ask them using his own words. The guide is solely to hint the researcher about certain things (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

3.5 Processing and analysis

All interviews were taped and afterwards listened to and written down word for word into an interviewer journal. The interviewer journal can serve several purposes, such as to contain an outline of topics discussed in each interview to help keep track of what has been covered. It also enables the researcher to follow up on something by going back to specific conversations and is not as time consuming as listening to the tapes again and again (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Emphasis indicators, such as sighing, giggling, anger in voice were marked in the interview journal, as that can give an extra insight to the opinions the participant is expressing. Then the researcher read the interviews over numerous times to identify themes. A detailed analysis of the data was carried out parallel to later processing, so a constant analysis of the interviews took place.

An observer should look for emerging themes, interpretations, hunches, and striking gestures and nonverbal expressions essential to understanding the meaning of a person's words (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The analysis in this research included first identifying special themes and concepts that came up in the interviews; next linking them together to find a specific thread in the narratives, and from then on comparing them with academic sources, theories and existing research in similar fields.

3.6 Strengths and limitations of the research

A study on this sample, young unemployed migrants in Iceland, has not been done before, which gives this study special value. The advantages of qualitative research stems from the internal validity of the data because they are derived directly from the participants. Qualitative research enables the researcher to examine selected issues in depth and detail (Patton, 1999); though Taylor and Bogdan (1998) point out that a researcher can never escape all assumptions he

or she has about the world. Even an interest in social meanings can draw a researcher's attention to some features in how people think and act in a setting, and not to others.

My interest in the field of migration is at least partly related to my own experience as an Icelander living in Denmark. Even though Denmark is considered to be one of Iceland´s closest neighbours, and numerous Icelanders are living in Denmark, I was frequently surprised in relation to the attitude I experienced as a foreigner living abroad. This kindled my interest in the field and shaped my beliefs. My experience may therefore to some degree have affected the research. This factor can also have affected the manner in which this study is conducted.

One of the defects about focus groups can be that people cannot be expected to say the same things in a group that they might say in a private interview. Some members in a group can also be more outspoken than others, which can lead to a superficial consensus where other members refer to them (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). This includes the focus group interviews in this study. In the English speaking group there were three members who talked the most. The researcher responded to this by directing the questions directly to the individuals who committed less, and also went round the group with some questions so as to elicit a response from everyone. Nevertheless, this was a disadvantage that can occur in focus groups, as previously mentioned.

The strength of focus group interviews is however that participants are likely to have a conversation with each other and thus debates may develop on issues that otherwise would not arise (Rubin & Rubin, 1995), as was the case in this study. During the interviews the researcher can furthermore interpret a participant's gestures and in that way for example see if all, or many, agree with what is being discussed each time. The nodding or shaking of heads or displaying other kinds of gestures can tell the researcher many things. Body language is

therefore very important in this context (Morgan, 1988), and came in useful in this study.

Some participants´ English skills were not as good as others, resulting in less involvement in the discussions. Those who spoke better English did in some cases interpret for their compatriots if something was not understood. One member in the Icelandic speaking group did not speak so much Icelandic, but understood everything. She left early and did not finish the interview due to other commitments. Different language skills may have affected and possibly influenced the interviews in this case.

4 Conclusions

4.1 Language

The Icelandic language was discussed very often in the interviews. The participants saw their lack of language skills as a major obstacle on the labour market. Even those who could speak some, or even quite good Icelandic, talked about not having the same opportunities as Icelandic people. All participants had a job before the economic crisis hit, but changes regarding requirements for language skills were noticeable after the financial collapse with good language skills then becoming a requirement.

4.1.1 Higher language requirements being asked for on the labour market: "... even in advertisements for simple cleaning jobs this demand for good Icelandic skills came up."

The employment consultant Jón said that he noticed differently-phrased job advertisements after the economic collapse, with demands for good Icelandic language skills increasing enormously in a short period. *This is something that was not before,* he said, *and even in advertisements for simple cleaning jobs this demand for good Icelandic skills came up*. Jónína, the consultant at the Directorate of Labour, also said that she saw more advertisements where good Icelandic skills were required after the economic collapse. And Guðrún, a specialist in teaching foreign people Icelandic said she could see these changes in

job advertisements, i.e. the requirements for language skills, something she did not see before. And she added that previously everybody could get a job, but those days were over:

> ... now they [migrants] have started to talk much more about that they have to learn Icelandic.
>
> Researcher: So now they feel the need?
>
> Guðrún: The groups that I'm teaching say: Otherwise I will always be cleaning floors!

Here Guðrún indicates that the crisis has had the consequence of pushing migrants more into learning Icelandic. This is reflected in the interviews with the migrants as well, and in the Icelandic speaking focus group Tomas said:

> When you go looking for a job you have to speak Icelandic, but that did not matter 2 years ago … but now there are so many people unemployed and then naturally … they only want the ones that speak Icelandic.

Tomas is pointing out that the demand for Icelandic skills has changed, which is something he had not experienced before. Sara agreed with Tomas and added that it was mostly those who speak good Icelandic that are getting the jobs now. Mikael was in agreement with them and added:

> If I am looking for a job and speak English I get a no immediately, but if you talk Icelandic then ... talk, talk, talk ... and you have to talk for one hour ... and you can get the answer no and yes, but if you talk English it does not work.

What is interesting here is that Tomas, Sara and Mikael were all in the Icelandic-speaking focus group and could all speak Icelandic. But that does not seem to be enough for them and they all feel that now they have to learn Icelandic even

better to have better opportunities in Iceland. Their Icelandic was at various levels, but all were able to communicate well and understand everything said in Icelandic. But still they were facing problems getting a job on the labour market, a problem which they link to their language skills.

All the participants that did not speak Icelandic associated their lack of language skills to less chances of getting a job, and there was agreement in the groups about this matter. All participants had a job before the economic collapse, despite not having Icelandic language skills, but now the demands had changed considerably on the Icelandic labour market.

4.1.2 Learning Icelandic. "People just speak English."

All but one participant wanted to learn Icelandic and those who already did speak some wanted to improve their skills further. The only one that did not want to learn Icelandic said he was only staying in Iceland for two or three years more to earn money and then return to his wife and child in East Europe. In his case he does not see the point in learning Icelandic because he is only staying in the country for a short period and does not see it as his future home country. All the others wanted to learn Icelandic or improve their Icelandic to increase their chances on the labour market and be better able to communicate in society.

The migrants believed many things would change in their life in Iceland if they learned Icelandic. Maja believed it to be the only thing missing and said: *Yes, only this, speak Icelandic. I know Polish people who speak Icelandic and very quickly have some job.* And when asked about what would have to change in order for them to get a job and increase opportunities for them on the job market in Iceland, Sara said that learning more Icelandic was necessary and Mikael said he would have to try to speak more Icelandic. They all see better language skills as their doorway to the labour market.

As the language is one of the things that really affects their stay in Iceland a relevant question to ask is why they do not 'just' learn Icelandic if it has such a major influence on their life. Out of eleven people in the focus groups only four spoke Icelandic, this after staying in Iceland from 1-12 years, most of them for 3-4 years. When asked about their opinion on why so many foreigners do not learn Icelandic some reasons were given. Sara said:

> People just speak English, and when the people [Icelanders] speak English then everyone speaks English. I know many kids who only speak English and they just forget their mother tongue, this is very simple.

Here the issue of Icelanders speaking English to foreigners comes up, so a lack of opportunity to practice is one of the problems, as it does not give them the necessary exercise in Icelandic. Viktor said:

> I want to start talking Icelandic, but I never had the chance. When you are working as a translator ... you know for Polish guys and you are listening and talking in Polish and answering in Polish … and I know English, not quite good but enough to understand each other. So I never had the chance to start talking Icelandic … but jeh (sign) … we are trying to talk both languages, I mean this is not any strange language for me.

Viktor also talks about the lack of opportunities to speak Icelandic as he speaks Polish and English all the time. He also said he sometimes started to talk Icelandic to Icelandic people, but the conversation soon switched to English. Guðrún, the Icelandic teaching specialist, said: *As soon as an Icelandic person hears an accent, he or she changes to English immediately*. This makes it more difficult for the foreigners to learn Icelandic because they lack opportunities to practice speaking Icelandic with Icelandic people.

Regarding if the Icelandic language was more difficult to learn for foreigners than other languages, Guðrún said it was more difficult, but that it naturally came down to what methods are used in teaching and what demands are made. If the demand is correct use of the language, then of course it is more difficult than a language with little grammar. Icelandic being a difficult language to learn also came up as a discussion in the focus groups and Sara mentioned that the inflections were especially difficult. But Guðrún said that if the expectations are that people can function independently in the community and learn the vocabulary familiar to their environment, and be capable of understanding, even though they don't know why words change because of inflections and so on, then all languages are similar in that way.

Guðrún illustrates that in Iceland there is not much tolerance towards incorrect grammar. She also mentions that Icelanders cannot hide behind a difficult language and that Icelanders have in fact killed the motivation in people by endlessly correcting inflections and saying for example to a person trying to learn: You have to say "ég borða kjúkling", and not "ég borða kjúklingur" [taking examples in Icelandic of varying endings due to inflections].

By focusing too much on these things Guðrún means we are trapped in the form instead of the content. That is really what is the matter she said and added: *As Toshiki Toma, the immigrant priest said: Why are people so interested in how I say things, but not in what I am trying to say*?

4.1.3 Icelandic courses. "I just didn't learn anything there."

Icelanders speaking English to the migrants, a difficult language and wrong focus on what is important in one´s language ability are not the only problems, and in fact quite many of the participants already had taken some Icelandic courses and really wanted to learn the language, as previously stated. Tomas said that he had

been in the language school Mímir but that didn't help at all. He said: *I just didn't learn anything there*. Mikael came into this discussion and said: *You only learn the name (laughs), and what's your phone number*. And Tomas continued:

> The Directorate of Labour did send me to this school. There were people there that did not speak any Icelandic or anything, so we were only learning all I knew already.

Here Tomas points out that people at very different levels in Icelandic skills were put into the same course. As he already spoke some Icelandic he did not learn anything new and the course was too easy for him. Sara who also had experience from Mímir asks Tomas:

> You were in the first class right?
>
> Tomas: Yes.
>
> Sara: Yes, they have stopped offering the third class.
>
> Tomas: First class and third class were exactly the same.
>
> Sara: Yes, exactly the same.
>
> Tomas: I have finished three classes and they were all the same.
>
> Researcher: Really?
>
> Sara: Yes.
>
> Tomas: I was like … what's this, it's just the same! … I didn't learn anything. I learned more at home with my kid than going to this school.

Here Sara and Tomas talk about different levels at the school being exactly the same. The same teaching material taught in first, second and third class, and

people with different Icelandic abilities in the same class. Mikael agreed with Tomas and Sara and he also talked about the length they were given to learn:

> It's also that you have only two months … it's not possible to learn Icelandic in two months. It takes more like two years, not two months.

Tomas saw this as a waste of time and money, he said:

> If they are sending you to such schools like Mímir they are only throwing money away because people are not learning anything. You don't send people which don't understand anything to such. They can just save money.

Here obvious frustration about the low quality of language teaching is expressed and the school Mímir gets a very poor rating. Criticism comes up about bad teaching, the same teaching material being taught at different levels and not enough time being given to learn the Icelandic language.

Jónína, the consultant at the Directorate of Labour, said they had sent all the young unemployed foreign nationals to a test to see how their Icelandic skills were. It was revealed that over 70% of the group were at the first stage, which is the lowest, and some had so little skills that they could not even answer the question: What is your name? She added: ... *You see just no, absolutely no Icelandic skills. And these are people that have been here for some time because they have the right to unemployment benefits*. And she continued:

> Many of the ones at the first stage have taken language courses, at least one course. This of course tells one that they are not learning anything at these courses ... this is a waste of time and money.

She was not only worried about this and said this also had a bad influence on the foreigners:

> It is so bad if you go to a course and don't learn anything, it's such a disappointment for an individual. It both reduces the self-esteem ... like you're stupid and cannot learn ... even though perhaps it's the fault of the course. And also that it becomes discouraging to attend other courses later. It is better not to go at all than going to a bad course.

Guðrún commented further on this same matter and said Iceland was far behind when it came to teaching Icelandic to foreigners. She said it is due to the teaching being so enormously trapped inside the form, the focus all being about if people speak correctly and focusing on grammar. She said:

> If you for example go to the University of Iceland where Icelandic is taught to foreigners, then they know everything about the Present and Past Subjunctive, like this (clicks fingers), but they can't use any of it. So the students we're teaching … who may not have been attending school for many years, have even dropped out of school and have bad experiences from there … and then we start teaching them something about the accusative and dative [also a part of Icelandic grammar].

Here both Jónína and Guðrún point out what a bad influence poor or wrongly focused language teaching can have on people. Because people can start to feel very inadequate when teachers start focusing on very complex features of Icelandic grammar at the beginning of an Icelandic language course, and feel like they cannot learn, something which can break people down. This approach can knock people completely off balance and reduce their self-esteem. They can get a sense that they can never learn Icelandic, and feel it is much too complicated to ever learn.

The four in the focus groups that did speak Icelandic were asked how they learned Icelandic and two said they learned from colleagues at work. One said he learned most at home as he had an Icelandic partner and a child and spoke

Icelandic to them. The fourth came to Iceland at elementary school age and learned Icelandic in school. No one in the focus groups has learned Icelandic at a language course. Most participants spoke their native language at home, one participant saying she mixed a little at home between her native language and Icelandic.

Another problem with language courses can be in what language the teaching takes place. Some foreigners that come to Iceland speak neither English nor Icelandic. Jónína described a case she knew personally:

> I know a foreigner that did not speak any English and when he came to Iceland he took a course in Icelandic. He came home very happy after the first class because he had learned one new Icelandic word "Globe" [an English word not Icelandic]. Apparently his teacher was always mixing English and Icelandic. He knew neither language and therefore did not know when he was learning Icelandic and when English. He took two courses at the Adult Education Centre [Námsflokkarnir; Mímir] and did not learn anything.

In the interviews with Jónína and Guðrún, like in the focus groups, discussions about the language school Mímir came up. Criticism was made concerning poor teaching and a monopoly on the market. Mímir is the most known language school in Iceland and has been for decades. Guðrún said:

> When I was working for The Intercultural Centre (ísl. Alþjóðahús) we of course participated in the unemployment issues and offered our Icelandic courses … and thus what we had to offer … but we didn't get anybody, they sent everybody to Mímir. So even people that came to us and wanted to get their refund from the Unemployment Insurance Fund did not get their refund, because they were not sent to our school. So here we come to the question of cronyism.
>
> Researcher: So Mímir has some kind of monopoly on the market?

> Guðrún: Yes, Mímir is of course linked to the trade unions and the unions insist that Mímir does this ... so there is not even an alternative of different schools.

And Jónína said about Mímir:

> Now I just have to be frank and simply speak my mind. Mímir is the biggest institution on the market, and is owned by the Icelandic Confederation of Trade Unions (ísl. ASÍ) and the Adult Education Centre of Reykjavík (ísl. Námsflokkar Reykjavíkur), which has amalgamated with Mímir. This institution is then owned by the unions and is a huge association on the market and very dominant... so competition from others is just completely hopeless, they are so big. And this is their policy. They have lots of courses and a huge number of people have attended these and the teaching is just bad. And the good teachers who inadvertently stray in there, they are either leaving again or falling into the same routine as all the others. I have more or less all my friends there, people that mean well and want to do well, but ... the mentality is wrong and there is a long history of wrong thinking. And whenever someone else from the outside criticizes them, they become very defensive ... you can't say anything against Mímir.

Both specialists talk about monopoly and cronyism when it comes to Icelandic teaching for migrants in Iceland. This affects the quality of the teaching and is not giving other schools, which might do a better job, a chance on the market.

4.1.4 Official policy towards teaching Icelandic to foreigners: "... they approve all kinds of implementation plans, but then they are not followed up."

Guðrún, the specialist in teaching Icelandic to foreigners, said Iceland simply was not doing a good job in teaching foreigners the Icelandic language. She says the

government´s implementation plan has various goals, among other things that there should be established an education for teachers to learn how to teach foreigners Icelandic, but it was not enough to have a good strategy plan if the actual implementation is missing. She continued:

> Nothing has been done. There are some kinds of courses at Kennaraháskólinn [The Faculty of Teacher Education in the University of Iceland] … diversity teaching, but that addresses more the anthropological and sociological side to the matter than the actual teaching of Icelandic … how people learn and how to support them to do that.

Guðrún, along with a colleague at the University of Iceland, compiled a report for the Nordic Council about the situation in Iceland. All the Nordic countries participated in this project, where it was being investigated what the education system is in fact doing for foreigners, and how. About this she said:

> What we in fact found out here in Iceland is that law and regulations … it is all very new here … the implementation plans are relatively good, but the execution, however, is wholly uncoordinated. They approve all kinds of implementation plans, but then they are not followed up. We think that here it‘s like the authorities adopt laws and regulations and everything only because it looks good from the outside.

And she added to this that because of all the approved implementation plans, laws and regulations the authorities always can point to these and say they are addressing the matter, but then the doing part of this policy is disorganized. She also pointed out regarding the teaching part directly, that all educational bodies have been able to apply for grants to the Ministry, and said: *The Ministry is just distributing grants everywhere*. Guðrún also said that the Ministry claims to have monitoring under control, but she claims this is never visible, that there is not

any control, and added: *So these grants are thrown out here and there and the only monitoring control they demand is 75% attendance*.

Guðrún said that when the school gives a final report after the course has finished, the Ministry checks every person to see if he or she is still in the country and whether they are cheating with attendance, and that is really the only thing they do. Checking on if Icelandic skills have improved is totally missing. Guðrún wants to see some kind of evaluation on what is being done and also empathizes on how little language teaching foreigners in Iceland get in comparison to the other Nordic countries, referring to the research the Nordic Council has undertaken.

At the time of the upswing in Iceland some employers did take responsibility in some way, by giving their employees a chance to learn Icelandic, Guðrún commented on this:

> At the time of the upswing it was a lot better because there was so much competition for workers, so that employers were beginning to allow workers to have Icelandic lessons during working hours. Now that has all more or less stopped so now the foreign people must go themselves … take some courses and also need to fulfil some hours to complete the courses. But they are never asked to show any improvement and all this after working a fullday´s work. So the improvement … you can imagine four hours of Icelandic in the evening after working 10 hours hard work … it´s just random what comes out of this, people are so tired.

When the demand for man power was at its peak, it was actually the employers who bore some of the cost of sending their foreign workers to Icelandic courses during working hours. Then the private sector was participating because of the intense competition for workers. Supply and demand seems therefore to have a lot to do with whether foreigners in Iceland have a good possibility to learn

Icelandic or not. Now during the economic downturns this 'goodwill' from the private sector is no longer the case and people must take lessons in the evening after a full working day.

Jónína, the consultant at the Directorate of Labour, was of the same opinion as Guðrún adding that bad teaching in Iceland is in some ways due to a lack of policy by the authorities. She pointed out that now for the first time teachers can take some courses in how to teach Icelandic as a second language, but no one can have an educational qualification in it, only take some courses. And before no one had learned anything in this field, because no such courses existed. She said the professional base does not exist and a prevailing lack of understanding regarding that Icelandic has to be taught in a different way than is done now. She said: *The focus is wrong … It is all about correct grammar and the right pronunciation and nothing else matters. But what matters is to be able to communicate*. And she continued:

> Too many are teaching Icelandic based on the needs of Icelanders, not the foreigner. And the teaching is centred on how to teach children … and naturally the Ministry has to lay down the policy. And the owners of Mímir should shoulder their responsibilty and just make the necessary changes needed there, since it is such a big school that controls so much in this area. There are plenty of good teachers, maybe with small companies that are doing really good things in this field.

4.1.5 The cost of language courses: "... are not entitled to free courses."

In the interview with Guðrún she pointed out that foreigners taking evening language courses have to pay for it themselves. For those who have a full time job most unions support language classes up to 75%, but Guðrún said: *... it can still be expensive for people on a low salary*. Temporary projects to help

unemployed people can give foreigners who have acquired certain rights in Iceland, and therefore have lived in Iceland for a while, the chance to attend free language courses. But the newcomers who have not earned this right and have not gained sufficient points with their trade unions to entitle them to support, have to pay for the courses themselves.

Support for language teaching is different in Iceland than for example in the neighboring countries of Denmark and Norway. In Denmark adult immigrants are entitled to receive free Danish education for three years after they have received a residence permit (Københavns Kommune, 2010). In Norway immigrants can have 700 hours of free Norwegian teaching and 2500 hours for those who cannot read Latin fonts. In Iceland however immigrants themselves have to pay for their language learning unless they are employed and therefore can turn to the unions for support (Björnsdóttir, 2004), as was pointed out above.

In an email the researcher sent to The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, enquiring about Icelandic language teaching for migrants, it said in a response from a representative of the Department, that migrants in Iceland are not entitled to free courses:

> Question: Do migrants that move to Iceland have the right to take free language courses?
>
> Representative: No, they are not entitled to free courses.
>
> Question: If migrants are not offered these classes for free, does the state provide subsidies for language courses?
>
> Representative: The Icelandic government subsidizes courses in Icelandic for foreigners, just like secondary schools are provided with funds to cater to the growing Icelandic teaching for foreign students.

Here a representative of the Ministry of Education confirms that foreigners are not entitled to take free Icelandic language courses. Nor do they get any funds, the language schools however get funding.

Guðrún said that in Iceland everything is based on people having full time employment to have support to attend language courses. But in other Nordic countries people have the right to start these free language courses when they come, and usually 4-5 hours a day, and in some cases also support to live. Then after some time when the have reached a certain standard in the language they can go out to work.

Summary:

In the interviews it was found that job advertisements changed after the economic collapse when demands for good Icelandic language skills increased. The job market changed dramatically from being open to everyone because of the demand for workers, to one setting out different requirements for those applying for a job. Migrants feel a greater need to learn Icelandic because of this and also even those who already speak Icelandic, as now they feel they have to speak even better Icelandic to have an opportunity of getting a job.

The majority of the participants want to learn Icelandic. Participants´ views show that they link better Icelandic language skills to better opportunities of getting employment and see the language as a gateway to the job market. Some participants feel that it is difficult to learn Icelandic and they lack chances to practice because Icelandic people speak English to them. Icelandic people tend to switch to English when they hear Icelandic spoken with an accent. From the interviews it can be concluded that there is too much emphasis on grammar amongst Icelanders, which makes it more difficult for foreigners to learn the language and can also kill their motivation to try.

It was revealed that interviewees are unsatisfied with the Icelandic teaching for foreigners. Some participants did not learn anything at the language school Mímir and the specialists expressed that this school has a monopoly on the market and linked this to cronyism. A test on unemployed foreigners to test their Icelandic skills revealed that over 70% had very little, or no Icelandic skills, despite having lived in Iceland for some time and taking at least one language course. It was also stated in the interviews that poor language teaching could have adverse consequences for the confidence of the participants and their willingness to learn the language. The participants who spoke some Icelandic learned it at work from colleagues, at home or in elementary school. None had learned Icelandic at a language course.

Interviews with two of the specialists revealed harsh criticism of official policy relating to matters of language teaching for foreigners. Critical remarks were expressed about the government´s implementations plans, which look good on paper and say the right things, but were not implemented. This makes them useless and they only seem to exist to allow the authorities to be able to say that they are addressing the issue. Teachers that teach Icelandic to foreigners do not receive appropriate education and are not able to educate themselves in this area, they can only take some courses. The criticism was also aimed at how grants to language schools are distributed at will without any evaluation of the language progress of students, the only monitoring is to see if there is at least 75% attendance.

The specialist in the field of language teaching for foreigners pointed out the little support that those migrants wanting to learn Icelandic get in Iceland. A comparison with Denmark and Norway shows that Iceland is inferior to these neighboring countries when it comes to supporting foreigners to learn the language. Grants in Iceland are mainly based on working people who have already acquired certain rights in the country. The support does not come from the authorities but from the trade unions. An answer from the Department of

Education at The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture confirmed that foreigners in Iceland are not entitled to free language courses.

4.2 Social ranking

4.2.1 Media coverage: "… in the news they are always saying if something happens, they are from Poland or Lithuania."

Discussions about prejudices and racism came up in the interviews where some participants felt like they were all lumped together. Tomas talked about it being like Icelandic people sometimes did not want foreigners and added:

> … It's like, I'm from Lithuania and many say like people from Lithuania are stealing or doing something like selling drugs, because there are so many in jail now … some are thinking like that. So if you are from Lithuania, then you're just like all of them, you know.
>
> Researcher: So you can feel these prejudices?
>
> Tomas: Sometimes … the Icelandic people say so themselves.

A discussion about what is said in the media came up here since it can articulate people's perceptions, e.g. what is said in the news and when people´s nationality is mentioned. Some participants were concerned about nationality being mentioned in relation to crime reports in the media. This is understandable particularly when the report is about something negative, and when it occurs it then tends to reflect on everyone from that country. Like Tomas said: *As in the news they are always saying if something happens, they are from Poland or Lithuania*. Mikael's view is that the media should not be allowed to do this. And Tomas said:

> Why don't they say that the foreigners can't do everything themselves … the Icelandic people are helping them [committing crimes] … but saying only foreigners were doing it … but never say that the Icelandic people were helping them.

Tomas is describing his feelings as a man from Eastern Europe living in Iceland. He feels like Icelandic people sometimes look at him as a criminal only because of his nationality. This classification as a possible criminal is degrading for him and he feels like he is being branded. He points out that nationality is not mentioned specifically if it is an Icelandic person committing the crime, only if it is a foreigner. Michael was also concerned about this and said:

> If they are saying this on TV and stuff, that foreigners were doing things [crimes], then people start thinking that foreigners are doing all this.

Mikael is very concerned about this also and talks about that such reporting might lead people to think everyone from that country mentioned is just a criminal. He also points out that such news might lead to Icelanders thinking that most crimes in Iceland are committed by foreigners.

4.2.2 Discrimination: "… when you are meeting a Pole you think he is the second guy."

Other forms of branding were discussed and some said they felt this on the job market. Julia talked about discrimination, she said: *Icelandic people don't want now take to work Polish people. And if Polish people speak Icelandic then Icelandic people don't take them to job*. Here Julia means that even though they would speak good Icelandic they still would not have the same opportunities on the job market as Icelandic people, which is consistent with what the Icelandic

speaking migrants said about it not even being enough to be able to speak Icelandic now.

In discussions about the job market Viktor talked about that being Polish only meant having problems on the job market. He said:

> I will tell you, because I am Polish and I have experience with meeting Icelandic people, it's the first rule that, ... when, I mean it is not a rule, ... but when you are meeting a Pole you think he is the second guy, you never, ... you Icelandic guys know that, not all of you but part of you think that Polish is something worse than,... you know, Icelandic, original Icelandic. Ah, (sign) so I would say yes, we ... I mean, it is because we are Polish we have this problem. Not all of the people, I know plenty of the guys that speak fluent Icelandic and have been here for a lot of years, they just ... you know, they have a job and don't have any problems because they speak Icelandic, they melt into the community, they are,... you know, not showing up as Polish guys, they are not dressed as Polish guys.

Here Viktor points out that his experience of Icelandic people is that they view Polish people as something inferior to being Icelandic. He uses the phrase 'second' and at that point comes in on the stigmatization where he feels that Icelanders set themselves above the Polish. He also mentions that those who manage to speak fluent Icelandic and 'behave' like Icelanders: *Not showing up as Polish guys*, have a better chance.

Maja wanted to point out that she saw this as the same case everywhere and said: *It is the same in Poland, the people from Poland choose first Polish people, not like from Russia or from Lithuania, so it is the same everywhere*. Lena also talked about this and said:

> It's not the language, it's this where you are from, and if you are a local or you are not. If you speak sometimes the language does not

> matter ... not always, but sometimes. If your sister needs help, and your friend needs help, who do you help? Of course your sister, not your friend, it's like they´re closest.
>
> Researcher: So your saying like maybe Icelandic people will hire Icelandic people because that´s more like the friend?
>
> Lena: Yes, of course, it's like that everywhere.

Here Maja and Lena point out that migrants have in fact less opportunities everywhere because locals will pick 'their own' first. The conversations in the focus group got quite intense at this point and resulted in arguments at times. This was obviously a matter that touched the members of the group and of course a very important subject for them as it has to do with their unemployment and opportunities in Iceland. They all seemed to agree though that their fewer opportunities had to do with them being foreigners. Lena for example had this to say:

> Of course if there is two guys and with the same experience, one is Icelandic and one is from somewhere else then of course the Icelandic will be first, that's for sure … Icelandic of course, pick their own ones, it's their own country.

The stigmatization described here comes down to the participants feeling that Icelandic people are placing the migrants lower in order than themselves or their fellow Icelanders. Sara talked about finding a lot of prejudice at The Directorate of Immigration, she said: *I feel it* [prejudices] *when I go and translate for my friend at The Directorate of Immigration … that I find very difficult.*

4.2.3 Different conditions and support. “They were just keeping in their group.”

In the conversations in the focus groups discussion about different facilities and different degrees of assimilation of migrants in Iceland came up. Viktor said for example that he did not find himself as being a typical migrant because he communicates quite a lot with Icelandic people and he is not sending any money to his home country. He said:

> … I know this difference between me and the guys which are having some families they have to support [in the home country]. Because when I was working for first two years here, in two companies, I had like about 40 Polish guys around me with a lot of problems, they were never … ehhh … you know joining Iceland … they were never you know going somewhere, on trips or whatever. They were just keeping in their group, they were like … ok, they were Polish speaking Polish, they never going outside flat … you know, work flat work flat … and of course sometimes they went to Bonus to buy some food and to banks to send money home.

Here Viktor describes Polish workers that came to Iceland alone, leaving their families behind, and are sending money home to support their families. Their lifestyle seems very simple and isolated and revolves entirely around working, eating and sleeping, like Viktor describes it: …w*ork flat work flat*. He also said they had to send money home because: …*this is just when you have a family and you know that they have to eat something*. He is describing bad conditions he witnessed, migrants who have poor families at home that they are trying to support. Then suddenly they lost their job and in Viktor’s mind they do not have such good opportunities in Iceland, he said: *I think the best solution for them is just to find a job or just motivate themselves and do something, or go to another country because they are immigrants.*

Most participants in the focus groups have relatives in Iceland. Some have sisters or brothers and one had a mother in Iceland. Some of the sisters and brothers also had children. Others have a partner and children. Only one participant had an Icelandic partner. The participants mostly seek their social support from their relatives or friends, who in most cases are from the same country. Adam said he has a sister in Iceland and added:

> … which is quite good. I mean if you know some few Icelandic people and you have a good community around you, it's your support. So it's ah … if you need some help or have a money problem or if I can help someone with something, we are always helping each other. Most of them are Polish guys, but then they know a lot of Icelanders and yes it's good. I think it is important this support … what you are doing in your free time. We still meet a few times a week in some interesting place like the swimming pool … they are the greatest in Iceland. When you have something to do in your free time, it's you know … this is your support.

Easy communication via the internet and phone also came up for discussion and it was considered very simple to communicate with relatives back home. Like Lena said: *I can call my mom anytime, we got phones and internet and stuff*.

Summary:

From the interviews it may be discerned that the migrants feel prejudice and racism in relation to people believing that everyone from certain countries is just a criminal. Some talked about these prejudices stemming from negative media coverage in which nationality was mentioned in connection with crimes.

Coverage in the media is therefore very important to participants. They feel like they are all painted with the same brush when there is negative media coverage of some issue, particularly reports relating to crime that is linked to their

nationality. They feel they are being branded and as though they are all considered criminals.

In general, interviewees feel stigmatization in some areas. On the job market some sense they are not wanted if the selection is between them and Icelandic people. This seemed to make them feel that they were second class in Iceland, as though they are not on a par with Icelanders. Others pointed out that this was the same everywhere and locals would always pick their own kind first.

Some participants made a distinction between 'types' of migrants, the ones that do not have any connection to Icelandic society and only work and sleep, and send as much money as they can back home. Those migrants were described as living under bad conditions and having a lot of problems. And then there are those who have more interaction with Icelandic society and are socially active in their free time, they do more than simply work.

Relationships with families and friends are important for the participants and all but one have family members in Iceland. Interviewees mainly seek their social support from relatives and family members also living in Iceland, as well as from friends, mostly compatriots. Modern technology helps the migrants maintain good relationships with family and friends back home via the internet and phone.

4.3 Labour market

The situation on the labour market often came up as a topic for discussion in the interviews. All participants in the focus groups were unemployed and the labour market was naturally a matter that concerns them directly and their opportunities in life. In conversations about the labour market, stories of abuse of foreign workers were related. Several participants had experience or knew

about abuse of foreigners on the labour market or some form of infringement on their rights. A discussion also developed about their own opportunities on the labour market.

4.3.1. Abuses on the labour market: "… they were like becoming slaves."

When talking about the labour market and why participants lost their job or had quit, the question of abuse of foreign workers on the labour market came up. Some had left companies of their own free will because of misuse and/or some kind of violation of rights. Filip said he quit his job himself because the company was: *Playing me bad around*, as he phrased it. Adam said his boss did not pay the taxes and: *later changed the kennitala* [the ID number of the company]. *And paid like, I don't know, hundred, hundred and twenty.*

In Filip's case he was not being paid as negotiated on initially and in Adam's case his former employer did not pay the taxes due on his salary to the Icelandic state and was in addition actually paying him a very low wage. Then the company changed its ID number, known in Iceland as an ID rover [ísl. kennitöluflakk], i.e. a ploy used by some companies where they declare bankruptcy in order to abandon debts due in the old company and so start afresh. When a company does this employees can lose unpaid salary if a claim against the old company is not successful due to insufficient funds, which is often the case.

When stories like this came up in the focus group other participants were nodding their heads in agreement. It was stressed that this was something that was ongoing in Iceland, infringements on their rights or some form of violation against them on the labour market. This became even clearer when Viktor started talking and saying that a lot of Icelandic people were: *…screwing Polish guys*. Here Viktor uses a very strong expression about the mishandling he had experienced and witnessed. Viktor had also worked as a translator so he had

helped a lot of Polish people on the Icelandic labour market. He has close links to the construction industry and therefore knows many Icelandic construction contractors that often turned to him and asked him to find construction workers for them. Viktor said about this:

> … but what they were giving them instead was ridiculous, I had to tell them, no I'm not letting you have any workers from me because you are just rude. And because many people … many Icelandic guys were trying to rob the Polish. They were like paying them … I can tell you this it's nothing new, its an old story. In 2008 working was growing and growing, it was about … I know about a company that was hiring about 40 Polish people, they were supporting for them accommodation, salary and work. Ok, they had to work, they had accommodation but they had no salary for months. So they were like becoming slaves. They were with a hope to receive salary with months delay and in the end what they got was reduced … they … all of this companies reducing ridiculous high rent for a apartment, you know … and some repayments and those things. This people came here to work and send money home but they did not send any penny because they had nothing to send. They had money maybe to buy case of beer and buy food, that's it. And this is how Icelanders … not everyone … but it was many Icelandic people doing this in 2007, 2008.

The type of fraud Viktor talked about was especially linked to the construction industry. He also told a story of his friend that had just lost his job but had not been paid for two months: *…the boss always said next week, next week … this was also in the constructions, and this guy does not speak any English.* Here Viktor demonstrates the importance of the language also, as it is easier to violate the rights of someone that does not have the possibility to understand or communicate with others than his or her own compatriots and therefore becomes more vulnerable to some kind of cheating or abuse in a foreign country.

Robert said that his experience was quite typical. His former company was: *Robbing working hours*, he said, and continued that this was common. He was just working and working, but there were always working hours missing. *That was why I quit working for them, and they did not pay any over time*, he said. Robert added that his former boss sometimes admitted to forgetting up to 40 working hours, and promising that he would fix it next month. But the working hours just added up and then the company went bankrupt so the workers never got paid.

When Lena was asked how she lost her former job she said: *I did not sleep with my boss so he fired me*. Lena is a young woman from Eastern Europe. The media coverage of women from the same country as Lena comes from has often been linked to their working in strip clubs and prostitution. It is impossible to say whether Lena's nationality had something to do with her losing her job, but it is possible that her nationality could have something to do with her former boss´s attitude towards her. The incident, which she described, falls into the category of sexual harassment. When Lena did not give in to the person harassing her, who also was her boss, he fired her.

Maja had quit her job herself and told a story about a boss that did not like her. She was subject to constant critical remarks and therefore did not feel good in the job. When asked if she thought this was because she is not Icelandic she said she did not know, and added that maybe the boss simply did not like her.

Jón, the employment counselor, touched on this matter of abuse and said that they had been somewhat surprised at the employment office when they got particular requests as to finding foreigners for maybe a quite simple job. That raised suspicions as to a possible intention to take advantage of workers or breach union rights on the workers. Guðrún, the specialist in teaching Icelandic to foreigners, said that it is quite common that foreigners claim they are getting lower wages than Icelandic workers and added:

> … and if you believe this you can imagine the mud pit, the idea they have of Icelanders. If the general opinion is that you do not trust anything and are absolutely convinced that everyone is lying to you and cheating you as to salary, then they naturally believe that in everything else too, and they believe that many of them are also paying a higher rent.

Migrants in Iceland that do not have the network of Icelanders around them to verify what is a fair salary or rent can of course end up in this situation. Guðrún reckoned that this could lead to such immigration problems where some resort to burning cars and such and in her opinion this is because when they came to the new country their issues were never addressed. This can happen if migrants feel like: …*everyone is just a damn cheat,* as she phrased it.

4.3.2. Opportunities on the labour market: "…suddenly the Icelandic dream collapsed."

There are different reasons for the participants´ unemployment, expressions such as: *Bankruptcy*, *everything in construction has stopped*, *collective redundancies* and *cuts backs* were some of the reasons given and these can all be linked to the crisis. Some had quit their job themselves because of bad treatment as stated before. As all the migrants in the research took part in a compulsory project for young unemployed people, to help them get back out on the labour market, they were asked about their aspirations and expectations. Most said they thought the project would help and some said that at least they were going out to do something instead of just staying at home. So staying active was considered positive in itself.

They all agreed that learning Icelandic or improving their Icelandic skills was necessary to have chances on the labour market as has been revealed before.

The language factor was a common theme throughout all the interviews. Some also talked about getting more education as that would help them on the labour market. Mikael said: *Learn something so one can get a job right away.*

Viktor talked about the importance of having a qualification and said that highly educated employees with skills for doing a lot of things had a much better chance on the labour market. Lena also talked about this and the importance of having a good CV and good experience.

Most of the participants said opportunities for them were less than for Icelanders. They had all been trying to find a job without success so far. Maja said: …*I was looking everywhere, but like, nobody needs so*… and added that the reason for this was because of the recession. The job market has been through a huge contraction and in that kind of situation circumstances are tough. Filip had the same experience as Maja and had been looking for a job but could not find anything. Viktor said that his former employers would like to have him back, but nobody was requiring the job they once did, due to the crisis and added:

> …suddenly the Icelandic dream collapsed and people started thinking how to save money … people are thinking about, you know, next years, so they are, it is not 2007 anymore, people don't spent any money, so the market kind of changed from what it was.

Sara said it was always the same story for her, she applied for a job and had the same answer: *Always, sorry we have already hired someone for the job*, she said. And Mikael said that sometimes he did not even get an answer after applying for a job: *Sometimes you're not told on the telephone, but then they should at least send an email with the answer*. Here some describe the harsh world of searching for a job in a time of crisis. They apply for many jobs and in some cases do not even get an answer.

4.3.3 Job opportunities in other countries: "…they cannot find work in other countries either."

Jónína, the consultant at the Directorate of Labour, said that all those receiving unemployment benefits and that belong to the EEA area, have the right to transfer social benefits between countries up to three months. This gives them a chance of searching for jobs in other countries as well. She said that many migrants in Iceland were doing this, going to other countries, usually their home country, in search of jobs. She added:

> Usually people are coming back when the three months have passed because they cannot find work in the other country either.

This was also reflected in the focus group interviews. Mikael said for example that he would not try to go to his home country to find a job because it was difficult to find employment there as well. Tomas said that all countries had the same problem now in the crisis, therefore moving back home or to another country is not a solution to their unemployment.

4.3.4 The future

About half of the migrants say they are going to leave Iceland after 2-4 years. Some want to go back to their home country but others want to go to another foreign country and Sweden and the United States were named in that context. The other half wants to stay in Iceland, but some mentioned that if the economy changed they would possibly leave after some time.

Jónína said that people can remain on unemployment benefits for three years and after that they will be terminated. This also came up as a discussion in the focus groups and what the future would bring. Viktor said to another participant:

> What will you do after, you know, you stop receiving these benefits, because this is going to come. What is your plan in life, do you think it is going to be enough? To have nothing? You know, the government of Iceland will stop paying your benefits.

Getting a job soon is therefore crucial for the migrants and their future plans depend on whether they find a job in Iceland or not. Mikael said it was difficault to say now if he would stay or not and added:

> If I can find a job, I want to be an Icelander ... yes, to find a job I want to be it ... it does not work if you are a foreigner.

Viktor also linked his future plans to employment and the economic situation in Iceland and said:

> …it's quite difficult to say I am going to stay here for like the next future, it depends on the situation in the economy, it is no reason for me to stay in Iceland if everything will be crap. If the economy will not change … if the people will not start spending money, …ehh (sigh)… you know it is going to be worse and worse.
>
> Researcher: So, it depends on the situation?
>
> Viktor: Exactly, I don't have any country to go to … I can go to Poland and work there you know, doing just things with my brother, and … but I want to stay in Iceland, yes.

Summary:

It seems as though discrimination against migrants in Iceland has occurred on the labour market, both according to the participants´ personal experiences and what they know about others. The participants placed a heavy emphasis on this and this was obviously something of immense importance to them. Lost working

hours, unpaid salary, violation of rights and use of the metaphor slavery were part of the claims made about the Icelandic labour market. This affects the migrants´ feelings and can shape their views on Iceland and Icelanders. Concerns about the consequences came up and were linked to a lack of communication with immigrants when they arrive and their issues never being addressed.

In order to have better opportunities on the labour market, participants emphasized the importance of having Icelandic language skills. This came up again and again in the interviews and is obviously a matter that affects the migrants and their chances on the Icelandic labour market the most. When there was a shortage of man power in Iceland, anyone could get a job. But now when the situation is completely different the migrants find how their lack of language skills prevents them from getting employment. Having a qualification and experience on the labour market was also something that most participants said was important in order to improve their chances of finding employment. Interviewees believe their chances on the Icelandic labour market are worse than for Icelanders. Most have experience of applying for jobs and some expressed dissatisfaction with not even getting answers to their applications.

Judging from their comments, those interviewed do not think the grass is greener on the other side. They do not see a solution to their unemployment problem consisting in moving back to the home country, or another country, as the situation is no better there. According to the consultant at the Directorate of Labour, the ones that go to seek jobs in other countries come back to Iceland after they have tried, because there is no work to be had there either.

In interviews with the migrants it was stated that some saw their future as being in Iceland, while others plan to leave the country within a few years. Some of those who plan to stay, however, said it would depend on the economic and employment situation in Iceland. Unemployment benefits are paid out for a maximum of three years, which also affects the migrant's future plans.

4.4 Making ends meet

As all the participants were unemployed they were asked about how it was to live on unemployment benefits. Most said it was very difficult to make ends meet. Some talked about the amount paid out being about 120 thousand Icelandic kroner per month and Maja said:

> Like somebody gets like 120 thousand; ok, you have to pay for the house ... and then you have to buy some food ... if you want to like some party you have to spend on that, if you are smoking you have to spend, if you have a family in Poland you have to send some money, we don't have the money.

Maja finds it hard to get by financially and talks about not being able to send money to her home country like she wants to do. Lena came out with an unexpected comment and said when Maja was describing her concerns about the low benefits:

> Well, if you are very beautiful and pretty then you should not have to worry about this benefit… (laughs).
>
> Researcher: Why not?
>
> Lena: Don't make me to say this.
>
> Researcher: Yes, I'm interested.
>
> Viktor: Ahh … me too, I want to know.
>
> Lena: Let's say it is my secret.

Here Lena indicates that she engages in prostitution to make ends meet. She says this as a kind of input or response to Maja who could not make ends meet on unemployment benefits. Some of the participants were working on the black

market which means not having a contract, not paying tax on their income and lacking any union or legal rights. Viktor said:

> …for everyone it is hard … people work on the black [market] everywhere they can, because of this 130 thousand [unemployment benefit], it's very little, very very little. I used to receive a much higher salary before I went on these benefits. And for me it's just a … you know … I could not … I would not stay in Iceland if I would not have anything to do else.
>
> Researcher: So you … do you all find some other ways, like some black work or?
>
> Lena: (Giggling).
>
> Viktor: Ok, You can go work in a restaurant as a bartender, doorman or whatever, you know, this all is paid black everywhere, you know.
>
> Researcher: So you have to do something like that to survive or?
>
> Maja: Yes.
>
> Researcher: So the benefits are not enough to…?
>
> Maja: No.

Here some of the participants are admitting they also work on the black market to get by. Tomas said that he paid the same amount in rent as he got in unemployment benefits, and then there is everything else left to be paid. To survive he has to take loans, so he can only buy the most necessary things, such as food. Sara said the same and she is only paying for the most important things. She wants to take more courses to add to her education but she said: *I've been looking at these courses, but they are so expensive that I can't go*. Sara cannot afford to take courses to gain more education. This leaves her in a difficult situation as these courses would add to her knowledge, which in turn could offer

her better job opportunities, but now she is stuck because of poverty. Viktor admits that he would leave Iceland if he only had the unemployment benefits because that would make it too hard to live off only.

Not many of the participants were sending remittances to their family back home because their families were relatively well off. Still four of them said they were sending something home, in the form of gifts or money. Maja wants to send money home but because she is out of a job she cannot afford it now.

Summary:

In interviews with the migrants it clearly emerged that they had difficulties in making ends meet solely on unemployment benefits. From the discussion it can be assumed that it is likely that many of them find other ways to earn money and admissions of prostitution and working on the black market came up. This was spoken about like a natural response to trying to survive on unemployment benefits. Low unemployment benefits appear to prevent further progress in education. Unemployment also affects remittances to the homeland.

5 Discussion

The research questions were two. The first looked at what factors have the most impact on young migrants´ opportunities on the Icelandic labour market. The second research question examined the situation of young migrants in Iceland after the crisis hit with regard to work, social and financial aspects. In this chapter these research questions are discussed in relation to academic sources, previous studies and the conclusions that have been presented in this research.

5.1 Opportunities in Iceland

Concerning the first research question and what factors have the most impact on young migrants´ opportunities on the Icelandic labour market, one factor was primary and was unanimous among participants.

The results showed that according to the interviewed individuals, both the young migrants and the specialists, that an ability to speak Icelandic is the element that has the greatest impact on young migrants´ opportunities on the Icelandic labour market. The migrant participants are unanimous in maintaining that speaking Icelandic, or having better language skills, would increase their job opportunities. From the interviews it may also be judged that some participants sense prejudice and racism in relation to their nationality. This was partly linked to negative media coverage that can also affect their opportunities in Iceland due to negative public perceptions. The results reveal that when it comes to matters of language teaching for immigrants in Iceland, the situation is not good enough, both poor

teaching and wrong priorities were listed by critics. Comparisons made by the researcher and what came up in discussions with specialists showed that Iceland came out poorly compared to neighboring countries when it comes to support for foreigners wanting to learn Icelandic.

Language has an especially important part to play in an individual's integration into society because everyday communication, resources and opportunities in education and on the labour market rely on the ability to communicate (Esser, 2006). A skill in the receiving country's language is therefore the key to successful assimilation and helps migrants to obtain suitable employment (Hauksdóttir, 2008; Berger, 2004). This is in line with the results in this study where language was seen as the most influential factor in the interviewed individual's opportunities on the labour market in Iceland. The findings here concurred with Skaptadóttir´s (2007) research, i.e. participants in her research also linked their limited Icelandic knowledge to poorer integration into Icelandic society.

There is a relationship between language knowledge and networking where inadequate language skills diminish social interaction, leading to reduced opportunities (Milroy, 1987) and language is always one of the factors of inclusion or exclusion in a number of fields, such as access to knowledge and employability (Wright, 2000). A general knowledge of the national language is therefore, as the research indicated, enormously important when it comes to migrants´ possibilities of employment (Esser, 2006).

As reported by Carli et al. (2003), people speaking a foreign language in a society, clearly are marked as the others and ethnic and cultural identity can be considered on the basis of language diversity. Language can as well play a crucial role in the formation and continuity of ethnic stratification (Bade, et al., 2006). This in itself makes language a huge influence device and moreover languages and accents can act as symbols of belonging or separation and lead to distinction

and discrimination. This is in line with the findings of this study where participants described impressions of prejudice and racism.

Skaptadóttir (2010) argues that Icelandic nationalism is particularly marked in Iceland after the crisis hit and is especially related to the Icelandic language. This is a hindrance for migrants in search of employment and is similar to the results obtained in this research where the language is identified as a barrier on the labour market along with prejudice and racism in relation to an interviewee's nationality.

As concluded in this research, accent in itself is enough to be a drawback in opportunities on the labour market, which is in line with Skaptadóttir´s (2004) findings where language was given as a reason for not hiring a person even though she spoke fluent Icelandic. Accent alone has the tendency of being classified as not good enough Icelandic, which obviously can make it more difficult for migrants to find employment. Accent is something that follows most individuals when speaking a foreign language.

Although the migrants in the focus groups have lived in Iceland for some years, most for 3-4 years, some of them did not speak any Icelandic. This is in accordance with Skaptadóttir´s (2007) findings where some participants´ knowledge of Icelandic was very little despite having lived in Iceland for years. This study highlights the participants´ dissatisfaction with Icelandic teaching for foreigners in Iceland. Some participants said they learned nothing during Icelandic language courses, and that would concur with Skaptadóttir (2004, 2007), where it emerged that participants learned very little or nothing during Icelandic language courses.

In the interviews with the migrants and the specialists it was reported that the requirements for Icelandic language skills had changed after the crisis hit and a higher standard was requested by employers. This is consistent with Skaptadóttir (2010) who has also pointed out that after the economic collapse more demands

were made concerning Icelandic language skills in most jobs. This makes language a highly influential device in the lives of those migrants who came to Iceland to work when the demand for foreign workers was high. And now that they have lost their job they also have less chance than nationals of finding employment, due to an increased demand for language skills. This comes in on the separation, discrimination and diversity concepts, as Esser (2006), Bade, et al. (2006) and Carli et al. (2003) touch on in their work. Demands that were not made before become a source for separation in which language plays a big roll.

Media coverage is important for the young migrants, as was pointed out in this research. The results showed that negative media coverage is linked to a more negative attitude towards migrants. Some mentioned being branded as criminals due to their nationality being associated with crimes in the Icelandic media. Most participants in this research are from Poland, then Lithuania, one from Asia and one from southern Europe. According to an Icelandic study (Þórarinsdóttir, Georgsdóttir, & Hafsteinsdóttir, 2009), there are various indications that people from Poland have a harder time in Iceland than other migrants. The reason for this is mainly thought to lie in how many Polish people live in Iceland and to negative news coverage about Polish people in the Icelandic media. These findings are consistent with the results from this research as well as a research that showed that migrants are primarily represented in low paying jobs Skaptadóttir (2004), which also can affect the attitude towards them and their opportunities on the labour market.

5.2 The situation of migrants in Iceland after the economic collapse

To answer the second question, namely the situation of migrants in Iceland after the economic collapse with regard to work, social and financial aspects, the results indicate that several factors affect their situation and most interviewees

were clear about these in the interviews. In the conclusions it was revealed that job advertisements changed in Iceland after the bank collapse where demands for good Icelandic skills became a necessity. It was reported by the interviewees that they as foreigners have less chances of getting a job than Icelanders after the collapse. This was new because all had a job before.

It was also stated that some had lost their job or quit because of being taken advantage of in the workplace. In their view Icelandic people rather hire fellow Icelanders. Other factors that the interviewees mentioned in relation to this were feelings of being second class and stigmatized. Participants found it hard to live off the unemployment benefits and part did some work on the black market to make ends meet. A few wanted to send remittances to help their relatives in the home country, but could not afford to do so. From the discussion it emerged that moving back to the home country is not a solution because the situation is no better there. The situation of migrants has according to these results changed for the worse after the crisis struck.

In interviews with the migrants it emerged that they feel they have less possibilities as to getting a job than locals after the economic collapse. Job advertisements became more excluding for them due to demands for good Icelandic skills. This gives them the feeling of being second class in Iceland where locals would rather hire their compatriots. This is consistent with Castles and Miller (2009) and OECD (2010) that has pointed out that migrant workers in Western Europe have borne the brunt of restructuring and recessions, and have higher unemployment rates than local workers and lower occupational status.

All the interviewees had work in Iceland before the crisis hit, but according to them their situation after the collapse had changed for the worse. These changes they describe are in agreement with OECD (2009b, 2010) reports which show that the economic crisis has meant a decrease in employment rates amongst immigrants, and they tend to disproportionately suffer from economic

downturns. These results are also the same as Wojtyńska and Zielińska´s (2010) research which showed that Icelandic employers chose to let go foreign workers rather than natives after the crisis hit, hiding behind the excuse that the migrants could get work in their home country. The number of unemployed foreigners in Iceland has increased rapidly since autumn 2008 when the crisis hit, and the unemployment amongst them has increased faster than for Icelanders as shown in Figure 14, which also confirms what the participants experienced and is found in this research.

In Wallerstein´s (1986, 2000, 2004) World Systems Theory he among other things touches on the social rankings and exclusion of civilians. Those who are for example visitors in a country or persons from minority ethnic groups can be part of this exclusion. He means that ethnic ranking (along with other rankings) exists in every country, where there is a dominant ethnicity and then the others, where the others do not enjoy the same opportunities as those in the top ranking, or those above them in the ranking list. This corresponds with what is stated in this research, where interviewees felt themselves to be second class and that people rather tended to hire their compatriots over others, which was the experience of the participants in this research.

Wallerstein (2004) also points out that some workers lose a larger proportion of their created surplus-value than others, depending on location inside communities, i.e. the social ranking. This matches with the migrants´ experience as to being taken advantage of on the labour market where low salary or even unpaid salary, unpaid taxes and violations of union rights were among the factors mentioned. In this way the migrants get a lower part of the produce and it indicates that even before the crisis hit and Icelandic employers needed people to work, and the demand for workers outstripped supply, there still was a social ranking to the extent that migrants were rather exposed to misuse according to the interviewees. After the economic collapse they even lost a greater part by losing their job and on top of that encounter a hard time getting another one.

By talking about feelings of being second class and therefore stigmatized by Icelandic society, the interviewees illustrated social ranking. Their statements of being defined as criminals, seen as second class and looked at as something inferior to Icelanders, are among the elements that illustrated stigmatizing. This touches on the same results as Skaptadóttir (2010), who stated that after the economic crisis attitudes changed towards migrants and became even more negative than before.

A classification based on nationality and the tendency to perceive migrants as second class is also in line with what Castes and Miller (2009) point out as nationals respond to what they feel are threatening changes to their dominance as the privileged group. They somehow feel threatened by the newcomers and therefore stigmatize them. In this context it might be said that increased anxiety has possibly broken out amongst Icelanders after the economic collapse and competition for jobs became more intense. This led to a changed attitude for the worse towards migrants, and they additionally were considered a threat on the labour market.

Interviews with the migrants showed that they do not believe that moving back to the home country or to another country is a solution because the situations are no better there. This is in agreement with Martin (2009), Wojtyńska and Zielińskas (2010), Skaptadóttir (2010) and Castles and Miller (2010), who all have pointed out that the reason some migrants did not move home immediately after the crisis struck was because opportunities were extremely limited back home as well.

It was stated in the interviews that migrants have a hard time financially surviving on unemployment benefits. Some find other ways to make ends meet and several confessed to working on the black market and one in prostitution. A few of the migrants said they could not afford to help their relatives in the homeland after the crisis. Others did not need to send money because their

families had no need for it. For those used to sending remittances home it can be difficult emotionally not being able to do so any more, as they no longer can support their family as they would wish to. Wojtyńsk and Zielińska (2010) point out that this can force migrants to cut back even more on their expenses in Iceland in order to keep the amount of money sent the same. In this way the crisis also affects a migrant's remittance to their home country (Skaptadóttir, 2007), and for many it is clear that it is impossible to continue payment after the devaluation of the Icelandic króna and having less income.

In some cases remittances are sent to support the education of family members, to support sick and poor parents or in some other way contribute to the support of family members in the home country (Þórarinsdóttir, Georgsdóttir, & Hafsteinsdóttir, 2009). The conditions of migrants in Iceland are not only worse after the economic collapse, but the effects extend much further and can affect the quality of life of many other individuals.

5.3 Possible means of improvement

As shown in Figure 2, Iceland is one of the countries in the world estimated to have the largest increase in migrant stock. As shown in Figure 4, the proportion of immigrants in Iceland has in fact increased rapidly over the past years. The proportion of immigrants has become an increasing part of the total population in Iceland (see Figure 5) and a permanent feature of Icelandic society. It is because of this that this matter must be given better attention in Iceland.

Experience in neighbouring countries shows that immigration is often a cause of deep political conflicts and if not handled carefully a cause for serious social discord (CIRRA, n.d.). In my view it is very important for Iceland to give greater attention to migrant issues to avoid further conflicts and increased negativity towards migrants. The main key to better opportunities for migrants on the

labour market is the language, as pointed out before. As the findings of this study infer, Icelandic teaching for foreigners is not effective enough.

Improvements could be obtained for example by requiring the language schools to demonstrate the progress of their students, so it would be possible to intervene if the instruction is poor. Subsidies should not, in my opinion, go to language schools that fail to demonstrate acceptable progress of their students. In this way schools that show student improvement would continue to receive subsidies but not the others. This would reduce the risk of foreigners ending up in a bad language course, which in turn can have negative consequences for their confidence and willingness to learn the language, as stated in the conclusions. Not to mention of course the waste of time and money that such control could prevent.

Offering free language courses as is the case in many neighbouring countries is, in my opinion, a matter that would help migrants attend the courses and increase the likelihood that they would try to learn Icelandic. That in turn would help their integration into Icelandic society and improve their opportunities on the labour market. This has also been pointed out for example by Martin (2010), who maintains that in the receiving countries better language proficiency among migrants needs to be encouraged and financed as it is a wise investment for the future. Good labour force outcomes for immigrants are not just desirable, but also necessary and something OECD countries´ economies cannot afford to ignore.

I also think there is a need to review if some rules can be set when it comes to negative news reports of migrants by the media and whether or not nationality should be stated in crime contexts, something not done when Icelanders are involved.

Migration issues are not limited to the migrants themselves. Personally I feel Icelanders have to get more education and information about migration issues in

order to avoid a rift between ethnic groups. It is also important that Icelanders start to see Icelandic spoken with an accent as proper Icelandic. Perhaps it is worth pointing out the fact that Icelanders themselves sought out people from abroad to come and work in Iceland when their economy was booming, and consequently have their responsibilities. This is an issue that is far more complex than to simply have all migrants move back home as soon as there is a recession.

5.4 The contribution of this research

The results of this research indicate what factors affect the opportunities on the work market of young migrants living in Iceland, and how their situation is in Iceland after the crisis hit, with regard to work, social and financial aspects. The results summarized very briefly are that language skills are the most influential factor when it comes to opportunities for young migrants on the Icelandic labour market. Prejudice and stigmatization are also factors that affect their status and the situation of young migrants in Iceland is worse after the economic collapse partly due to Icelandic employers preferring to hire Icelanders and changed job requirements where Icelandic skills became a necessity.

It is my hope that this research provides information that can be useful regarding migrant issues in Iceland. The authorities can hopefully use its findings to look into the factors the interviewees mentioned. Improving these would promote better integration and opportunities for migrants in Icelandic society. The parties involved in teaching Icelandic to foreigners and the authorities could take into consideration the criticism expressed by the interviewees and specialists regarding how Icelandic is taught to foreigners. And the authorities in addition could consider the lack of financial support for migrants concerning opportunities to attend Icelandic language courses.

Increased awareness in the school system about migration issues so as to combat prejudice and misunderstanding would be welcomed in my opinion, as would any kind of guidance to integrate into society and so reduce prejudice towards people from certain nations living in Iceland.

This study suggests further research on Icelandic teaching for foreigners. Also on factors associated with integration and aspects that possibly are contributing to a negative attitude towards migrants in Iceland. Migrant issues are in Iceland to stay and must therefore be given immediate and proper attention. With further research we increase our ability to deal with the factors that create unequal opportunities for migrants in Iceland, as well as encouraging successful co-existence between different nations in Iceland.

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