

WSF

Working Paper Series

TRANSWEL

#1/2018

March 2018

Welfare Negotiations Among Estonians Working in Sweden. Experiences, Barriers and Nar- rated Coping Strategies

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Funding

ERA-Net Plus Funding

Grant Agreement Number 618106



WSF Working Paper Series
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Welfare negotiations among Estonians working in Sweden

Experiences, barriers and narrated coping strategies

Maarja Saar, Florence Fröhlig & Ann Runfors

1. Introduction

This report focuses on experienced barriers to and strategies for accessing and transferring social security rights among Estonian born EU citizens working in Sweden. The case of Estonian mobile EU citizens is quite special as the Estonian population could be divided into two: a majority of approximately 70% Estonian speaking (ethnic) Estonians and a minority of 30% Russian-speaking Estonians. As a result of the political fall-out following the break-up of the Soviet Union the position of this minority within the Estonian society oscillates between near complete integration to almost categorical non-inclusion into the Estonian state building project. The Russian-speakers in Estonia fall into three categories in terms of their citizenship status: Russian citizens, non-citizens and Estonian citizens. This report hence offers a view of the use of the European social security coordination system not only from the perspective of Estonian speaking majority mobile EU citizens in Sweden, but also from the perspective of Russian speaking minority Estonian mobile EU citizens.

The report has six chapters. After this introductory chapter follows the methodology chapter 2. Thereafter we, in chapters 3-5, turn to the typical experienced barriers accessing and porting social benefits and the typical coping strategies used by migrants. Chapter 3 is a case box chapter presenting Raivo's life story with the aim of giving the reader an introduction to the typical experiences, barriers and strategies that surface in the material in the most illustrative way. Not least does Raivo's life story offer the reader a sense of how the barriers and strategies are interwoven. Chapter 4 analyses the main experienced barriers we detected in the order of importance: We discuss the requirement of a personal identification number (PIN) experienced as a barrier to access benefits and thereafter in-transparency of the system and how it intersects with the informants lacking knowledge about the Swedish welfare system and in the Swedish language. Following we analyse another type of barrier detected, namely

barriers created by discursive expectations of self-sufficiency. Thereafter we discuss regulatory gaps and incompatibility of the Estonian and Swedish social welfare systems as experienced barrier. The chapter ends with a discussion on how problems to port welfare rights also act as barriers for accessing rights. Chapter 5 analyses the main strategies used for dealing with the detected barriers (also in order of importance): the strategy of self-reliance, the strategy of turning for help and the strategy of victimization. Through chapter 4 and 5 we return to and elaborate further on Raivo's story, this as the central themes of the material is illustrated in his case. Finally, chapter 6 concludes and sums up the results and discuss how the barriers and the chosen strategies are connected.

2. Methodology and reflections on overall results

In total 25 *interviews* were conducted: 20 with migrants and five with significant others in Estonia. Among the migrants the number of females and males was equal, meaning ten each. Seven of the migrants were Russian-speakers and thirteen Estonian-speakers. These shares were calculated based on the overall population in Estonia. When it comes to interviews with significant others, two were Estonian-speakers and three were Russian-speakers. All were women: three were mothers of the respondents, one was mother in law and the fifth one was the sister of a respondent. The imbalance between Estonian-speaking and Russian-speaking significant others is a result of bigger difficulties in finding significant others among Estonian-speaking migrants. Either the respondents did not want their relatives to be contacted or the significant others refused to participate. The Estonian-speaking participants were interviewed by Maarja Saar in Estonian, while the Russian-speaking participants were interviewed in Russian by Martin Ericson and Valeria Kopeykina.

The sampling strategy was the same as in the overall project: to get interviewees coming to Sweden after the 2004 enlargement and who had encountered problems of porting or accessing welfare, but also interviewees with different employment status (regular, irregular employed as well as circular migrants). We aimed to get as broad scope of experience as possible in total. As the sampling for the interviews hence was theoretically oriented, the sample is not representative of general group of Estonian migrants in Sweden.

Since our first interviews indicated that the main portability issues in Sweden are related to accessing PIN, we then aimed to find people who had struggled with applying for PIN. As it proved to be easier to approach female interviewees our strategy after the first interviews was to find male respondents in order to equalize the sample. In the later stages of the interviewing process we also wanted to interview

people who would agree to have their significant others interviewed – as this turned out to pose a problem.

In order to find migrants to interview we used different strategies. Russian speaking interviewees were mainly found through calling to the people who had agreed to be interviewed during the quantitative survey phase of the research. Since there were close to twenty people that had agreed, we focused on those migrants who based on our quantitative data had experiences with accessing social benefits. Furthermore, we checked for interviewees who would have commuting experiences. Some of the interviewees were also found through personal contacts.

When it comes to Estonian interviewees most interviewees (six) were found through Facebook, by screening different Facebook pages for users that had commented on accessing social security and by checking the public profiles for these users to check for children, potential long-distance relationships as well as commuting. Personal messages in Facebook were written to close to 30 people. Only two interviewees were found through the quantitative survey, as many of the Estonian speaking survey respondents did not have experience with portability and did not agree to be interviewed. One Estonian speaker was found through Estonian kindergarten in Stockholm, two through an Estonian community leader in Stockholm and two through social contacts (knowing that they had various issues with accessing social security).

All significant others were found through the interviewed EU movers.

It is rather common among people in Estonia, not least among males, to be relatively private about their personal lives, such as family background etc., but less private on institutional matter and criticism against institutions. This meant it was not always easy to find persons who were willing to participate and not least was it difficult to find significant others willing to participate. This was valid for both Estonian and Russian speaking interviewees, but was more accentuated among the Estonian speakers – a phenomena that has also been noted by other researchers (see e.g. Pajumets, 2012). The process of finding both suitable and willing interview subjects was hence a time-consuming process

Our final sample of *Russian* speakers contained of many generally well-educated persons. We interviewed one person with a master, three with bachelor degrees, one with higher education (ballet dancer), one with vocational school and one with secondary education. Among these seven interviewees four are clearly employed in works that did not match their educational degree. Among these four, three

were women who had bachelors or master degree and who were working in cleaning companies (Olga), in home services (Julia) and as a team leader for a cleaning firm (Tatiana). The fourth person was a man (Mitrofan) who was working as a welder though he has an education as a ballet dancer. Six of the seven among the Russian speakers were regularly employed, the seventh person being a posted worker (Mitrofan).

Among *Estonian* speakers the sample was more versatile regarding education, ranging from those with basic education to those with doctoral degree. We interviewed two people with basic education, one with vocational school after basic school, four with secondary education, one with bachelor, two people with master degree, two either obtaining or having PhD degree. At least three of these had experience with illegal work and several of them had been posted workers over extended periods of time. Several of the Estonian speakers also had been unable to find work in in Sweden matching the field they were educated for and had taken on less qualified jobs. Tiit was working as a crane operator even though he had an education in communication and marketing. Mari was stay at home mom and had never worked in Sweden even though she had masters-degree in marketing. Helmut, even though he only had secondary education had worked in hotel and management, had not found job matching his qualification in Sweden. The amount of regular and irregular workers among then Estonian speakers are not easy to calculate, as several had been oscillating between the positions and it furthermore depends on how we define the categories. Some that were posted workers before had for example now received Swedish working contract and some that had been before illegal workers had Swedish legal working contracts. One woman was on maternity leave and had not worked in Sweden and received PIN through her husband.

Two of our interviewees initially entered Sweden already before 2004, Tatiana and Raivo, but in both cases we deemed them as anyway within the project interest. Tatiana came to Sweden first time 2002, when Estonian citizen were welcomed as part of the Baltic Sea cooperation program. But as she is one of the few EU migrants in the sample (3 cases in total) that has porting experiences we regarded her narrative as important. On top of that she offered an interview within a Significant Other. Regarding Raivo he came to Sweden 2000 – but as he did not try to enter the Swedish welfare system until after the incorporation of Estonia in EU we categorized him as with our target group (see more on this in chapter 3) He also had porting experiences. Without these two cases we hence would be left with one narrative on porting experiences.

Due to the mentioned perceptions of privacy, most interviews were conducted in public spaces such as café's (22) and very few interviews were conducted at participant's homes (only three). This also meant

that we did not succeed in collecting any additional material – such as photo albums or other types of documents.

The interviews chosen for coding were selected similarly to the general idea for the sample – namely the most problematic cases in relation to portability and access. Grounded theory was implemented as the main tool to analyse the collected data in accordance with the WP4 guidelines. This included coding of the interview transcriptions with analysis beginning as soon as the first interview was collected and transcribed. It continued and evolved throughout the data collection process as described below. Estonian interviews were coded by Maarja Saar and by segment. The Russian speaker interviews were coded by Valeria Kopeykina and Martin Ericson. The first of these were line-by-line coded, while the of coding thereafter was segment based. After the first interviews Martin Ericson and Maarja Saar discussed their work and tried to find a common ground in the coding process and decided to use segmented coding as this proved most productive. They also discussed which could be more overlapping categories and which topics seem to be subthemes. The whole coding process was carried by the project idea with focus on social security. Some data which was not related to issues of social security was therefore left un-coded. Maarja Saar also wrote memo's right after interviewing and was summarizing her more theoretical and abstract observations throughout the process. At a later phase, numerous discussions between Valeria Kopeykina, Maarja Saar and Martin Ericson took place over similarities and differences between the Russian and Estonian interviews. In general, the differences discovered were fewer than expected, while there were some very similar patterns emerging. After most of the interviews were coded Martin Ericson, Maarja Saar, Valeria Kopeykina and Florence Fröhlig discussed which general categories that could be formed based on both Estonian and Russian interviews and the performed coding.

Reflections on work process and results

Although both Estonian speakers and Russian speakers were generally relatively private about their personal lives, the two categories differed a bit in their interaction with the researchers. The Estonian speakers were generally quite trusting in the sense that they revealed facts about both irregular and illegal employments as well as about various strategies of cheating which were used in order to access welfare. The only area that was not well covered was family relationships. This is probably due to what was mentioned above, the more underlined tendency to not be very open about the inner workings of the family. As it was considered as somewhat a violation of privacy the Estonian speaking interviewees generally preferred not to ask their relatives to participate in an interview. Nor did they want to that to

share any additional material.¹ The Russian-speaking migrants proved to be a bit more willing interview subjects, while their Significant Others however tended to present a more reserved attitude towards the in-depth interviews sought after by the research team.

One consequence of the above is that the interview narratives in general are mostly lacking long stories, detail and coherency. Oftentimes the interviewees just answered questions by saying that they did not remember. Reflecting over these tendencies however also means reflecting on our main results. As will be discussed in the core chapters, the types of narratives we received can be seen as a result of several *additional* factors, beside the privacy attitude – factors telling us about welfare management. Firstly, the migrants we interviewed did not communicate a great interest in social benefits and often just said that they did not apply for unemployment assistance etc. Rather the general tendency was that they seemed to avoid contact with social security offices. It furthermore – from the interviews – seems like the contact with social security offices was often enacted through the interviewees enterprises/employers. Some even said that they did not even apply for their PIN themselves, but this was organized by communication between the employers and the welfare authorities. Hence, the interview material also contains very few stories on migrants' own interactions with authorities. In the chapters below, we will analyse how the above tendencies in the material can be understood in relation to various barriers. We however in this report also put to the few narratives we have on interviewees direct encounters with social security office – even if these are atypical cases. One interview that departed from the main pattern discussed above was the one of Estonian speaking Raivo, which contains a more detailed narrative. This narrative is here presented as an introduction to chapter 4 and 5 as it proved to illustrate the typical experiences of access and portability of social welfare we identified in the interview material as a whole, and also typical barriers to access and portability. It also shows how these different kinds of barriers for accessing welfare intertwine and furthermore how this influences Estonian mobile EU citizens' strategies in dealing with the barriers. It furthermore illuminates the confusions mirrored in many interviews regarding how supranational and national welfare is working. In the chapters, we discuss the EU-movers confusion as related to an interplay of barriers identified, such as experienced intransparency of the system, the individual's lack of sufficient system knowledge as well as the self-sufficiency attitude. Raivo's uncertainty and puzzlement about his social rights below is actually one of the more telling aspects in his narrative.

¹ This may indicate something about how the internal relations in Estonian speaking families are carried out, namely there seems to be a high degree of separation between family and individual. Getting close to an individual might not lead to getting to know their family

3. Raivo's illustrative case

Raivo is a 46-year-old male with secondary education that is working as a construction worker. Although he has been working illegally in Sweden for 14 years, he just recently started to go through the regular welfare procedures with accessing PIN etc. During his illegal employment, Raivo did not have access to welfare. Raivo is married with three children, but his family lives in Estonia. Since 17 years he meets his family only every second month. Even though, he visits Estonia so relatively seldom, he declares that he himself "lives in Estonia". Being a circular migrant, displaying a transnational life-style, having recent experiences of trying to access the Swedish system as well as of both illegal and legal employment makes Raivo a very interesting case for our study.²

After a short period of construction work in Netherlands, Raivo decided to move to Sweden in 2000. As a motivation for the move he mentions being cheated by his employer in Estonia:

"I have, of course also worked in construction in Estonia, but there ...well we tried....we had a very good team in Estonia. We had good marks and we were working so efficiently that the employer had to pay a lot. So, he just took the marks down so that you would not get money. I did not understand this principle. So, I started looking outside."

Raivo explains that the salaries for the construction workers in Estonia were relatively high when he left, and that he worked with a team of four to five young men who were all motivated to work long hours. Hence, Raivo's income was good and not a direct motivator for moving to Germany. What pushed him was rather the feeling that the Estonian employer cheated him and his work mates upon the money which they had fairly earned.

Both in Netherlands and Sweden Raivo worked illegally. In Sweden, he worked illegally for private households. Raivo says that all the jobs he got were acquired through social networks and that most people hiring them were well educated and well aware of the fact that they hired illegal workforce:

² As Raivo did not try to enter the Swedish welfare system until after the incorporation of Estonia in EU we categorized him as belonging to our target group.

“Of course, Swedes themselves are also looking for options...well, work is very expensive in Sweden. They are also looking for place where to get...and they also appreciate the quality of our work. We have very good people.”

Raivo hence continued working illegally in Sweden for 14 years before he got employed legally in a Swedish electric company three years ago. To his opinion it is extremely difficult to get legal, official employment in Sweden and he describes the country as a stronghold in this sense. Although Raivo has now been working in Sweden for 17 years he expresses no wish to move to Sweden permanently.

As a strategy to secure himself health coverage he, during his illegal employment in Sweden, was also fictively registered (without getting salary) under a company in Estonia owned by a relative. He was hence paying social tax in Estonia (but no other taxes) and, as mentioned above, was getting his salary in Sweden from the illegal income gained from the work for private people in Sweden, who hired him to remodel their houses. This was a way to not have to deal with the Swedish system but to still insure healthcare in Estonia in case he would need it – although by illegal means.³

After finally getting legally employed Raivo started to pay his taxes in Sweden. He by help of his employer got a ‘samordningsnummer’ a temporary PIN, which all people that pay taxes in Sweden get. But in his opinion, having only ‘samordningsnummer’ and not ordinary PIN-number has created multiple difficulties for him. One was that his lack of PIN prevented him from getting a phone contract. It also created problems in accessing healthcare. Raivo – as well as the men working with him – accesses health care through EHIC. According to Raivo this is a disadvantage as it “takes ages” to apply for and receive EHIC and he and his mates have experienced being declined help under several occasions.⁴

Another Estonian speaker suggested Raivo to apply for ordinary personal identification number (PIN). Despite having worked in Sweden for long Raivo felt unsure as to how to go about things – since all the administration was in Swedish and Raivo does not speak much of the language. He then turned to Reet, an Estonian woman which he got to know through common activities in the Stockholm

³ Note that this is not the same as being a posted worker, as one can be posted worker only for two years in EU and one in the case the posted work actually gets paid through company

⁴ We do not know if Raivo needed to apply each time as he did not elaborate in this and we unfortunately did not ask during the interview. For the same reason, we do not know if he the reason for him to not apply was because he was not in a medically urgent situation.

Estonian House, an organization for Estonian speakers. Reet has a legal education and has worked several years as voluntary helper of Estonians in legal matters and now assisted Raivo for free in turning in such an application. The interview contact with Raivo was actually mediated through Reet at the Estonian community.

Raivo never received PIN however:

“I have no idea what they were thinking and why they did so (denying PIN). I was angered by this....If there would have been an institution to write to....All kinds of people come into Sweden who get all their documents immediately. They do not even work, they only live off state support. They get apartments, they get allowance to support themselves. Whatever. We have been slaves to the Swedish state, in a direct sense built up the state and I was not asking much.”

As he had been working legally in Sweden for 3 years and had been paying his taxes to the Swedish system, Raivo expressed disappointment with the authorities' decision. He compares his situation with refugees, by stating that for him it is more difficult to be part of Sweden than for refugees. He creates a dichotomy between himself as a hard-working person and refugees, who are framed as living off state support. He obviously experiences being unappreciated by the state and to some degree also deceived. At the same time, he does express helplessness against the system, because he is unaware of who would accept his complaints. His explanation to why his PIN application is denied is that his centre of life was judged to be in Estonia – as he had his family living there. Raivo says that the most important argument from the Swedish authorities in denying him PIN was that his youngest child was still under 18. As will be discussed later on, this is another telling confusion in the story which illustrates both the complexity of the Swedish administrative system and the unawareness of the migrants.

An additional complexity for Raivo is his lack of language proficiency as this hinders him from engaging in a dialogue with state institutions. But Raivo also expresses a certain attitude towards the social system of Sweden – an attitude of self-sufficiency that came across in other interviews as well. The attitude is that you do not want to get involved in the paperwork and in the system. Rather you do your job – and this is where your claims towards the state end. His disappointment illustrated above, when he involved himself in the PIN application, one time claimed something but was denied, also confirmed to him that you better manage on your own.

Even though Raivo is now legally employed, he is still using “samordningsnummer”, the temporary PIN provided for those who are not working in Sweden long-term – although this, as mentioned, has created multiple difficulties for him. Raivo says that most paperwork and legal matters are organized by the secretary of the company where he is now employed and that workers generally have very little contact with the Swedish system and the “legal side”. When Raivo tried to access PIN, it was the very first time that he approached the Swedish authorities on his own – and even this was facilitated by one of the co-ethnic voluntary legal experts that supports Estonians in Sweden.

Finally, another area of problem for Raivo is porting child benefits to his family in Estonia. All Raivo’s children are now over 18, but until two years ago Raivo attempted to apply for top-up for his younger son, that is for “differential supplement” as the official term goes (“tilläggsbeloppsmellanskillnad” in Swedish). He was altogether very confused about the process and says that he never fully comprehended it. He did not know how big should the top-up be, nor how often should he receive it. In the end Raivo ended up receiving one lump sum as a top up, retrospectively for one year. But he never followed up the matter. He does not quite understand how top-up for child benefits is calculated and assumed that this is how things work in Sweden.

Raivo’s story hence illustrates many of the experienced barriers we detected in the material and which we will be describing in this report, such as the requirement of personal identification number experienced as a barrier to enter the system and hence access benefits, experienced in-transparency of the system and of administrative hurdles – and how they interplay with the informants lacking knowledge about the Swedish welfare system and in the Swedish language. But in Raivo’s narrative, another type of very influential barrier is also visible, namely internalized Estonian discursive expectations that he should manage on his own and not mix up with the welfare state manifesting itself in his own ideal of self-sufficiency. The ways Raivo dealt with these experienced barriers also illustrates the main coping strategies found in the material: turning for help, accepting help offered by employers, victimization and finally the most common coping strategy – relying on one self.

Raivo’s story furthermore illustrates being in a vulnerable position as an illegally hired blue-collar worker and also problems with shifting from illegal to legal work. Even if he since some years has got a legal employment he still experienced problems in accessing the Swedish welfare system in various ways. First, Raivo did not get access to PIN. Second, he experienced problems in porting child benefits, but never followed up on the issue – which refers to the experienced intransparency of the Swedish welfare system, the lack of system knowledge but also to system mismatches.

4. Experienced barriers

In this chapter, we describe and analyse the typical experiences of barriers to access benefits based on the material as a whole, starting with the most prevalent experienced barrier and then moving towards barriers experienced by fewer EU movers.

The PIN as an experienced barrier

As discussed in our analysis of the Swedish and Estonian welfare *regulations* (Runfors et al. 2016) PIN is required to access the Swedish system, to register at any Swedish administration and hence also for accessing benefits. For PIN acquisition one year working contract and plan for residency for more than one year is required. These requirements are difficult to meet for EU migrants with employment contracts of less than one year, with temporary employment or who are more mobile. Due to these regulations, unemployed and irregularly employed EU migrants who haven't had formal employment in Sweden are excluded from PIN, and must show they hold comprehensive health insurance, either state or private. However, the ceiling set for private health insurance is ten million SEK (ap. one million Euro) and hence so high that it is hard for anybody to meet. If a person is not planning to stay for twelve months, he/she may apply for a provisional PIN. However, he/she will be subject to discretionary decision-making to determine their residency status (Runfors et al. 2016).

The PIN system hence forms a main regulatory condition for EU mobile citizens access to the system and social benefits. As will be shown here, PIN system is proved to be the main experienced barrier among the EU migrants themselves. However, it should be noted, that there were significant differences in experiences inbetween different categories of EU mobile citizens. For regular migrants, with one year working contract, obtaining PIN was just a minor inconvenience, while getting PIN proved to be a major hurdle for those having shorter working contracts and for those who were working semi-legally, which will be commented on later. As follows, we will describe the experiences in obtaining the PIN for different categories of migrants. After a short overview of regular migrants and their experiences we continue describing the categories that experienced problems: those having shorter working contracts and for those who were working semi-legally. When describing the problems encountered, we will refer to and expand on Raivo's story to illustrate in a detailed manner the particular difficulties.

Experiences of regularly employed migrants

Regularly employed migrants with at least one year contract either experienced very little problems with getting PIN – or none what so ever. The main issue mentioned was long waiting times. However, the waiting periods proved to vary greatly for those within this category. Some recall they got their PIN within a week, while other said that they were forced to wait for months. The longest experienced waiting period recalled was nine months. Long waiting times could be a major inconvenience, as without having PIN one often cannot access social benefits, open a bank account and sometimes not even access the housing rental market. One migrant however discovered a shortcut.

“People think they need to wait for the letter of approval from migration board (Migrationsverket). Even in migration board they tell you that you need to register and wait for the paper. The paper comes approximately in six months. However, I knew that one does not have to wait for this paper. You can just tell the tax office (Skatteverket) that you have been in migration board. If I had not heard this from a colleague I would have to wait for six months.”⁵ (Andrus E)

Andrus is a highly-skilled Estonian speaking migrant that came to Sweden four years ago due to his work. Andrus lost his job in Estonia and was approached by a colleague in Sweden – on social media where he announced that he had his last day at the office – who offered him a job in Sweden. Andrus is working in IT company in Sweden. He is married with four kids. His wife followed him to Sweden two years after his arrival, but as neither the wife nor the older kids liked it in Sweden, the family moved back to Estonia. When asked about his future plans, Andrus is unsure and a discussion about a divorce seems to be on the table.

Since 2015 migrants do not have to register at the migration board anymore to apply for PIN, but can go directly to tax office. This can explain Andrus’s experience (Andrus applied for PIN in 2015) as well as why the waiting period for PIN differs so markedly even among those that have a regular employment. However, the ten interviewees who did not experience any problems with obtaining PIN usually regarded the application procedure unproblematic and were unaware of the difficulties of other migrants. Therefore, the opinions on how accessible Swedish social system is, differs quite a bit depending on migrant category.

⁵ It should be noted that since 2015 migrants do not have to register at the migration board anymore and can go directly to tax office

Experiences of other migrant categories

As mentioned the eight interviewees who did not have one year working contract had much more problems with gaining access to PIN, and here we will in more detail describe their experiences. When entering Sweden, about six of our interviewees had either only temporary working contracts lasting less than a year or did not have a Swedish working contract at all (but with an Estonian company in Sweden, registered in Estonia).⁶ As such these two categories were not eligible for PIN. Many migrants belonging to these categories were furthermore only partially aware of their situation and knew very little about the central importance of PIN when entering Sweden. Paavo (E) for instance vaguely recalls that he pays his taxes in Estonia and is hence hired as a posted worker. He however says that the company where he works for is in the process of re-registering itself as a Swedish company (formerly the company was registered in Estonia but operating in Sweden). Through this re-registration, Paavo will get a Swedish contract. He has however already applied for PIN, but is somewhat worried about the process as he does not have knowledge on how his current status as a posted worker will have an impact on the judgement on his application. Paavo also lets me know that his managers are well aware of all the legal loopholes that can be found in the Swedish system and that it is a common practice for Estonian companies to try to 'beat the system'. For instance, Paavo's employers – who are both Estonian and are in the process of registering their company in Sweden – do not have PIN themselves. Paavo cannot explain how this is legally possible, but says that the owners of the company have several lawyers from Estonia hired to help them with reregistering their company in Sweden.

Such 'beating of the system' also comes out from other interviews. Five interviewees for example describe semi-legal practices applied by companies in order to provide them a PIN. In the case of Helmut (E), he pressed his employer for PIN and according to him, he was given a fake working contract in order to get the PIN. In his experience, it is common for Swedish employers to hire subcontractors (Estonian companies). Swedish mother companies, according to him, do not want to grant workers permanent contracts due to the seasonal nature of construction work. Rather, they employ Estonian companies, who then hire workers. Hence, Helmut says that the Swedish mother company offered him a 'fake' contract which was retracted as soon as he received PIN. However, Helmut did not mind, but was rather happy about having received PIN and hence being integrated the Swedish welfare system and thus able to access to all kinds of benefits.

A similar story is told by Heli (E), whose partner Kaupo according to her received PIN the same way as Helmut. Kaupo, has been working mostly as a posted worker. According to Heli, her father's workplace

⁶ Several of the above had only temporary work contract (which thus did not make them eligible for PIN). They should hence not be confused with posted workers.

in Sweden provided Kaupo with a ‘fake’ working contract so that she and Kaupo could get PIN – because according to her working for Estonian companies in Sweden is “pointless”:

“This is pointless. If they transfer money to Estonian account it is pointless if you want to be in the apartment queue, have unemployment benefits- you get nothing.” (Heli E)

Heli refers to the many posted workers she knows or have heard about, who regularly get employed via Facebook. According to her they are unaware of what working for such a company entails. As she points out, living in Sweden is very difficult without having PIN – as EU movers with temporary contracts, fake or illegal employment with Swedish companies will not be able to get PIN and hence will not be able to enter the Swedish system. The same goes for posted workers. Even though, her own partner, Kaupo, has been oscillating between working as a posted worker and working officially in Sweden ever since.

Finally, to deem from the experiences of the EU-movers, the most disadvantaged group in terms of applying for PIN are those migrants who do not have a work contract nor are significant others that have accompanied a migrant to Sweden. Tiit (E), was one of these, even though he had a sister in Sweden. Tiit bumped into the obstacle that many companies require PIN in order to hire people. However, to obtain PIN he would have needed a job. This particular case is not an EU wide trouble but rather a Swedish problem. Because parallel to the one year work contract condition, companies often require that people have PIN before they hire them. So, in the end there is a Swedish “Catch 22”-situation, as EU movers cannot get a job if they do not have PIN and they cannot get PIN if do not have a job. Being faced with this, Tiit had an idea of an alternative strategy:

“I had an idea that I will open my own company. I was looking for a job and bumped into an obstacle that I did not have ID-card (PIN) and bank account. I had an idea that I can open my own company and be my own employer. I had this clever idea. I went to the office, I do not remember which office it was where they also register enterprises. Something related to migration. I went there and said that I am a foreigner and want to start my own company. I do not want to work here....But I did not get further from there, one told me one thing, another totally different thing, I do not remember more exactly anymore.”
(Tiit E)

Hence, Tiit was trying to obtain PIN through registering a own company in Sweden. Even though this strategy did not work in Tiit’s case, it did work for Eduard’s father – who is not even residing in Sweden. Eduard’s father – who is living in Estonia – now has a Swedish PIN by having registered his Estonian

company in Sweden. It should be noted however, that even despite belonging to the most disadvantaged category, Tiit did not respond with feelings of hopelessness, but instead – just as shown above – tried to figure out alternative strategies as to how to access Swedish labour market and PIN.

It is now time to return to Raivo's experiences related to the access of PIN. As we saw, Raivo, after working illegally for many years finally got a legal contract with a Swedish company. He then also aspired to apply for PIN. At the moment of application Raivo had a temporary PIN, which he – as mentioned – experienced created some problems:

“One cannot enter the system with temporary PIN when you go to a doctor. It is always a hassle. On the other hand, it works with the Tax Office (he can pay his taxes without any problems). But once I wanted to have a phone contract in the shop and they wanted a PIN. So, I thought, I should maybe get this going....” (Raivo E)

Raivo's experiences illustrate how not having PIN can create difficulties on several different levels and how sometimes the access of social benefits, according to our material, seems not to be the primary reason for Estonian migrants to apply for PIN. In Raivo's case for example it turned out that the main “hassle” experienced by him was that his lack of PIN prevented him from getting a phone contract. And it was the opportunity to get such a contract that in the end inspired him to apply for PIN.

As mentioned in the chapter 3 case description, Raivo turned for help to Reet, another Estonian speaker who acts as a voluntary helper of Estonians in legal matters, who aided him for free with the application. But as it turns out from his narrative, Raivo is of the conviction that he – with the help of Reet – applied for citizenship and not for PIN.

“They had a problem there that my family is in Estonia, children are in Estonia. One child was at this point less than 18. And that was it. And then they started telling me in connection to the marriage that Jesus Christ how can it be like this that your wife is there and you are here....So it went...But the main argument was that the child is below eighteen. But me and Reet we had a slight misunderstanding, I did not want a citizenship, but rather PIN.” (Raivo E)

Applying for citizenship and not for PIN however seems unlikely as there are some incoherencies which would make applying for citizenship very difficult for him. Because, in order to apply for citizenship in

Sweden, one has to have lived in the country for five years. Now, even though Raivo had lived in the country for many years, he had mainly worked illegally and furthermore paid social tax (sotsiaalmaks) in Estonia. Hence, there would be very little legal proof for Raivo to qualify for the five-year residency condition. Therefore, it is more likely that Raivo actually did apply for PIN – and not for citizenship as he seems to think. Hence, the most telling aspect of the story is still the fact, that Raivo is himself not quite sure what he applied for and how it went about – and maybe also that PIN and citizenship is confused, which might say something about the experienced importance of PIN as a gatekeeper.

Raivo's story shows how PIN as a barrier is tightly connected to other barriers – such as the complicated system and lack of knowledge of this system. Raivo is however thinking of applying for PIN in the future again. He explains:

“I think I have to turn to Reet again. She might be able to help. Everything has developed now....In reality everything takes so long time here. All the tax returns and everything, it takes years.” (Raivo E)

It should be noted that Raivo does not even consider applying for PIN by himself. Rather he feels that he lacks the resources to manage this on his own. Partially it can be that his lack of Swedish is one of the reasons why he avoids dealing with the authorities alone. However, it is also likely that his past experiences also discourages him. This mistrust towards offices will be analysed further in the section below – together with other barriers such as the intransparency of the Swedish welfare system and lack of knowledge of the same. As will be shown these barriers intersect with the barriers caused by the PIN system as a bottleneck to the Swedish welfare system and its benefits.

System-intransparency, lack of language- and system-knowledge as barriers

It is visible from Raivo's story that he was quite confused about how the Swedish system works, not even knowing if he applied for citizenship or for PIN. His confusion led him to not trust himself in being capable of accessing the system alone. He rather felt that he needed some help from either his company or his Estonian helper, Reet. Here one could also note that Raivo does not talk about turning to authorities in Sweden for help. Rather he seems to perceive Swedish authorities as barriers:

“Healthcare is also.... You call them ...We had a problem here. One guy's EHIC expired. First you do not get hold of them. Secretary sat I think for three days trying. And finally, she got hold of them. They

had some problem, the papers were just lying around. One employee left for pregnancy leave. The other employee came, but never looked. So these papers were just lying.” (Raivo E)

Raivo describes Swedish authorities as inefficient, hard to reach and furthermore as careless with individual cases. Also in other interviews, it was visible that they were experienced as unreachable and that the paperwork was experienced as overwhelming and not manageable. Several interviewees described the paperwork and procedures as something that was handled in between the company where they worked and the Swedish authorities. Another example from Raivo's narration, this time on how things works now that he finally got a Swedish work contract and his employer helped him both to get a temporary Pin and to handle other legal matters:

“I probably do not have answers to all of your questions, because the paperwork is handled by our secretary. It is simple for us, we do not have to do anything. We are hired by Swedish state (he is opposing this to the employment by Estonian state), we have health care, social taxes whatever. All the papers have been organized by our employer.” (Raivo E).

So, on the one hand Raivo says he needs the help from his employer, as he does not know how the Swedish welfare system works. On the other hand, he due to this help does not have much contact with the system and the paperwork. This in turn leaves Raivo non-informed of the system and he only through social interactions with the co ethnic voluntary legal expert Reet found out that he is legible to apply for PIN. As will be elaborated on in the section, Raivo moreover was confused in regarding portability. He knows that he, on one occasion, received an additional child benefit top-up for his youngest child. But he has no idea how this came into realization. He knows that there are some papers which need to be provided to social institutions, but he has no idea exactly which ones.

The above illustrates a general experience among the interviewees, namely that the Swedish social welfare system is experienced intransparent and also as anonymous, with which individuals have little contact. Eduard (ER) for example also experience a similar lack of knowledge and describes the Swedish welfare system as complicated. According to him *"there are too many uncertainties in application procedures in Sweden and too much paperwork"* (Eduard). In Eduard experiences institutions often ask for additional documents simultaneously as they do not give proper information about what is needed to do in order to get access to benefits. He thinks one needs to be very active oneself. One should however keep in mind that the attitudes towards the Swedish welfare system was also communicated to

the interviewees on one hand – through the experiences of other EU movers and through internet forums.

The experiences on intransparency were also shared by all four migrants that tried to use the EU transnational social security and port benefits. They were all left confused about the process and the state of their application. The same kind of intransparency was also noted by Tatiana who tried to apply for child benefit:

“..it was especially difficult with child benefits. Mmm ... half a year it took to get child benefit, because, as nobody informed me, I should have presented an attestation confirming that I do not get any benefit from Estonia. If I knew about this at once, I could have resolved everything through internet, mm ... it is possible to order the documents through internet, to send them through internet bank, it is a question of minutes! (...) But, I didn't know that I had to hand in such an attestation. Nobody informed me about that. And I called them every week and asked, (...). Finally, they explained “You didn't send the attestation that you don't get any benefit from Estonia. At the end, when I did that, I got all family benefits very quickly.”

(Tatiana ER)

Tatiana hence says that she was not informed about the necessary steps for applying for the benefit. Similarly to Eduard she says that she was in contact with the welfare institutions but that their handling of the case was ineffective and that no clear guidelines were communicated. Tatiana was hence left confused and unaware of what was going on. This again gave her an impression of the Swedish system as something abstract and difficult to reach.

Only two interviewees tried to apply for unemployment benefits. These two however experienced this as a main area of confusion and seemed to lack knowledge about the procedures. In Sweden, it is required to sign up for membership in an unemployment fund (Arbetslöshetskassan) and to pay a membership fee in order to qualify for unemployment insurance. One has to be a member and pay the fee to the fund at least for one year in order to receive benefits. However, several migrants had found this information only in retrospect. Natalja (ER) for instance found out too late that she would have needed to be signed with the unemployment fund in order to receive the benefits. She assumed that her employer should have informed her about this.

“I went at once to Arbetsförmedlingen for information regarding unemployment benefits (...) When I moved, no one at my first job told me, that you have to register separately at Arbetsförmedlingen, Akassa, to pay etc. It’s now that I’m eligible in June and I know, that if I lose my job, then they’ll pay me at least 80% of my salary. When I just moved here, no one told me about it, and I was left “high and dry” when I lost my job ... I’ve learn through my own bitter experience.” (Natalja ER)

As can be seen from the quote above, Natalja had clear expectations on her employer to inform her about Swedish social system and also hold the employer responsible for not receiving unemployment benefits during her first period of unemployment. She feels neglected and dismissed and also, as she says, bitter towards her employer.

Such anticipations were not only observed with Natalja, but also among several other interviewees – who expressed that they expected their employers be more informative. These expectations are potentially related to experiences of welfare transactions as arranged in a non-individual sphere, between organizations, as for instance, health insurance application is managed through the contact between the employer and the health care board. This is exemplified by Olga: *“At my new job, I had a permanent contract (“tillsvidare kontrakt”) and from that I had medical insurance.” (Olga ER)*

For Olga accessing benefits was hence automatic and did not pose any problems. The same applied for all interviewees that were regularly employed. Since medical insurance is granted automatically through the employer it might be difficult for the interviewees to keep track of when social benefits are managed by their employer and when they actually need to organize those themselves and it might surprise individuals when an additional initiative is expected from them to get access to welfare – such as in the case with child benefits, for which the form for application is sent to applicants home.

Additionally, many international companies actually seem to go an extra mile to organize social welfare for their employed EU citizens, mostly for corporate expatriates. Laura (E) who works at an international company says that she was one of the people who helped to design the procedures for hiring EU citizens in her company. Laura’s company offers incoming EU citizens not only information on welfare issues, but also access to the housing market and to child-care facilities. Terje’s (E) told the same about his employer. Both Laura’s and Terje’s companies are big international institutions and have probably noticed the need for more information among highly-skilled mobile people and therefore readily provide.

Somewhat similar to Natalja's experience in applying for unemployment benefits, is Olga's experience in accessing child rearing benefits. Namely, neither she nor her husband were aware of the possibility of receiving such benefit nor the existence of such benefit in Sweden. Olga says:

“We found out about it when we moved to another municipality and the child went to the kindergarten. In other words, we post factum got to know that we had the right for it” (Olga ER).

Hence, Olga was also not informed about the social benefits in Sweden and found out accidentally about child rearing benefits. These identified barriers in the form of experienced system intransparency and lack of system knowledge is one way of understanding why some EU-movers let their employers manage their welfare and also why the employers, on their side, offers this service.

Besides the experienced system intransparency and the lack of system knowledge, lack of language knowledge also played a part in several cases. The problem with turning to the social institutions only when it is too late for example has partially to do with confusion caused by language issues. Eduard (ER) for instance believes it to be difficult to reach information on social insurance in any other language than Swedish. He experienced that even if the agencies have staff that speaks foreign languages it is difficult to find this person and also to book an appointment. In connection to language issues Terje (E) mentions that even though officials usually speak English, the phone system of the institutions uses Swedish. When phoning to the institutions an automatic operator usually asks in *Swedish* to enter the number of your issue. Hence, unless one speaks Swedish and understands the instructions, one cannot access the English information via phone:

“They have actually also a phone line in English (Tax Office)...theoretically....but I have not been able to find it yet because whenever I call there then the first thing it says is: If you want this then push this button, if you want that push this button. and it is all in Swedish. And then I cannot get pass this or I just push random button and wait...and wait for like 30 minutes or 40 minutes and then have something else to do or cannot wait anymore. So, I have actually never reached them via phone.” (Terje E)

As shown, many EU movers seemed to be rather puzzled about Swedish social welfare system. Actually, as many as twelve out of 20 expressed confusion. In some cases, they were unaware of how things functioned and did not use their rights – for instance their right for unemployment benefits or occasionally even their right for child benefit. In five cases, they only tried to access the system in case of emergency.

In sum, the system was experienced as intransparent and difficult to master with only your own individual knowledge. As shown, language problems also added to this. Another observation from the interviews is that the migrants often waited with turning to the social agency until it was absolutely necessary. For instance, Natalja only started enquiring about unemployment insurance when she had become unemployed. In the same manner Tiit started thinking about joining the union – where one year union membership is necessary to receive unemployment insurance – only when he had critical problems with his back and could not work very well any more. In both cases it was hence too late to actually acquire benefits. There seems to be a certain idea embedded in these behaviours, where state is considered a last straw which is used only when all the other options have been tried out. This will be discussed more in length below in the section on the interviewees own attitudes as barriers. We will show how mistrust towards the system as well as strong discursive expectations of self-sufficiency not only created barriers on their own but also intersected with the barriers discussed above.

Discursive expectations as a barrier

In our discourse analysis of Swedish and Estonian expert interpretations of welfare deservedness (Fröhlig et al. 2016) we showed that one conditions for the welfare access of Estonian EU movers are the Estonian discursive expectations on self-sufficiency. The Estonian experts strongly underlined that citizens should be self-sufficient and independent of the state. Rather than applying for social assistance in Estonia they should leave the country and migrate to be able to support themselves. The logic displayed in the expert interviews was that the citizens were seen of as owing to support the state, rather than the state owing to support the citizens, as in the Swedish welfare context. As follows we will describe how this proved to be mirrored in the interviews in the form of internalized attitudes of self-sufficiency.

Seven of the interviewees for example indicated that they had never thought about applying for social benefits. Some of the reasons behind disinterest towards for example pensions are reflected as follows by Paavo:

“I have no idea about pension. Who knows so much happens. Maybe they figure out a new system in twenty years. I think the current one will not work anymore then.” (Paavo E)

Many migrants narrated making no effort to access benefits until it becomes directly necessary. This can be seen in Natalja’s case (ER). She did not enquire about unemployment insurance until it was too

late. Tiit also did not pay any attention to social insurance until one year ago when he started experiencing severe back pains. He had so far also not paid the unemployment fund fee which is necessary in order to receive unemployment insurance. On one hand, Tiit says he had no idea about the necessity to pay additional fee, on the other hand, he also confesses that he did little to educate himself. He explains it as follows:

“In general I am not the kind of person who waits what happens when I become unemployed. I try to be independent, do everything in my abilities to ...The only case where I would need to rely on state is in the occasion I become ill. Become disabled. I had a serious condition this year and I was already thinking, shit I cannot work anymore. With back ...lower back. It is very common in the world. I went to Estonia for several months [to consult medical care in Estonia] but it only kept going worse. Since my job is physically requiring I had great problems at work. I got such back pains that I thought I cannot continue. So, in the case I become disabled, I will use these opportunities ... So, when I had these problems, I started to think, what happens if this does not pass. What if I cannot work anymore? So, I started paying union fee this march. I need to pay at least one year in order to receive anything. So, if something would happen right now ... If this problem with my back would have not passed I had not received anything from the state. I would have been probably homeless...I have no idea what would have happened.” (Tiit E)

Tiit says that since he has not paid the union fee for one year, he cannot get any unemployment insurance or disability benefits. He also says that he does not want to rely on unemployment benefits unless really necessary. It is thus evident from Tiit's example that social welfare, especially unemployment benefits, are for him considered an emergency solution. As he explains he prefers to be self-sufficient and not depend on the state. However, in the case of emergency he discovered that he is not insured. What can be deducted from this example is that Tiit waited with accessing the social security system until it became urgent. This however, can be really problematic in the Swedish case, as the paperwork as well as the entitlement can take months. Tiit's case, and the fact that he only started thinking about his social insurance when he was already in trouble, is proved to not be uncommon for Estonian migrants and the same can be seen in both Natalja's as well as Olga's case. One conclusion is hence that welfare is often experienced as for emergency cases only, which is also related to the attitude of self-sufficiency.

Raivo and his history as an illegal worker can also be seen as an example of a self-sufficiency ideal as answers to discursive expectations. He worked illegally for 14 years without worrying how this might affect his pension payments or his access to social insurance. Furthermore, Raivo worked out a strategy as to how to maintain his illegal work in Sweden, namely by having a fictive work contract in Estonia in a company owned by his friend. He also paid social tax in Estonia through this company in order

assure health insurance in his native country and to not have to deal with Swedish welfare system. This can be seen as a strategy adapted to maintain the illegal work status in Sweden and also as a sign of self-sufficiency.⁷

In talking about relying on benefits there were however differences in attitudes towards different sorts of benefits. Child benefits and parental leave benefits were usually considered more normal, while relying on other kinds of benefits, and especially unemployment benefits, was something that many migrants deemed problematic. It is not quite clear why applying for child and parental support was not considered problematic. One of the reasons as to why child support was perceived as something 'normal' could be because child benefit is a universal right given to everyone registered in Sweden, without complicated application processes. Furthermore, the attitude towards parental leave could be explained because Estonian state has connected the amount of parental leave with salary, so many people might not perceive this as a direct benefit, but more as a contribution for the years that they have been working.

The interviewees seemed to still have recollections of the collapse of Soviet Union – which also supported the discursive expectations to be self-sufficient. Even though Paavo is only 34 years of age – and therefore cannot have any personal memories of the Soviet period – such are passed on for example by parents. For instance, Tiit's mother had raised three kids practically on her own and furthermore even shared what little she had with others around her. Such self-sufficient attitude was also highly visible in Tiit's narrative, who only considered applying for unemployment benefits when he actually faced the threat of becoming disabled.

The internalized ideal of self-sufficiency hence seem to have created an opinion in the interviewed that state welfare should not be relied upon, unless necessary. However, such an attitude might lead to situations where migrants do not get state support even if it becomes absolutely necessary.

Regulatory gaps as barriers

It has been briefly noted earlier in this report that the Swedish system works well with the cases that are by the system regarded as 'regular'. As we have seen, accessing PIN was for example hardly a problem with the regularly employment. In this section, we will however focus on cases which the Swedish system are not designed for – and hence on gaps in the regulations. In order to illustrate what kind of

⁷ Even though Raivo did not talk about it, this scheme might of course also be connected to pension planning.

problems one might run into when one does not fit with the formula of the system we will here in more detail describe the case of one 'atypical' migrant which we call Heli (E).

Heli was a mother of two children and was only fifteen when she followed her boyfriend Kaupo to Sweden. Kaupo had found a job in Sweden through Heli's mother – who had come from Estonia and started working in Sweden several years ago. Due to being teenager, as well as an unmarried mother, Heli experienced multiple complications when trying to access Swedish social security system. The biggest problem for her was accessing PIN. At her first visit to the Tax office Heli had her boyfriend with her, since she was not 18. The official however told her that she needs to bring her mother with her. Next time when Heli went to the tax office with her mother, the Tax office official she encountered this second time told Heli that she needs to bring her boyfriend with her and not her mother. So, Heli was sent back from the office once again. Finally, Heli decided to get PIN only for her child and for her boyfriend, while planning to apply for herself only in the future. In this errand she visited the Tax office with her child and boyfriend a third time. Her boyfriend filled in the documents to receive PIN for himself and their child – and Heli signed the documents which allowed Kaupo to come to Sweden with their child. After a week of waiting, all three received PIN however. Heli was confused, but of course very happy, to unexpectedly receive PIN.

Being in possession of PIN Heli could apply for a bank account. As she was still under 18 she went to the bank office together with her mother. However, the bank had an information that Heli's mother did not have a child. Apparently, the tax office had registered Heli as a parentless minor. This made it impossible for her to apply for a bank account. Heli accepted that she will not get a bank account – as she was afraid that complaints to the authorities would result in withdrawal of her PIN. Heli's fear is an interesting example of some kind of expected institutional punishment. It could be suggested that the expectations of institutions to be control mechanism rather than helpers contributed to the attitude of self-sufficiency as well as the perception of Swedish welfare system as something distant and incomprehensible. One of the examples of how Swedish state was expected of having a rigid control is the following:

"In Sweden people do not dare to ignore the rules. When in Finland one can agree with Finnish boss that they will ignore some regulations then in Sweden everything needs to be in order. Finnish state is not so demanding in that way. One can very well have an Estonian company and have posted workers there.....I do not know how they do this, but it is for sure over two years."(Paavo E)

The requirements for receiving a PIN in Heli's case seem to be in the discretion of an individual official. She got sent back at her first visit to the Tax Office because she did not have her mother with her and the second time because she did not have her partner with her. The third time Heli, her partner and child went to the Tax Office, wanting to get documents only for her partner and the child. Now Heli surprisingly received PIN, without being aware that she had applied for herself. Hence, this story tells about three officials who all seem to have a different perception of what is needed to receive PIN in Sweden. Heli also notes:

“There is always some hassle with payments. They think they have made it so easy. However, when you make something wrong then everything is lost. You have to call to ten places and see what to do. When you then also end up talking to people that do not speak English, you can never solve the issue. Or when you send email then it takes for ages. You want to do one thing and have to go to three different places.”
(Heli E)

Heli expresses her fear of having to go through all the procedures again and provide all the documents from the beginning. As she says, when you make a small mistake or are a substandard case, you have to deal with the concrete officials, who may or may not be aware of what needs to be done and might or might not have language skills to assist you.

Heli's problems can be understood as an effect of the Swedish system being designed for certain kind of migrant cases – where she as a teen-aged, unmarried, non-working migrant mother does not fit in. She hence ends up in a regulatory gap. Besides minor EU mobile citizens, EU-movers with semi-legal working contracts and EU-movers having their family in another country also experienced not fitting in. They seemed to land in-between rules and to leave the decisions to concrete officials. This also open decision-making for discretionary judgements.

The narrations from the cases that fell into gaps in the regulations thus tells us about the room for human interpretations that are shaped by vague or missing rules – while highly formalized rules leave little space for human interpretation. When accessing PIN causes no problems for an EU citizen with regular employment it can for example be understood as an effect of the Swedish system being designed to accommodate such cases with rules that apply for them. In Heli's case she was perceived of as a not normal case which the officials did not know how to handle and hence got subjected to discretionary and differing judgments made by several officers. This means that the migrant categories shaped as

atypical by the regulations not only have to deal with regulatory gap as barriers and spaces of regulatory uncertainty but also with discretionary decisions.

Incompatibility of social welfare systems as barrier

In our study on regulatory conditions (Runfors et al. 2016) we detected problems in fitting together the Estonian and the Swedish social security systems. Such transnational system incompatibility is also mirrored in two of our interviews and for example in Heli's narrative. As soon as Heli got a PIN, she got access to child benefits and parental leave from Sweden. Nevertheless, there were some problems in accessing these benefits related to moving between countries while already receiving benefits from one country. Heli describes the process as follows:

“Swedish authorities told me that I do not have to say anything to Estonia, they will inform Estonia themselves. They did...but slightly too late. I could only tell? Estonian office that I will pay back 30 euros per month. It seems nothing, but transferring money constantly to Estonian account...well and seeing the sum in the beginning with the request to pay back everything. In retrospect, I would have accepted the money anyway, but well...I would have wanted to know, so that I would have not spent my money this way. But back then I did not know much about the benefits that they have here. Just that they have child support 100 euros per month and well we were happy about it...I did not know that they have parental leave here as well. I found out only later, but well we managed.” (Heli E)

As we see Heli's problem was related to the fact that the Estonian system considers both parental leave and child benefit as family benefits, while the Sweden system only considers child support as family benefit. This leads to a situation where Heli had to pay back quite significant amount of money to the Estonian system. Simultaneously she did not get immediate access to Swedish parental leave support, but had to separately apply for it. This process of applying for family benefits in Sweden took about six months. The result was that Heli had to manage with very little money during that time.

Heli hence encountered two different problems. One was discussed in the former section, namely being a migrant case not fitting into the existing regulations and hence being confronted with regulatory gaps as a barrier. The other problem, illustrated in this section, was the existing Swedish and Estonian regulatory systems not fitting together and where Heli encountered the consequences of this mismatch. Interestingly enough Heli did not end up feeling victimized, like Raivo did. Even though not coming from an educated background and not having parents familiar with administration Heli invested a lot of

time in educating herself about the Swedish welfare system and managed to acquire an excellent understanding of it by the time she was 19 and was interviewed for this study.

Problems in porting benefits as barriers to access

Only three interviewees had experiences with porting benefits, but all these told about problems. In their three interviews, we have detected four porting experiences: three experiences of porting top-up for child benefits and one experiences of exporting the right for parental benefit (as the mother was moving in the middle of receiving parental leave). The most common problems experienced when porting were threefold; long waiting periods, sudden termination of the benefit by Swedish health insurance without any warning and requests to pay back excess benefit that had been wrongly been paid by the state. As follows, we will describe these cases more in detail.

Raivo was one of the interviewees who had experience with porting. He had applied for a top-up child benefit for his youngest son, but however did not know much about porting nor about what he was entitled to. He had somehow an abstract knowledge that he could apply for some additional support for his children, but did not know how it worked and did not know of any way to check if the sum he received was correct. Raivo himself explains the process as follows:

“Yes, my youngest son received the benefit. And this did not come with the salary, but it was a separate money. But it was somehow weird...It was all year benefit or something. I do not remember. It was very confusing, but it came only once.” (Raivo E)

What most likely happened in Raivo’s case is that the Swedish health care just terminated the payment for child benefits, even if it should continue according to the rules. As is evident in other cases – which we will discuss later – such incidents were experienced regularly, after which the migrant, who has discovered that he or she is not receiving child top-up payments anymore, had to start the whole application process again. In Raivo’s case, he got the child benefit top-up payment for one year and then never however enquired about why he did not receive it anymore. This can probably be understood as an effect of lack of knowledge and feelings of helplessness in relation to authorities. Hence, the Swedish welfare system itself was experienced as a serious hindrance for portability and access.

Other examples – referred to in the beginning of this chapter – include Eduard (ER) and Andrus (E) who both applied for a top-up child benefit. In Andrus’s case, he moved to Sweden alone, while his family

of wife and three kids followed him one year later. The family however did not like it in Sweden, so they decided to move back. Even though Andrus upon the moving to Sweden had provided the Health care agency with all the necessary information – such as children birth certificates etc. – he had to start the whole process from the beginning once the family relocated to Estonia. This process went as far as Andrus having to prove that he even had kids. Andrus says that it was as if the whole previous documentation had just disappeared. The application process took more than six months. After this the Swedish health care initially paid out too much benefit. They then asked Andrus to return the excess amount:

“There was all kind of trouble with child support...I guess...It took really long time before I got this support....I think it was seven months after the application. And then they... I think paid too much.... I do not remember where I had to pay it back to Estonia or Sweden...And then Sweden stopped paying. I had to go there again. Luckily Tax Office is really close to my house...and then it took half a year again...” (Andres E)

The phenomenon that the initial calculations are erroneous and the money must be paid back by the migrant later was an experience that was recurring in the material. Andrus actually experienced this on two separate occasions, once cited above when the health care agency was calculating the benefits upon his children’s arrival to Sweden, but also once later on when the institution calculated for the top-up.

Eduard (ER) – who knew from his employer about porting possibilities – is another interviewee who ported child benefits and who experienced multiple difficulties in doing it. Eduard was asked at the Tax Office information desk to fill in an application for top-up and to prepare some documents: the originals of birth certification for all his three children, his marriage certificate, his wife’s passport and his own ID card and work contract. A month after Eduard had submitted these documents, he was asked to fill in an additional application form. After he filled it in and mailed it he waited three months before going to the Tax Office to enquire about the status of the application. He then was asked to provide a paper from the Office for Pensions in Estonia, regarding the benefits his wife receives in Estonia. After Eduard submitted this paper, the Swedish Tax office took contact with the Estonian tax office and asked for the document Eduard had already provided. A month later the Swedish Tax Office received the documents from Estonia. These then needed to be translated to Swedish. Although Eduard repeatedly reminded the Tax Office and enquired about the status of his application it took eleven months to process the request. Even today, Eduard regularly stops receiving child benefits as Swedish Tax Office is communicating with Estonian Tax Office to find out if Eduard is still eligible for the top-up. Interesting enough, Eduard does not think that Swedish institutions are trying to cheat him, but rather says that *"in Sweden it is more*

rigid with that sort of stuff than in other countries" (Eduard, ER: 52). One way of understanding Edwards acceptance of the repeated controls are again by relating them to Estonian discursive expectations. The discourse we identified among Estonian officials namely said that Estonian people cannot be trusted and therefore need to be checked regularly. There was an attitude of mistrust towards citizens 'and expectations on them to be 'cheating' on the system (Fröhlig et al. 2016). Hence, Eduard's narrative can be interpreted as he expected this attitude from authorities and therefore finds it totally justifiable that Swedish institutions regularly stop paying him child support, requires him to prove his eligibility and expects him to enquire about the status of his application on a regular basis. The regular checking from authorities hence fits with his discursively constructed expectations of authorities.

As has been described, porting benefits between Estonia and Sweden was, by these three interviewees, experienced as highly problematic for reasons such as inefficient communication between offices, unclear requirements from Swedish side as to what kind of documents are needed, lack of information about the status of the application, the validity of the request from Swedish side and well as problems in calculating the exact sum of money to be paid out. From the interviewees' perspective, the tax office is perceived as being drowned in paperwork – and therefore being extremely inefficient and thus providing little help. The effect was that the agency at times was perceived of as negligent and uncaring. The topic of portability and the inefficiency in processing applications on portability might hence be understood in relation to the high formalization of the system we detected in our analysis of regulations (see Runfors et al.2016). Those porting benefits furthermore seems to be somewhat 'atypical cases' in the sense unusual. They are hence not falling into regulatory gaps, but they – according to what is mirrored in the interview narrations – seemed to be so rare that officials do not appear to have knowledge regarding the kind of documents that are needed and therefore give out conflicting information and make discretionary judgments.

In sum, we from the interviewees narratives on accessing and porting social benefits identified six different types of experiences of barriers, namely the PIN system as a bottleneck to the Swedish system, intransparency of the Swedish system, regulatory gaps in the Swedish system and incompatibility of the Swedish and Estonian system, problems in porting and finally the migrants internalized attitudes of self-sufficiency. Next chapter discusses the coping strategies which migrants employed in order to deal with these barriers.

5. Strategies for coping with the barriers

We found three main coping strategies by which the interviewees managed the barriers they experienced, namely the strategy of self-reliance, the strategy of turning for help to acquaintances or accepting help from the employer and finally the strategy of victimization. Here we will describe these coping strategies in greater detail and in order of importance, starting with the most common strategy; relying on oneself.

Self-reliance as the most common coping strategy.

As described above discursive expectations of self-sufficiency formed one of the main barriers for accessing social benefits among Estonian EU mobile citizens – in the form of internalized ideals of being self-sufficient. Below we will discuss how these self-sufficiency expectations is also reflected in as most common coping strategy used when dealing with social welfare institutions, namely self-reliance.

One side of the self-reliance strategy was not wanting to rely on welfare benefits. In many cases the interviewees said they never applied for unemployment insurance nor unemployment assistance – as ‘asking for social benefits was not in their framework of thinking’. Many also waited to apply for social rights until emergency situations (and hence to late), and showed unwillingness to ask for help – and especially from welfare institutions. This is one way of understanding why many Estonian EU citizens ignored the Swedish welfare state until they confronted an acute situation. One could also make a connection between receiving unemployment benefits and being considered unsuccessful in the eyes of Estonian neoliberal discursive expectations. It could furthermore be suggested that pension was not really thought about, because it was considered unreliable to plan so much ahead and rely on the state.⁸ Even if some gave over the responsibility for applying for social welfare to the employer, the main attitude was that applying was better avoided. The ideal of self-reliance promotes the attitude that that relying on institutions is a reduction of the individual freedom and agency – even if the institutions are seen as trustworthy. Understood this way, neoliberal ideology and the attitude of individual freedom influences the welfare practices of Estonian migrants in Sweden not only by fostering an attitude of self-sufficiency but also by fostering an unwillingness to report to anyone about one’s actions.

There were also exceptions however, such as Eduard who registered to the trade union beforehand to be eligible for unemployment benefits in the case of unemployment – and Helmut and Heli who took it into

⁸ Just like in the case of child support, the view of Parental leave however differed – as this was perceived as something ‘normal’. This could be because Estonian state has connected the amount of parental leave with salary, so many people might not perceive this as a direct benefit, but more as a contribution for the years that they have been working.

heart to find out as much as possible about Swedish social security system. Among those who *did* interact with the welfare system, many tried to cope with the Swedish paperwork and language issues themselves – for example by using internet to find knowledge and Google translate to solve language issues. Heli (ER), as mentioned, was dedicated in educating herself about the Swedish system. Even though not coming from an educated background she invested a lot of time on doing so. By the time she was 19 (and was interviewed for this study) she had managed to acquire an excellent understanding of the Swedish system. Helmut in turn – just like Eduard – had been very active in communicating with the union and finding out more about his working contract, his conditions and legal ramifications there. Signe (E) was also – due to own efforts – extremely informed about how the Swedish system worked and had managed to ask for special support for her children.

So, many were self-reliant in the sense that they themselves tried to find knowledge about the Swedish welfare system. It should however be noted that we – in our sample – cannot relate this capacity to acquire knowledge about the welfare system to the informants' level of education. Heli and Signe, who were well informed about how Swedish legal system works, only had basic or only secondary-special education, while for example Natalja had higher education but found Swedish system to be complicated and difficult to follow.

Turning for help as strategy

As the most common strategy was relying on one self, the turning for help strategy was not used overly often. But when it was, we found differences between the two groups in the material.

The seven Estonian-speakers did to a higher deal with the complications on their own and in the case they did ask for help, they rather turned to formal contacts. Andrus (E) describes how he regularly uses Google translate to understand the paperwork on social benefits. Raivo (E) also uses Google translate to understand the documents, together with his 'broken German'. But Raivo is actually also one of the few cases of Estonian-speakers using the help of others. As mentioned he relied heavily on Reet, the Estonian speaking voluntary legal expert which he got to know at the Estonian House association. Raivo felt that he could not face the difficulties and manage Swedish administrative system on his own and therefore felt much safer with having someone to handle the documentation for him. Andrus and Terje (E) both as well used the help of their colleagues to find out more information about the Swedish welfare system. Terje was speaking with an Estonian colleague in order to find out how to handle her double

employment and taxes and to know if this anyhow influences her legal status and her access to for instance child benefits, whereas Andrus was asking for potential shortcuts from his colleagues.

The five Russian-speaking interviewees were a bit more inclined to ask for help than the Estonian speakers and also took more advantage of their personal social networks in organizing their welfare. Tatiana (ER) says that she in the case of problems in handling social security in Sweden first turns to her *mother* – who has a longer experience of living in Sweden. Olga (ER) at times asked her relatives in Sweden for help – for instance in terms of child benefits. Eduard (ER) in turn asked Swedish speaking friends to phone social security agency for him, in order overcome the language problem discussed above (when the automatic operator at the institutions asks in Swedish to enter the number of your issue). Olga, Tatiana and Eduard (ER) hence all turned to *significant others* – but the significant others they turned to where those *in Sweden*, as they expected them to have knowledge on the Swedish welfare system. Eduard however also had gathered information through colleagues:

“I have got to know about trade unions through Swedes. I discuss a lot with my Swedish colleagues. All Swedes are registered at a trade union and pay the fees. I didn’t lose time and went to the trade union. There by chance I met a trade union employee with polish background. He spoke some Russian. We sat and discussed. He explained me everything: which are the risks, which are the advantages. I decided to register, because I have three children, and I want some guarantee” (Eduard ER).

There were hence not only differences between the two groups regarding the frequency of turning for help but also differences regarding whom they turned to. As illustrated above the Russian-speakers often talked about seeking help from their informal social networks in Sweden, such as relatives, friends (significant others) and acquaintances, while the few helpers mentioned among Estonian speakers in contrast were more formal contacts – such as fellow Estonians or internationals they knew to be professionally linked with their question.

Even if the EU movers did not *themselves* turn for help very often, many – as has been shown in previous sections – narrated *getting* help from their employers in social security matters. Some actually referred to their employer and company as responsible for everything. These narrations can be interpreted as mirroring the need of system knowledge in order to manage barriers (such as the difficulties in accessing PIN, and once in the system also the complexity in regulations and procedures) – and hence also how difficult it is for single individuals to acquire the amount of system knowledge needed. To deem from EU movers experiences many employers also seem to know this, and to provide help in order to get the,

for them, most suitable working force. As indicated, these narrations were however not so much about *turning* for help, as *getting* help (without having to ask for it).

Victimization as coping strategy

The last coping strategy – victimization – is narrated only by a five of the interviewees. Among them we find Raivo. When he did not receive a PIN, he felt violated against, referring to all his years of illegal work as a slave job and comparing himself to refugees who ‘receive benefits without problems’. Furthermore, being turned down by the tax office clearly reinforced Raivo’s idea that he is incapable in handling Swedish legal system. Finally, Andrus, Eduard and Karl all showed a degree of victimization in the form of tiredness in dealing with social institutions. As we have seen Karl talked about overloads in paperwork, Andrus about at least having the Social security office next to his house and Terje and Raivo about having to call repeatedly to the Tax office. Contacts with social institutions in Sweden were described as a hassle and Karl referred sarcastically to the paperwork as a ‘Swedish present’. All found that handling paperwork in Estonia was much easier. However, there was also great sense of victimization felt towards employers, who were thought to hold the key for the access towards social security. As we saw earlier, Natalja for instance blamed her employer for not having told her about the union and the necessity to sign up for the union in order to receive unemployment insurance. Eduard was talking about his frequent attempts during the two years to become employed as Swedish employee. Such examples were plenty in our sample. Victimization feelings were in general more commonly narrated in relation to employers than in relation to state institutions.

Regarding the other interviewees, the strategy of self-reliance and ‘trying to avoid dealing with social authorities’, seemed to lead them to not feel victimized. This as they never even attempted to access social security to begin with.

6 Discussion; Experiences of regulatory, discursive and additional barriers

This report has focused on the transnational experiences of Estonian EU movers within the Swedish social security system, in relation to the Estonian social system and transnational welfare (porting). After discussing the main experiences of barriers for accessing social welfare and after describing how these barriers were dealt with we in this concluding chapter sums up and make some ref construct the non-fitting atypical cases as non-normal lessons on the main barriers and strategies we identified and discussed above.

Our results regarding experienced *regulatory/procedural* barriers to welfare access and portability in the Estonian Swedish country pair is that we identified such barriers in the form of the one-year residency and employment requirement for accessing PIN; intransparency of Swedish system; regulatory gaps in this system which gave decision makers undue power and finally the misalignment of Estonian and Swedish welfare systems. As shown the one-year residency and employment requirements for accessing PIN was mirrored in the interviews by regularly employed narrating less problems in accessing PIN and hence in accessing social welfare than did other categories – such as posted workers, workers with temporal contract and not least those working irregularly or being unemployed. It was also mirrored in confused stories, such as Raivo's introductory one displaying that he was not even aware of what exactly PIN was and confused PIN and citizenship. Similarly, when porting the child benefits, he had no idea why the contract was ended or that it had been ended to begin with.

Once the interviewed EU citizens had come by the PIN bottleneck and entered the Swedish system many still experienced the requirements and procedures in general as complicated to grasp, come around and often even as unapproachable. This experienced intransparency barrier led EU citizens to experience themselves as powerless against the 'system'. It both confused them and made them feel helpless. If we define class in line with level of education, we could expect the experienced intransparency barrier to lead to specific class related inequalities. But as shown we found no significant differences in relation to class/ level of education in our (limited) sample. Some individuals with low education displayed a high level of knowledge regarding Swedish welfare system, whereas some highly educated displayed a low level of knowledge. The experienced barriers in form of transnational mismatches inbetween the Estonian and Swedish social security regulations was experienced mostly regarding child- and parental support and was hence narrated mostly by interviewees with children. The *regulatory gaps* in the Swedish system in turn – that is where there are no clear rules as how to handle some cases – caused an even higher level of intransparency for the untypical migrants and hence also and spaces of regulatory uncertainty. They furthermore got subjected to differing judgments and discretionary decisions. Finally, regarding porting this was also experienced as problematic among our few cases. Here, intransparency of the system and system mismatch intersected with gaps in the regulations in the sense that the porting cases seemed to be cases the officers were not very used to handle, which made them atypical.

Further results are that we besides these detected experienced *regulatory/procedural* barriers to welfare access and portability also identified experienced *discursive* barriers. As shown the narratives reflected Estonian discursive expectations of the desired Estonian citizen to be non-dependent of the state. These

discursive expectations can be understood as a result of the heavy neo-liberalization in Estonia since beginning of nineties (Woolfson 2009) and surfaced as a self-sufficiency attitude among the interviewees. This barrier was very influential with regards to their welfare practices, as the EU movers expressed not wanting to depend on the Swedish state for welfare and idealized individual responsibility. The interviewed in general displayed a strong wish 'to control' their welfare themselves and in general perceived of it as undesirable to rely on the state for securing their welfare. While the above ways of answering to the discourse of self-sufficiency were not classed, they were however gendered when it came to health care matters. The non-consumption of health care can mostly be attributed to Estonian male migrants and could be connected to gendered expectations of what is normal and not.

Besides the strongly communicated discursive expectations on Estonian people to be self-sufficient, the transference from Soviet system to neoliberal Estonian one – and hence the experienced instability of systems – might contribute to unwillingness among Estonians to rely on welfare systems and on many kinds of benefits. The mentioned ideal of control might for example originate from nineties transference between systems, when it was used to deal with the rapid societal changes and where belief in individual responsibility and agency provided the final comfort and source to rely upon. An additional aspects that might also underpin the hesitation among Estonians to rely on the welfare systems is the low level of benefits in Estonia together with the experienced intransparency of the Swedish social system.

To sum up on the results regarding Estonian EU movers welfare experiences they seem foremost related one the one hand to how the Swedish welfare system is perceived by the individual – as intransparent and complicated to come around – and on the other hand to discursive expectations on non-dependency steaming from the welfare system in Estonia. This points to a crucial difference in expectations regarding welfare between Estonians and Swedes and demonstrates how expectations can turn problematic for accessing welfare benefits. The prevalent attitude of self-sufficiency furthermore interplayed with the experiences of the Swedish welfare system as the ideas on self-sufficiency seemed to be exaggerated by how the system was perceived of by the individuals: as abstract and unreachable. When rules seemed not clearly defined and decisions seemed to be at the hands of the decision maker it helped to create an image that one is at mercy of the social institution. The feeling of lack of control and distance furthermore seemed to be increased when interactions were made between employer and the social security system.

Regarding strategies used when dealing with social welfare institutions, the most common strategy identified was *self-reliance as coping strategy*. The migrant interviewees communicated a general unwillingness to apply for social rights until emergency situations (and hence to late), as well as an unwillingness to ask for help in general – and especially from welfare institutions. The second most

important strategy for overcoming the discussed barriers was *turning for help or accepting help from employers*. Both the strategy of relying on one self and of turning for help can be understood in relation to the discursive expectations on non-dependency as the modes of turning for help did not include using transnational strategies/significant others in Estonia, nor overly much using Estonian diaspora in Sweden. There were however also differences between the two groups. Estonian-speakers, were more self-sufficient and in case of turning for help, they relied more on *formal* inter-personal networks, while the Russian-speakers relied more on their *informal* inter-personal networks. These differences could be understood in several and intersecting modes. Firstly, it can be related to different ethnic boundary making practices. Kalmus and Vihalemm (2006) for example argues that the Russian-speaking minority in Estonia display more community orientation, while the Estonian-speaking minority displays more individualistic orientations. It might furthermore be related to class, as Russian speaking Estonians is an oppressed minority in Estonia, that is also ascribed lower social status, and is hence declassified (Vetik 2011, 2012, Vetik & Helemäe 2011). Their position in the Estonian society was describes in relation to their position in the Swedish society by Olga (ER) as “we are strangers both in Estonia and in Sweden, but there is less pressure on minority language speakers in Sweden”. Seen in this way the practices of accessing social welfare among the two categories of Estonians could also be understood in relation to the Ethnic Estonian speaker’s majority position versa the non-Russian speaker’s minority position.

Finally, we – by the migrant interviews – detected further results in the sense of *additional* experienced barriers, that is barriers not directly connected to regulations or discourses. As mentioned, there were a lot of narrations about employers helping EU movers to manage their welfare. They indicate that welfare management among Estonians in Sweden has shifted away from individuals to an organizational level. When companies are given a lot of power in managing contacts with the Swedish authorities and their employee’s welfare, EU movers become dependent on their employers in providing them with relevant knowledge. Help from the employer might assist in overcoming the barriers to access social security/portability, but as shown it also meant that EU-movers having this support did not need to acquire very much system knowledge themselves. Many hence stayed unknowledgeable.

The narrations about employers who often did not want to employ EU citizens for one year, can in turn be said to make visible *a second additional* experienced barrier. This employer practice hence inflicted on migrants possibilities to acquire a PIN. And as earlier mentioned, if EU movers cannot get a job if they do not have PIN and cannot get PIN if do not have a job a Swedish “Catch 22”-situation is created. One could hence ask if some companies are taking advantage of the strong border that is created when the one year work contract requirement is combined with a PIN requirement. This might promote illegal or semi-legal employment arrangement and hence increase the amount of workers that struggle with

welfare access because they are not eligible for PIN. It has probably also contributed to the huge market for Estonian posted workers – among which some try to negotiate with their employers in order to receive a Swedish working contract and thereby access to social security (see also Fröhlig et al. 2017, Saar et. al. 2018). Deeming from the interviews the subcontracting arrangement also seemed to make the contacts between the Swedish employers and the Estonian worker scarce. Such distance also effects welfare opportunities.

One more general reflection on both the main barriers and the strategies identified, are that they seemed be quite independent of the problem narrated – if it was accessing PIN, porting child benefits or something else.

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