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Reception Policies, Practices and Responses

Sweden Country Report

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List of abbreviations

ABF	Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund (The Workers Educational Association)
ABO	Accommodation provided by Swedish Migration Agency
AT-UND	Certificate for exemption from work permit
CAB	County Administrative Board
CEAS	Common European Asylum System
CSOs	Civil society organisations
DN	Dagens Nyheter
EBO	Accommodation arranged by asylum seekers
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	European Union
FARR	Flyktinggruppernas riksråd
FBOs	Faith based organisations
IFRS	International Federation of Iranian Refugees
IOM	International organisation for Migration
LMA	Lag om mottagande av asylsökande med flera (Reception Act of 1994)
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
PBO	Introduction program
PES	Public Employment Service
RFSL	Riksförbundet för sexuellt likaberättigande (National organisation for Sexual Equality)
SALAR	Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions
RAFF (SRLC)	Rådgivningsbyrån för asylsökande och flyktingar (Swedish Refugee Advice Centre) recently changed name to Asylrättcentrum (The Swedish Refugee Law Centre)
SD	Swedish Democrats
SEF	Sveriges Ensamkommandes Förening (Swedish Org. of Unaccompanied Minors)
SFI	Svenska för invandrare (Swedish for immigrants)
SIM	Division for Management of Migration Affairs
SiS	Statens institutionsstyrelse (The National Board of Institutional Care)
SMA	Swedish Migration Agency
SOM	Samhälle, Opinion och Massmedier (Society, Opinions and Mass media)
SOU	Statens offentliga utredningar (Official Reports of the Swedish Government)
UAM	Unaccompanied minor
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
VSIU	Vi står inte ut (We can't stand it)

About the project

RESPOND is a Horizon 2020 project which aims at studying the multilevel governance of migration in Europe and beyond. The consortium is formed of 14 partners from 11 source, transit and destination countries and is coordinated by Uppsala University in Sweden. The main aim of this Europe-wide project is to provide an in-depth understanding of the governance of recent mass migration at macro, meso and micro levels through cross-national comparative research and to critically analyse governance practices with the aim of enhancing the migration governance capacity and policy coherence of the EU, its member states and third countries.

RESPOND will study migration governance through a narrative which is constructed along five thematic fields: (1) Border management and security, (2) Refugee protection regimes, (3) Reception policies, (4) Integration policies, and (5) Conflicting Europeanisation. Each thematic field reflects a juncture in the migration journey of refugees and is designed to provide a holistic view of policies, their impacts and the responses given by affected actors within.

In order to better focus on these themes, we divided our research question into work packages (WPs). The present report is concerned with the findings related to WP4, which focuses specifically on **reception policies, practices and humanitarian responses to the current refugee crisis**. Despite efforts to achieve harmonisation (especially promoted by the 2016 CEAS and by the ENP), significant differences exist in this field in the countries that are the object of research (Austria, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Sweden, UK, Turkey and Lebanon). WP4 will map the policies and practices of reception and humanitarian responses of the afore-mentioned countries and migrants' perceptions, actions and reactions to policies and practices. The main objectives of WP4 are as follows:

- to develop a mapping of policies and practices of reception in the countries being researched;
- to develop a typology of these policies, practices and responses
- to assess the coherence of these policies and practices with respect to international and EU standards
- to study migrants' perceptions, actions and reactions to policies and practices
- to provide basic information in the area of reception for the development of all subsequent WPs.

The last point will be achieved through an additional comparative report that will be based on the data from individual country reports.

Executive summary

This report explores reception policies, practices and humanitarian responses to the current refugee crisis in Sweden, focusing on the aftermath of 2015 unprecedented refugee migration, and also providing a brief historical perspective. Sweden has been known as one of the most generous countries in terms of welcoming refugees and providing an easy path to citizenship but its migration and reception policy has taken a 'restrictive turn' in recent years. The refugee crisis in 2015 has not only opened the window for 'a major policy shift' and 'historical' legislative changes to the Swedish migration and reception policy but also impacted the social, economic and political sphere instigating anti-immigrant sentiments. To significantly reduce the numbers of asylum seekers, Sweden has taken a series of temporary measures including changes in the Reception of Asylum Seekers Act (LMA) and a new Temporary Law (2016) reducing its asylum standards to the minimum standards of EU law. Under this temporary law, everyone who applies for and is given asylum receives a temporary residence permit, at the same time making family reunification extremely difficult. Although the numbers of asylum seekers decreased remarkably in the last three years, the government had not lifted the restrictive measures thus leading to asylum seekers experiencing difficult reception conditions.

Current Swedish reception conditions can be best described with the word 'uncertainty' due to the lengthy reception period. It can be strongly argued that during the 2015 refugee influx the country received more refugees than it could have absorbed and managed which ultimately posed profound challenges at policy, administrative and implementation level. When it comes to reception practice, the approach of the Swedish government is more one of centralised dictating to the regional and municipal level, where the state is the main actor. The Swedish reception system, after the mass migration of refugees, encountered major problems providing accommodation, healthcare, services and allowances and early access to education and the labour market. In many dimensions of reception these limitations continue to exist.

The report compiles data from different sources (academic literature, research reports, official texts, policies and other relevant texts, the interviews conducted both at micro and meso level) in order to provide comprehensive insights into regulations, policies, practices and experiences of reception in Sweden. This report also examines matches or mismatches of reception policies and practices across various levels of governance (e.g. EU, national, regional, municipal) as well as in relation to the EU reception directive. The main body of the report of primary material focuses on practices and migrants' perceptions, actions and reactions to policies and practices based on interviews conducted. In terms of reception facilities and experience, key findings include:

Housing: With the LMA Act of 1994, asylum seekers are free to find housing on their own (EBO), however new amendments have been introduced which will come into force on 1 January 2020, imposing restrictions on EBO housing arrangements. If the asylum seekers request accommodation from the SMA (ABO), they cannot decide on the location. Both groups of people living in EBO and ABO are eligible for daily allowance. The accommodation capacity for asylum seekers became insufficient in 2015, although the Swedish Migration Agency offered temporary accommodation to all asylum seekers who needed it but, in many cases, these were low-quality, inadequate accommodation facilities often characterised by overcrowding, isolation, instability, and leading to 'depression and stress'. The SMA has established special accommodation centres for vulnerable groups in or near big cities. To ensure geographic dispersion of refugees upon receiving a positive decision, the Settlement Act came into force in 2016 making it compulsory for municipalities to provide accommodation for refugees.

Early access to Education and the Labour Market: During the asylum process, adult asylum seekers have access to informal or semi-formal language courses. Upon receiving a positive decision for their asylum application, they have the right to access formal education which starts basically with language learning education such as SFI, Swedish for Immigrants. Asylum-seeking and refugee children have full access to the school system even during the asylum process. Under

the Upper Secondary Education Law (2016), once a course has been started teenagers are allowed to finish it, even though their temporary residence permit may have expired before the course ends.

The asylum seekers who access the full procedure are exempt from the need to have a work permit if they can establish their identity but this ceases to apply upon a final negative decision. The policy to allow an asylum seeker to work during the asylum procedure is very important. However, especially during the reception period, it is difficult for asylum seekers to find employment regardless of their potential qualifications. Generally, work accessible for asylum seekers is limited to unqualified sectors (e.g. working in construction or moving furniture). It is possible for some to switch the status to a labour migrant by fulfilling specific conditions.

Services and Allowances: The Swedish Migration Agency (SMA), in collaboration with the municipalities and County Administrative Boards, is responsible for providing basic services and allowances to asylum seekers. However, effective provision of these services and allowances varies from municipality to municipality. Daily allowances for asylum seekers are much less than the one provided to welfare beneficiaries in Sweden. Allowances also can be cut or reduced under certain circumstances. Often allowance provision is not carefully considered for people living in EBO. Many asylum seekers mention being supported by their family members. Every applicant is granted necessary medical care and guaranteed the right to a free medical examination but the latter is often criticised for delays and inefficient communication. Asylum seekers with disabilities are entitled to free special care. Access to health services is organised via officially distributed bank cards and the LMA card and provided by Regional Councils.

Reception of Unaccompanied Minors: Sweden received more than one third of UAMs (the majority coming from Afghanistan) in the EU in 2015 but the numbers dropped significantly in the following years. Specialised units within the SMA are responsible for taking care of UAMs and arranging suitable accommodation for them as well as appointing a legal guardian. UAMs can be placed in specialised accommodation, foster homes, the home of a relative (assuming that it is suitable). UAMs aged 16 are entitled to a daily allowance for their personal needs. A critical stage in the lives of UAMs in the host society is the time when they reach the age of 18, the state limits the support in case of a negative decision which also puts them in a vulnerable situation. Most UAMs are aged between 13 and 17 and 75% get a permanent residence permit.

Welcoming culture: Generally, the asylum seekers in Sweden feel they are being 'welcomed' at the initial stage but in many cases, this feeling changes when they go through difficult situations during the long reception period. The feeling of uncertainty and fear of deportation affect the general feeling of being 'welcomed'. Sometimes, the stressful encounter with public officials and undignified reception experiences lead them to despair and vulnerable situations. Often public authorities like the SMA are unable to provide activities to make the reception period meaningful and to create a general welcoming atmosphere. This 'gap' is currently filled by the efforts of CSOs and FBOs by facilitating the engagement of newcomers with Swedish society, organizing language learning sessions and social activities. The experience of a welcoming culture becomes intensely negative for asylum seekers when their financial allowance and basic services are reduced or stopped which happens when their cases are finally rejected, with no smooth transition.

Formulating policy recommendations, the report concludes that most pressures and negative experiences during the reception period result from uncertainties linked to the asylum decision and the long waiting period. The feelings of uncertainty and fear of deportation among refugees increased in relation to the Swedish government's restrictive policy measures introduced in late 2015 and early 2016. The inefficient reception process cannot simply be explained by the large number of new arrivals to Sweden, but is also due to administrative and bureaucratic burdens. The limited, varying capacity of actors and facilities at different levels in the Swedish reception system create diverse and unequal reception experiences among asylum seekers.

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1. Introduction

We're willing to do more than anyone else... But even we have our limits... We can handle the 160,000 people who came this year. But we can't handle it if there are another 160,000 people next year [...] Our whole asylum system would break down.

Morgan Johansson (2016)

Swedish Minister of Migration and Asylum Policy

Sweden faced serious challenges during the late summer and autumn of 2015 when receiving weekly more than 10,000 asylum seekers. The well-institutionalised Swedish asylum and reception system encountered major problems in providing accommodation, social services, and schooling to new arrivals. The reception system was simply neither prepared for nor designed to handle such a large number of arrivals (Fratzke 2017: 2-3). After overcoming the initial 'shock', the state not only developed some internal measures to accommodate the needs of new arrivals, but also introduced several historical legislative changes to Swedish migration and asylum policy.

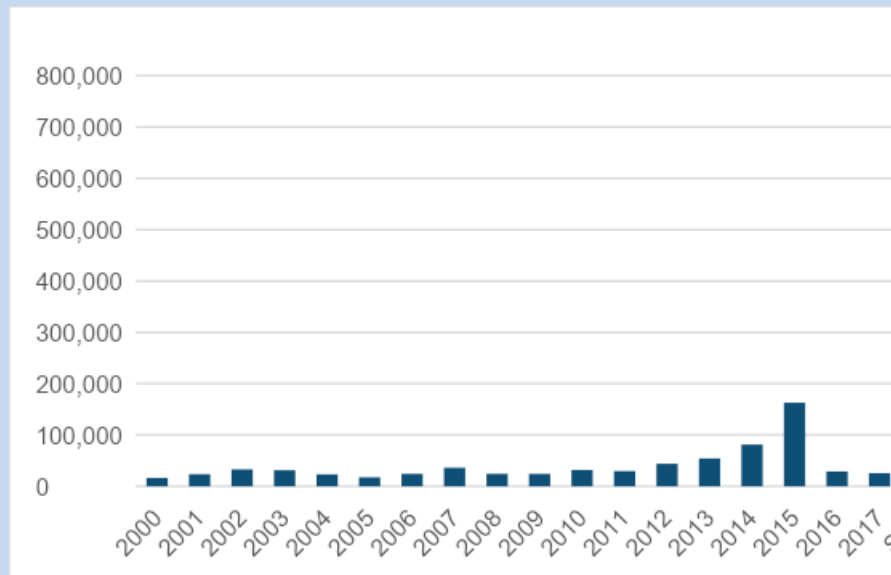
The new measures (see the 'Timeline' box below) introduced had two main objectives: First, Sweden had to drastically reduce the number of asylum seekers to a 'manageable' level. It is not only a capacity issue (Fratzke, 2017: 3), but rather that the unprecedented numbers of asylum seekers were regarded as a threat to the sustainability of the welfare state. If it had only been the capacity issue, the state would have just limited its 'modus operandi' to crisis management measures. This brings us to the second goal: Sweden had to send a 'strong signal' to people who were planning to make their way to the country. The first goal was achieved by introducing 'temporary' border checks, starting directly in January 2016. As statistics reveal, after the closure of the migration routes, the number of asylum claimants dropped drastically. For the second goal, the Swedish government tightened the Aliens Act and introduced a narrow definition of rights – interestingly with a reference to EU law: beneficiaries of protection would be granted temporary stay and their right to family reunification would be limited.

It is still debated whether the changes introduced were prompted by the experienced challenge or whether the political establishment saw the 'crisis' as a window of opportunity for redesigning the country's asylum and reception policy. On many occasions, the government stated that the changes introduced were 'temporary' and that the country would soon go back to its regular policies which were historically embedded in a welcoming 'habitat'. This can be regarded as politics of liminality; the mode of policy-making becomes ambiguous in times of crisis. While some scholars see the new regulations as a 'restrictive turn' and a 'major policy shift' for a country long known for its open and generous asylum and reception policy (Skodo, 2018), other scholars (Hedlund, 2017 cited in Cerotti 2017) argue that the migration law is 'tightened' but 'not entirely rewritten' and see the changes in the context of a process started since the second half of the 1990s by introducing several restrictive measures (e.g. limitations to family reunification, abolishment of the rule of 'last link').

Skodo (2018) sees parallels between the policy shift introduced in 2016 (and afterwards), and the 'Lucia Decision of December 13, 1989' and suggests that most of the restrictive measures and discourses were articulated in the late 1980s and early 1990s. According to that decision, only those asylum seekers who met Geneva Convention criteria would be granted protection. The announcement came after the entry of 29,000 asylum seekers, including 5,000 Bulgarian Turks, in the autumn of 1989. The restrictions in the asylum system were intended to send a signal to those who were planning to make their way to Sweden, amongst them 50,000 ethnic Turks from Bulgaria. Similar to the 2015 situation, the political establishment portrayed the situation in terms of a 'threat' to the Swedish welfare state. The same centre-right party (*Moderaterna*, under the leadership of Carl Bildt) that allowed the Lucia Decision of 1989, upon winning the 1991 elections reversed the decision and allowed the entry of refugees from the former Yugoslavia. Comparing two periods, there are similarities with the rhetoric used, threat perceptions and its relation with the welfare state, increased xenophobia in public discourse and for the first time in Swedish

history, with the 1991 elections, an anti-immigrant party, New Democracy (*Ny Demokrati*), entered Parliament.

Figure 1: Applications for asylum received 2000-2017



Source: Migrationsverket (SMA)

Since the mid-2000s Sweden received over 20,000 asylum seekers per year. Thereafter, a continuous increase in the number of asylum seekers occurred up to 2015. With the highest number of asylum seekers, around 163,000 in 2015. After the restrictive measures taken by the government, the number of asylum seekers dropped in 2016 and 2017. In 2016 and 2017, the number of asylum seekers was back at the same levels (just under 30,000 asylum seekers per year) as it was during the first ten years of the century.

The impact of the 2015 migration crisis on Swedish society and politics has been more remarkable. The anti-immigrant party, the Sweden Democrats increased their electoral vote from 4% in 2010 to 17.6% in the September 2018 elections, and have become a 'key' party in the Swedish *Riksdag*. The most significant impact is to be seen in the internalisation of right-wing, anti-migrant rhetoric in political discourses and 'widespread anxiety' about the future of the largely deregulated Swedish welfare state (Skodo 2018).

Table 1: Timeline for the 'restrictive turn' in Sweden's migration and reception policy¹

- **12 November, 2015.** Sweden introduced temporary border controls. The aim was to reduce the number of asylum seekers. At the end of the year 162,877 persons had applied for asylum in Sweden. Many (51,338) came from war-torn Syria.
- **4 January, 2016.** Sweden introduced temporary identity checks in order to try to reduce the number of asylum seekers coming to Sweden.
- **1 March 2016.** 'A joint responsibility for receiving newcomers to the country', draft legislation 2015:33. All municipalities are compelled to receive a proportional number of the refugees.
- **1 June 2016.** Change in the Reception of Asylum Seekers Act (LMA), etc. An asylum seeker who has received a negative response to his/her asylum application, with a non-suspensive

¹ SMA 'Migration to Sweden – History'.

right to appeal, loses the right to aid if he/she does not leave the country voluntarily. An asylum seeker who has received a definitive decision stating that he/she is to be expelled or deported loses the right to a daily allowance, and to asylum accommodation paid for by the Swedish Migration Agency. Families with children under 18 will still have the right to aid until they leave Sweden.

- **20 July 2016 – New temporary law - valid until July 2021²** In previous legislation, all persons in need of protection generally received a permanent residence permit. Now, everyone who applies for and is given asylum (except resettlement refugees) receives a temporary residence permit. The law remained valid for three years initially but was prolonged.
- **Limited opportunity for family reunification.** The opportunity for family reunification is restricted to those who have refugee status – they receive a 3-year permit. Refugees must be able to support both themselves and their family who receive a residence permit unless they apply for reunification within three months from receiving the permit. With applications made later than three months it is also necessary for the family to have a place of residence of sufficient size and of adequate standard. However, the maintenance requirement does not apply if the person with the connection is a child. This change is temporary.
- **Persons eligible for subsidiary protection are given a 13-month permit.** Those who receive a 13-month residence permit as persons eligible for subsidiary protection do not have the right to family reunification. If the reasons for the person's protection remain valid when the residence permit expires, he or she may apply for an extended residence permit of two years. This change is temporary.

This report aims to analyse reception policies (legal and political framework), practices (implementation) and experiences of those who are affected by these policies, namely, asylum seekers and new arrivals in Sweden.

The term 'reception', as used in this report, refers to a set of policies and practices deployed in the transitional phase of accepting migrants into a social, political and economic system. This transitional phase starts upon arrival of an asylum seeker, covers the asylum process (waiting time for a final decision) and includes partly the period of the so-called 'introductory programmes'. Reception is a process with strong linkages to the juridical/administrative process of asylum application and the whole set of integration measures. It can also be seen as a 'pre-integration' measure.

The process is structured around power asymmetries and domination of subject positions. The decision of accepting an asylum applicant determines the type of relationship. State practices are not only regulatory but also selective in the sense of producing discriminatory outcomes applied to different groups of asylum claimants. In the narrow sense reception time is regulated by state actors but is experienced differently by individuals depending on their resources.

Reception takes place in a transitional realm where liminality is the operating logic. Humans respond in diverse ways to liminal experiences, but the significance of this process is the sudden foregrounding of agency – in this case refugee agency or subjectivity. Looking at responses given to established migration policies and practices, this report illustrates the agency of refugees by looking at their lived experiences. Further, it investigates how refugees are resourceful, equipped with the necessary knowledge and claim their rights even during their reception period where they are in an asymmetrical power relation with the state. Refugees (or asylum seekers) are not soloist individuals. They are surrounded with different sorts of networks, such as family, friends, community and civil society organisations. In positioning themselves vis-à-vis policies and institutional practices, they make use of these networks; claim their rights and/or find 'ways' to

² The Act was intended to apply up to and including July 19, 2019, but it has now been prolonged and will be valid up to and including July 19, 2021.

establish themselves in a 'new' country. These networks are crucial resources that empower asylum seekers and refugees.

This report consists of four sections. Section 1 includes the introduction and the methodology deployed in this study. Section 2 first provides a brief historical account about the formative periods of the Swedish reception policy, and secondly, an overview of the national legislation and policy documents including a brief discussion of Swedish reception policy in relation to EU and international legislation. Built on this background in Section 2 the report also includes a specific subsection about the reception governance in Sweden and provides a mapping of governance actors; explores the scope of local governance, the role of civil society and the involvement of the private sector in reception services. Section 2 ends with a brief account about political parties' views and discourses on reception policy, and a short theoretical discussion in order to explain the Swedish reception governance in relation to multilevel governance theories. Section 3 is the main body of the report, and includes the analysis of interview material with stakeholders and migrants in five thematic subsections as 'housing', 'labour market and education', 'services and allowances', 'unaccompanied children', 'health care' and 'encounters with a welcoming culture'. The final section addresses the main conclusions of this report together with policy recommendations.

1.1. Methodology and Sources

The report follows RESPOND project's overall methodology and applies a level of analysis, structured along macro (policy), meso (implementation) and micro (individual) analysis. Data utilised for this report consists of three primary sources: 1) Legal and policy documents related to reception policy to provide a contextual background to the analysis, 2) interviews conducted with stakeholders to understand the implementation processes and practitioners' own experiences and reflections about their work in the field of reception, and 3) interviews with migrants who arrived in Sweden between the period 2011-2018. This is supported by secondary sources, mainly consisting of previous academic research conducted on the same topic, both academic and policy-oriented reports written about reception policy and some relevant newspaper articles. Concerning reports, the Official Reports of the Swedish Government (Statens offentliga utredningar – SOU) have been an important material to trace the development of reception policy from a historical perspective. These reports are prepared by committees appointed by the Swedish government for the analysis of societal issues in anticipation of proposing a Bill to the Riksdag or the issuance of ordinances.

Interviews with migrants are based on a sampling of the largest groups of asylum seekers who arrived in Sweden in the period of 2011-2018. The interviewed persons were recruited using a snowball method and through the identification of gate keepers. The micro-level interviews were conducted with 61 asylum seekers in 2018-2019. In sampling, the following criteria were considered: geographical spread (centre and periphery locations), the largest migrant groups, gender, age, religious/cultural adherence, and arrival after 2011. The composition of interviews is described in the table below:

Table 2: Composition of interviews

Gender	Women (n=28)	Men (n=33)	
Nationality/ Country of origin	Syrian (n=44)	Afghani (n=15)	Iraqi (n=2)
Age	18-29 (n=15)	30-49 (n=36)	50+ (n=10)
Civic status	Married/engaged (n=34)	Single (n=17)	Divorced / widowed (n=10)

Educational background	University (n=32)	Upper secondary and secondary education (n=14)	Elementary (n=3); illiterate (n=5)
Ethnic group	Arab (n=28)	Hazara (n=11)	Assyrian (n=4); Kurd (n=3); Tajik (n=2)
Religious adherence	Muslim Sunni (n=36) Muslim Ismaili (n=9)	Christian (n=6); Converted to Christianity (n=4); Druze (n=2)	Atheist / non-religious / other (n=3)
Family situation	Living with family (n=35)	Living alone (n=17)	Single mother (n=4)
Legal status	Residence permit with refugee status or subsidiary protection status (n=35) Temporary protection (n=4)	Asylum seeker (n=9); Asylum seeker at deportation stage (n=6)	Family reunification (n=2)

The micro-level interviews were based on the semi-structured questionnaire designed by the RESPOND research team. Relevant interview questions from all RESPOND work packages (border management, refugee protection regimes, reception policies, and integration practices) were put together (See Annex #2 for the questionnaire related to reception experiences).

Eight interviews with stakeholders working in the field of reception were conducted. One of these stakeholders works at a County Administrative Board (*Länstyrelsen*); three of the stakeholders work at different municipalities where a large number of migrants reside; one is a representative of a municipal council; another is a representative of an NGO; one of them is a health practitioner and the other one is an employee of municipality housing support unit for unaccompanied minors. With these interviews, the aim was to understand the implementation of reception policies, identify the main problems and challenges and explore the experiences of stakeholders in their encounters with migrants. In addition, two roundtables were organised in December 2018 and January 2019 with the participation of stakeholders (governmental, non-governmental actors) working in the fields of asylum policies (protection), reception and integration.

Data will be analysed based on a qualitative content analysis of policy documents and interview material. In the analysis of interview material, in line with grounded theory, empirical concepts have been deployed. The strength of grounded theory is that it offers 'a way of constructing sociological reality' by creating theoretical categories from the empirical material, and analysing relationships between key categories (Charmaz 1990: 1163). Particularly, in order to better understand migrants' experiences, we have entered into a 'dialogue' with our empirical material (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007:19) and made sense of the 'real-world problem' (Wagenaar, 2010: 3–8). In a later stage, these empirical concepts and analysis will be theorised with analytical concepts and utilised further to develop a typology of reception together with the work package co-leaders. Moreover, the report provides various explanations about the governance of reception policies in Sweden.

2. Policies and Legal Regulations concerning Reception

2.1. A brief historical perspective

Swedish reception policies and laws are deeply interconnected with integration. The origins of Swedish integration policy³ lie in the late 1960s, developed from a corporatist perspective⁴ based on the concept of 'welfare-state citizenship'. This notion of citizenship aimed at fostering 'belonging' through social rights and to a large extent informed the reception of newcomers. Thus, a central principle for reception is to prepare the newcomers for labour market participation and turn them into 'self-sufficient' individuals [read this as 'taxpayers']. This has been a recurring narrative in policy documents and legislation about reception and integration of new arrivals. According to Qvist (2012), reception legislation has been characterised by a remarkable institutional stability and a strong objective of equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities. Therefore, the Swedish state acts in support of self-organisation of refugees and asylum seekers (e.g. in offering the possibility to organise private housing).

Swedish reception policy has taken shape in various stages, all related to the migration waves the country received in different historical contexts. This is also a process through which the main actors of reception policy emerged and became institutionalised. It is important to briefly look at several formative periods for reception policy.

In the aftermath of World War II, Sweden experienced an economic expansion where an external labour force was needed. The large majority of immigrants who came to Sweden in this period (from the 1950s to early 1970s) were labour migrants, mainly from other Nordic countries (191,000 Finnish immigrants) and tens of thousands of labour migrants recruited from countries such as Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey, Hungary, Austria, and Italy. These labour migrants as in other places elsewhere in Europe were not seen as 'temporary' guests who would eventually return to their homelands; rather perceived as 'future citizens' (Westin 2006). In Borevi's words (2014: 710): 'The Swedish approach was that labour migrants should gain immediate access to welfare state membership on the same basis as natives so as not to undermine core principles of universal egalitarianism'. The policy of permanent immigration (Westin 2006) has been one of the main underlying features of reception and integration policies, including a strong incentive of labour market inclusion of newcomers. During this period the Swedish Immigration Board (*Invandrarverket*, renamed the Swedish Migration Agency, *Migrationsverket* in 2000) was formed in 1969 with the aim of regulating migration. The policy was implemented by a number of state agencies together with the municipalities. The need for a more organised migration policy came

³ In general terms, Swedish integration policy aims at the realisation of equal rights, obligations and opportunities for all, regardless of ethnic or cultural background. The general aims for Swedish integration policy were set by the Swedish parliament (Riksdag) with several governmental enacted bills, such as the 1997 Law, *Från invandrarpolitik till integrationspolitik* (prop. 1997/98: 16, bet. 1997/98:SfU6, rskr. 1997/98:68). Thereafter, they were completed in 2001 (prop. 2000/2001:1, bet. 2000/2001:SfU2, rskr. 2000/01:72), in 2002 (prop. 2002/2003: 1, bet. 2002/03:SfU2, rskr. 2002/03:46) and in 2008 (prop. 2007/2008: 1, bet. 2007/08:AU1, rskr. 2007/08: 27). For broader information about Swedish integration policy, see also the Government Official Report, SOU (1996:55) *Sverige, Mångfald och Framtiden* and SOU (2003:75) *Etablering i Sverige: Möjligheter och ansvar för individ och samhälle*.

⁴ Another cornerstone of Swedish integration policy has been the policy of multiculturalism which was officially adopted in 1975, aiming to encompass ethnic and religious diversity and to support ethnic and religious groups in safeguarding their identity and culture. This has boosted the number of migrant community organisations (both religious and secular organisations) and mother tongue instruction in primary schools. This policy continued till the mid 1980s where the integration policy moved away from targeting collective groups towards individuals.

to be realised during the 1970s when the economic crisis of the early 1970s halted the need for foreign labour force. During this period, the migration flows of the 1970s and 1980s changed significantly the composition of migrants in Sweden. Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, Sweden became a country of asylum and welcomed people fleeing from war, conflict and persecution.

2.1.i. 1980s: The Whole of Sweden Strategy

Throughout the 1980s Sweden was one of the top destinations for asylum seekers and refugees worldwide. Especially in the second half of the 1980s, the number of asylum seekers from Iran and Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey and Eritrea began to rise, and at the end of this decade, asylum seekers started arriving from Somalia, Kosovo and from several former Eastern Bloc countries.

In 1985, a new system for the reception of asylum seekers and new arrivals was introduced. The Swedish Immigration Board took over the sole responsibility for concluding agreements with local municipalities on the reception of asylum seekers. Initially, about 60 municipalities signed agreements with the Immigration Board on a voluntary basis. This policy shift was encapsulated with an official dispersal policy, entitled 'Hela Sverige strategin' which was implemented between 1985-1994. With this strategy, the authorities aimed to end the concentration of immigrants and asylum seekers in big cities. In practice, the policy implemented from 1987 to 1991, where 90 percent of new arrivals were placed in designated municipalities. Upon receiving their residence permits, they were allowed to settle in a different municipality of their choice. A large majority of people who were placed in different municipalities chose to move out to the places of their choice, usually to bigger cities where they had larger family and ethnic networks. The anticipated goals of this strategy were to a large extent not achieved (Andersson 2003). Rather, it led to increased unemployment among newcomers and their high dependency on social benefits. A state inquiry concluded that most of the newcomers placed in different municipalities ended up in a spiral of education which prevented them from becoming self-sufficient (SOU 2003:75). Nevertheless, the social proximity of the smaller municipalities for the reception and integration of newcomers was evaluated positively.

The even distribution of asylum seekers and new arrivals is another recurring narrative in policy documents. The concentration of new arrivals in certain municipalities was seen as a serious challenge for the integration of these groups. In the last four decades, the state made several attempts to implement the same type of dispersal policy measures as drafted in the Whole of Sweden (Hela Sverige) strategy.

2.1.ii. The 1990s – A first attempt to legislate Swedish Reception Policy: the Act of 1994

The current system for reception policy was introduced in 1994 presented by the centre-right coalition Government through the Act on the reception of asylum seekers and others (*Lag 1994: 137 om mottagande av asylsökande med flera* – hereafter LMA). The most significant change this Act acknowledged was indirectly to end the interventionist dispersal policy implemented with the Hela Sverige strategy. With the LMA, it became possible for asylum seekers and new arrivals to choose their place of stay either in assisted housing facilities (called ABO accommodation – *Anläggningsboende* in full) organised by the Migration agency or in self-arranged housing options (called EBO – *Eget boende* in full) without losing their daily allowance. The change aimed to encourage asylum seekers to take greater responsibility for their own lives and reduce costs of reception for the state. With this neo-liberal formulation, the responsibility – even the economic part – was shifted away from the state to resource-weak asylum seekers and new arrivals. The main rationale was that self-arranged housing would promote integration and make it easier for asylum seekers to get a job and to get to know Swedish society with the support of relatives and acquaintances who already lived in Sweden (SOU 1992:133). Looking at the policy process behind the so-called EBO-reform, Borevi and Bengtson (2015: 2605) show how the reform was

initially aimed to create a more cost-efficient reception system. Accordingly, 'economic and instrumental concerns were predominant in the discussion.' It was only later that the freedom of choice of the asylum seekers became an important argument. Prior to the reform, it was estimated that about 10 percent of asylum seekers would choose the path of EBO, that is, arranging their own accommodation. However, the unintended consequences of this change was that a significantly large proportion of asylum seekers chose to arrange their own housing in the outskirts of three big Swedish cities (SOU 2009:19, p.66). The share has varied between 30 and 50 percent between 1999 and 2017. This proportion did not change even after the mass migration in 2015.⁵

In 1995, Sweden joined the EU. In the second half of the 1990s, while the number of asylum seekers in Sweden decreased, more restrictive provisions were implemented. For example, in 1997 the age limit for family reunification was lowered to apply to children under the age of 18, as opposed to the previous age limit of 20. The possibility for elderly parents, especially widows/widowers, to reunite with their children in Sweden, was removed. The provision regarding the 'last link of the family chain' was also removed.

In 1998, the Swedish Integration Agency (*Integrationsverket*) was established and made responsible for concluding agreements with municipalities for the reception of new arrivals. In the selection of municipalities, the Agency considered the capacity of municipalities based on their size, labour market capacity/employment conditions, educational opportunities and the number of existing asylum seekers in EBO. The system of voluntary agreements with local authorities continued even after the shutdown of the Integration Agency in 2006 from where the Migration Agency (*Migrationsverket*) took over the responsibility for signing agreements with municipalities. In 2011, county administrative boards took over the task. A more effective and market-oriented introduction system was launched for the reception of new arrivals within the framework of *Etableringsreformen* (The Establishment Reform)⁶. Accordingly, the Swedish Public Employment Office (*Arbetsförmedlingen*) was assigned as the coordinating authority instead of municipalities that had this responsibility previously.

In the last four decades, until 2016, the settlement of new arrivals was based on voluntary agreements between the state and municipalities. These voluntary agreements did not have a binding function on the municipalities. Nevertheless, they were characterized by a sort of 'soft governance' approach where the solidarity norm played a central role. This, for example, implied that municipalities that would break the terms of negotiations risked negative attention (stigmatization) in the media (see for example the Sjöbo case in Qvist, 2012: 78). But the SMA was also aware of the controversial nature of the issue, and therefore tried to avoid situations that would trigger local populist sentiments.⁷ In practice, due to lack of places people with a residence permit had to wait long before they could settle in a municipality. During the period 2012–2014, the number of people with residence permits staying in SMA's reception centres (ABO) increased from just over 4,000 to about 10,000 people. In the autumn of 2016, the number was up to just over 18,000 people. Many new arrivals have therefore chosen to arrange their own accommodation, which has often happened in municipalities that have already had a high reception of migrants or in municipalities with weak employment growth. This has also reinforced the uneven distribution of new arrivals between Sweden's municipalities. The policy on 'voluntary agreements' with municipalities was changed in March 2016. The government introduced an obligation for municipalities to receive new arrivals. This policy change – from voluntary arrangements to compulsory agreements – has long been tabled especially by Social Democrats and local authorities (e.g. Södertälje, Malmö, Gothenburg) with a large number of migrants, but the change only became available during the migration crisis in late 2015 and early 2016.

⁵ See SMA's website: *Statistics – Persons with Accommodation in the Swedish Migration Agency's Reception System*

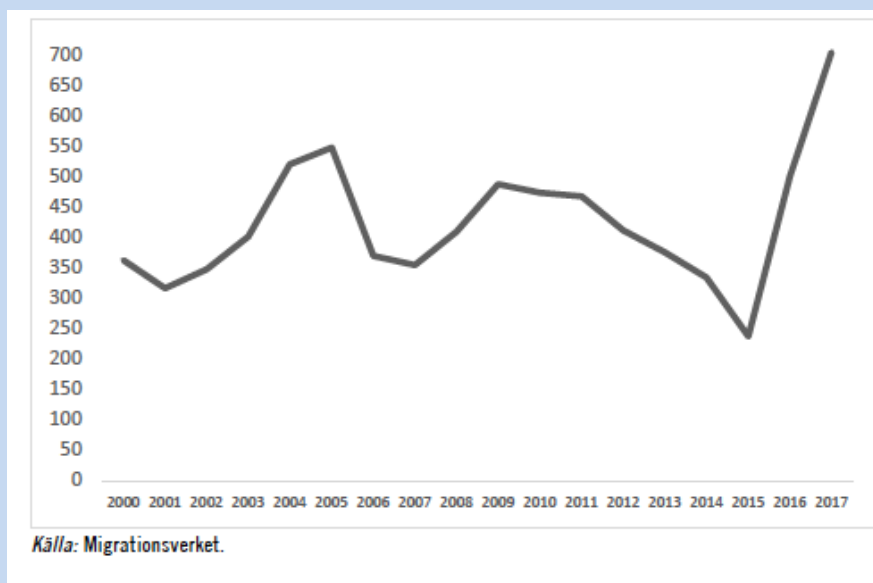
⁶ This was decided in the Swedish *Riksdag* on 17 March 2010, *Nyanlända invandrades arbetsmarknadsetablering – egenansvar med professionellt stöd* (Prop. 2009/10:60).

⁷ We would like to thank Karin Borevi who brought this point to our attention.

Waiting time

It is not just the number of people seeking asylum in Sweden that varies over time, but also the time spent in the reception phase. Figure 2 shows the average length of stay in the reception during the period 2000–2017. This includes only the time when an asylum application is filed to the first decision made by the SMA, and does not include the time a) spent in the appeal process following a negative decision; or b) spent waiting for a municipality to be enrolled in the 'introduction' programme.

Figure 2: Average time in reception 2000-2017 (days)



The processing and residence times in the reception phase play a critical role for the well-being of asylum seekers and new arrivals. The figure shows that the residence times vary considerably during the period 2000–2017. The lowest was the average length of stay 2015 when it was down to 237 days (due to the impact of the collective decision made for asylum seekers from Syria), while in 2017, it was up to 702 days due to backlogs from preceding years, especially for the asylum applications submitted in the second half of 2015 and 2016.

Table 3: Average processing and waiting times in asylum cases (2012-2017)

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Antal nya asylsökande under året	43 887	54 259	81 301	162 877	28 939	25 666
Avgjorda asylärenden	36 526	49 870	53 503	58 802	111 979	66 301
Inom 3 månader (andel)	52	52	37	24	8	16
Inom 6 månader (andel)	86	79	75	39	20	20
Inom 9 månader (andel)	95	91	89	59	33	23
Genomsnittlig handläggningstid (dagar)	108	122	142	229	328	496
Genomsnittlig tid från tillstånd till utflytt (dagar)	80	89	108	110	93	123
Genomsnittlig tid från lagakraft till självmant återvändande (dagar)	76	73	67	61	58	82

Källa: Migrationsverket.

Historically, a large proportion of asylum seekers have had to wait a long time for a decision in their case, even though the average processing time in certain periods has been relatively short.

Table 1 shows the average processing time and what proportion of the cases were decided by the SMA respectively within three, six and nine months during 2012–2017. In 2012 and 2013, about half of the decisions were made within three months. One year later (2014) the proportion had dropped to 37 percent and in 2017 the proportion was 16 percent. The average processing time in an asylum case is largely in line with the overall average of asylum applications. The last two figures of Table 3 shows a) the waiting time for individuals to be placed in a municipality after a positive decision, and b) the time for voluntary returns after a rejection has gained final legal force.

2.2. An overview of the national legislation

The central legislation for reception policies is formulated with the Act on Reception of Asylum Seekers and Others in 1994 (LMA) and with the Reception of Asylum Seekers and Others Ordinance (1994:361). The LMA which has been slightly adjusted, yet not fundamentally changed since its implementation in 1994, was introduced in order to accommodate the large number of asylum seekers fleeing from the Balkan Wars in the early 1990s. The Act addresses which government entity should have the main responsibility for reception. An amendment in 2016, as an attempt to manage the ‘refugee crisis’, toughened the LMA (2016 Amendment to the Act (1994:137) on the Reception of Asylum Seekers and Others (2016:381)): access to reception conditions was cut down for certain groups such as adults without children who have received a decision on refusal which cannot be appealed anymore or those adults whose period for voluntary return has ended. See Table 4 for the other legislation, the main implementing decrees, and administrative guidelines relevant to reception conditions.

Before the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ in 2015 only a few relevant legal changes can be observed (Emilsson, 2018). In 2010 greater economic incentives for applicants were created to learn the language faster (2009/10:188). In the same year responsibilities for introductory programs were taken from municipalities and transferred to the state; the Public Employment Service took control of the implementation procedure. This was also connected to further economic incentives to get applicants integrated into the labour market faster (2009/10:60). In 2014 target groups (especially family reunification migrants) were expanded by greater economic compensation from the government to municipalities (2012/13:188).

In 2015, 181,890 people were enrolled in the reception system. This drastic rise in asylum applications not only created processing backlogs, it also strained the ability of the asylum and refugee reception system to house and provide for the primary needs of the newest arrivals. In response to this situation, the above-mentioned amendment was introduced as well as a new act for an effective and solidarity-based reception in 2016. This new act centralised the governance of migration by shifting the decision about the intake of refugees from the municipal to the national level. It also transferred the task of allocating recognised beneficiaries of protection to the national level. The role of the Minister for Employment and Integration got strengthened and extended to coordinate and direct the government’s work regarding the reception and integration of newly arrived beneficiaries of protection.⁸ As a result, in 2016 the number was down to 122,708.⁹ This is a decrease of 33%.

When making the asylum application, the applicants are provided with information about the reception system in Sweden. Information is given both orally (by SMA staff) and in written form. The information documents are available in 21 languages.¹⁰

⁸ EMN (2017) Report Sweden 2016, p. 16-7.

⁹ EMN (2017) Report Sweden 2016, p. 32-3.

¹⁰ FARR, ‘Provision of information on Reception’.

Table 4: Overview of the legal framework for reception

Legislation, main implementing decrees, and administrative guidelines relevant to reception conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lagen (1994:137) om mottagande av asylsökande (Law on Reception of Asylum Seekers and Others) SFS 1994:137 - Förordningen (1994:361) om mottagande av asylsökande (Ordinance on Reception of Asylum Seekers) SFS 1994:361 - Migrationsverkets föreskrifter och allmänna råd gällande mottagande av asylsökande m.fl. MIGRFS 2018:3 - Lagen (2005:429) om god man för ensamkommande barn (Law on Unaccompanied minors) SFS 2005:429 - Lagen (2008:344) om hälso- och sjukvård åt asylsökande (Law on Health Care Services for Asylum Seekers) SFS 2008:344
On 'Allowances' during the asylum period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Förordningen (2017:193) om statlig ersättning för asylsökande m.fl. SFS 2017:193 - Migrationsverkets föreskrifter gällande förordning (2017:193) om statlig ersättning för asylsökande m.fl. MIGRFS 7/2017 - Förordningen (2002:1118) om statlig ersättning för asylsökande m.fl. (upphävd 2017) SFS 2002:1118 - Förordningen (1996:1357) om statlig ersättning för hälso- och sjukvård till asylsökande SFS 1996:1357
On 'Allowances' for those with a residence permit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Förordningen (2010:1122) om statlig ersättning för insatser för vissa utlännningar SFS 2010:1122 - Förordningen (1990:927) om statlig ersättning för flyktigmottagande m.m. SFS 1990:927 - Migrationsverkets föreskrifter gällande förordning (1990:927) om statlig ersättning för flyktigmottagande m.m. MIGRFS 9/2017
On 'Settlement'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lagen (2016:38) om mottagande av vissa nyanlända invandrare för bosättning (Settlement Act) SFS 2016:38 - Förordningen (2016:39) om mottagande av vissa nyanlända invandrare för bosättning SFS 2016:39 - Förordningen (2016:40) om fördelning av anvisningar till kommuner SFS 2016:40
On 'Establishment'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lagen (2017:584) om ansvar för etableringsinsatser för vissa nyanlända invandrare SFS 2017:584 - Förordningen (2017:819) om ersättning till deltagare i arbetsmarknadspolitiska insatser SFS 2017:819 - Förordningen (2017:820) om etableringsinsatser för vissa nyanlända invandrare SFS 2017:820
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Utlänningslagen (Aliens Act) 2005:716 - Lagen (2016:752) om tillfälliga begränsningar av möjligheten att få uppehållstillstånd i Sverige (Law on temporary limitations to the possibility of being granted a residence permit in Sweden) SFS 2016:752 - Skollagen (The Education Act) SFS 2010:800 - Socialtjänstlagen (Social Services Act) SFS 2001:453 - Socialtjänstförordningen SFS 2001:937 - Proposition 2005/06:46 om mottagande av ensamkommande barn - Proposition 1989/90:105 om samordnat flyktigmottagande och nytt system för ersättningar till kommuner m.m.

2.2.i. Daily allowance

Table 5 displays the daily allowance for different categories of applicants. These can be reduced under certain circumstances,¹¹ e.g. when the applicant is not cooperating with the institutions. Considered as non-cooperation, for example, is not to appear for appointments or the refusal of expulsion orders. While the reduction can be appealed at the County Administrative Court, the chances of succeeding are rather low. Reductions of allowances can amount to 35-40% but do not apply to children.

There is also the possibility to apply for a special financial allowance. This type of allowance is addressed to cover the needs or services that are not possible to cover with the daily allowance. Among these the Migration Agency lists eyeglasses, a baby carriage or warm winter shoes. In these cases, the Migration Agency makes an individual evaluation of the need. Apart from that, travel cost compensation for visiting the Migration Agency can be covered as a special allowance.

If during the waiting period asylum seekers find a long-term job (more than 3 months) in a place where the Migration Agency does not have accommodation to provide, they are entitled to residential support. The residential support is 850 kr/month for families 350 kr/month for a one-person household¹².

Table 5: Daily allowances for refugees and asylum seekers¹³

	Stay at reception centre with food included	Stay in private housing or housing provided by the SMA
Single adult	24 SEK	71 SEK
Adults sharing accommodation	19 SEK each	61 SEK each
Children: 0-3 years	12 SEK	37 SEK
Children: 4-10 years	12 SEK	43 SEK
Children: 11-17 years	12 SEK	50 SEK

2.2.ii. Work permits

If asylum seekers can verify their identity and prove that Sweden is responsible for their asylum application, they are exempt from the need to have a work permit. This work permit exemption is known as AT-UND and allows asylum seekers to work immediately after arrival. This ceases to apply if they received a refusal of entry or a negative final decision of their asylum application. If a person has been employed for more than four months before a negative decision, he or she can apply for a work permit and switch the status from an asylum seeker to a labour migrant. If they then obtain at least one-year contract¹⁴ from the same employer they must apply for a work permit within two weeks. If successful, a work permit for up to two years¹⁵ can be granted. Multiple applications can be made but after four years with temporary permits, an application for a permanent residence permit is possible. Temporary permits allow for family reunification. The procedure to switch somewhat easily was introduced by the centre-right Alliance government in 2008 in order to develop third-country labour migration to Sweden and to integrate highly qualified

¹¹ <https://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/sweden/reduction-or-withdrawal-reception-conditions>

¹² SMA, 2019, 'Financial support for asylum seekers'.

¹³ FARR, 'Reduction or withdrawal of reception conditions'.

¹⁴ In case of part time employment, SEK 13,000 per month before tax is necessary. See further: <https://www.migrationsverket.se/English/Private-individuals/Working-in-Sweden/Employed/If-you-are-in-Sweden/Asylum-seekers-who-have-a-job.html>

¹⁵ Depends also on the validity/expiration of passport.

persons amongst rejected refugees. The need for certain skills in the labour market usually does not affect the asylum procedure.¹⁶

2.2.iii. Health care

During the asylum process, applicants are granted necessary medical care, however, in some cases the asylum claimants under the Dublin Regulation were denied access to health care (or limited only to emergency care). Every applicant is guaranteed the right to a free medical examination. Scheduling this examination has been criticised for taking too much time, sometimes up to two to eight months, and is not always conducted thoroughly enough. In many cases, the language barrier also hinders a proper examination (Mangrio and Fross, 2017). Access to health services is organised via officially distributed bank cards and the LMA card that proves the right to entitlement. Entitlement ends when an applicant refuses to leave the country within four weeks after an expulsion order gained legal force.¹⁷ Under-18-year-old applicants are entitled to the same access to health care as minors, residing in Sweden. Medical service is provided by county council-run institutions such as primary health care centres (*vårdcentralen*), hospitals and the National Dental Service (*Folktandvården*). Services provided vary between the different counties but always include emergency health and dental care as well as gynaecological and prenatal care and all other care in accordance with the Swedish Communicable Diseases Act. Holders of the LMA card pay 50 SEK for a doctor's visit, while appointments with nurses or physical therapists cost 25 SEK per visit and transportation amounts to 50 SEK. Fees for emergency services vary among the counties. For adults as for children prescribed medication costs no more than 50 SEK. SMA can compensate for costs of more than 400 SEK if this limit is passed within a six-month period. However, it does not include dental and emergency care. For those who lost their right to use an LMA card, since the changes in 2017, health care is only provided in urgent cases.¹⁸

In 2016, the Government allocated SEK 1,5 billion to the Swedish county councils to increase their capacity for healthcare for asylum seekers and refugees. In the budget bill for 2017, the Government announced increased funding for specialised care for victims of war and torture.¹⁹

2.2.iv. Education and schooling of children

During the asylum process, adult asylum seekers are only provided with informal or semi-formal language courses. Upon receiving a positive decision for their asylum application, they have the right to access formal education which starts basically with language acquisition. A variety of language courses *provided* by different institutions, inter alia, the municipalities, organise the language courses within the concept of introduction programmes, Swedish for Immigrants (*Svenska för invandrare* – SFI). Several other institutions provide similar language acquisition courses as part of sprinter/fast-track programmes for higher educated migrants.

Children under-18 who seek asylum have full access to the school system even during the asylum process. Asylum-seeker children have the right to attend school in Sweden, and schools are required to enrol newly arrived children, including asylum seekers, within one month of their arrival. They are integrated into regular schools. Preparatory courses are offered for those who have to improve their skills in Swedish and core subjects. Once a course has been started teenage refugees are allowed to finish, even though their temporary residence permit may have expired before the course ends. 'The right to go to school has also been confirmed in law for those children still present in Sweden with an expulsion order and who have absconded with their

¹⁶ FARR, 'Access to the labour market'.

¹⁷ SMA, 'Rejection-of-application-for-asylum'.

¹⁸ FARR, 'Health care'.

¹⁹ EMN report Sweden 2016, p. 37.

parents.²⁰ Another important measure is the right for mother tongue education. If more than five children are in the area with the same language in the area, they have the right to have lessons in their mother tongue on a regular basis. This measure helps to improve their performance in school and learning Swedish. Some larger districts, including Stockholm and Malmö, have created 'sprint' and 'start-up' courses, so called because they are designed to help students who do not speak Swedish during the first year or two of arrival.

Since 2016 some changes have been implemented that both reduce the access to upper secondary education but also introduced a residence permit that allows applicants to continue their studies. A multitude of rules exist here for different categories of people. Residence permits can be granted for 13 months up to four years for certain categories of young asylum seekers pursuing upper secondary education (subject to certain conditions). It is possible to get a permit that is valid for six months after finishing the program. Since this applies to everyone under 25 (between age 17–24, not only to unaccompanied children) it is possible to apply on the ground of upper secondary studies regardless of whether they came with their family or alone.²¹ The date to apply for residence permit for upper secondary school studies under the new law was from the 1 July to the 30 September 2018 (recently the SMA has reopened the application process).

2.2.v. Housing

Through the introduction of LMA (Lag 1994:137)²², the division of responsibilities was established among different authorities. The SMA as a national authority became responsible for asylum seekers, on the other hand local municipalities became responsible for refugees with residence permits. But over time, geographical division has also built up where there is a majority of Swedes in some municipalities and in others immigrants. Spatial segregation can also be seen within a municipality where in certain neighbourhoods the dominant groups are natives or foreigners. Thus, the problem of structural organisation of housing is as significant as the housing crisis in the context of Swedish accommodation governance. In 2016, a new law was introduced called The Settlement Act (2016:38)²³, which came into force on 1 March 2016, making it compulsory for the municipalities to organise accommodation for refugees thus ensuring geographic dispersion.

According to the new regulation, once a residence permit is granted, beneficiaries can choose to receive assistance finding 'permanent housing'. SMA coordinates with county administrative boards and municipalities to map the available accommodation. And by law all municipalities are required to make housing available. In 2017, SMA together with the Association of Local Authorities and Regions (a body representing 290 municipalities and 21 counties) and the Public Employment Service developed a formula and assigned protection beneficiaries to 21 counties in Sweden based on the population of the municipalities, its labour market capacity, total reception of newly arrived and unaccompanied children and the number of asylum seekers already existing in the municipality. SMA's decision cannot be appealed. However, there is no measure for sanctions if a municipality does not accept a newcomer assigned to the municipality within the specified time (two months after SMA's decision).²⁴ In the same vein, there are no specific guidelines in the Settlement Act with regards to accommodation type, standards, length of rental contracts, costs and so on. As a result, the implementation of the Settlement Act differs in different municipalities, which furthers inequalities.

²⁰ Cited from FARR report on 'Reception': Betänkande 2012/13:UbU12 Utbildning för barn som vistas i landet utan tillstånd, available at: <http://bit.ly/1GfU4uO>.

²¹ SMA, 'FARR, Access to Education'.

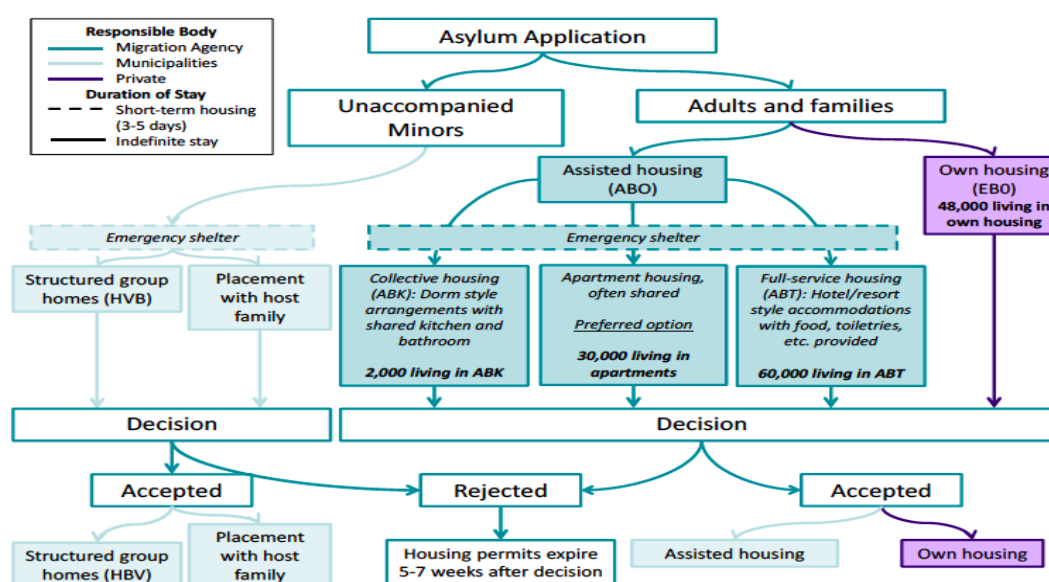
²² Lag (1994:137) om mottagande av asylsökande m.fl.

²³ Regeringskansliets rättsdatabaser.

²⁴ This aspect is not explained well in the guidelines. At the moment of writing this report, SD-led municipality, Sölvesborg announced that they would challenge the Settlement Act and will not take any newcomers.

Since the adoption of the *Lag om eget boende* (EBO) Act of 1994, asylum seekers and refugees are free to organise housing on their own. However, new amendments have been introduced to the 1994 EBO Act decided on 27 November 2019, which will come into force on 1 January 2020, imposing restrictions on EBO housing arrangements. The Government has proposed that the opportunity for asylum seekers to live in accommodation they have arranged themselves should be restricted in certain areas. If an asylum seeker arranges accommodation on his or her own in a socio-economically deprived area, he or she will as a rule not be entitled to a daily allowance or special allowance. The purpose of the proposal is that asylum seekers more often than is the case today should choose to live in areas where there are conditions for them to be received in a socially sustainable fashion and to ensure that the negative social consequences of asylum seekers choosing their own accommodation be reduced.²⁵ The type of accommodation asylum seekers choose has significant consequences, both during reception and after receiving a positive asylum decision, determining access to municipal housing. The municipalities are not obliged to provide accommodation to those who have previously arranged their own accommodation (EBO) even if they receive a positive decision on their asylum claim.

Figure 3: Housing Assignment Process



Source:
Susan Fratzke (2017: 25)

If the asylum seekers request accommodation from SMA (ABO), they cannot decide on the location²⁶. Such accommodation is provided in apartments or reception centres. Those who organise their own housing (e.g. via family or friends) receive similar daily allowances as those who get accommodation via SMA. It is always possible to switch the type of housing. Switching municipalities is also possible but to a limited extent. If a new municipality is chosen within one month of having received residence the municipality does not assume legal responsibility to offer introduction programs and allowances (Myberg, 2017). In 2016, 29% of refugees enrolled in the reception system organised their own housing, 20% stayed in special facilities and 51% stayed in SMA provided accommodation²⁷. Whereas in 2017, 33 221 (43%) of the asylum seekers enrolled in the system had arranged their own accommodation (EBO), and 35 496 (46%) relied on ABO.

²⁵ <https://riksdagen.se/en/news/2019/nov/27/the-opportunity-for-asylum-seekers-to-choose-their-own-accommodation-is-to-be-restricted-in-certain-areas/>

²⁶ <https://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/sweden/reception-conditions/housing/types-accommodation>

²⁷ EMN (2017) Annual Report on Asylum and Migration - Sweden 2016, p. 33.

The remaining 10% were accommodated in other specialised facilities²⁸. The drop-in arrivals from 2016 onwards has led to the closure of 183 reception centres, all in all 29,687 places²⁹, throughout late 2016 and 2017 to adjust to the reduced levels of arrivals³⁰. The closed accommodation facilities mainly had been used as emergency accommodation centres in the late 2015 and early 2016. The private housing market in Sweden was accused of profiting from the asylum seekers position by renting out low-quality housing for too-high prices (see further 'Private sector' in Section 2.5 'Actors involved').

2.2.vi. Special accommodation for vulnerable refugees

The legal framework with regard to the needs of vulnerable asylum seekers is part of the 1994 Law on the Reception of Asylum Seekers (LMA). The LMA provides the legal framework and briefly mentions the provision for the needs of vulnerable groups³¹. Although these provisions are not clearly defined, SMA has established its own standards and initiatives for fulfilling the needs of vulnerable groups. As a part of the initiatives, special accommodation was established in 2016 for vulnerable asylum seekers and refugees. This initiative aimed to accord with the Provisions for Vulnerable Persons of ³² that requires special consideration to be given to people with special reception needs. Despite the suggestions of SMA and CSOs, the government did not feel the necessity to specify identification procedures of vulnerable groups, thus the implementation of Provisions of Vulnerable Persons has been delayed. A special group at SMA have issued a standard (looking at the needs of vulnerable groups from different aspects) through the Quality Assurance Unit of the Migration Agency which was updated on 25 September 2017³³. As mentioned earlier, in 2016 20% of vulnerable groups stayed in special safe housing compared to 10% in 2017, which is a sharp 50% decrease. From 2016 onwards, significant numbers of temporary/emergency reception facilities including special accommodation were gradually shut down as restrictions on immigration were introduced and the number of incoming asylum seekers and refugees decreased. Special accommodation is usually provided for women, unaccompanied minors, LGBTI persons, torture victims, elderly people, disabled people and those with physical and mental disorders or those endangered by harassment due to their gender identity or sexual orientation and victims of human trafficking.

Protection of vulnerable groups can rather be re-framed as protection of vulnerable individual asylum seekers. No special rights are collectively granted to any group, decisions are made on a case to case basis. However, the needs of vulnerable people are taken into account by the SMA, in order to find suitable accommodation for them. Therefore, SMA has established special standards and special accommodation centres in or close to big cities like Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö. The initial number of places is 45 with the option to increase in the future. The main purpose is to provide more adequate facilities, to ensure safety and to decrease harassment of vulnerable groups in SMA facilities. Certain procedures are set out by SMA for needs assessment of people with physical disabilities in order to provide them with special flats. However, customised housing for these persons is not especially available³⁴. Further, SMA makes systematic efforts to identify victims of human trafficking among asylum seekers and refugees. Individuals living in safe housing generally express that they feel safer than in the normal accommodation provided by SMA.

²⁸ EMN (2018) 'Annual Report on Asylum and Migration - Sweden 2017, p. 36

²⁹ SMA, Annual Report 2017, p. 54.

³⁰ SMA, 'Planering klar för att stänga 183 boenden' (12 February 2018).

³¹ FARR, 'Identification'.

³² Directive 2013/33/Eu: Provisions for Vulnerable Persons.

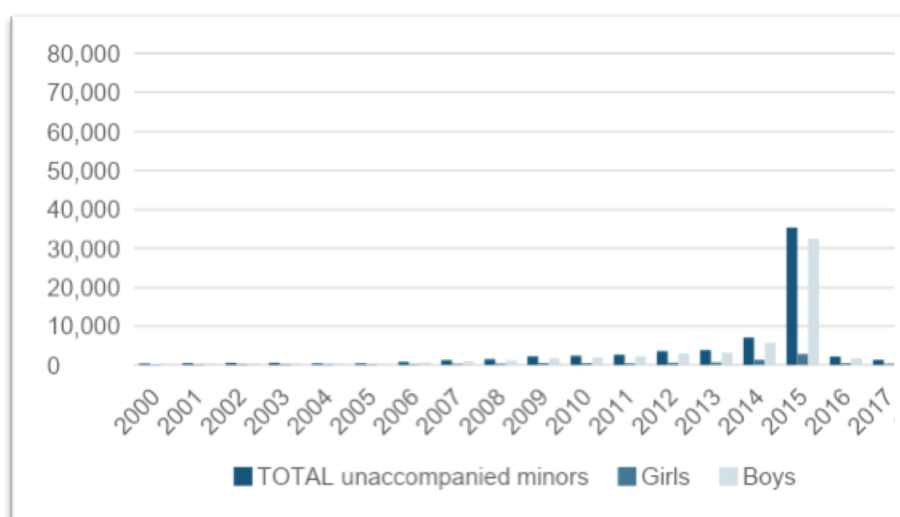
³³ Migration Agency, Kvalitetschefens instruktion om standard för dokumentation av särskilda behov, I-78/2017, 25 September 2017

³⁴ Query to EU Member States requested by the European Migration Network, 2018.

2.2.vii. Reception of unaccompanied minors

According to the UNHCR definition from 1994, an unaccompanied minor (UAM) is ‘a person who is under the age of 18 [...] and who is separated from both parents and is not being cared for by an adult who by law or custom has a responsibility to do so.’³⁵ For the first time, since World War II when Finnish children were evacuated to Sweden, Swedish authorities paid attention to the existence of unaccompanied migrant children in the 1980s. As a result, the state started establishing ‘special homes’ for unaccompanied minors, and over time, the need for a new law to protect children’s rights arose. UAMs started to be taken care of by the municipalities. In 2006, an arrangement was introduced in which the children were received and lived in a municipality that had reached an agreement with the SMA, but the agency still kept the overall responsibility for the reception of UAMs. A municipality that has reached an agreement with the Agency was also entitled to compensation for their commitments. After the municipalities took over the responsibility in 2006, Sweden started receiving around 400 unaccompanied children per year. The number of unaccompanied children has continued to increase in numbers (see Figure 4 for the numbers of UAMs from 2000-2017).

Figure 4: Applications for asylum received 2000-2017 – Unaccompanied minors



Source: SMA

In 2015, Sweden has received the largest numbers of unaccompanied minors, more than one third of UAMs in the EU. The majority of them were boys (ca. 92 percent³⁶) of the age of 13-17 from Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia and Eritrea³⁷. In 2015, UAMs made up 22 percent of all asylum seekers and refugees.³⁸ In 2017, the number of registered UAMs decreased to 944 (4.4 percent of the total number of asylum seekers), and the percentage of girls was 26.4 percent³⁹.

The SMA considers unaccompanied minors as a vulnerable group entitled to a special provision of services. UAM’s needs must be assessed in order to place them in suitable accommodation. Among the factors that should be taken into consideration are possible traumatic experience in home country and/or transit period, gender, religious practice and mental state.

³⁵ UNHCR 1994: 121

³⁶ Among them 32522 were boys and 2847 were girls (Source: SMA)

³⁷ EMN (2018) Annual Report Sweden - 2017, p. 14.

³⁸ EMN (2017) Annual Report Sweden - 2016, p. 34.

³⁹ SMA (2019), ‘Statistics – Asylum’.

The responsibility for UAM's settlement starts with the municipality of arrival, which will place the child in a transit shelter (arrival housing) and arrange meetings with social workers. The child stays in the transit housing until the municipality which will take all further care of the child is assigned. The Social Services Administration of the assigned municipality should place the child in accommodation relevant to the child's situation. UAMs can be placed in a foster home, as well as a home of relatives of the child (however, in the case of accommodation with relatives, the place must be inspected and confirmed). In order to assess the provision of care in the group homes and foster families, the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs has appointed the Agency for Health and Care Services Analysis. However, there are complaints about lack of supervision regarding foster homes and centres for UAM. One of the municipality housing support staff for UAMs explains this as follows:

I don't really think that they put so much attention on whether the persons receiving these kids in their homes were qualified to do so. An extra room was essentially all that was needed. It was kind of the same with the companies as well – they provided funding for receiving the kids but they didn't really check what they were doing.

According to the EU Reception Directive 2013/33, only UAMs aged 16 and over can be placed in the centres with adult asylum seekers, 'if it is in their best interests, as prescribed in Article 23(2)'. There is also a special type of supported accommodation for adolescents from the age of 16 to 20 who are 'not in need of the level of care provided in formal foster care family homes or residential care homes for children and young persons' (ibid.). They can be placed in individual or shared flats in general accommodation. Changes of residence of unaccompanied minors shall be limited to a minimum. There are designated care homes providing special support for girls (and women) who are victims of honour crimes. There are also compulsory care centres for young adults with psychosocial problems operated by the National Board of Institutional Care [*Statens institutionsstyrelse*, SiS]⁴⁰.

In 2016 the SMA developed a new model of assignment for asylum-seeking UAMs. UAMs are assigned to one of the municipalities based on a set percentage in order to ensure a more even distribution of minors throughout the municipalities. In these cases, the assigned municipality can place the child in another municipality. Nevertheless, it is the assigned municipality which stays responsible for the child's access to healthcare and schooling facilities, as well as for provision of respective services and allowances.⁴¹ UAMs of the age of 16 receive a daily allowance for personal needs like clothes, medicine and leisure activities.

The National Board of Health and Welfare is in charge of carrying out regular assessments and conducting an analysis of the social services offered to UAMs. The asylum-seeking minors have access to public health care under the same conditions as Swedish minor citizens and residents. This includes access to mental health resources such as consultations with psychologists, access to specialist centres and organisations that provide support.⁴² The latest development is the adoption of the European Parliament resolution on the protection of children in migration (2018/2666(RSP)) which stresses implementation of the principle of the best interests of the child for all decisions concerning children, regardless of their status; investment in psychological and psychiatric support and rehabilitation for the purposes of addressing children's mental health issues.⁴³

According to the EU Directive 2013/33, each UAM should have a legal guardian. Legal guardians are appointed by the Guardian Committee in the municipality where the child is present. The legal guardian represents the child as custodian and guardian and makes decisions regarding the

⁴⁰ EMN (2018) Annual Report - Sweden 2017:4, p.25.

⁴¹ Länsstyrelsen Stockholm, Report 2016:28, p.9.

⁴² SMA (2017) 'How to apply for asylum for children who are applying for asylum without a parent or other guardian', p. 13.

⁴³ European Parliament, Resolution 2018/2666(RSP), paras. 4, 8, 11, 16.

child's personal and legal affairs. The legal guardian works on a voluntary basis and shall have had and 'shall continue to receive appropriate training concerning their needs, and shall be bound by the confidentiality rules provided for in national law, in relation to any information they obtain'. If a permanent residence permit is granted a custodian is appointed. In 2017, most UAM registered aged between 13 and 17 and the protection rate for UAM was 73% (72% in 2016)⁴⁴.

In 2017, the European Commission issued its Communication on the protection of children in migration. Along with other recommendations the European Commission encouraged the Member States to 'provide support to enable children make the transition to adulthood (or leaving care)'⁴⁵. According to a new Swedish compensation scheme of 2017, the municipalities do not receive compensation for unaccompanied adolescents who have reached the age of 18 years. The responsibility for the young adults shifts to the Migration Agency. Therefore, youth who have reached the age of 18 are supposed to move from the accommodation for minors to accommodation provided by the Migration Agency. However, if the adolescents after turning 18 are awaiting an asylum decision, they are entitled to apply for an extension of their stay in the municipality's accommodation. In case of a positive decision after the examination of the application by the Migration Agency, the applicant, if needed, can receive accommodation and care from the municipalities until the age of 21.⁴⁶

2.3. Swedish reception policy in relation to EU and international legislation

The EU Law that governs reception of Asylum Seekers is Directive 2013/33/EU. In line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, as well as the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, this Directive aims to protect the rights and dignity of those in need of international protection. More specifically, it lays reception standards that are consistent with the prohibition of torture, inhuman and degrading treatment, personal liberty and security, the right to privacy and family life, and the right to an effective remedy. Also, of relevance is the European Social Charter which addresses everyday essential needs related to employment and working conditions, housing, education, health, medical assistance and social protection. The central directive of the European level 2013/33/EU sets out minimum standards for the reception of refugees. Since 2016 a proposal by The European Parliament and the Council to revise the directive has been discussed. This revision is part of a more comprehensive European effort. The European Agenda on Migration was adopted in 2015. Since then EU member states are working on the implementation of a Common European Asylum System (CEAS). The European system shall provide common minimum standards and set out rules for the application procedures (based on the Dublin regulation). The Asylum Procedures Directive defines standards for asylum procedures, the Qualification Directive defines the protection and recognition of beneficiaries of international protection and reception conditions are determined in the Reception Conditions Directive. The Commission is working on improving the CEAS, as seen in a communication from 2016 which identified weaknesses, mostly the varying reception standards in the various countries. Legislative proposal packages were adopted by the Commission to guarantee improvements including a revision of the Reception Conditions Directive 2013/33/.

In this revision, the European Commission aims to standardise reception conditions among its member states and extend some reception benefits following criticism by humanitarian organisations. What is important to note for the Swedish case, is the extension of the definition of material reception conditions. The commission proposes to include 'non-food items' and also clarifies that accommodation, food, clothing and other essential non-food items may not be reduced or withdrawn. 'Only daily allowances may, in certain circumstances, be reduced or, in

⁴⁴ EMN Annual Report, 2017 'Sweden', p. 47.

⁴⁵ European Commission, Communication COM(2017)211 final, p. 14

⁴⁶ EMN (2018) Annual Report - Sweden 2017:4, p. 20.

exceptional and duly justified cases, be withdrawn'. This is relevant in light of the 2016 Amendment to the Swedish Asylum law, concerning persons who have received a rejection of their asylum claim.⁴⁷ Until the revision is made, Member countries are required to meet the standards laid out in the Directive 2013/33, but are free to revise their national law in order to reach them.

Table 6: National and international legislation governing reception conditions

INTERNATIONAL	EU	SWEDEN
UDHR 1948 Geneva Convention 1951	EU Directive 2013/33 European Social Rights Charter Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms	Act on the Reception of Asylum Seekers ('LMA') 1994 Aliens Act 2005 Aliens Ordinance Act 2006 Amendment to LMA 2016 Temporary Act 2016

The Law on the Reception of Asylum Seekers and Others (LMA) of 1994, amended in 2016, indicates that all asylum seekers in the country have the right to material reception conditions (accommodation and allowance) from the moment the application is filed and until they are granted a residence permit or after being granted protection of some kind, or until they leave the country if protection has not been granted. However, in almost all fields Sweden provides more generous conditions of reception.

Sweden has been seen as one of the most generous EU Member states, when it comes to protection and reception of asylum seekers and refugees. In many areas of reception, such as housing and material support of asylum seekers, and in terms of procedural standards Sweden provides higher quality compared with many other EU Member States. Therefore, there are critical discussions when Swedish politicians publicly consider to (only) apply minimal European standards. One of the recurring narratives articulated in political discourses is shifting away the responsibility to EU level. This becomes obvious in the political discourses of Social Democrats. The politicians have long sought a common EU policy on migration and asylum, and called all other member states to share the 'burden' of migration. This was partly to alleviate the pressure on Swedish domestic politics.

2.4. Reception governance in Sweden

This section first provides an institutional mapping of governance actors involved in reception practices. This mapping is further discussed in subsequent sections by providing a descriptive overview about the local governance of reception, the role of civil society actors and private sector in reception practices. In an attempt to theorise the topic, this section ends with a brief discussion about the reception governance in the light of existing governance theories (e.g. Multilevel governance) and some typologies.

⁴⁷ EU Commission: 2016/0222 (COD).

2.4.i. Institutional mapping: Actors involved

The Act on the reception of asylum seekers, LMA from 1994 (*amended* in 2016) regulates who is responsible for the reception of asylum seekers in Sweden. Actors' roles should be understood within the two time-categories of reception: roles and responsibilities 1) during the asylum period and 2) after an asylum decision.

During the asylum period, the central actor responsible for the organisation and coordination of reception activities is the SMA. Upon receiving a positive decision, the SMA hands over its central task to a) municipalities (for settlement and housing), and b) PBO (for the establishment programme –also known as the 'introduction' program). County administrative boards play a coordinating role between different authorities working in the field of reception, including civil society actors and monitors the reception work in general terms.

The Swedish Migration Agency (Migrationsverket)

- a) *During the asylum period:* As mentioned above, during the asylum period the central actor is the SMA. The governmental agency has six regional divisions for North Sweden, Mid Sweden, Stockholm, West, East and South Sweden as well as a central head-office with administrative functions.⁴⁸ During the reception process, the SMA makes decisions regarding the application for asylum, offers accommodation to asylum seekers and decides on financial compensation during the waiting period. The authority's assignment also includes making forecasts and planning for the need for reception places in the municipalities, administering reimbursements to municipalities and county councils, and motivating people who are not granted a residence permit to return to their home country. As a government agency the efforts were formally supposed to end after four months, the 'normal' processing time, but the prolonged waiting time complicated the responsibilities of the SMA and the municipalities.
- b) *After the asylum decision:* SMA matches and assigns new arrivals who are covered by the Settlement Act to the municipalities. The agency also decides on state compensation for municipalities and county councils. In its forecasts, the Swedish Migration Board calculates how many people who need help with living in a municipality. The forecasts form the basis for the county figures decided by the government.

Municipalities (Kommuner)

- a) During the asylum period, municipalities only have responsibility for asylum-seeking children who are by law entitled to attend school on the same terms as all other children in Sweden. The municipality will offer a school placement from the autumn term in the year the child turns six. The social services make decisions on certain interventions if necessary, especially when it comes to unaccompanied children and young people.
- b) *After the asylum decision:* On the local level, the municipalities are responsible for the reception. They provide individuals with the necessary services such as housing and education. The municipalities are responsible for providing SFI, civic orientation classes and other adult education, as well as responsible for the school, preschool and child care arrangements for children and young people. In addition, the municipalities provide support for those who are not entitled to an 'establishment' plan and thus, do not receive establishment allowances. Up until 2016, the distribution of refugees and asylum seekers in Sweden was organised via a contract between the SMA and the municipalities. This gave the latter the freedom to decide about the number of people they want to take. Between 2006 and 2010 92% of all Swedish municipalities had such a contract, the annual average was 74 places per municipality. This, however, led to a significant variation between the various municipalities.

⁴⁸ SMA, 2019, 'Our organisation'.

The varying commitment made by the municipalities often depended on their specific circumstances and capacities relating to the budget, housing, and size of administration. In March 2016, all municipalities were required to settle a certain share of protection beneficiaries through an assisted housing system which introduced a major policy shift from previous policy built on 'voluntary' agreements with municipalities.⁴⁹ The SMA has been assigned the responsible authority for the centralised distribution, authorised to use legal enforcement instruments, but this has not been clearly identified. Instead, the government has deployed a reward approach applied in terms of compensation. In April 2016, the government announced SEK 1.85 billion in grants to municipalities to support new housing construction for asylum seekers and new arrivals (Fratzke 2017, 13-14).

County councils (Landstingen)

The county councils are responsible for health care for asylum seekers in accordance with the Health Care Act for asylum seekers. Adult asylum seekers are entitled to a free health examination and emergency care that cannot be postponed. Asylum-seeking children receive the same health care, including dental care, as other children in Sweden.

County administrative boards (CAB – Länsstyrelserna)

- a) *During the asylum period:* The county administrative boards are tasked with coordinating the work on *early measures* for asylum seekers throughout the country. Early measures activities are usually organised by civil society organisations and aim to speed up the establishment process and at the same time make the waiting time more meaningful for asylum seekers. Activities include introduction to the Swedish language, knowledge of Swedish society and early mapping of asylum seekers' skills (together with the Employment Office) and health. Educational associations (*Studieförbund*), folk high schools (*folkhögskolan*), humanitarian organisations and faith communities are examples of civil society organisations that offer language education, information about Swedish society and health - enhancing measures.
- b) Municipalities, county councils / regions, and other actors also contribute in various ways in the work with early measures for asylum seekers. The Employment Service, the Swedish Migration Board and the Swedish National Council for Education have special assignments concerning asylum seekers. The county administrative boards distribute grants (for 2019, a total of more than SEK 139.4 million) for activities carried out within the framework of early measures.
- c) *After the asylum decision:* CABs participate in the planning, organisation and implementation of measures for newcomers. This is done at both national, regional and local levels in collaboration with municipalities, government agencies, companies, organisations and civil society actors. CABs promote regional cooperation between municipalities, government agencies, civil society organisations and other relevant actors. They also have the task of supporting municipalities in the coordination of municipal activities such as Swedish language education for immigrants and civic orientation education. In addition, they distribute state grants to municipalities to facilitate settlement, increase municipalities' readiness and reception capacity. They also follow up the implementation of measures for newcomers and unaccompanied children, both at regional and municipal level. Thus, they have both monitoring and coordination functions.

⁴⁹ See further Swedish Parliament, *Förordning om mottagande av vissa nyanlända invandrare för bosättning*, SFS 2016:39 (February 4, 2016).

Public Employment Service (PES – Arbetsförmedlingen)

1. *During the asylum period:* the PES has the task of mapping asylum-seekers' skills (e.g. educational background and work experience) already during the asylum period. The Employment Service has developed a digital skills mapping tool www.jobskills.se
2. *After the asylum decision:* with the Act (2017: 584), the Public Employment Service has the overall responsibility for the establishment of newcomers (limited to those aged 20-64 who have been granted a residence permit) in the labour market. The authority is responsible for developing an individualised 'establishment plan' together with the person concerned (via an interview) and in collaboration with the relevant municipalities, authorities, companies and organisations. The introduction programmes may not exceed 36 months from the time the newcomer was first registered. PES also decides on establishment compensation. The 'establishment/introduction programme' normally includes (a) Swedish for immigrants (SFI – Svenska för invandrare), (b) civic orientation, and (c) work preparation (e.g. validation, internship).

Central government

The government decides how many new arrivals will be covered through instructions to municipalities within the framework of the Settlement Act and the distribution by county.

The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR)

All of Sweden's 290 municipalities, 20 county councils and regions are members of SALAR. Due to decentralised governance in Sweden, the local and regional levels shoulder significant responsibilities in delivering welfare services. SALAR provides advice and support to municipalities and counties on various issues that arise due to increased reception, and works in close communication with authorities and ministries to coordinate efforts within reception.⁵⁰

The Swedish Social Insurance Office (Försäkringskassan)

The Social Insurance Office pays out the establishment allowance decided by the Public Employment Service. The authority also decides on and pays the establishment and housing allowances.

2.4.ii. Local governance

Sweden has three levels of government (see Table 7): national, regional and local.⁵¹ In addition, there is the European level which has gained increasing importance following Sweden's entry into the EU. The division of tasks between central government and municipalities has changed over the years. In line with the principle of subsidiarity, activities have largely been transferred from central government to municipal bodies⁵². At present, the local authorities manage a very substantial share of public affairs – approximately 75 % (COE Report, 2014).⁵³

⁵⁰ SKR, 2019, 'Asyl- och flyktmottagande, integration'.

⁵¹ Sweden is divided into 21 counties. The county administrative boards are government bodies at the regional level. Some public authorities operate at regional and local levels through county boards. Sweden has 290 municipalities. Each municipality has an elected assembly, the municipal council, which takes decisions on municipal matters.

⁵² Swedish Government, 'The Swedish model of government administration'.

⁵³ COE Monitoring Committee Report. 2014. *Local and regional democracy in Sweden*.

In Sweden there is a long tradition of local self-government; municipal self-governance is enshrined in the constitution.⁵⁴ Local authorities (municipalities and county councils) are independent bodies, who freely make their own decisions within a regulatory framework shaped by laws and the constitution. Having said that Sweden is not a federal state, but rather nominally a unitary state where legislative power is held entirely at the national level. In order to empower the democratic rule and create a closer link with the citizens, the state promotes decentralisation in many policy domains. Nevertheless, the scope of municipal authority and the areas of decentralisation are decided by the parliament.

Table 7: Sweden's governance model

National	The state <small>General elections</small> The Parliament (<i>Riksdag</i>) The Government Government offices, central government agencies and authorities (e.g. Migration Agency)	
		County Councils <small>Gen. elections</small> County council assembly County council executive committee Administration and services
Regional	County administrative board	Municipalities <small>General elections</small> Municipal assembly Municipal executive committee Administration and services
Local	Local administration and Services	

Source: Regeringskansliet (2005)⁵⁵

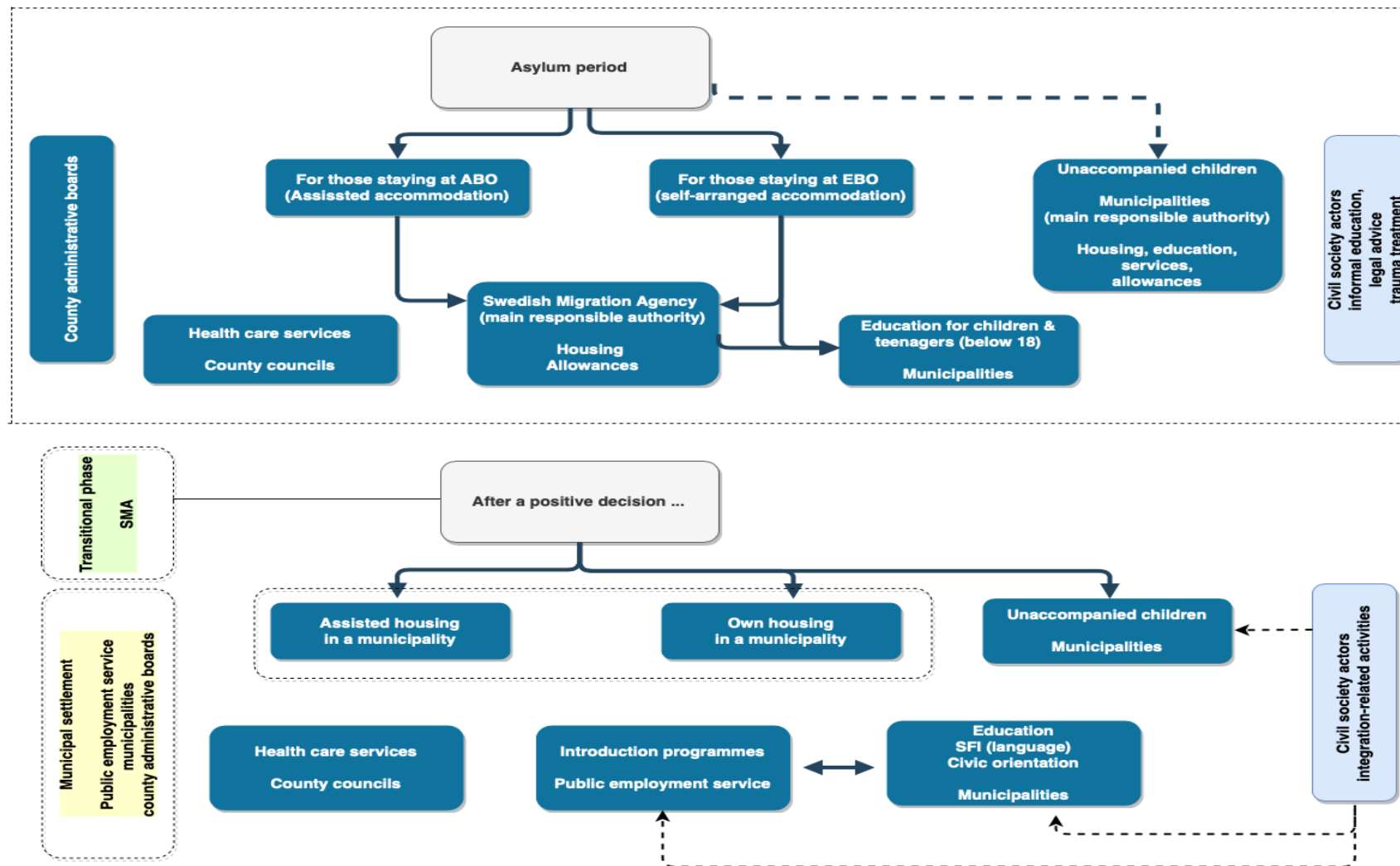
Reception is a policy domain involving multiple interdependent actors both at national, regional and local levels. As outlined in the diagram below (Figure 5), state-agencies play a central role in reception. The Swedish Migration Agency (SMA) is the main responsible authority during the asylum period. The central position of SMA continues in the transition phase where a newcomer after a positive decision is allocated to a municipality. Following a positive decision SMA hands over its tasks to the public employment service (PES) at national level, county administrative boards at regional level and municipalities at local level, each having different tasks and roles in the organisation, coordination and delivery of reception services which have been formulated within the framework of 'introduction' programmes. It has to be noted that both SMA and PES are state agencies at national level. Country administrative boards, who hold a monitoring and coordinating role at the regional level, are also state-agencies. This also shows the high involvement of central government in the organisation of reception practices.

Even though local governance is strong in Sweden, as outlined in the previous section. the responsibilities and areas of authority of municipalities are limited in the organisation of reception.

⁵⁴ Local governance took shape in the 19th century and was regulated in the 1862 Local Government Ordinances and since 1974 it is laid down in the Constitution (1 ch. 1§ Regeringsformen [RF] [Constitution] (SFS 1974:152), <https://www.notisum.se/rnp/sls/lag/19740152.htm>, archived at <https://perma.cc/9WFN-QL65>.)

⁵⁵ Swedish Government (Regeringskansliet), 2005. *Local Government in Sweden*. Brochure.

Figure 5: Reception practices



Source: Author's own work

During the asylum period municipalities are responsible for providing education to all newcomer children under 18, and for the UAMs. After a positive decision, their area of responsibility increases through providing housing to newcomers who settle in their municipality and being involved in the organisation of introduction programmes (especially providing SFI classes and civic orientation courses) with other authorities (PES and country administrative boards) in the educational part of the introduction programmes.

One of the key issues which has continuously been debated between the state and local authorities is the issue of housing. According to the new system introduced with the Settlement Act of 2016, SMA has strengthened its authority together with county administrative boards. In the new procedure, the SMA decides the number of newcomers that will be settled in 21 regions. Thereafter, these estimations are 'negotiated' with municipalities via county boards. In the calculation of the number of newcomers that each region will receive, labour market conditions are a primary consideration not 'housing' (Righard and Öberg, 2019b). Where labour market conditions are stronger in urban areas housing shortage is a common issue. Rural areas have a housing surplus but lack favourable labour market conditions.

There is a remarkable variation between municipalities. The number of asylum seekers per 1,000 inhabitants in 2017 varied from close to 0 to 59 (Source: SMA). The variation, however, has decreased compared to the period 2013–2016. Most of the recipient municipalities are smaller ones in rural areas with lower incomes and weaker employment growth. Municipalities with a low reception of asylum seekers are instead larger municipalities in metropolitan regions with higher incomes and relatively strong employment growth. We observe the same pattern in the distribution of newcomers (those with a residence permit). Even though the Settlement Act of 2016 did have an impact, the uneven distribution of newcomers has remained to a significant extent the same. This is mainly related to the lack of affordable housing and newcomers' perception (and choices) of their place of living in the new country. Two points need to be highlighted: first, there is a structural problem beyond the housing issue of newcomers. The system with the shortage of affordable housing and growing housing inequalities paves way to 'structural homelessness' of newcomers (Righard & Öberg, 2019). Second, in most cases, as revealed in our interviews, newcomers prefer places where they have family members or at least migrant communities with the same background. This is a preference which should be understood in the context of 'feeling safe'⁵⁶ and has been articulated in previous migration waves. The gap between the policy which is based on dispersal measures and newcomers' preferences is remarkable. One of the stakeholders working in Malmö municipality draws our attention to the implications of EBO

[...] you feel somewhat safe in unsafe conditions ... It is a thoroughly human choice. I think that everyone understands how they think. The problem is that when they get residence and find themselves in Malmö there are no flats and not a whole lot of help available. They are virtually hostages of the town they are in (quoted in Myberg 2017: 333)

Municipalities mostly apply national legislation with a limited leeway. The EBO-system, which allows refugees to freely choose where they want to live, creates 'unpredictability' in the organisation of reception efforts, and is perceived as unfair by certain municipalities, especially Malmö, Södertälje and Gothenburg, as the distribution is highly unequal with few cities shouldering a much higher 'burden' (Myberg, 2017: 333). These municipalities have demanded a policy change in the reception of newcomers for a long time and tried to shape national policies and steer them in their direction by making use of strategic interaction with different government levels (here, national level). Here we observe a divergence in party politics, and local politicians' demands raised intra-party discussions. The policy changes followed two routes: first, in the aftermath of the electoral loss in 2006, Social Democrats changed their policy in line with these three municipalities' demands for a more regulated, fair and even distribution. Second, in the 2015

⁵⁶ See for example the work of N.Atto (2011) *Hostages in the homeland, orphans in the diaspora* about the Assyrian migrants' settlement preferences.

context, under the centre-left government rule, this policy change has been introduced in the settlement act of 2016. While looking at the genealogy of this policy change, we see that local governments managed to change party politics and state policy under specific circumstances (electoral loss, a notion of crisis in the refugee flows). With Myberg's (2017: 323) terms local governments become the source of new frameworks of cooperation and innovation. However, looking at the content and outcome of the change, we do see a shift in the policy direction towards more centralisation in Emilsson's (2015) opinion.

2.4.iii. The role of civil society

The role of civil society organisations in the reception system must be placed within the framework of the Swedish welfare state model. Indeed, Sweden has long prided itself on a strong public sector with a strong social responsibility. Civil Society organisations were long seen as providers of recreational activities rather than social services (Törngren et al. 2018). In reality, however, CSOs have been involved in the reception of asylum seekers, since the 1990s, and have contributed a number of crucial social services.

The formal recognition and legal definition of CSOs' role however, was a rather slow process. Only in 2009 did the government of Sweden present a bill to highlight the importance of civil society and clarify its relationship to the state. The bill was based on a number of Agreements signed in 2007 and 2008, between the government, non-governmental organisations and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR)⁵⁷ which had previously guided the dialogue between the actors in various fields⁵⁸. The bill united five common principles, present in the previous agreements, which should frame the process and remove obstacles for CSOs: 'independence', 'dialogue', 'transparency', 'quality' and 'diversity' (Överenskommelsen 2008). The bill can be seen as an example of normative or soft governance approach that has characterised the role of the state in migrant reception (Arvidson et al., 2017).

It was only in 2018, after the experiences of 2015 when civil society organisations became a crucial actor in reception, that their role was formally codified and regulated. In line with the 2009 National Policy for Civil Society⁵⁹ and the EU Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation as well as the 2008 Agreement between the government, non-governmental organisations in the social field and Sweden's municipalities and county councils (IJ2008 / 02110 / UF), the new 2018 Agreement officially defined the role of CSOs in the provision of social services. It also established a new national support structure for dialogue and collaboration between the government and civil society organisations (Överenskommelsen, 2018). Since then, collaboration between the different CSOs on the regional and local level is coordinated under one umbrella organisation (Righard & Öberg, 2019a).

Despite the various agreements, the role of civil society organisations in the reception system is quite ambiguous. While formally reception is the responsibility of public organisation, mainly the Swedish Migration Agency, the latter is reliant on civil society organisations to fill certain gaps in the reception system (Hansen 2018). Indeed, the Swedish state has outsourced services like legal support, early language classes and social activities to CSOs. However structural issues regarding public procurement largely limit their involvement (Righard & Öberg, 2019a) and create a rather undefined role. By providing funding for the delivery of certain public services and continuously forging dialogue among actors, the state aims to remove some of the obstacles for CSOs, but also expects them to "perform" when needed. This creates a certain dependency and subordination to public management and performance indicators. (Arvidson et al. 2017) and also poses the question of who bears responsibility for social welfare.

⁵⁷ An Association promoting local and regional self-government in regard to welfare services

⁵⁸ Government of Sweden, 2010, 'A policy for civil society'.

⁵⁹ Government Offices, 2009, 'En politik för det civila samhället' (Prop. 2009/10:55).

The main civil society organisations active in the reception of newcomers can be divided into three main actors; Humanitarian organisations such as the Swedish Red Cross, faith-based organisations, mainly *Svenska kyrkan* (The Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church, commonly referred to as the Church of Sweden) and smaller civil associations (sometimes loosely organised). Their activities can be divided into two main types. First, immediate humanitarian aid, including the provision of basic needs and temporary housing, and second, early integration activities such as provision of information, legal aid and language classes.

Since the State officially transferred the responsibility for providing meaningful activities during reception in February 2017, the actors are in much closer collaboration. CSOs, often provide social services such as language classes and community activities within SMA-run accommodations and receive funding from the national Government to fulfil this specific task. Moreover, the Swedish Migration Agency, refer asylum seekers to several NGOs such as Swedish Red Cross, SRC, FARR and Svenska kyrkan etc. for legal advice, informal language classes, and sometimes housing. For example, organisations such as the Swedish Refugee Law Centre (SRLC) offers individual case support in cooperation with a number of the Swedish churches and Swedish Save the Children. The umbrella organisation FARR offers the 88-page advice book 'Goda Råd' with emphasis on the asylum-seekers own possibilities to take action.

It is important to note that activities from CSOs vary depending on local needs. For example, Save the Children focuses on the care for unaccompanied minors in municipalities with a disproportionate number of children. Moreover, CSOs have adjusted their efforts according to lessons drawn from previous experiences as well as from a shifting context. Many have extended their activities beyond what is asked by the government. The Red Cross for example, has started to extend its activities to mental health support and trauma relief. CSOs have adjusted their activities since the number of newcomers has decreased and focused more efforts on early integration. There are also some refugee-led groups that have put down roots in Sweden and formed their own community organisations, e.g. a Swedish branch of the International Federation of Iranian Refugees (IFRS). Apart from providing community activities, some of these organisations, such as UNG I Sverige, focus on activism and protests.⁶⁰

The main question regarding the role of CSOs in relation to the state, is one of dependence and responsibility. In 2015, early efforts by civil society organisations were largely independent from the national government and filled important gaps in the reception system. Moreover, according to Hansen these efforts, motivated by humanitarianism and international solidarity, made a political statement in favour of the reception of asylum seekers (Hansen, 2018). The latter also created a political dilemma in regard to national egalitarian welfare that is still on the political agenda today. According to economic statistics from 2017, development and housing still account for the largest proportion of the total added value of civil society organisations, a task that is officially in the hands of local and state governments. This shows that civil society's role still goes beyond official agreements made with public organisations as they step in where and when the welfare state fails⁶¹.

The role of civil society in early education

In June 2015, the Swedish parliament decided to introduce a government funded programme for popular education (*folkbildning*) of asylum-seekers. The purpose of this measure was to enable meaningful activities during the waiting period before a decision on residency has been obtained (Folkbildningsrådet 2016, 6). The government funds are distributed by the Swedish National Council of Adult Education (*Folkbildningsrådet*) and used by popular education associations (*studieförbund*) to provide education in language and Swedish society. These popular education associations are an essential feature of Swedish society and began as self-educational efforts by

⁶⁰ Aida Country Report Sweden 2017, p. 56.

⁶¹ SCB, Det civila samhället 2017 – satelliträkenskaper.

the labour movement and temperance societies in the 1800's. The activities provided are mainly organised in the tradition of Swedish popular education, with 'study circles', i.e. participant-driven teaching where a study leader works as a guide and planner, but where the participants' group is expected to actively take part in shaping the study process. The study circles are primarily to begin language studies, but they are carried out through introducing a number of different aspects of Swedish society, for example learning language through recipes, shopping for groceries, and cooking together. According to Folkbildningsrådet's own evaluation, participants have benefitted by this introductory course by becoming familiar with the language to the extent that they are often able to begin SFI at a higher level once they get their residence permit (Folkbildningsrådet 2016, 14). According to Folkbildningsrådet statistics, this programme has been highly successful in terms of enrolment of the intended target group (asylum-seekers waiting for a decision), with approximately 80 000 participants (55% of target group) in 271 out of 290 municipalities in 2016 (Folkbildningsrådet 2017, 14).

2.4.iv. Private sector: Privatisation of some reception services

In Sweden, some of the services (especially health and social care and housing⁶²) for asylum seekers and refugees have been partly privatised (Lethbridge, 2017). The relationship between the state and private sector (service providers) is more at a contractual level, and thus, their involvement in the reception system is limited. In the wake of 2015 the Swedish government took extra measures to accommodate all asylum seekers and refugees arriving in the country, and lowered its quality standards (e.g. SMA did not follow its former procurement procedures in the contracts with the private sector) especially in accommodation. The state has outsourced some of the reception services. The private sector has been encouraged by the state to become involved in the provision of asylum accommodation. As a result of this, the purchase of services from private actors increased by 164 per cent in 2016, from SEK 4 to 10.7 billion. The largest increase was seen in private homes (HVB) for UAM. However, this has declined to 6.6 billion in 2017 in line with the decreasing number of asylum applications (Swedish Statistics – SCB; Dagens samhälle, 2017).

Many companies have seen the situation (2015/2016) as a good opportunity to expand their services and took advantage of the lack of asylum accommodation in Sweden (especially for UAMs) to make large profits.⁶³ The private sector has been criticised for exploiting the situation, overcharging the state for their inadequate services, understaffing⁶⁴, poor quality of food, lack of translators and so forth (Crouch, 2015; Al Ghussain, 2016). Even the government which has the executive power to investigate and end the misuse of public resources 'complained' about the situation.⁶⁵ This being said, at the practical level the privatisation of these services and decreasing quality standards have had remarkable impacts both on newcomers and for the employees working in this sector as the very idea of privatisation, especially when the state is the customer and paying the 'bills', clashes with the idea and experience of a welcoming culture. In the former, the relationship is instrumental and based on material benefits, whereas a welcoming culture can

⁶² In some municipalities (e.g. Stockholm City and Helsingborg), the language (SFI) and civic courses to newcomers are also subcontracted to private actors (schools and educational centres).

⁶³ For example, Aleris, a company owned by private equity investors (the Swedish Wallenberg family), professionalised in delivering social care services especially in elderly care started to provide services for asylum seekers, particularly for UAMs in 2015. Aleris is reported as charging 84,000 SEK/month to place a refugee child with a family. Another company who profited enormously is Jokarjo, owned by Bert Karlsson, who was the founder of Sweden's first anti-immigrant New Democracy party in the beginning of the 1990s. Jokarjo was paid 170 million SEK in the first six months of the 2015 to house 5,000 refugees at 30 different sites.

⁶⁴ The issue of understaffing in private asylum accommodation gained attention in January 2016 after Alexandra Mezher (caregiver) was killed by an unaccompanied minor at a Gothenburg facility run by a private company. She had been working alone at the time of her death, despite government regulations that asylum accommodation workers must always work in pairs.

⁶⁵ For example, in October 2015, Swedish PM Stefan Lofven challenged these companies and asked them whether it 'feels good when you look in the mirror' after making big profits out of the refugee crisis.

best be understood in the context of encounters with authorities and also with a large body of service providers.

2.4.v. Political parties and reception policy

Today, migration is one of the most polarising issues among Swedish voters and political parties. This is one of the fields where the traditional left-right political stances have significantly become blurred. For example, both the Social Democrats and the Moderates have fluctuated between a generous to a more restrictive stance. On paper, there is a clear majority in the Swedish Parliament for tightening up the country's migration and asylum policy. At the same time, the political parties who share similar views on reducing the migration flows to Sweden, are deeply divided on several migration-related topics (e.g. family reunification, and unaccompanied minors).

In a survey conducted with the political parties prior to the 2018 elections⁶⁶, the party leaders were asked whether they consider today's migration to Sweden as 'too high'. Except for the Left and the Greens, all the other parties consider the number of asylum seekers far more than Sweden's reception system can handle and ask for a regulated [read it as limited/selective] migration. The Sweden Democrats (SD) demand a 'full stop to asylum'. In a follow up question, party leaders were asked whether they see migration as an 'asset' for Sweden. Looking at the answers given, again parties close to the centre have similar thoughts about this issue, see migration and migrants as an asset (especially in terms of labour force as a remedy to Sweden's ageing population) and point out 'work' and 'language' as two central elements that should govern the reception/integration process. SD does not see asylum seekers as an asset but rather as an 'economic burden' and 'societal problem'.

In a different survey done among 2376 local politicians in the southern municipality, Lund, the local stakeholders were asked whether they support the following statement: 'Compulsory Swedish language courses must be introduced for new arrivals as a condition for allowances'. Answers given at the local level mirror the restrictive tendency at national level. Accordingly, except for the Left party and (to a degree) the Green Party, all the other parties gave a green light to linking economic assistance and 'integration performance' (here, compulsory participation in language courses).

A similar tendency can be observed in public discourses. According to a recent survey (SOM Institute, 2018) Swedish public opinion is divided on the issue of refugees and immigration. Especially, after the migration and refugee 'crisis' in 2015, more voters became negative to Sweden receiving asylum seekers and refugees. Today, a clear majority wants to see a move to a restrictive migration policy. The survey shows that 53 percent of Swedes want Sweden to receive fewer refugees, while only 22 percent think 'this is a bad idea'.⁶⁷

Concerning political parties' approaches to reception policy, we see a cross-party consensus which spans over traditional party blocks. Political consensus based on logrolling has a long tradition in Swedish modern political history. We observe such a consensus in two recent law changes: the first one is the Settlement Act of 2016, where all political parties represented in the Swedish Parliament except for the Left party voted for passing the Act. The second, a more recent one was decided on 27 November 2019⁶⁸ –at the time of writing this report– about introducing limitations to EBO (self-arranged accommodation) with a similar consensus, in which again only the Left party did not support the proposed modifications.

⁶⁶ *Expressen*, 2018. 'Så tycker partierna om invandringen'.

⁶⁷ According to the same survey results, between 38-53 percent of the population considers 'integration/migration' as the most important societal problem; 28% has serious concerns about the 'worsening welfare-state', but also around 50 percent are concerned about the 'increased xenophobia' in Swedish society.

⁶⁸ Asylsökandes möjlighet att välja eget boende ska begränsas i vissa områden, 2019/20:SfU1

The Social Democrats propose that asylum seekers should initially be accommodated in special reception centres which was also described in detail in the Government Official Report (SOU 2018:22) as a 'one-stop shop'. The party has also pushed for a long time to abolish the EBO-system (self-arranged accommodation). The new law on EBO-limitations is a step forward to achieve this goal. The Conservatives (*Moderaterna*) also share this stand. Their party leader Ulf Kristersson has explicitly shown his scepticism towards the EBO-legislation, and underlined how important it is for the state to designate new arrivals' place of residence. This is a remarkable change in the party's standpoint. A few years back the party's Minister of Migration Tobias Billström together with the Minister of Integration, Nyamko Sabuni (Liberal), in a reply to the Social Democrats, stated that:

Sweden will have a good, functioning reception of refugees. The way forward, however, is not for the state to coerce people to find a home where told to, not even for a limited period. People must have the opportunity to decide for themselves where they want to live. The state cannot on its own predict where the individual refugee enjoys the greatest chance of obtaining employment: this is better left to each person to decide in collaboration with job centres. (DN, 6 March 2007).

The Conservatives have shifted away from this policy⁶⁹ and adopted a policy which is based on an interventionist reception system where state agencies would hold a key role. The Conservatives are also aiming to turn the Temporary law (Law on temporary limitations to the possibility of being granted a residence permit in Sweden, 2016:752) into a permanent one, and introduce further barriers to family reunification. The Conservatives in line with the Public Inquiry's (SOU 2018:22) suggestions propose that asylum seekers should live in special reception centres during the asylum process, by which the party predicts will shorten the processing times. By removing the EBO legislation, the party thinks that reception will become organised and predictable. The Christian Democrats have a similar perspective about the reception centres to be established near borders.

The Left party is also demanding a change in EBO legislation so that new arrivals are spread to all municipalities, which increases the conditions for good integration. Instead of EBO, the Left is suggesting VEBO (worthy private accommodation) for new arrivals which will provide a secure accommodation to new arrivals without black leases.

On the other end of the spectrum, the SD proposes a transit centre where everyone must meet security officers directly and undergo a health examination. Together with this, the party proposes for security reasons more closed premises and detention until the identity of an asylum claimant is clarified. Daily allowances are replaced with coupons.

Political parties have naturally different opinions, but they share at least one point in their problem definition: they state that the reception system in Sweden does not work. This problem definition paves the way to a similar rhetoric, such as 'more effective reception', 'regulated/predictable migration via reception', 'speedy reception and settlement (and return)' and 'shorter waiting times, and for the organisation of reception, the intervention of the state with coercive measures is suggested.

Looking at the local responses given to the reception of new arrivals, Lidén (2014) compares four municipalities (Rattvik, Ånge, Bräcke, Dorotea) and concludes that local elected politicians to a large extent follow their party's standpoint on migration, and deploy different symbolic and instrumental arguments in order to legitimise their stance. Some municipalities see the reception of new arrivals as a 'welfare gain' due to their entitlement for economic compensation from the state. Some other municipalities point out the 'solidarity' aspect of receiving new arrivals, but some others see the reception as a 'welfare loss', more in line with the narrative of 'migrants as

⁶⁹ Even though this statement sounded liberal and more 'migrant-friendly', it was deliberately ignoring the structural problems of reception policies: the state's responsibility in providing adequate housing, education, health care and jobs, but rather, shifting away this responsibility to individual asylum seekers and new arrivals in a neo-liberal fashion.

a burden on the welfare state'. Beyond these identified narratives, a common issue at local level is the lack of housing for new arrivals.

EBO-legislation: from a battlefield to a consensus

According to the new changes introduced into the EBO-legislation, asylum seekers will lose their financial support (daily allowance) if they choose to settle in certain socially vulnerable areas - in total 32 municipalities. Before the law was passed, these municipalities were asked to identify their socially vulnerable areas. The new law will come into force on January 1, 2020. The new legislation is framed as an attempt to reduce segregation and to get more new arrivals to settle where there are better opportunities for rapid integration. All parties voted for the proposal, except for the Left party. After the decision of the parliament, the Social Democrat politician Rikard Larsson's (Deputy Chairman of the Social Insurance Committee) statement is interesting in several ways to understand how Social Democrats would like to shape the reception policy:

We Social Democrats have long wanted to abolish the EBO legislation...The EBO has had devastating consequences for integration... Together with the Settlement Act, this is one of the most important measures to counter segregation and create a sustainable reception of new arrivals.

The Social Democrats want to go even further and abolish completely the EBO legislation. In the new legislations this 'temporal' dimension reflects the characteristics of a transitional passage through which the new Swedish reception system is formed and re-constructed.

Settlement Act of 2016: Municipal responses to the enforcement of the Settlement Act

The Settlement Act obliges all municipalities to receive and arrange housing for new arrivals assigned by SMA and county administrative boards. The Settlement Act was approved by parliament with a large consensus of political parties. However, several review reports (Sydsvenskan 10 September 2019; Glimer Policy report 2018) concluded that the law has been interpreted arbitrarily by different municipalities, reflecting the political parties' continued battle in different forms.

The Settlement Act of 2016 gave the power of 'distribution' of new arrivals to state agencies, but in practice, local politicians have a lot of leeway to decide which housing will be offered to new arrivals and how long the contracts will last. For example, while Malmö is offering four-year contracts to new arrivals, Vellinge and Staffanstorp (both municipalities in the south) set the limit at two years. Both investigations (ibid.) emphasise that a two-year limit would contribute to a growing number of 'structurally homeless' people.

Karin Magnusson (2018) in her report provides an analysis about the implementation of the Settlement Act at local level starting from the example of Staffanstorp, a municipality which is not willing to implement the law and is trying to find different ways to counteract it. One of the methods deployed by the concerned municipality is to delay the communication/assignment process with the SMA, not providing enough information and planning for the settlement, but most importantly by offering 'temporary' and 'bad places' to new arrivals. One of those new arrivals, Wassim Alshatib who moved into a caravan in Staffanstorp explains the reception conditions: How are we able to study Swedish here? We have no internet, nothing and the feeling is not good, you can do nothing here! (Pembro 2017, Skånska Dagbladet cited in Magnusson 2018). New arrivals share these caravans with a stranger; bathroom/toilet and kitchen are outdoors in a different caravan. The caravans are usually placed in remote and segregated areas. New arrivals several times reported that they felt insecure as they have been verbally targeted by unknown people (ibid.). Magnusson (2018) explains the municipality's response to the Settlement Act by using Lennart Lundquist's (1992) theoretical model about Swedish administration and management.

According to Lundquists' typology (1992, 73, 76, 86–87, cited in Magnusson 2018) the municipality is indirectly protesting the Act by being 'inactive', 'obstructing' or 'subverting' it.

The Settlement Act was approved by all parties. Nevertheless, at local level the debate has taken a different route and centred on the length and nature of housing contracts. The opposition parties and municipalities led by these parties are challenging the law by reducing the length of contract from four to two years with a tendency to end social housing after the end of the state's liability period, and thus, not offering permanent contracts to new arrivals.

We see a strong relationship between the restrictive turn in migration policy with the changes introduced in the reception system which is designed around the narrative on 'efficiency'. This comes together with 'performance indicators' (which will be controlled and measured by state agencies) and with a stick and carrot policy, where compliance will be rewarded (economic compensation of different forms) and non-compliance punished (yet the scope is not well known).

We argue that today's migration policymaking (including a large body of reception-related arrangements) in Sweden is based on a consensus approach where left and right-wing political parties deploy similar narratives. With Gramsci's terms the policy setting is based upon an 'unstable equilibrium' of compromise (Gramsci, 1971) within which the restrictive thinking and policymaking become the main mode of resilience (or a wide range of responses) of the system. Behind the restrictive thinking we see the activation of protectionist discourses: protecting the system (both state and society) from crisis (which is exogenous to the system), and protecting newcomers from 'themselves'. This is justified with a normative clause where 'we do this for you and for all of us!'. In the political debate around migration, reception and integration, we usually do not hear people's voices and experiences. Human responses have notably been silenced and marginalised. Therefore, many activists and civil society actors are calling governments to develop more human-oriented policies, rather than efficiency and security-oriented thinking.

2.4.vi. Defining reception governance in relation to Multilevel Governance literature

MLG is broadly defined as the dispersion of authority upward (supranational level), downward (subnational) and sideways (public-private networks) from central states (Hooghe and Marks, 2003, 2004). Accordingly, three points are of importance in the definition of MLG: It has to challenge vertical, state-centred formal hierarchies of distribution of power and responsibility; the interdependency of actors in the sense that a policy issue cannot be carried out by just one level of government, but involves other levels (upwards and downwards) and non-public actors; and the interaction between levels and actors therein should imply a degree of bargaining and negotiation (Caponio and Jones-Correa, 2017: 1996). Scholten and Penninx (2016) have advanced the usage of MLG in migration studies by identifying four modes of *multilevelness*: centralist (top-down), localist (from below), multi-level (cooperation and engagement), and a decoupled mode (disengagement from initial cooperation and mutual support to increase their mandates and power).

Looking at the developments in the policy domain of reception, we see a move towards 'centralisation' of authority areas previously allocated to local authorities. Henrik Emilson (2015) in his study of the integration policies for newcomers in Denmark and Sweden points out how local integration policies and practices are increasingly governed by the state and explains this as a 'national turn'—as opposed to the main assumption of multilevel governance model's emphasis on 'local turn'. For example, with the 'Establishment reform' of 2010 the state took over responsibility for the introduction programmes from the municipalities. This was one of the most significant moves in centralisation of reception and integration policies in Sweden. A more recent move towards centralisation can be seen especially after 2015/2016 with the introduction of the Settlement Act of 2016 which ended literally decades long 'voluntary arrangements' with the municipalities and introduced *coercive instruments*. This is the first mode in Emilsson's typology where he describes the relationship between central and local government as authoritative. With

the new law, the municipalities are obliged to accept newcomers allocated by SMA and negotiated by county administrative boards. Besides coercive instruments, according to Emilsson's typology, states use *economic* (e.g. state funding) and *normative* (e.g. narratives on 'solidarity', 'burden sharing') instruments in order to enforce compliance at the local level. For example, reception of newcomers (and thus, state funding received) is seen by many, especially small municipalities as a remedy to the depopulation of these *kommuns* (municipalities) and thus, decreasing tax revenues. In line with this, Peo Hansen (2018) in his paper discusses the trade-off between migration and welfare, and shows in the case of Swedish municipalities refugee reception and integration are seen as 'vital in making local communities liveable again, helping to reverse a decades-long vicious spiral of depopulation, ageing, declining tax revenues and welfare service retrenchment' (Hansen, *ibid.*).

The centralist mode of governance aims to bring policy convergence via top-down approaches with a clear hierarchy between government levels (Scholten 2013., p. 93). Nonetheless, the Swedish model of governance does not entirely fit into the centralist type of MLG, neither to the *localist type*, in which local governments frame migration policies, including reception in a specific local way, which in turn leads to policy divergence (*ibid.*). Even though local governance and the policy of decentralisation are strong in Sweden, there is a limited occurrence of localist type in the Swedish governance system, particularly in reception policies. To a large extent, local authorities comply with the law and regulations. The significance of *multilevel governance type* is that interaction between the various levels of government occur without the clear dominance of one level, which engenders some convergence between policy frames at different levels, produced and sustained by their mutual interactions. In the field of reception, as mentioned before, state agencies play a central role. Nevertheless, the governing model in Sweden is inclusive; in the preparation of a new law, local authorities, civil society actors and all relevant public and private actors are consulted. Unlike being a centralist type, the governance model in Sweden underlines the importance of 'cooperation' (*samarbete*) and 'coordination' (*coordination*) in public policymaking. The *decoupled type* refers to the absence of any meaningful policy coordination between levels (*ibid.*, p. 94). At least in reception policy and practices, on paper all roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. As explained above, the main actors for coordination are the SMA and in part the county administrative boards (at regional level) and to an extent SOLAR.

Despite the increased level of multilevel governance in public policymaking, there are no 'radical departures' from the central state, which is the precondition of MLG (Hooghe and Marks 2003). The central state is not vertically challenged by local governance models. Interdependency of actors and levels are obvious in the Swedish case. Reception policy as well cannot be implemented by just one actor and one level of government. In the organisation of reception, settlement of newcomers in municipalities is a central element. In the same vein, the terms cross-sectoral cooperation and coordination are well articulated in all policy documents and initiatives, and formulated as a pre-condition for the 'success' of reception and integration.

The MLG concept serves as an umbrella term, providing useful analytical tools to capture multiple models of migration policies and politics as well as to understand the role of agency, structure and their interdependencies. Nevertheless, in our opinion it falls short in explaining the 'meta-governor' role of the state, especially in complex and cross-cutting policy issues, and reproduction of this role in horizontal governance networks other than 'traditional statist styles of government in terms of bureaucratic rule-making and imperative command' (Torfing and Sørensen 2014, p. 341). The meta-governance model lays its focus on the development of the 'self-regulatory' capacity of governance networks in line with Foucault's (1971) approach to governmentality as the 'conduct of conduct'.

Reception policies and practices constitute a complexity, involving multiple interdependent actors operating in different service and policy domains, such as housing, employment, health care, and education both at local and national level. In general, meta-governance operates on two modalities: to develop self-regulatory capacity of governance networks via creating a collaborative

space and to provide government (who assumes the role of ‘meta-governor’) some level of indirect control over the governing process by deploying non-coercive measures (Peters 2010, p. 48 cited in Qvist 2017; Torfing and Sørensen 2014). A collaborative space is crucial for network interactions where diverse public, private and civil society actors jointly shape and implement public policy. Here, we should keep in mind that ‘space’ is placed within the broad policy framework and strategy. One of the main aims of reception policy is the employment goal. Collaborative space is formed and governed to achieve this goal. One other example can be given about the deployment of non-coercive measures – which is also similar to ‘normative instruments’ formulated by Emilsson (2015). The Settlement Act of 2016 functions as a legal regulatory framework for the central distribution of newcomers in municipalities. Local authorities did not show a significant opposition to this policy change. Although the Act does not specify any sanction for non-compliance, the local authorities act both instrumentally (dependent on resources, here the state-funding) and normatively as it was the right thing to do to show solidarity.

The governance of reception of asylum seekers and newcomers in Sweden is undergoing significant change. More ‘centralised’ governance modalities have been introduced. The main driving narrative is based on a simple formula: labour market-oriented reception organised in the most efficient way is vital for the success of integration. Efficiency of reception is also meant for organizing the return of those who have received a rejection for their asylum application. A law for a new structure for reception is currently underway following the specific public inquiry (SOU 2018:22) prepared on reception, titled ‘A regulated reception: collective responsibility for rapid establishment or return’.

Briefly, we can summarise some of our findings as follows:

1. The Swedish reception system is characterised by a degree of decentralisation that can be placed between Germany (highly federal) and Denmark (highly centralised). This means most actors being involved in the reception practices operate on the national level while regional and local actors exert some influence.
2. Since the enactment of the Establishment Reform of 2010 and later with the Settlement Act of 2016, there is a remarkable move towards centralisation of this policy domain where state-agencies hold central roles and responsibilities.
3. The role of municipalities is limited to certain areas of reception. However, in their localities as the main point of contact and being the main ‘service providers’ (housing, education, language acquisition, civic orientation courses etc.) they are faced with the problems and challenges of reception. There is no policy divergence in the implementation of reception policies, but a variation in implementation practices. For example, the Settlement Act of 2016 is not accompanied with any guidelines, which gives room for municipalities to adopt their own guidelines within the boundaries of a self-regulatory framework. Nor can a localist governance model be observed in the reception of newcomers. Municipalities follow the formal regulatory framework with compliance, but negotiate their intake of newcomers with country administrative boards.
4. In the last four decades the Swedish reception policy followed an institutional path, yet with some incremental changes and modifications, especially in the organisation of reception, areas of responsibilities and its overall orientation or goal. As described earlier, in the 1980s municipalities were responsible for the organisation of reception. Municipal reception activities were later criticised for being inefficient and not leading to the goal of self-sufficient individuals. In the 1990s in line with a neo-liberal move in the public sector, incrementally state agencies started to take a more central role in the organisation and coordination of reception and labour market orientation was more explicitly attached to reception policies. With the Establishment Reform of 2010, a more remarkable move towards centralisation of this policy domain took place where the Public employment service took the coordination role. The Settlement Act of 2016 is a continuation of this centralisation trend in the field of reception.

5. The involvement of civil society actors in reception activities is limited to formal/informal activities mainly during the asylum period, such as informal language courses, legal advice and support and treatment for traumatised refugees.
6. Governance of reception in Sweden is based on a self-regulatory formal/informal framework where the state through its agencies assumes the role of 'meta-governor', and deploys non-coercive indirect control measures for governing the process of reception.

3. Practices of Reception

3.1. Housing⁷⁰

The SMA offers temporary accommodation to asylum seekers while they wait for the decision. During this time, they are enrolled at a reception unit which helps them with accommodation and other expenses. However, this service is provided based on individual needs assessment on a case by case basis. There are mainly two different types of accommodation for asylum seekers in Sweden: accommodation provided by the SMA at an accommodation centre/reception centre or in an apartment in a normal housing area (ABO) and private accommodation arranged by the asylum seekers themselves (EBO, often staying with friends or relatives).

Figure 6: Types of accommodation

Indicators: Types of Accommodation	
1. Number of municipalities with reception centres: ¹⁰⁸	290
2. Total number of places in reception centres:	47,034
3. Total number of places in private accommodation:	33,321
4. Total number of places in special accommodation: ¹⁰⁹	24,196
5. Type of accommodation most frequently used in a regular procedure:	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reception centre <input type="checkbox"/> Hotel or hostel <input type="checkbox"/> Emergency shelter <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private housing <input type="checkbox"/> Other	
6. Type of accommodation most frequently used in an accelerated procedure:	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reception centre <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hotel or hostel <input type="checkbox"/> Emergency shelter <input type="checkbox"/> Private housing <input type="checkbox"/> Other	

Source: AIDA, Sweden Country Report, 2017

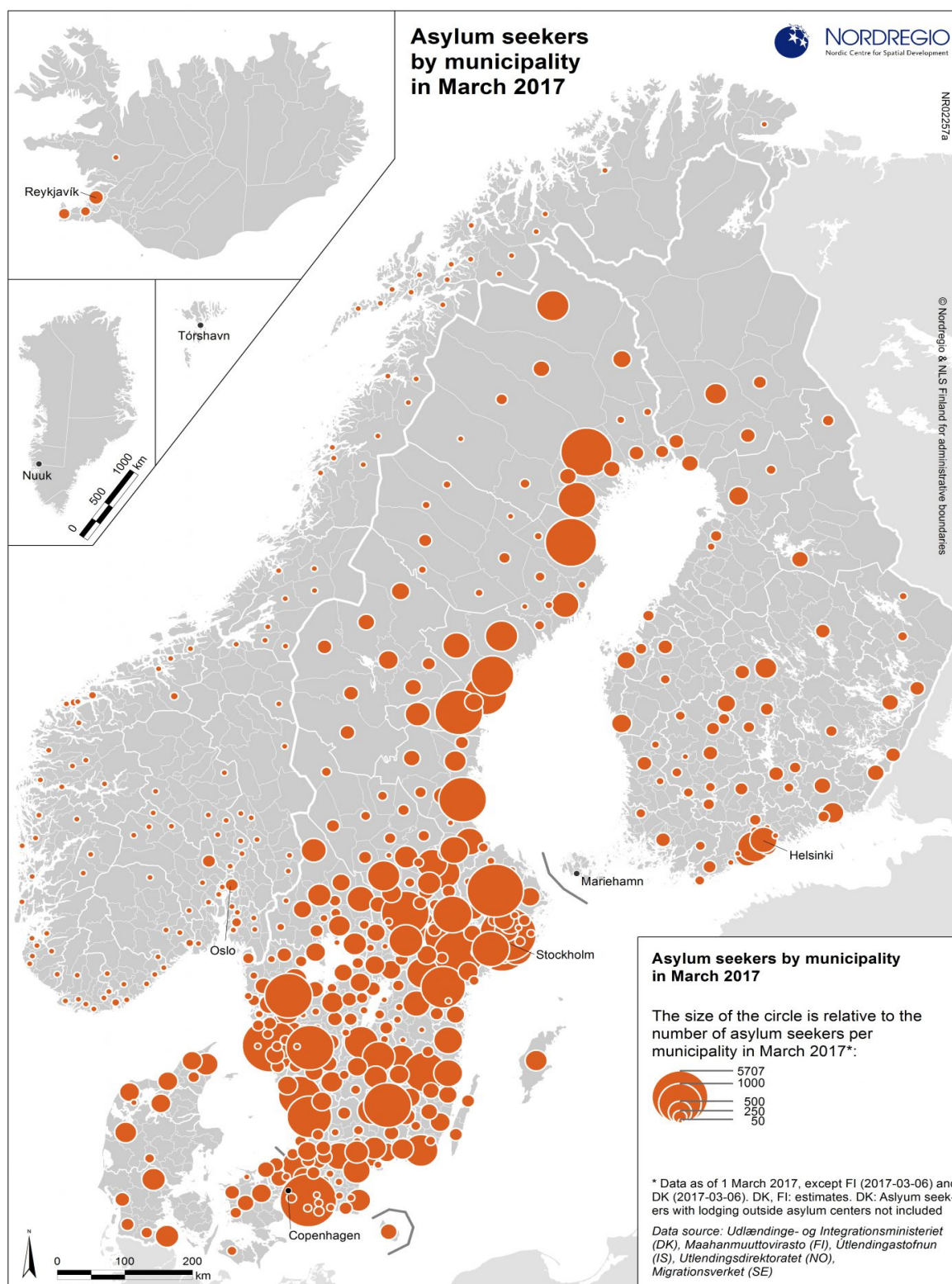
On receiving a positive decision, the refugees are moved to municipal reception facilities on the basis of The Settlement Act. It is the County Administrative Boards who calculate how many new arrivals each municipality should receive depending on the municipality's size, the total reception of newly arrived and unaccompanied children, labour market conditions and how many asylum seekers are already staying in the municipality. The intention of the government is that municipalities that have a comparatively good labour market, large population, low reception and relatively few asylum seekers may receive more new arrivals. However, the attitude of municipalities towards receiving the refugees are not the same, some of them are prepared and willing on the other hand some are even fearful of economic collapse as a consequence. A representative from the Municipal Council of Södertälje – a large town outside Stockholm, which has for a long period received immigrants – stated this aspect when comparing their reception with other municipalities:

Many municipalities were especially fearful of their economy – some were worried that their economy would collapse because they'd receive twenty refugees, when we have been receiving a thousand per year! (SE_Meso_Interview no.8)

Asylum seekers must move from their accommodation provided by SMA if they receive a negative decision or a decision on expulsion (when it comes into effect) or when the period for voluntary departure expires: this applies to all adult asylum seekers except those who live with a child under 18. Accommodation governance of reception in Sweden has undergone significant changes in recent years initiated in response to the all-time high number of asylum seekers who arrived in the country in 2015.

⁷⁰ Note: Two types of accommodation during reception – accommodation provided by Migration Agency (ABO), accommodation arranged by asylum seekers themselves (EBO).

Figure 7: Asylum seekers by municipality in March 2017⁷¹



Source: Nordregio, 2017

⁷¹ As also illustrated in the map (Figure 6), 35 municipalities were hosting the largest number of asylum seekers in March 2017, housing between 760 and 5707 asylum seekers each.

3.1.i. Accommodation centres

In 2015, Sweden received 12,29% of the EU total⁷² of asylum seekers, more per capita than any other country in Europe. This mass migration of people created great pressure on the reception and accommodation of refugees. In a short period of time, authorities had to find acceptable accommodation but previous reports have shown that this was not always done in an adequate way (Riksrevisionen 2017: 4). It has been shown afterwards that some of this accommodation were not up to standard, many of them understaffed and unsafe in general for the mixture of people housed together, not least allowing women and men to share accommodation and facilities which is contrary to the basic standard of housing during reception of asylum seekers according to Article 18 of the Directive 2013/33/EU.⁷³ In these accommodations, the low standards had negative consequences on new arrivals. Some did not like the idea to share an accommodation with people whom they did not know or asylum seekers from different countries. They used strong words (e.g. disgusting, prison) to describe the accommodation, replacing the term accommodation with 'camp'. Some were affected with difficulties of shared facilities.

It [was] a room with shared bathroom, the whole floor basically had two toilets for men and three bathrooms for sharing, so in the morning sometimes I used to wait for my turn around two hours (Syrian man, Age group 27-50, No.44).

Another respondent described his first months as being in a 'prison':

(...) during the first months of being here in Sweden, at the beginning when we arrived in Malmö, all the refugees were placed in a big hall to sleep under the same roof. It was really a difficult time and a very bad time. It was like a prison, I felt like a prisoner (Afghan man, Age group 27-50, No.61).

Since life in the provided accommodation is primarily the experience of asylum seekers in the host country, the accommodation conditions play a vital role in their perception of reception in the host society. Needless to say, refugees face adverse situations at every step of their journey often putting their lives at risk to come to the destination country with the hope of safety and better living conditions for themselves and for their future generations. On the individual level inadequate, appalling and undignified accommodation conditions may lead to dissatisfaction, stress, humiliation and a negative perception of the society, which is evident from the response of interviewees mentioned above.

In other cases, the respondents express their satisfaction and consider the accommodation facilities adequate providing them with basic facilities and fulfilling their necessities,

(...) so I lived a while with my brother and then I stayed in a camp. The camp I stayed in was ideal, it was number one in Sweden, it was a tourist resort, hotel, and I was very happy and comfortable, and of course for children there were a lot of activities which took place. For classes there were teachers once or twice a week. There were people who attended, whoever wants to attend can. There were activities, and medical care I think there was, there was a clinic (Syrian man, Age group 50+, No.41).

There are no restrictions for asylum seekers to travel within Sweden, neither in law nor in practice. But often, it is the case that asylum seekers are placed in rural areas, accommodation centres are established in isolated areas and this ultimately minimises their right to domestic mobility and opportunity to communicate with broader society, thus depriving them of basic services. It is important to notice that almost all the respondents call these centres 'camp' which implies a negative connotation suggesting that they are usually bound to live in bad conditions, only

⁷² Eurostat, Eurostat, Asylum and new asylum applicants – annual aggregated data.

⁷³ EU Directive 2013/33/EU.

expecting to stay for a limited time, as if feeling more permanent is prohibited. Even some respondents compare this so called 'camp' to 'prison':

After the camp, we were located in [City X] (...) it was an isolated area, which had a few houses around and it had a bus by which you could go fetch your needs and get back to sleep. We were 2 persons living in a single room, see! ...and how to say it... It seemed like we were in prison (Syrian man, Age group 50+, No.41).

Sometimes these isolated accommodation centres and their instability make it difficult for asylum seekers to have access to schools. The instability of this temporary accommodation was misused as an excuse in few instances to deny asylum seekers their basic rights. When a Syrian single mother with two children tried to get her daughters registered into school while living in an isolated accommodation centre, she had the following experience:

Our accommodation was a summer resort. We told the social worker to get our kids registered in school. Her view was the camp closes in April or May, so it's not applicable to get the kids to school late in the term but I disagreed with her (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.10).

There are also 'Transit Centres' operated by SMA, a type of accommodation centre for those who have agreed to voluntary return to their country of origin or in the instances of Dublin cases. In Sweden, there are four transit centres established in Gothenburg, Åby, Malmö and Knivsta. Some of these centres are established in former detention centres. People living there have freedom of movement but must report daily by night. If someone changes his/her mind about voluntary return, those cases are handed over to the police.

Table 7: Average duration of stay in reception centres (2018)

Category of applicant	Average stay (days)
Persons returning voluntarily	658
Persons forcibly removed	895
Persons absconding	688
Persons granted permits	768
Total average	736

Source: SMA

3.1.ii. Housing (outside accommodation centres)⁷⁴

Some asylum seekers and migrants live with relatives or spouses (EBO). While others appeal to authorities to be allowed private housing because of their perception of accommodation centres concerning safety, fear of harassment, overcrowding and inadequate facilities which play a significant role on their psychosocial wellbeing. Asylum seekers migrate to a new country not only to escape violence and persecution but also with the hope that they and their children will have a safe and better future there.

In Sweden, asylum seekers choose individual flats as their preferred form of accommodation (according to our interview material) which are available in most municipalities. Asylum seekers express their happiness when they are provided with an individual flat, which they consider as an improvement in their lives.

It was only a month ago that my daughters and I got a home. I feel like my daughters are happy and comfortable, that is the most important thing to me (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.13).

⁷⁴ In this section, we have focused both on accommodation provided by SMA in a normal housing area and EBO.

We lived in a single small room in a camp, and the food that we got was not good for us, because my wife had some special food needs that the camp couldn't provide for. After 6 months we got a small flat which was about 70 m², so it was good for my family, and it was good enough (Afghan man, Age group 27-50, No.61).

However, the result of EBO accommodation could be in fact greater isolation from society and social relations according to some stakeholders:

Own accommodation for asylum seekers can cause considerable social problems. This may involve, for example, increased segregation, extreme overcrowding and difficulties for the municipalities to offer welfare services' (Swedish Minister of Justice and Migration).⁷⁵

Some stakeholders also suggest that the only way to improve the housing situation for asylum seekers is to abolish the EBO Law. When asked for suggestions on improving the current housing conditions, the representative of Södertälje Municipal Council stated that:

There's only one: abolish the EBO Law, so that nobody gets to choose where they will live upon arrival. Everybody should be taken care of by the Swedish Migration Agency upon arrival and for the following three-four weeks, while it's been decided whether they'll stay in Sweden or not. Those that get to stay should be distributed equally and justly among all of Sweden's municipalities. All municipalities should provide housing and assistance. The situation is impossible to correct as long as the EBO Law exists. (SE_Meso_Interview no.8)

The accommodation type during the asylum process determines access to municipal accommodation after the decision of asylum application. Although the municipalities are obliged according to The Settlement Act (2016:38)⁷⁶ to provide housing to those who receive a positive asylum decision, the asylum seekers who have arranged their own accommodation (EBO) during reception are excluded from this regulation. Therefore, the type of accommodation asylum seekers have/choose bears significant consequences both during reception and afterwards. However, most of the interviewees in our material express their satisfaction living in the accommodation arranged by themselves which can be connected to the fact that they may feel safer living with someone (friends, relatives) they know and who can be of support in the asylum process and in their everyday lives.

My conditions were relatively good because I was living with my aunt so I had facilities that would have been unlikely seeking help from people I don't know (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.12).

When asked about the reception experience which started with an EBO housing arrangement, one of the interviewees responded positively:

I think it was good. I stayed at a relative's house and used to go to the investigation interviews about my case. I did two interviews and in the third session they gave me the decision about permanent residency (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.24).

The opportunity to stay in EBO might be reduced significantly in the near future as the government has introduced new amendments to restrict EBO arrangement. However, it is uncertain to what degree these restrictive measures would reduce the numbers of people living in EBO accommodation, commenting on the issue one of the stakeholders envisaged:

There will be a change in the Law after January – refugees won't be allowed to settle in the most socially and economically vulnerable areas of the country. Settling in such areas will entail the loss of their right to economic support. We don't think this is going to work

⁷⁵ Swedish Government, 'Regeringen vill ändra reglerna om eget boende för asylsökande'.

⁷⁶ Regeringskansliets rättsdatabaser, 2016.

however, since it's still possible to register elsewhere and live in these areas.
(SE_Meso_Interview no.8)

The responses of other asylum seekers suggest that those who have had a high standard of living in the home country and used to live in urban areas, find it more difficult to live in rural areas where basic services are insufficient and there are fewer opportunities. Migration brings new realities to people's lives and transform their 'established' privileges and social roles in the migration context. This notion of newness is sometimes perceived and experienced positively, sometimes negatively. People respond differently to the 'new realities' that they face. In the following case, the asylum seeker was a teacher and her husband was a lawyer in their home country. Moreover, her children were highly educated; they were accustomed to life in cities. As a result, recalling the social needs they acquired due to their culture, education and lifestyle, it becomes quite difficult for them to accept the reality of a municipal housing situation in Sweden, where they can be placed randomly. They emphasise the importance (including psychological stability) of being socially surrounded at the place of residence, especially considering the reasons causing them to flee their country.

When my husband, my daughter and I went to tell them that we want a house they told us: 'Forget Stockholm, Uppsala, Malmö or Gothenburg because it's hard for you to get one in these cities. We might be able to arrange a house for small cities or villages.' My 18 years old daughter got nervous and told them how we were social and friendly in Syria, and how important that is for us now in order not to get depressed, because we fled from the war. The lawyer told her to calm down and then we left. After 2 weeks, she called us and told us about a house to come over and see it. In the migration office they told us that we'll get one chance to get a house. If we liked it, we'll get it, if not we'll search on our own [the house was in Uppsala] (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.35).

(...) a house for migrants, our needs were provided, but the allowance wasn't enough at all, maybe because we had been used to a certain lifestyle, the salary was normal, below normal, we can hardly get our needs, we were living in a village (...) (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.33).

There is also a concern among some interviewees that they have been discriminated against in settlement based on their nationality. When asked about whether they felt discriminated in ABO during the reception period, two respondents from Afghanistan replied:

They were helping Syrian people more; I feel that Afghani people didn't get so much attention. All the Syrians got apartments in cities but Afghani people are living further away and living like animals (Afghan woman, Age group 27-50, No.58).

(...) I also noticed that they differentiated between two types of people here. Their high priority was the refugees from Syria, even healthy male refugees from Syria were taken well care of compared to an Afghan family. That made me feel very bad and discriminated. And that led to that I got in conflict with the migration officers (Afghan man, Age group 27-50, No.61).

The discriminatory treatment may make asylum seekers feel inferior and angry. This can result in both mental and physical consequences such as stress, anxiety and depression. FARR affirms that 'There should be no institutionalised difference in treatment with respect to nationality. However, if a person belongs to a vulnerable group, solutions are sought based on the individual's needs.'⁷⁷

⁷⁷ FARR, 'Differential Treatment of Specific Nationalities in Reception'.

Temporary accommodation and its impact

One of the major issues for asylum seekers during the reception period is the *temporariness* of housing, since they are moved from one municipality to another, according to the availability of accommodation operated by SMA: *'If you need the agency's help for accommodation, you are not entitled to choose; rather you should be willing to move to a place where accommodation is available. It is also probable that while you wait for your decision, you may have to move to a new home in order to make room for more applicants'*⁷⁸. This instability often creates tremendous psychological pressure on the part of asylum seekers, as many of them refer to this experience as 'torture', 'starting from zero' and so on. Moreover, in several cases asylum seekers recall that the forced and continuous migration within Sweden and its accommodation facilities have led them into conflicts with officials.

And I know people, they let them stay in Stockholm for 5-6 months until they integrate and they know all the places, then they take them to another place which they need to learn from the beginning. My idea [expectation] was different. I came to Stockholm and stayed here. They were torturing people in legal ways. If you want this person to stay in this city, let them start living in that city or place. After they give fingerprints and you let [place] them in another place. That affects their psychology (Syrian man, Age group 27-50, No.39).

I want to have a place to live not to move again and again. I am going to start from zero and I do not want to move after that to start all over again (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.29).

The migration moved us to Gothenburg and even in Gothenburg we were not given proper housing or somewhere to live. We were moved to different types of housing. Sometimes we were in a church and sometimes in some other place. So, we were moved around by immigration because they didn't have appropriate or permanent housing for us, and I also got into some small conflict with the migration officers about the situation that I and my family had (Afghan man, Age group 27-50, No.61).

The uncertainty, where to be moved, where to end up the next day, in the life of asylum seekers creates hindrances to crucial activities - language learning, child care, access to education, the opportunity to be engaged into broader community and ultimately integration into Swedish society.

Isolation – Housing in remote areas

The feeling of isolation and deprivation is one of the major concerns that has presented itself throughout our interview materials: both accommodation centres and individual flats are established in isolated areas. Often asylum seekers point out the fact that the accommodation in isolated areas results in additional pressure on their situation, being yet another obstacle to overcome their trauma. Notably, they often underline their absence of 'voice' and power, and thus inability to improve the situation. An Iraqi woman described the vulnerable position when she was put in a 'nowhere' place:

...when we were refugees, they put us in a nowhere place...It increased the pressure and we were coming out of another trauma at that time. We suffered but we had no solution besides being silent (Iraqi woman, Age group 27-50, No.46).

Some respondents mentioned that they did not know anyone in their place of accommodation, felt unsafe and had no connection with society. Another respondent expressed her concern about the effect of isolation on children:

The children who were with us at the time were in bad shape. They had no place to play or anything to help them live their childhood (Syrian man, Age group 27-50, No.6).

⁷⁸ SMA, 2017, 'Accommodation'.

Many respondents express a certain level of disappointment about their places of residence, since it is mainly inhabited by asylum seekers which hinders their encounter with Swedish society. Surrounded by other asylum seekers, they feel detached and distant from Swedish culture. When asked if there is a chance to contact a wider community, the respondents answered:

Yes, but how should I do that. Most of them are Arabs. ... When I go to the association, Swedish visitors come around. (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.8)

I have not tried [to communicate with neighbours]. Because of the language, some of them are Somalis and some are Afghanis, we do not understand each other (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.18).

This isolation can also be connected to lack of infrastructure, transportation and access to important needs:

We can hardly get our needs, we were living in a village we didn't know how to move around. Only once a week one of the villagers used to pick up men and take them shopping to get their needs only. We couldn't go out, there was no transportation (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.33).

Remoteness may also restrict access to organised activities, children's activities, outdoor activities, since 2017 onwards the SMA no longer has responsibility for organising meaningful activities for asylum seekers and the responsibility has been handed over to CAB (*Länsstyrelserna*), who is supposed to provide the activities in cooperation with civil society.⁷⁹ This may be challenging if civil society actors are not present in the remote areas.

Space – a major factor in housing

To handle the extraordinary pressure of need of housing due to the record number of asylum seekers in 2015 and the ongoing housing crisis in Sweden, minimum space per person was reduced in accommodation facilities by Migration Agency in order to accommodate more asylum applicants. According to the Migration Agency, 'Families are always given a room of their own. Single people must share a room with others of the same sex'⁸⁰. It is important to pay attention that the number of family members and how many people have to share a room is not mentioned. This created quite a devastating experience, especially considering the inferior position of asylum seekers not allowing them to change the situation anyhow:

The immigration [agency] was absolutely not nice with us, we were living in a very small room with another family. We said to immigration [agency] that it is very difficult for us to stay two families in a small place, they said we didn't give you an invitation to come to Sweden from Afghanistan, you have to accept that, you have to stay like that and live like this. When we appealed, we got more support, we got apartment and it was much better (Afghan woman, Age group 27-50, No.54).

A peculiar situation in housing is created when the issue of space forces teenagers (turned 18) to leave the apartment assigned to their family. In the following case, the teenager came to Sweden with her parents and siblings as a minor and she was allowed to stay with her family in a small apartment. But as soon as she turned 18 and got a rejection, she was told to leave the apartment with the logic that it was a small apartment for another adult in the family; thus, putting her in a vulnerable position.

Five months that they did not pay anything for me, I do not have any money, I am staying with my parents. They said, I have to leave the apartment because I am not allowed to

⁷⁹ FARR, 'Conditions in Reception Facilities'.

⁸⁰ SMA, 2019, 'Accommodation with the Swedish Migration Agency'.

live with my family because I am over 18 and I do not have any place to live, they said, it is a small apartment... (Afghan woman, Age group 18-26, No.55).

Often the teenagers turned 18 (especially with negative decision) are forced to move from their accommodation as if turning 18 makes them competent to find their own accommodation and live on their own. This practice can also be connected to the issue of a housing crisis for asylum seekers, so that new minor applicants can be accommodated in those same places where other teenagers used to live until they became 18 years old. This crisis of space and compromise of care are also stated by one of the employees working in the municipality housing support unit:

In the beginning, we focused a lot on care and so on, but during the second year it was like Okay, they are so many, we can't focus on a single person too much (...) This was in 2015 and this kind of thinking had already started, i.e. that this is too much. We had space for two youths but for a while, we had thirteen or fourteen. We had too many people (SE_Meso_Interview no.6).

Effects of housing on health and family relations

In our interviews, many respondents express that the difficult housing situation has a negative impact on their mental health (depression, anxiety, stress, etc) and family relations. In the case of a 42-year-old man from Afghanistan and his family, the fear and uncertainty connected to housing affected the psychological wellbeing of his wife:

One of the main concerns, which was also the cause of my wife's psychological issues, is the fear about the future. Basically, regarding our housing and moving to another place, where we don't have these opportunities, like a smaller house, which is not enough for our children. She is consulting these issues with a psychologist (Afghan man, Age group 27-50, No.61).

In another case of a 50-year-old woman from Syria, the significantly changed housing conditions (compared to the home country), especially the congested living situation, lack of private space, had ultimately affected her relations with her family. When asked about whether the current living conditions had affected her family relations, she replied:

Yes, it has changed a lot because we have a lot of pressure. This affected my relations with my family mainly because after our house in Syria was 400 meters, we were given a single 40-meter room to live together. Therefore, there were differences between me and my husband and this has a psychological impact on my children (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.32).

In her case, it was also a matter of standard of life she had in the home country where her family had an independent house of 400 metres. So, when they were assigned a single room of 40 metres for a family of four members, the experience became a shock to them. In the same interview, the respondent explained how the current housing condition also hampers her study and the studies of her children as they do not have any space to concentrate. According to the respondent they do not have any privacy in that tiny apartment. As a result, it creates psychological pressure and tension among them and they are in constant fights with each other, thus worsening their family relationship.

Gender dynamics in housing

According to the International organisation for Migration (IOM), gender 'refers to the socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to people based on their assigned sex. Gender is relational and refers not simply to women, men or other gender groups, but to the relationship between them. Although notions of gender are deeply rooted in every culture, they are also changeable over time and have wide variations both within and between cultures' (IOM, 2015)⁸¹.

⁸¹ IOM, Gender Equality Policy 2015–2019.

Excluding gender considerations in policy making and planning can expose women, men and other gender groups to further risks and vulnerabilities. Throughout our materials it became evident that housing issues affect asylum seekers differently depending on their gender roles, so much so that the gender of asylum seekers and associated responsibilities may determine their housing situations.

A woman who is mentally abused by her husband refused to move to a shelter because of fear for her children's mental state and deprivation of the father's presence in their lives, if SMA moved her to a remote area:

They first told me we can take you to the battered women's shelter but I refused...Firstly I am totally against this process and the way. I didn't want to get into a situation that I don't know of its legal consequences later. All their care would be about my daughters. My daughters, at that time, were enrolled in a nursery at the place I was renting. Their teacher advised me not to go. She told me, your daughters are already emotionally stable here, so do not make it a hassle for them...they will put you in a very faraway place, and you will not know where. And it was also important for me that they do not live without a father. Let them see him. At the end of the day, he is their father, regardless of our conflict. So that's why I refused to go to the battered women's home (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.13).

In other cases, female respondents expressed their concern about the housing arrangement in terms of safety of women. Placed among many other young men, they feel extremely vulnerable and question the judgement of the authorities and demand those to be held accountable for ignoring the gender issue. They feel that the authorities should arrange specialised accommodation facilities for women in order to ensure safety and justice. According to them, there is a huge cultural difference and so putting men and women in the same housing based on the cultural perception of the host society can be considered disregarding human lives and values of refugees and ultimately a policy mistake. This situation can make women more vulnerable and also lead to sexual harassment and rape:

The accommodation was available but it wasn't secure at all. I had a lot of sexual harassment attempts and a rape attempt inside the camp and it got very famous on social media, there are videos and the people who did this didn't get any punishment (...)The ladies should be treated well and put in a special and safe place for them, if they had special camps for women they would have solved a big problem. I don't know what is the point of putting a lonely girl with families, young men and youth. In a women's camp, we could grab each other's hair but we won't rape or sexually harass each other. There was a way of disregarding the human lives and the refugees' value as humans. We were treated as sheep (...)So, I think there was a huge policy mistake in the immigration department especially with handling ladies' cases, for example, the one who came alone or with their kids. There was injustice and they put them through things, I think those responsible for that should be made accountable (...)It's fair to put us all in the same camp because we are all singles but due to our origins, which are from the Middle East, it's not fair to put one girl with 50 boys to share the same bathroom. The bathrooms didn't even have locks. (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.5).

According to the Respond interview materials, such situations may also trigger traumatic home country and transit experiences of asylum seekers.

3.2. Early access to Education and Labour Market

This section includes two sub-sections providing insights and explanations for the experiences of newcomers in the field of education and labour market.

3.2.i. Access to introductory language and orientation classes

For adults, the main educational institution is the Swedish for Immigrants (SFI), a two-year language introduction that one has the right to attend as a resident in Sweden. It is the obligation of the municipality where one is resident to provide SFI, but the classes can be organised by a range of educational providers, such as municipalities, for-profit schools, non-profit organisations (e.g. folk high-schools). As newly arrived in Sweden, a person cannot participate in SFI without a residence permit.⁸² As the waiting times in the asylum-seeking process can be very protracted, some of the interviewees mention having waited a long time before beginning to learn the language. This wait can lead to a feeling of wasting time:

The negative thing is that we have been left on our own for two years with no activities or language, just staying at home and it felt as if we had cerebral palsy, our brains have stopped and our bodies had no energy... it would have been better if we had learned the Swedish language at that time (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.33).

In another example, the usefulness of the introductory programme within the integration stage is diminished by the fact that the participant had already been in Sweden for a long time before they were able to begin the integration programme:

They did it [civic introduction class] for us after being in Sweden for 2.5 year. (...) It was just speaking. (...) It was for explaining the rules and things that we knew by living 2.5 years here. (...) Yes [answering the question if it is a good thing for the newcomers]. Not for the one who spend 2.5 years and faced all the problems. Then explain to him what are the problems that he already faced. It was boring because of that (Syrian man, Age group 27-50, No.36).

The quotes above are examples of how the time between arrival and receiving a decision is typically long (see the box on 'Waiting time' on page 19 above). This time can become a liminal period of isolation and uncertainty. In our interviews however, many mentions being able to take language classes through a CSO such as the Red Cross or ABF (*Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund*) as a way to begin learning the language and to meet people. That many of the interviewees have experience from these language classes was to be expected, as the Swedish National Council of Adult Education (*Folkbildningsrådet*) report that more than half of the people in this group (awaiting a residence decision) were participants in the 'Swedish from day 1' programme organised by the popular education associations (*studieförbunden*). In total, more than 120,000 individuals participated in these classes between 2015 and 2017 (Fejes, 2019).

The introductory language study circles can take place in different places. In our interviews, there are examples of people attending classes at the 'camp' (Migration Administration facilities) where they live, whereas others go to the organisation providing the language lessons:

Yes for sure, there are a lot of organisations that taught us Swedish there were a lot, but what can I tell you! They came only one day per week, and also in Christmas like these days, now it's Christmas they used to come and held a Christmas party, they used to teach us how to sew⁸³. They were very enjoyable (Syrian man, Age group 27-50, No.44).

⁸² Skolverket, 2019, 'Rätt, behörighet och antagning till SFI'.

⁸³ Sewing, cooking or other similar activities are common activities for asylum seekers.

There were some special associations and people who came to the camp and gave us some Swedish language classes weekly, and made some conversation in order to get to know each other and for integration. [...] sometimes volunteers from the city come over to the camp management and ask about a group who want to learn. Most of them are retired people. They sit and start to teach us the language so when we enter school, we would already know some words (Syrian man, Age group 50+, No.19).

In terms of language classes there was a centre for the Red Cross. I was going there twice a week (Syrian man, Age group 27-50, No.14).

A couple of those who have participated in language studies organised by the study associations mention attending classes at more than one place in order to be able to study five days a week:

I'm attending [ABF courses] 5 days a week. Because I'm attending two schools and I want to learn. I have a window of time because my kids are in school, so I'm investing my time (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.23).

Until now I am studying with my teacher [name] in a volunteer school three days a week and two days with different volunteer schools (Iraqi man, Age group 50+, No.45).

In 'Swedish from day 1', the study circles are typically limited in number of days per week that they can meet (Folkbildningsrådet 2017, 10). Attending classes at more than one association thus becomes a way to maximise the possible learning outcome, or as respondent 23 above says: 'invest time'. It is clear that these language studies are appreciated as meaningful occupation. However, as this is a very uncertain time, waiting for a residence decision, a negative decision can, not surprisingly, lead to a loss of motivation for someone who initially has been very motivated to learn the language.

Before I used to watch YouTube and I tried my best to read and write, but since I got a negative, I don't have the motivation to learn the language anymore. There is a class offered by the Red Cross where every Friday for 2/3 hours I go to, it's been 40 days that I've been living in [XX] but I feel very tired and sad (Afghan man, Age group 18-26, No.49).

This notion of despair among asylum seekers is also affirmed by a stakeholder working at a municipality's housing support unit for UAM:

When we were urging them to go to school they'd always tell us "talk about it to the migration agency and I'll go to school". The hardest part was to motivate them to do things and they'd always refer to migration – they would say, "If I get to stay in Sweden I will learn Swedish" (SE_Meso_Interview no.6).

Children's access to school and gender dynamics

The fact that children have the right to attend school during the asylum process frees up time where the parent (mother) can attend language lessons or other activities. Some women have experienced that coming to Sweden has enabled them to do more than they were able to in their home country, while others have experienced that they have very little time to learn Swedish or work because they are the primary caregiver.

Interviewer: Your essential life like childcare and language courses, are they available?

Respondent: In [this town] yes, my kids applied for school. They started in August and for me there were schools for those who don't have residency. I had the opportunity to study language during the day while my kids are in school. And [this town] is away from family yes but we have our life. It's not easy though because I'm alone and I have to do domestic

chores and think about my kids. But it's okay I can adapt to that and manage things (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.23).

3.2.ii. The importance of getting a residence or work permit

Asylum seekers have the right to work as long as they fulfil the criteria for a certificate showing them to be exempt from the obligation to have a work permit, a so-called AT-UND.⁸⁴ However, a strong impression from the interviews is that having a work permit or residence permit is very important for the respondent's abilities to find work, and thus it is difficult to find employment during the time waiting for an asylum-decision, even if one tries:

I started working when I was 14-15 years old in Afghanistan and also I worked in Turkey for one year and in Sweden I did some small part time jobs. (...) To find a job is easy here if you have a working permit and a personal number then it is easy to find a job but if you don't have any it is hard to find (Afghan man, Age group 18-26, No.47).

Because of my legal status, it was really difficult for me to find a job (Afghan man, Age group 18-26, No.48).

As with access to education in the waiting period, finding work is important not only from an economic perspective, but also serves to provide a sense of meaning.

Yes, I went to the shops, I went everywhere, a lot of places to ask about a job but they said no, we don't have any. Then I even tried to go to Swedish language school, I want to learn Swedish at least, I have to go out from home, to go somewhere because it is so difficult to sit and do nothing (Afghan man, Age group 27-50, No.50).

Even after I received the approval for my permit I had to struggle because I was unemployed because I wanted to settle and establish a new life. I wanted to be independent and live by myself in order to support myself. I need my own house and food. This was a psychological struggle (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.12).

One of the stakeholders suggest that the difficulties in finding work and engaging with broader community during reception period are also connected to cultural differences, linguistic weakness and partly to the knowledge gap of asylum seekers:

This most often has to do with their linguistic weaknesses and their large cultural differences, which make it difficult for them to integrate in larger society. My experience from the project (and I've also worked with new arrivals earlier) is that many of the newly arrived truly want to enter society and the job market. The motivation and the willingness is there, but the knowledge is missing. (Coach and language supporter for the project Establishment Lift, SE_Meso_Interview no.7)

There are a few examples among the interviewees who have experienced that it has been easy to find work outside the regular labour market: working in construction or moving furniture. However, even though one might want a job to be able to provide for oneself and one's family, working without a permit/illegally might not be very appealing.

Sometimes, civil society organisations may apply for funding from the County Administrative Board for specific projects aimed to support asylum seekers.

The County Administrative Board is responsible for early support to asylum seekers. It is also in the same service. I have two colleagues that distribute the grants and we work as a team to evaluate the project applications submitted to the County Administrative Board

⁸⁴ SMA, 2019, 'Working while you are an asylum seeker'.

requesting funds to support asylum seekers. (County Administrative Board, Stockholm, SE_Meso_Interview no.5)

These programs are related to early access to the labour market and trying to get asylum seekers off social assistance, as soon as the asylum claim is accepted.

3.3. Services and Allowances

According to the European Union's directive on asylum reception from 2013, reception should be conducted with respect for human dignity (§35). This includes the provision of essential needs and services to asylum seekers upon submission of the asylum claim. In Sweden, the SMA in collaboration with the municipalities is responsible for providing these basic allowances and services. However, these can vary between the municipalities.

3.3.i. Access to Health Care Services

Asylum seekers have the right to one free, voluntary (but recommended) health assessment in order to determine the potential need for further care. The Swedish Migration Agency by law should inform all asylum seekers about their rights (including their access to health care) upon arrival. In all health care facilities asylum seekers are legally entitled to a translator speaking their mother tongue (SMA, 2019). The health assessment is conducted by health care professionals, who are bound to full confidentiality (ibid.), and it can therefore not affect the asylum claim. A nurse from Medical Service centre in Boden affirms:

No, there's no cooperation with the Swedish Migration Agency. There are many asylum seekers that believe that, i.e. that we have knowledge of what is to happen with them, but we really don't know a thing. I can call them and tell them [Migration Agency], for example, that a patient has missed an appointment because he/she has misunderstood the instructions or because he/she doesn't understand the language – those kinds of things. (SE_Meso_Interview no.4).

While the Migration Agency funds and informs about the health assessment, the health service centres must arrange the examination and send an invitation letter to the registered address (Shedrawy, Lönnroth, Kulane, 2017, p.2). Examination can be performed either at local health centres or at accommodation centres through visits of mobile clinics (Ibid. p.3). County councils are responsible for the primary healthcare centres (*vårdcentralen*), hospitals and dental service centres (*folktandvården*).

Despite the direct invitation, it is stated that not all asylum seekers are reached. According to the MPI Report from 2017, only about 44% do seek the first health care assessment (Fratzke, 2017). This may be due to a number of factors including location (rural vs. urban divide) but also the language barrier. A study from 2015, finds that often the invitation letters were sent in Swedish (Johansson et al., 2015) (Asli et al, 2018, p.3). Moreover, there was a confusion among asylum seekers about the procedure of examination. Some did not know what diseases they were tested for and did not have access to the results (Asli et al, 2018). Asylum seekers perceived one-way communication with nurses, where they did not have space to express specific needs or questions regarding their health (ibid.).

However, it seems that situations may depend on individual and cultural specificities. According to the interview with the nurse providing medical services in Boden, interpreters are employed during the health check in order to understand patients' health condition. In case more specialised care is needed, the patient is referred to counsellors, psychologists, doctors, occupational therapists. Voluntary health interviews can be conducted to comprehensively investigate the personal situation of the refugees which may affect their health, *'how they live, how they experience their current situation, what they think of their status when it comes to health and healthcare, vaccinations and so on'* (SE_Meso_Interview no.4).

If the assessment finds the need for prolonged assistance for chronic diseases, the newcomers have access to further care and medical provision.

(...) when we first came, I had the right to go to a doctor and take medicine due to my heart illness, I took with me an amount of my medicine, which could be enough for 2 months

before I arrived, because I can't live without it. So, when I went to the clinic and told them about my situation, they gave me a list [prescription] for a full year, which means I can go and take my medicine whenever. The medical care was good (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.35).

Nurses from the Medical Services for Refugees mention the introduction of a 'general information document' giving basic information about self-health care, and its presentation during the first assessment. From their perspective:

This general information document has been distributed for many years, and the asylum seekers have received it as well. I believe that their knowledge on health issues has been enriched (SE_Meso_Interview no.4).

In the same interview, however, the nurse mentions that often newcomers visit the centre with symptoms developed due to the unfamiliar Swedish climate, which in her opinion is not a reasonable ground for visiting a clinic. She highlights that they would know how to deal with the symptoms, if they had read the general information document. However, the problem seems to be a lack of awareness about different cultural backgrounds and, therefore, mismatching expectations on health care from both sides. As well as a lack of solidarity and empathetic communication (Pacheco, Jonzon and Hurtig, 2016).

A 24-hour phone medical consultancy service (1177) exists in Sweden. The service aims to provide information necessary for initial self-assessment and if it is possible, for solving health problems independently. However, the phone service's accessibility seems questionable especially during the reception period, where the language barrier is still very important. Nurses on the phone line, speak only in Swedish and English, in contrast to physical visits where asylum seekers are entitled to an interpreter. Thus, in the reception period asylum seekers rather find themselves dependent on the presence of clinics, traditional visits and certain level of arrangements before being able to access health care services. This fact is often not taken into consideration by the health care providers.

Cultural discrepancies between approaches to healthcare provision in Sweden and expectations of newcomers about healthcare services may provoke a feeling of lack of agency among asylum seekers and health care providers. Indeed, newcomers tend to express a certain dissatisfaction and doubt about the first health assessment and what is considered an 'emergency case'. Whereas, the nurse from Boden points out that in her opinion there is a greater dependence on health care services among newcomers, naming it that they do not take responsibility for their health and fully rely on a doctor's opinion.

In Sweden, we usually try to take care of our bodies ourselves. Many times, I do inform people who come here of what they must first do themselves at home. (...) I've noticed that people from other countries tend to depend more on the healthcare system than on their own capabilities (SE_Meso_Interview no.4).

She assumes that 'This is because they usually haven't received the basic information needed in order to take care of their bodies and understand their symptoms, so that they know when it's necessary to seek further help'. Along with the low level of knowledge about the functioning of the body system, the cultural context may also hinder delivering precise information describing a health problem that relates to a 'taboo' topic or body parts.

Many people with genital problems have difficulty explaining it, believing instead that it's a stomach ache. (...) I must have a clearer picture of what the patient feels: it's often okay to talk about one's head or eyes, but talking about one's genitals is something that many people have a hard time doing, so they talk about another body part instead (SE_Meso_Interview no.4).

Nevertheless, nurses observe that there is quite a positive response of asylum seekers to the conversations with nurses, which expand their knowledge about their body and self-health care. At the same time, some asylum seekers are disappointed when they do not receive a familiar treatment that they consider relevant according to their home country routine:

If a patient comes to me having decided they're going to get penicillin and end up not getting it, the whole appointment might seem pointless to them. (...) This often leads to confrontations. They tell me that I don't want to help them and that I don't understand their problems (SE_Meso_Interview no.4).

Among other things, the separate research of Johannson et al. (2015) found that asylum seekers with chronic diseases are likely to need emergency health attention, as they have had irregular treatment. This may relate to the fear that their health difficulties may affect the asylum procedure. The SMA specifies on the main website that maternal and obstetric care, including abortions and access to contraception, are free for asylum seekers. Preventive care and other health check-ups after the first assessment, however, are then to be paid up front. Delayed access to their financial allowances sometimes poses an obstacle. Asylum seekers are usually charged a subsidised fee, when their treatment exceeds 400 kronor (Fratzke, 2017).

During the period of asylum, each person gets a small amount of money, but I think it was enough because in this period we pay for the doctor 50 kronor only, but if the amount reaches more than 400 kronor, we will give the invoices to the responsible people to get the amount (Syrian man, Age group 27-50, No.4).

Asylum seekers with disabilities are entitled to free special care; they can have health needs assessment by the staff of the local municipality, after which the cost and scope of special care is to be confirmed and then covered by the Migration Agency⁸⁵. Asylum seekers who had the experience with the procedure evaluate it rather positively.

The Swedish health care system is supposed to be facilitated for asylum seekers through LMA cards and financial assistance. However, administrative processes and uncertain legal status may cause a serious delay and thus pose significant challenges in access to medical care. A case related to the Dublin regulation is exemplified by a woman who was diagnosed with cancer in her country and was unable to receive relevant treatment or medicine for her son and herself in Sweden, as during their transit they had registered their fingerprints in Hungary. Being asked whether she finally got her necessary medicine in Sweden, she answers:

No, they told us to go back to Hungary, because we had given our fingerprints over there, and that I was sick and my son was sick, so it wasn't acceptable for them to keep us here. They told us that there are doctors everywhere (Afghan woman, Age group 27-50, No.53).

Moreover, it seems that her mental health condition affected by her transit period and unstable situation in Sweden at that time has not been taken into account.

There are a lot of changes that have happened in my life, but almost all of them are negative. I am sick, I am worried, my son had problems with his testicles in Iran and they took out one of them, and when we got here, I took him to the doctor to get help, but when we got there, he told us that we weren't allowed to get help, because we couldn't stay in Sweden, so we didn't have access to healthcare. Then they told us to wait until we had a personal number and then they would help us. But when we got there, it had gone, it's lost, there's nothing. He lost it. They told us to wait until we got a personal number. And when we got there, they told us there was nothing they could do (Afghan woman, Age group 27-50, No.53).

⁸⁵ AIDA Country report Sweden, 2018, p.67-68

This is a serious case where the limited rights of asylum seekers led to grave negative consequences. The legal registration in the Swedish Population Register in the form of a personal number is possible only when asylum seekers obtain a residence permit. The case exemplifies how administrative barriers in healthcare management in the reception period are preventing access to essential services, and thus, leading to a significant harm to the somatic and mental health of asylum seekers.

The mental health of asylum seekers generally needs special attention. Not only due to possible experiences of trauma but also considering that psychological problems may be associated culturally with stigma. This tendency was observed by the practitioner in the Health Centre for Refugees.

My impression is that it's a bit taboo for asylum seekers. I think that they don't like talking about such things very loudly. There is, I think, a tendency to obscure such things from the medical staff and to want to solve such things between themselves. It's seen as something shameful (SE_Meso_Interview no.4).

Moreover, migrants may avoid talking about their mental health because they are worried that it may affect their image, and thus, future opportunities. A representative of *Etableringslyftet*, an educational centre for newcomers, noted that the phenomenon is especially widespread among unaccompanied minors. Even though some of them acknowledge that they need help, they prefer to refrain from visiting a psychologist.

There are many unaccompanied minors that need to see a psychologist and talk about the trauma they've gone through or the stress they've experienced, but as soon as someone mentions the word "psychologist", they think they're perceived as crazy or that there's something wrong with their brain. There are also many who think that this is some kind of stigma, that's going to affect their future and their possibilities of finding a job later on. I think if someone talked openly to them and explained why this kind of help is available, many of them would open up much more (A stakeholder from Etableringslyfte Sollentuna, SE_Meso_Interview no.3).

A lack of attention and sensitivity can be observed towards the mental health of asylum seekers who had severe experiences during transit.

I am not feeling very good because when I was in Pakistan, the police took me and for 24 hours I was somewhere, I was tortured and I was raped. Still now I have problems, I had operations a few times (...). I am very very disappointed (...) I don't know what to do, I'm totally confused. I was raped very badly in Pakistan by the police (Afghan man, Age group 27-50, No.50).

This respondent had to undertake several operations in Pakistan and Sweden following his experiences and requested legal support. However, despite the fact that it is hard to underestimate how such a traumatic experience can affect one's mental state, according to his story it is seen that his implicit attempts to ask for mental support was not recognised, and thus, not addressed.

Yes, they [doctors] were very nice, they did the operation and the doctor said talk with your lawyer and he is going to take your case up again. Every time I want to tell my problem, nobody is listening. They said stop, the questions we are asking you, you have to answer. You are not allowed to say what you want. Nobody knows about my situation (Afghan man, Age group 27-50, No.50).

In general, Johansson et al. (2015) underline that asylum seekers tend to experience psychosomatic disorders, linked to the tension they experience due to asylum seeking. The statement can be confirmed by one of the refugees.

I started talking to the case officer that I needed the permit, I started to have an allergic skin condition and had a rash covering my body, while I was waiting for my permit (Syrian man, Age group 27-50, No.44).

Some asylum seekers expressed that they would have preferred a clear rejection rather than long periods of doubt, which was associated with significant health deterioration.

I think it is negative because after three years of waiting and feeling afraid of deportation and rejection I got many diseases, and it would have been better, if they told us from the beginning that this is our situation and we can't offer you asylum here (Iraqi man, Age group 50+, No.45).

Among other obstacles in accessing Swedish health care the location of their accommodation centres was mentioned.

(...) My wife delivered my child in that room, at home in Sweden. The ambulance came late, we are far away from the city and the hospital, so she delivered the baby at home. I helped her, and there was another woman there to help, but it was at home. When she delivered the baby, it wasn't easy to see her in so much pain (Afghan man, Age group 18-26, No.51).

Some of them claimed the special need for having quick access to hospitals due to health conditions, however, initially they were allocated without respect to these needs. Asylum seekers tend to explain the shortcomings with the large number of refugees for which the Swedish health care system and the SMA were not prepared.

My daughter goes into convulsions, so she needs an ambulance from time to time, and when I first arrived, I was sent to a village, where you needed an hour to get to the nearest health care centre, so they [Migration Agency] didn't take into consideration the status of a sick child. (...) they kept telling me to wait and wait because they had large numbers of refugees, and it took us a long time to get our residence, two and a half years, see! We were under a lot of pressure, psychological pressure (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.33).

Locational obstacles often come together with a complete lack of health care infrastructure.

A city in the north of Sweden on the border with Finland. There was no hospital there and it was so difficult in the beginning. Then I told them that I need a health care that I could not find here as I was sick. They sent me here. (...) I did not know that city [X] had no connection with the world. After a month and a half, they sent me to [name of a village]. It is also in the north. It was better, but still it is a town. I needed to be in a city, so I can go to the hospital. As you know, it is really cold in the north and the transportation is difficult. If I left in the morning I returned at night (Iraqi woman, Age group 27-50, No.46).

In essence, we can observe a mismatch between the expectations of asylum seekers as well as those coming from healthcare practitioners. This can lead to misunderstanding and inefficiency in health assessments. Both the lack of cultural sensitivity and the subjective experience of patients and health practitioners affect the satisfaction and effectiveness with medical care. The first period of reception is also associated with organisational failures in terms of the expressed necessity in accessing health care services and allocation of asylum seekers.

3.3.ii. Access to food & hygiene items and financial assistance

Under the direction of Division for Management of Migration Affairs (SIM), the Swedish Migration Agency is responsible for distributing the governmental compensation to the municipalities that are providing services for asylum seekers.⁸⁶ The sum is adjusted depending on whether asylum seekers reside in SMA-run accommodation where food is provided or not. Generally, the daily allowance for asylum seekers is significantly lower than for a Swedish national in need of social assistance.⁸⁷ On the adequacy of the daily allowance provided by the SMA a public administrator from the Stockholm County Board recognises:

The subsistence level is the subsistence cap for some families. They get by with what little they receive. No European would be satisfied with what happens for example in Rinkeby or Tensta; they'd want to have more. However, these people have been so poor, that the aid they receive that we consider so little appears to be very big and they are very thankful for it (SE_Meso_Interview no.6)

However, satisfaction with the daily allowance is very subjective depending on the individual asylum seekers situation and possibly previous standard of living. While some are happy to be enjoying basic needs like food,

(...) We had an amount between 600-700 kronor as a personal allowance. (...) Yes, per month. We used to eat breakfast, lunch and dinner. The situation was very good (Syrian man, Age group 50+, No.19).

others see the allowance as insufficient to be able to buy anything new for themselves.

(...) The immigration department were paying us and I had some money too. Honestly, the money they were paying us wasn't enough for anything, even to buy a jacket. Even if you want to get it as second hand, it may not fit your size and you won't accept wearing that. Maybe our clothing culture is a bit different too. So, I had my own money, but they were helping and paying us 200 Euro per month, but 200 Euro is not enough because you have to eat, drink and buy clothes with them (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.5).

The housing/living situation largely affects the amount of the allowance and thus the beneficiary's satisfaction. In particular, those living in informal housing – housing not provided by the SMA – consider that their financial allowance is insufficient to cover their basic needs. Many asylum-seekers mention being supported by their family members.

(...) the financial support was 1650 kronor per month, which is a small amount that cannot provide you with basic needs. In my situation, I lived in my sister's house and in this case, I got less compared to the person who was living in the camp, since in the camp they provided the individual with accommodation and food, while those who are living outside the camp have more needs. But we were patient because the situation was tough, and no one asked if our needs were met (Syrian man, Age group 27-50, No.9).

Effective provision of allowances varied from municipality to municipality. Some asylum seekers, attest having been placed in reception centres, where neither food nor financial allowances were provided in a timely manner, in some cases not at all.

Every family had a house, there was a reception and they were asking us about our needs, they even started to give us money. The resort we stayed in had no food or a kitchen or

⁸⁶ SMA, 2018. 'Olika myndigheters ansvar för personer med uppehållstillstånd'.

⁸⁷ FARR, 'Forms and levels of material reception conditions'.

fast food but they told us that money will be delivered to us in 2-3 days (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.35).

Aware of this challenge, the European Union set some indicators for guidance on food diversity, in 2016⁸⁸. These guidelines include recommendations on arrangements to meet specific dietary needs of the residents in the reception accommodation. In practice, some of the refugees faced obstacles with getting the special food. Moreover, a Syrian elderly man having health issues directly related to nutrition has tried to ask for changes in the menu, however, his request was not fully taken into consideration.

We stayed at the camp for about a month... the food was the best... but it was very spicy. ... Being sick with colon issues, each time I had that spicy food, I had health problems and had to go to the hospital. ... It was meant to be from the Syrian cuisine... and cooked in the restaurant. The only problem was that the food was very spicy. Then, I told them that I like the food, it was great but it affected my health badly, but the doctor stated that they couldn't help... Can you imagine this!... The doctor was helpless... He couldn't report my condition to the immigration office... I met the chef cook... he interviewed me, he told me they could help a little but not totally... Some refugees in the camp had handed applications to be moved to another place. (Syrian man, Age group 50+, No.41)

As seen in the example above, the inability of practitioners to accommodate the dietary needs of an elderly asylum seeker has resulted in significant health deterioration which has forced him to ask for medical assistance and even for other accommodation.

3.3.iii. Gender within services and allowances

Respondents did not particularly highlight specific challenges related to gender experience within services and allowances in the reception period. Most difficulties were associated to very individual circumstances. However, gender dynamics did seem to play a role within the provision of medical services.

Gender Perspectives in the Health Sector

Practices and approaches in health care in Sweden may be fundamentally different for newcomers also from a gender perspective.

Limited reception capacity on the administrative side (municipality and public health service centres) may limit the extent of gender-sensitive reception and health treatment. For instance, it happens that clinics cannot provide an interpreter of the preferred gender at the time of the particular visit.

Sometimes there can be some resistance if a female patient gets a male interpreter it isn't at all appreciated, but we have to act with the interpreters we have. If things get out of hand then we can reschedule the appointment and ask for a female interpreter. It can happen that we ask for a female interpreter but there is none available (SE_Meso_Interview no.4).

There may also be challenges related to varying cultural values and perceptions on gender equality, between health practitioners and their patients. An example may be the varying perception of privacy related to certain intimate health issues.

Sometimes women can only come and talk about their problems if the man is the one informing me about them, which I must confess I find somewhat irritating. I understand that this might be a standard practice in another cultural context, but I wish that since we're in Sweden, the woman could talk about her problems by herself. I usually ask the man,

⁸⁸ EASO, 2016, 'Guidance on reception conditions - operational standards and indicators', p. 25

politely but firmly, if he could instead wait outside, which doesn't always garner a positive response. They often prefer to stay in the room and talk about the woman's problem themselves while she waits around silently. This is somewhat hard for me I want to hear her talk about her problem. I can get a better result if I talk directly with her (SE_Meso_Interview no.4).

The mediation between a health practitioner and a patient may be a common practice for some asylum seekers, whose gender interaction is tied, for example, to the cultural context they lived in. However, it seems controversial for the health specialists of the local settings, since from their perspectives it may affect the quality of the health checks of such patients.

In some cases, problems with accessing health service provision may lead to a refugee's culturally-conditioned taboo violation. It is especially relevant to the asylum seekers coming from the cultures where interaction between a man and a woman, their distinctive body related processes, are heavily charged, and thus, stigmatised or determined with a set of customs and practices. An Afghani man described such a shocking encounter.

My wife delivered my child in that room, at home in Sweden. The ambulance came late, we are far away from the city and the hospital, so she delivered the baby at home. I helped her, and there was another woman there to help (...) In Afghanistan, no man would think of doing such a thing. In Afghanistan, women help other women [in childbirth] and men aren't allowed anywhere near, but here I saw that it's an important thing to be with your wife and hug her as she delivers a baby, it's a big thing. I'm not the same person I was in Afghanistan. It has influenced me because I helped her deliver the baby! I was helping her, cleaning and taking care of my other children. It influenced me a lot (Afghan man, Age group 18-26, No.51).

In his case, it can be observed that the situations may serve as a life-changing experience that may radically modify a person's meaning-making system and understanding of gender relations rather than traumatise him or her. However, differences in perception and significant stress coming along with such experiences should not be undervalued, and should be taken into consideration both by health service providers and mainly by the Migration Agency during settlement.

3.4. Reception of Unaccompanied Minors

In Section 2.2.vii, we have discussed the legal and policy dimension of the reception of UAMs. This section focuses on the role of civil society actors in the reception of UAMs; provides an account about the missing UAMs, and maps the problems and challenges in the reception of UAMs

3.4.i. Role of civil society actors in reception of UAMs

There are a number of volunteer organisations as the Children's Rights Agency, Save the Children, the Red Cross, *Skyddsvärnet*, *Stadsmisionerna* that provide support for the UAMs through social and educational activities, legal advice and support in contacts with authorities. A network of professionals working with the UAMs, 'Vi står inte ut' (VSIU, 'We can't stand it'), was simultaneously organised to advocate for the UAMs' rights as the rights of children according to international and European conventions⁸⁹. The members of the network are mainly people who directly encounter the UAMs as teachers, social workers, doctors, psychologists, legal guardians, school nurses, nurses, lawyers, foster families, football coaches, and school principals. They analyse shortcomings of the asylum-seeking process in dealing with unaccompanied children in practice and present their insights to improve the UAM's situation. Following their observations, they demand that the government of Sweden 'stop the relocation within Sweden of thousands of unaccompanied minors and youth during their asylum process as a means to prevent more suicides in Sweden by young refugees', as well as freeze deportations of minors and grant amnesty to those UAMs who have been in Sweden for more than a year.

Apart from this, asylum seekers themselves form organisations aimed at supporting newly arrived refugees. Among those are self-organised associations of UAMs, who support and help other unaccompanied children and young people. *Ensamkommandes Förbund*⁹⁰ (Unaccompanied Minors Association) provides leisure activities, introductory activities about Swedish culture and contributes to the involvement of UAMs in Swedish society. *Sveriges Ensamkommandes Förening*⁹¹ (SEF, the Swedish Organisation for Unaccompanied Minors) along with the activities for inclusion of UAMs, cooperates with Swedish authorities to support their asylum cases. The organisation *Ung i Sverige* (Young in Sweden) protests against deportations of unaccompanied youth to Afghanistan and also advocates for rights and the need to find appropriate housing of the UAMs, who were forced to leave their accommodation after turning 18 and to organise housing by themselves. Thus, they address inter alia the complications in accessing schooling facilities in cases of changing accommodation⁹².

3.4.ii. Missing UAMs

A serious issue of missing unaccompanied asylum-seeking children has been identified across the EU. National reports showed that children go missing due to 'poor conditions in some reception centres, lack of information on their rights and potential remedies, slow and complex procedures for protection, lack of training for professionals in contact with children and lack of coordination at national and cross-border level'⁹³. According to the research in 2016 in Sweden⁹⁴, in total, 4 percent of the boys compared with 2.5 per cent of the girls assigned a municipality were registered as missing. However, the research claims it as a relatively low number in the EU. Among those registered as missing, UAMs of Moroccan and Afghan background were the largest

⁸⁹ *Vi står inte ut!*, 2018, 'Report about Legal Uncertainties in the Asylum Process For Unaccompanied Minors in Sweden'.

⁹⁰ <http://ensamkommandesforbund.se/>

⁹¹ <http://www.kronprinsessparetsstiftelse.se/projekt/sef.html>

⁹² FARR, Access to NGOs and UNHCR.

⁹³ Lost in Migration Delegate booklet, Brussels, 11-12 April 2018, Background Note on p.11.

⁹⁴ *Länsstyrelsen Stockholm*, Report 2016:28, p.14.

groups, followed by Somalia, Algeria, Eritrea and Syria⁹⁵. A stakeholder working with UAM underlines how the fear of deportation and rumours circulated among UAMs:

Many of them knew that they would get deported when they turned eighteen so they decided to leave before that, as they were very scared of the prospect. They were afraid that the police would come and get them. We explained, of course, that it wasn't like that but there were many rumours among them. Some of them thought, "I will go before they get me".

Several municipalities reported that receiving rejections and awaiting deportation is a mentally exhausting situation for the children⁹⁶. A correlation was found showing that disappearances are more common among those UAMs who have little chance of obtaining a residence permit such as Moroccans and Algerians in comparison to Syrians and Afghans. Several municipalities interviewed for the aforementioned research confirmed that 'rejection of an asylum application and a perceived risk of having an asylum application rejected and fear of being deported are reasons that unaccompanied minors go missing after being assigned a municipality.' To escape deportation, the minors may go underground or travel to other countries to seek asylum⁹⁷. The fear of rejection and deportation is also confirmed and highlighted by Swedish children's rights organisations.

Among reasons of disappearance of UAMs are problems in housing, when the assigned municipality is not able to provide the child with his or her special needs related to age or gender. Apart from that, the research's results show that according to some 30 municipalities, children have gone missing because they have family, relatives and friends in other municipalities. The Migration Agency recognises that they 'generally experience difficulties in finding and arranging housing for unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable groups'⁹⁸.

Shortcomings in the guardianship system, pointed out in the Human Rights Watch report have also had an impact on the feeling of not being supported as a UAM in access to education and provision of essential information⁹⁹. Differences in how municipalities appoint and train guardians give evidence that staff taking care of unaccompanied children may lack necessary expertise. The Report of the Commissioner for Human Rights confirms that '*Guardians are also not always properly trained and supervised.*' Additionally, it underlines that there is no limit to the number of children a guardian can take care of, and UNHCR reported, for instance, cases in which guardians had up to 25 children under their care¹⁰⁰, which may affect the time and thus the extent of attention the guardian can devote to the child concerned. The lack of legal awareness and understanding of the situation of the UAMs are noted in the report of UNHCR. The children consulted described how

confused and insecure they felt during their first days in Sweden. Despite being supported by many different actors, they still felt ill-informed about their immediate future and their situation while staying in the municipality of arrival. Children who do not understand their own situation and therefore feel unsafe are more likely to not cooperate with authorities and comply with decisions to transfer them to another municipality responsible for their long-term care. This increases the risk of them absconding or disappearing, which poses further risks of greater vulnerability, including the exposure to exploitation and abuse¹⁰¹.

Both well-organized and culturally sensitive reception policy and practices, specifically tailored for UAMs are essential for meeting the needs of this vulnerable group. Especially when it comes to

⁹⁵ Länsstyrelsen Stockholm, Report 2016:28, p.14.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.20.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p.17

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.18.

⁹⁹ HRW, 2016, Seeking Refuge, p.3

¹⁰⁰ Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, 2017, Sweden, p.11

¹⁰¹ UNCHR, 2018, I want to feel safe, p.11.

establishing trust and collaboration with UAMs, it is important to develop a strong personalised approach which may in turn decrease their fear and anxiety.

3.4.iii. Problems in meeting the needs of vulnerable UAMs

Another concern arises in the sphere of housing for vulnerable individuals. Some of the UAMs who arrived in Sweden have experienced significant traumatic events in the country they fled and/or during their journey. Given this, they were in urgent need of special accommodation and support. However, in the year when the number of UAMs reached a peak, the procedures of special needs' assessment were hindered with 'a broader backlog of asylum cases and a lack of prioritisation of applications of vulnerable unaccompanied children'¹⁰². The waiting time for the interviews and the assignment of a guardian were extended, which put the children in a vulnerable position that could trigger them. According to the report of Human Rights Watch, some children, including those who had experienced sexual violence had not received adequate health screening or mental and physical health care, neither were they placed in a safe house. For instance, a 16-year-old girl from Afghanistan was repeatedly raped by a smuggler in Turkey, who kept her for 12 days. At the time of the interview, she was living in Sweden at a home with over a dozen boys, even though she asked not to be accommodated with a group of boys. Even though she had a general health check-up, her social worker 'did not refer her for post-rape care, gynaecological care or psychological support'¹⁰³. Other children were identified with symptoms of PTSD, many of them were not provided with mental health care services:

*a 15-year-old boy from Afghanistan, said 'I remember the entire journey and I can't stop the tears from coming,' when he recalled the six attempts he made to cross from Greece to Italy as a stowaway. ... a 9-year-old Afghan boy, recalled watching others die in the Mediterranean Sea: 'On the way we saw many problems. I saw people who are drowning.... I was scared and I felt really bad. Still I have problems. I have nightmares about it.'*¹⁰⁴ *Person [X], who experiences flashbacks to being held captive by ISIS and has trouble sleeping, said he asked his social worker about receiving psychosocial support but has been to see a mental health specialist only once and is still experiencing problems. The director of a specialised health centre in Malmö that treats adult and child refugees explained that many health care centres in Sweden do not have a psychiatrist on staff to work with children. As a result, children may be referred to hospitals to receive psychiatric care and placed on long waiting lists to see a psychiatrist.*¹⁰⁵

These testimonies indicate that the present policy and practices are not sufficient in order to meet the most urgent needs of UAMs. When considering the long-term consequences of untreated trauma experiences, it is highly recommended to take specific measures in order to provide UAMs with trauma treatment without delay.

3.4.iv. Vulnerability of unaccompanied young adults

According to the survey of the Swedish municipalities, some mentioned an upward adjustment of age or approaching one's 18th birthday as reasons that force the UAMs with uncertain asylum cases to hide, since legally they are not defined as minors and in the case of rejection they are entitled to different protection and reception conditions. Moreover, the change in their age status means that in case of a decision requiring return, there is no longer a demand that somebody (an adult family member) has to receive them in their home country¹⁰⁶.

¹⁰² HRW, 2016, Seeking Refuge, p.2.

¹⁰³ Ibid., Seeking Refuge, p.10

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p.12.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p.13.

¹⁰⁶ SMA, 2017, 'How to apply for asylum', p. 22.

Despite the fact that the government has provided a special fund to support those who turned 18 but wanted to remain at the accommodation and school they have been attached to, in practice it does not always happen. According to research¹⁰⁷, in new centres they are forced to move in, they usually have to share a room with several other people, of different ages and backgrounds, and thus needs and general lifestyle. Special attention should be given to the cases of the youth who received a rejection of their asylum claim after waiting for the decision for several years. During that time, many young people have already adjusted to a certain extent to life in Sweden, schooling and regained hope for the future. Rejection after such a long wait can be perceived dramatically. The situation resulted in the legislation of 2018¹⁰⁸ on granting the UAMs aged between 17 to 24 temporary residence permits allowing them to complete their secondary school education but not granting an amnesty to the young adults.

When asked about the struggle and vulnerability of the UAMs turning 18, one of the District Administrators of Spånga-Tensta (in Stockholm) emphasises alienation of a youth leading the life of unaccompanied refugees saying,

Most people who come here are minors, because they know that they must be able to come here and get the right support. If they come here when they are under the age of 18, they usually have been on the run since they were 14–15 years old, and then, when they come here, they have been locked up as well in asylum centres with lots of people and have got different bids to stay or not to stay. So, they have not been able to establish firm roots anywhere, and then they suddenly have to, when they are of age, then they are told to stay only until they have finished studying. And how should you be able to study, if you have no good accommodation, how to cope when you also have to mess with the Migration Agency, thus I understand that it is difficult. You [they] are in such a vulnerable situation

General uncertainty after rejection, lack of knowledge and experience, and lack of smooth transitions, all this leads the unaccompanied adolescents to look for the support of civil society actors. The administrator of Spånga-Tensta district highlighted the limbo state of the children:

If we take unaccompanied minors for example, it has been a limbo with these children. There have been those who have not been granted a residence permit and have been told to be expelled, [...] they have not had access to any public accommodation actually, because they have not known if they should be sent home or not. So many times, many of them have ended up in such places, where either the Migration Board or NGOs, for example, Stadsmissionen in Stockholm, supported many of them with temporary hotel accommodation.

The situation is confirmed in other research in an interview with a representative of the Children's Rights organisation:

Abdi, aged 18, is from Afghanistan, but has lived most of his life in Iran. He has been in Sweden for more than four years. He received a rejection to his asylum application a year ago. Abdi contacted us one day before he turned 18 in a panic, since the social services said that, as of his birthday, he could not continue living at the residence he was living at and the Swedish Migration Agency gave notice that he will no longer receive money from them. He did not understand anything. Before his 18th birthday, he had a very good housing situation, he did well at school and he had a contact person who was important to him, a whole support system, and suddenly overnight everything disappeared. On his birthday, when we met the social services together with Abdi to get an urgent review, the administrators were clear that they had received explicit directives from their city district not to grant financial assistance. When he asked where he should go tonight, they referred him to the church. Now, Abdi lives around with different friends and tries to get by.

¹⁰⁷ MSF, 2018, 'Life in Limbo', p.18

¹⁰⁸ SMA, 'Frågor och svar om uppehållstillstånd för gymnasie studier'.

*Although Abdi neither has a secure housing situation nor knows anything about his future, he is holding on in school and his training is important for him. We have appealed the decision and are awaiting a ruling.*¹⁰⁹

The literature review shows that the treatment of the UAMs varies in different municipalities. Thus, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child noticed that the 290 municipalities respond to children's needs in their own different ways which lead to inequitable access to support and services for children and has criticised Sweden for inconsistent practices on how to safeguard the rights of children¹¹⁰. Other research highlighted that the treatment can vary even within different city districts in the same municipality. Especially it relates to the social services processing the applications for emergency assistance from young people who have turned 18, while a rejection decision has gained legal force:

*In several cases, the social services have not chosen to accept the children's applications, with the motivation that 'you will get a rejection anyway', and in other cases, the application has been rejected with the motivation that the support would not be permanent (in cases where the applicant previously received support), and in yet other cases, the social services referred to the Swedish Migration Agency for support. According to SALAR, however, everyone who is in a municipality, even those with a rejection decision, has a right to apply for assistance and have their application reviewed*¹¹¹.

The transition from childhood to adulthood in practice does not go as fast and smoothly as in the legal documents. Many UAMs spoke well of their life and the support they received while living in the accommodation for minors. However, psychologically and practically they are still not ready to establish their life independently once they reach 18 years old. Numerous adolescents refer to the period as rather shocking, mentioning the challenging conditions they have to be preoccupied with when suddenly losing all the support they had, especially when receiving a rejection:

In this current situation, it gives me a really bad experience, worse than in Iran, I don't have any place to live. I can study, but I don't have any kind of housing or a stable income to support myself (Afghan man, Age group 18-26, No.59) .

While I was under 18 they took care of me really well, but once I turned 18, they left me alone and they did not care about me being here, and I have experienced those who got asylum approved got the state support and it took care of them, but those who got denied, they are left alone (Afghan man, Age group 18-26, No.47).

[...] they [Migration Agency] gave attention to my needs, [...] we were placed in a minor camp, when I was under 18, they took care of me a lot in the camp, but after I became 18, an adult, they forced me to leave the camp and to live on my own, and there was no attention paid to me after (Afghan man, Age group 18-26, No.59) .

For some the decision of rejection may be unbearable resulting in the feeling of being desperate, hopeless and doomed. The report of Doctors without Borders emphasises that the mental state of the UAMs may lead to suicidal thoughts and actions, which require emergency psychiatric care:

*Many feel like they have no control over their own lives. One of the youngsters said that the only decision he had control over was when he would die.*¹¹²

Some minors underlined the importance of support by legal guardians they had. It should be considered that the loss of a significant and supportive adult may trigger the children who left or lost their parents during their journey.

¹⁰⁹ Länsstyrelsen Stockholm, Report 2016: 28, p. 25

¹¹⁰ Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2015. *Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Sweden*, para. 11.

¹¹¹ Länsstyrelsen Stockholm, Report 2016: 28, p. 26.

¹¹² MSF, 2018, 'Life in Limbo', p.18

We had a guardian when I was a minor and he assisted me in all ways, but now when I am over 18 and my decision was negative, my guardian was taken away from me, so I lost that line of support and now I have to deal with it all myself (Afghan man, Age group 18-26, No.48).

The testimonies confirm that the transition of unaccompanied minors to being legally adults does not automatically make them mature and independent. Moreover, the settings they were growing in cannot be considered psychologically enabling. Initially, as it is remarked by the UN Committee, they 'are in a state of particular vulnerability, because of their age, their distance from home and often their separation from parents or carers'¹¹³. The situation does not change dramatically after reaching the age of adulthood.

¹¹³ UN Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (CMW), Joint general comment No. 3 (2017) of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and No. 22 (2017) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the general principles regarding the human rights of children in the context of international migration, CMW/C/GC/3-CRC/C/GC/22, 16 November 2017, paras. 49-50.

3.5. A Welcoming culture: Encounters with officials, civic actors and the host society

The concept of a welcoming culture (*Willkommenskultur*) was originally used in Germany as a way to promote positive attitudes in society at large and manage the mass migration of refugees in 2015 and provide people arriving in Germany with positive reception measures. The discourse of 'a welcoming culture' was adopted by and spread across other European countries, and it implies promoting an inclusive attitude among government officials, civil society actors, cultural and educational institutions and host society on the whole towards refugees and all foreigners. Doris Akrap in her opinion article in *The Guardian* (6 September 2015) underlines the politics and poetics behind the construction of the term: *Willkommenskultur* 'is a word not born of custom but created to establish one.' Furthermore, she draws our attention to whether this promotion of 'hospitality' will remain just as 'a slogan or a doormat again' when faced with the real-world problems. In this respect, it is highly important to read and analyse the experiences of asylum seekers in their encounters with authorities, civil society organisations and in their interaction with the members of the host society during the reception period. We believe that the 'first' impressions, the 'first' experiences form a path in establishing a new life in a new country without ignoring the role of structural barriers and other discursive factors.

3.5.i. Encounters with officials

The interviews reveal different sorts of experiences among the refugees concerning their encounters with officials at the migration offices and other public authorities. The narration of these experiences are important to understand their own perceptions of a welcoming culture. These narratives construct self and other. They are both substantive and subjective, and represent and reproduce multiple subjectivities.

I did not feel welcome, nor do I now. Persons who are working there are doing their jobs basically (Syrian man, Age group 27-50, No.9).

Indeed, the first encounter with the public officers may provoke feelings of insecurity among asylum seekers. Some respondents feel intimidated during their interviews with Migration Agency officers:

...it was not a nice experience. I feel like they spoke to me as if I had done something wrong. They did not believe me; they always thought I was lying. They didn't understand me (Afghan woman, Age group 27-50, No.58).

Here it is important to recognise the presence of power-dynamics in the encounter with officials. By requesting asylum in Sweden, asylum seekers may feel a certain inferiority or dependency and therefore enter the interview from a place of discomfort and insecurity. This may influence their perception of feeling welcomed by the host society.

A number of respondents mentioned that the migration officers were not able to accommodate their specific needs or requests, such as the need for an interpreter, or specific housing requirements that would ensure their safety or satisfy health needs of the individuals.

I had surgery in my head when I was small, so I get stressed quicker than normal people. So, one time I went to the migration and asked them for a separate room and I explained my situation and there was an available room. They said we can't help you and you need to prove your medical condition. That was after 15-20 days and I couldn't do it myself (Syrian man, Age group 27-50, No.40).

The testimony of a Syrian woman illustrates the importance of feeling 'understood' and being received with a 'positive attitude'.

... for example, I don't know the language at all and I don't speak English, and she is a staff member in the [migration office]. She knows Arabic, but she's not willing to

communicate in Arabic with you. I felt that she's racist or so. Her attitude wasn't nice (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.26).

Regardless of whether the responsible officer was in fact able to speak Arabic or not, the Swedish asylum policy specifies that a competent interpreter has to be present during the interview. The Syrian woman mentions her feeling of being dismissively attended to, when she was faced with the officer's 'unwillingness' to accommodate to her language needs. As an attempt for giving meaning to this experience she identifies the officer's position as being 'racist'.

At the same time, it is important to bear in mind the subjectivity of these accounts. In some cases, the perceived discrimination could have very trivial reasons, unrelated to the bias of public officials. For instance, the capacity of municipalities to provide adequate reception, or the availability of competent interpreters may be one of the main reasons for asylum seekers' negative perception of reception.

In a different example, the same individual had two different experiences on two different occasions about his reception. After receiving a rejection and applying for the second time, he received a more adequate reception.

Yes, we got rejection. When we appealed, we got more support, we got apartment and it was much better (Afghan woman, Age group 27-50, No.54).

Nevertheless, some individuals express gratitude, feeling like they have been treated 'professionally', and 'correctly' and some of the respondents would even say that they understand the difficulties that arise for the public authorities as they try to manage a large number of asylum applications and specific needs.

The employees [of the migration office] were nice... I told you [earlier] there were large numbers of refugees, so they couldn't look after each and every one (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.33).

Asylum seekers with adequate English skills seemed to be at an advantage as they were able to circumvent the language barrier. A young Syrian man, with good competence in English, describes the asylum process as easy and comfortable which led him to feel warmly welcomed in Sweden:

The first interview was very good and the people were very helpful and I did not find any difficulty, especially since I speak English. It was easier than for those who did not speak English (Syrian man, Age group 27-50, No.6).

The situation after rejection is associated with intense stress in the refugee experience due to the way they are treated by the Migration Agency officials. Financial allowance ends with the rejection of the asylum claim or deportation, without a smooth transition. In this period from the rejection of the asylum claim and deportation or an alternative resolution of the legal status, newcomers are put in a very vulnerable position. In some cases, the situations are extreme.

...we do not get any benefits, not even 1 Krona, they have kicked us out of the apartment, the immigration [officer] came and threw away all of our stuff outside the flat and they said leave the flat [...] We don't have any money, any place to live, it is very difficult. ... [participant crying] we don't have anything to eat. People are helping us for 20 Krona or 30 Krona for food. I am human, don't I need any help or any food or any place to live? From immigration, the woman came inside my apartment and threw away all of my stuff and said you are not allowed to live in Sweden (Afghan woman, Age group 27-50, No.54).

Encounters with officials are the first introduction to the host country that refugees have. From the inferior position of applying for asylum and being homeless, they show a high level of sensitivity and vulnerability. Moreover, their mental state is over-occupied with anxiety regarding the unstable future. Therefore, the first interaction with state officials has a significant effect on their

perception of safety and further openness to cooperate. The responsibility of officials in these interactions requires a certain awareness of these issues.

3.5.ii. Civil society actors and the concept of ‘a welcoming culture’

Recent reports and research concerning Swedish migration and integration governance have noticed the role played by civil society actors and volunteers (Larsson and Arora-Jonsson 2019, Hansen 2018, Sayaka Osanami Törngren, Klara Öberg, and Righard 2018, Narbutaitė Aflaki 2019, Salmonsson and Hedlund 2019, Myrberg 2019). There are examples of how public authorities are unable to provide the basic needs and social services that refugees need in the initial phase of integration. This ‘gap’ is currently filled by the efforts of CSOs and FBOs, and these voluntary actors play a crucial role in catering for social needs among socially vulnerable groups and individuals (Ideström and Linde 2019).

In a recent book of Emma McCluskey who has made an ethnographic study of migration reception in the region of Skåne, Sweden, she notes that the increased efforts of voluntary actors and individuals are extremely fragile. She argues that the increase of volunteerism further adds to the notion of the myth of Swedish exceptionalism and a role model for the world. A good citizen of Sweden would thus try to be welcoming and act in solidarity with those in need. This, she argues, however only increases a gap between ethnic Swedes as being and doing good, and migrants as being bad and reliant on the goodness of Sweden and Swedish citizens. This in turn accentuates the need for migrants to display gratitude and deservedness. She notes in her field study that when these two subjectivities are not performed, previously goodhearted and volunteering individuals become increasingly critical or even hateful towards migration and migrants, and orient themselves towards far-right political parties and opinions (McCluskey, 2019). In the paper by Larsson and Arora-Johnson who investigates integration in rural areas, they note that collaboration between local authorities and local civil society actors is driven from contestation and discontent on behalf of the civil society actors. Collaboration and local networks are thus more concerned with amending contesting views and characterised by a great level of pragmatism. The presence and efforts of civil society actors and volunteers are thus more complex than mere collaboration with public authorities.

At a practical level, public authorities, like the SMA, rely on the activities of NGOs in order to make the waiting time meaningful. The SMA explicitly states on its website that newcomers should reach out to ‘voluntary organisations’ for language classes and other activities. These voluntary organisations are crucial in filling gaps that the state is not able to provide and create a general welcoming atmosphere for migrants. When it comes to general services related to health and shelter, the Swedish Red Cross and the Swedish Church are the two biggest and most important civil society organisations supporting the state. Many other smaller organisations focus on providing legal advice that can be hard to access. For example, the Swedish Refugee Law Centre and *Sociala Missionen* offer free legal advice to asylum seekers.

A nurse working in the medical service in Boden, a small Swedish city, affirms the important involvement of non-governmental organisations:

The Red Cross is very active, as is the church and the school. We have groups of 7-8 people of the same nationality, where we discuss various issues in each of our meetings. We meet five or six times and discuss various things.

In the interviews with migrants, many mentioned the Swedish Red Cross as one of the main organisations that helped them upon their arrival in Sweden:

It was the only organisation I saw during that period. It worked with us and helped us during my journey during my emigration from my country Syria to Sweden (Syrian man, Age group 27-50, No.6).

Indeed, one of the key activities of the Swedish Red Cross is to help migrants and refugees during reception. Apart from basic needs, health services and legal advice the Swedish Red Cross also

facilitates the involvement of newcomers with Swedish society¹¹⁴, by organizing language meet-ups and social activities. These activities are quite important for generating a feeling of solidarity and a positive experience of a welcoming culture.

I would place the Red Cross in a position that links us to society and it's very amazing and everywhere they provide positive activities. They have a positive role and projects and they have the potential to serve people (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.23).

During the reception phase, migrants see the opportunity to learn the local language as a great service and a possibility to get a head start. Since in the early period of reception, asylum seekers do not have access to the government-funded SFI programme yet, most CSOs try to cater for the demand for language classes through language cafes. These are important to bring together established Swedes with newly arrived asylum seekers, and establish a first base of trust. A woman from Syria, interviewed in the early reception period, seems keen to start getting involved through the activities organised by the Red Cross.

Like learning the language, Red Cross, and such social projects. Integration and language at the same time (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.23).

Although the Swedish Red Cross has 270 reception centres for migrants all over Sweden, not all centres provide the same services and thus not all newcomers are able to access its services equally. Other NGO organisations tend to be present in the urban areas such as the start-up 'Kompisbyrån'¹¹⁵, that brings 'native Swedes' and 'new Swedes' together. Especially when it comes to access to language classes, many newcomers refer to the discrepancy between urban and rural areas.

They have, but they are not so active over there, because it's a small place, (...) but yes in another city they have classes that you can go to and learn (...) (Afghan man, Age group 27-50, No.50).

Accommodation centres are often located far from the reception services, and demand a certain form of independent mobility from the asylum seekers. The isolated location of the accommodation could also be associated with a general feeling of disconnect and inability to access Swedish society.

(...) I asked where I could learn the language, they told me there was nothing here in the camp area. I tried from the first day to look for a place to learn Swedish but they put me at the camp in Surahammar in a distant place, and if I would go to Västerås to learn the Swedish language in the Red Cross, it will take about two hours and that is tough (...) (Syrian man, Age group 27-50, No.3).

In general, newcomers may be looking for a place to find a first human connection and solidarity. This is where churches and religiously affiliated groups may play an important role. In fact, between 2015 and 2016, 8 out of every 10 churches in Sweden dedicated a large part of their activities to supporting asylum seekers¹¹⁶. They also perform an important lobbying role. As noted earlier in previous research, the Swedish church has an outspoken aim to work towards integration and to be a welcoming actor in Swedish society. Especially, since religion may have played an important role for newcomers in their home country. However, some respondents expressed concerns about the lack of access to the places representing the religion they belong to. A woman who was generally struggling with 'a colder environment and social life' in Sweden, mentions that:

¹¹⁴ <https://www.ifrc.org/en/what-we-do/where-we-work/europe/swedish-red-cross/>

¹¹⁵ <https://www.kompisbyran.se>

¹¹⁶ CEAR, Swedish Report 2019.

My kid asks me if he can go to the mosque but there's no mosque here in this city. He saw his friends going to church and he wanted to go to the mosque (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.24)

Some refugees find comfort and support by joining and participating in religious activities. It is not surprising to see that religious associations could be a strong facilitator and alternative route to integration.

We met Swedish people. Every Sunday we go to church to meet people and do activities. Songs and celebrations. I'm open-minded I can go anywhere. In less than two weeks I made good friends with my neighbour. She gave her house key when she travelled abroad. She asked me to stay at her place (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.10).

They seem to especially appreciate the ability to 'make friends' and interact with the host society. Another issue the Swedish Red Cross and the Swedish Church have tapped into is the lack of mental health care. The Swedish Red Cross organises treatment centres for refugees and other migrants who have suffered trauma linked to torture, armed conflict or dangerous migration journeys. Although there were no asylum seekers interviewed who had taken part in these specific activities, it can be concluded that there was a general need for psychological assistance, as many of the interviewed asylum seekers mentioned the stressors related to the asylum procedure.

The list of non-governmental organisations and citizen initiatives that facilitate the reception process of asylum seekers in Sweden goes way beyond the ones mentioned above. Some already pre-existing institutions like churches and schools such as the folk high schools (ex. Alma Folkhögskolan) simply adapted their existing practices. Other initiatives developed as grassroots initiatives where citizens simply mobilised through different means, usually via social media. This helped to create a welcoming environment and the efforts were valued by newcomers.

Volunteering is very good. It's very sweet that there's volunteering and they're cooperating with refugees (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.23).

The most important task filled by CSOs and that public authorities were not able to provide during reception, was human contacts and a dignified reception created from a feeling that their humanity is recognised. A young Syrian man describes how he was received by volunteers from the Red Cross.

Personally, I was helped by someone who adopted me as a musician and they were fans of this subject and extended a helping hand to me, unlike other organisations such as the Immigration Office or the municipality. They were talking to me in terms of humanity. (Syrian man, Age group 27-50, No.6).

3.5.iii. Experiences with 'welcoming culture'

The large number of refugees Sweden received in late 2015 and its aftermath, revealed a number of potential and real tensions in the welfare state and the egalitarian ideas on which it had been built. It was clear that the large influx of refugees did lead to increased pressure on the public and civil sectors, in particular in the reception phase.

In theory the SMA and the municipalities work together with the Country Administrative Board to ensure an effective and efficient welcoming process. In particular after the crisis of 2015, this organisation became essential.

We mediate between the state and its directives and the municipalities which will receive these people in practice - how many will be received, where they will live, health, societal orientation, Swedish, employment and so on.

They involve making the reception of those that come to our country more effective, making sure that they learn good and relevant Swedish as soon as possible, helping them supplement their skills according to their competence and making sure that they eventually

have good opportunities to find employment –not just in any job but also in the right one (SE_Meso_Interview no.5).

From one of the asylum seeker's perspective, there are indeed some limits to the Swedish reception system:

At state level, it has an infrastructure that is very expensive for newcomers, but it is very inefficient. For example, the amount of money allocated to all work related to reception and resettlement is quite considerable but its efficiency and routines use are bad. Another example is the job centre which is supposed to be to help find a job. But its work is limited to providing a monthly report on his follow-up to 60 people and talk to them. I cannot believe that there is a person who will undertake to find work for nearly 60 people and look at their certificates and competence. This system may be good for only a few people, but it is very bad for the large numbers that came. The result was that a man with a doctorate and a relative of my mother were treated in the same way. This has not changed so far and they have tried in several ways to support that issue, such as the Lots (Pilot) programs, but they have failed. And the reason in my opinion is ... the lack of adequate supervision and therefore it was exploited by the private sector which took over the system and which is only interested in material gain. This was worse. In addition, there is a lack of Swedish awareness of foreigners, who cannot all be categorised in the same way. This is why they treated holders of a doctorate and others in the same way without looking at the opportunities and this is also one of the reasons for failure, while Germany, for example, has an evaluation system (Syrian man, Age group 27-50, No.42).

The inefficiency of government reception programmes is also reflected in the asylum seekers' testimonies. Mental pressures and negative experiences during the reception period can largely be linked to lengthy waiting periods for processing their asylum applications which result in turn in feelings of uncertainty.

They are good people, basically, but their job takes a long time, their decisions take a long time, and I don't think it should be like that. I didn't expect that (Afghan man, Age group 50+, No.60).

A public officer from the county administrative board, explains, that the inefficient reception process cannot simply be explained by the large number of newcomers to Sweden, but was also due to administrative and bureaucratic burdens.

Many people say, 'Oh, a lot of refugees are coming to Sweden'. How does a refugee come to Sweden? You have twelve months and 26 municipalities. How many have come during January? One family of four – two children and two adults. (...) In the span of a year, these would be very few people if you divided them equally among the municipalities. (...) Already now, you have wasted half a year to gather enough people to offer Swedish classes. In six months, a doctor can learn very good Swedish (SE_Meso_Interview no.5).

Slow administrative procedures prolong asylum seekers' stay in limited reception conditions surrounded with the feeling of uncertainty about their future life in their new country [Sweden]. The protracted reception prevents most of asylum seekers enjoying the 'bigger' opportunities, usually connected with a residence permit as this is the ritual to end the passage of uncertainty in their lives. The last four digits of the 'Swedish personal identity number (*personnummer*) –which is unique for each individual– is perceived as the only magic key to enter into the Swedish system. Protracted reception takes a toll on their experience of 'a welcoming culture'. Lacking access to the labour market and educational opportunities asylum seekers tend to feel pessimistic and marginalised.

If you want to study Swedish as a second language (SFI) you have to apply, you can wait one, two or even three months. For a personal ID number, you have to wait two or three months, and for an ID card you wait a month! Residence permit I was fed-up of waiting! [August] 2015 they took my fingerprints and they gave me my permit by [December] 2016,

so that is a very long time to wait! In addition, doing nothing just wasting my time and efforts, you get exhausted (Syrian man, Age group 27-50, No.44).

The experience of a 'satisfactory' reception may vary depending on individuals' expectations about the services provided. Some asylum seekers mentioned that they received everything they needed:

They provided me with everything during the period of examining the asylum decision. They gave me a monthly grant, a housing allowance, courses in Swedish and medicine, all of which were free (Syrian woman, Age group 50+, No.28).

Both from the beginning of my entry into Sweden and the way they took care of the cleanliness, warmth and interest in providing food, they provided me with everything (Syrian man, Age group 27-50, No.6).

The feelings of uncertainty and fear of deportation among refugees increased in relation to the Swedish government's restrictive policy measures introduced in late 2015 and early 2016. Especially the possibility of deportation affected the general feeling of being 'welcome'.

I was scared because I thought they might not accept us and deport me back to my country (Afghan woman, Age group 27-50, No.58).

Post-migration stressors associated with the fear of deportation impacted on their perception of the 'new country/society/system' and contributed to the development of pessimistic views on their future and their existence. For example, a young asylum seeker enrolled in a high school was forced to take a different route in her life after she and her family received a rejection of their applications.

They took away my asylum seeker card, I am going to school but they want me to leave the country. For five months they did not pay anything to me, I do not have any money, I am staying with my parents. They said, I have to leave the apartment because I am not allowed to live with my family. Because you are over 18 and I do not have any place to live, they said, it is a small apartment and I have to leave the country. Now I am living in Sweden illegally (Afghan woman, Age group 18-26, No.55).

Asylum seekers show a great level of anxiety resulting in psychosomatic symptoms caused by the scope of anticipated problems, especially in the case of rejection.

I faced many psychological [problems] and it is because mostly you don't know what will happen to you in the future. Either I will get the permit or not. If I get deported from here where can I go? And I can't go back to my home country, and I am away from my family and I don't have any support from them, and I don't have anyone to share my pain with, and how can I support my family? This problem and difficulties cause pressure and illness (Afghan man, Age group 18-26, No.47).

The pressure resulting from a rejection of the asylum claim is immense as asylum seekers must decide to either appeal the rejection or (in case they have done so already) live a life in clandestinely. The change in the asylum law since 2016, concerning financial allowances and free housing after rejection and failure to voluntarily return, puts them in an extremely vulnerable position. Suddenly they are deprived of basic needs. This is the most extreme case of asylum seekers feeling explicitly unwelcome in Sweden.

Most pressures and negative experiences during the reception period result from the uncertainties linked to the asylum decision, thus, some even express they would have preferred a clear rejection rather than long periods of doubt.

I think it is negative because after three years of waiting and feeling afraid of deportation and rejection I got many illnesses and it would have been better if they had told us from the beginning that this is our situation and we can't offer you asylum here (Iraqi man, Age group 50+, No.45).

Apart from the long waiting time and uncertainty, the experience of 'a welcoming culture' was dependent on social trust. Lack of social trust and unfamiliar values and norms posed a significant challenge to the experience of 'a welcoming culture'. The misconceptions and cultural mismatch happen in both directions, due to prejudice in and about the host society:

Frankly, here in general, they do not accept Islam or the veil and believe that it is a symbol of terrorism, especially after the recent events, which is a mistaken idea, of course. But as a result, this prevents us from practising our religious rituals before them (Syrian woman, Age group 18-26, No.31).

If you do more research about small towns, you'd understand the mentality of these people. I lived in Stockholm and Malmö, I didn't face any racism. Swedes used to come and say hi because they got used to seeing our faces. In the small towns, they look at me and see us as strangers, like our community when there's new strangers (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.24).

I tried to say "hi" once, but they never respond... They should be more kind, that's why I don't know a lot of Swedes. There's one man, he looks decent, but he is not sociable. They are like that and we can't change them (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.24).

Some refugees relied on their own meanings and ideas about their encounter with Sweden. For instance, for some it was important just to reach the country where they can finally feel safe and not be forced to move anymore. While the feeling of 'safety' was rather intuitively perceived.

For the family I was very happy. I feel like it's okay, the trip is over (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.23).

I won't forget the feeling when I first came here. I came to Germany and my brothers told me to settle down there. There is no more need to move to another country. But I was not comfortable there. I came here and it was night. And I felt good. (...) I found safety here; what I was looking for. So that was enough for me (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.29).

There is also a significant difference among those who came through the family reunification process and those who came without having anyone in Sweden. Clearly, those who united with their families felt more comfortable both practically and mentally, than those who had to learn all written and unwritten procedures, culture and norms in a new country without any adequate support. The following quote illustrates metaphorically the difference between the above-mentioned migration experiences.

My reception was a family reception. Not state or migration office (Syrian man, Age group 27-50, No.16).

They [Swedes] are fine if I'm fine and this has never changed after coming here. Sweden is a country of love, brotherhood and tolerance, as well as a welcoming reception in general. As I like to balance things – negative relative to positive ones- I find Sweden a country that has more positives than negatives (Syrian woman, Age group 50+, No.28).

There are many factors affecting the perception of reception among newcomers, and their feelings about a welcoming culture in Sweden. There are many factors affecting these narrations: starting from reasons for migration, projection of the destination country prior to migration, the journey experience itself, encounters with officials, society, old settled migrant groups, family members and friends in a new country.

3.5.iv. Gender issues in a welcoming culture

Through migration and settlement in a new country, the role of migrant women has been placed in a transformation process. This acculturation process is assumed to empower migrant women

by introducing Swedish society's 'modern' norms and values, most importantly 'gender equality'. This has been perceived both positively and negatively in the constructed counter-narratives.

In the immigration office all the employees are women, you can see women here in many occupations that are occupied by men in Syria. (...) So, it seems that women here are more in charge/ powerful than men. In my opinion, a woman has her own role as well as a man has his own, therefore, no one is to be replaced by the other. Most of our concepts are related to the environment in which one grows up in. For example, seeing a woman driving a tractor or heading a painting workshop, is normal in Sweden, but for me it's unacceptable ... I was raised this way... that hard work is for men not women. In the context, I totally disagree with a man changing diapers or taking kids to the toilet, I can't stand this, it's a woman's job (Syrian woman, Age group 27-50, No.33).

It is important to take into account gender specific dynamics and cultural background. Different organisations working in the field of reception pointed out the cultural differences in the perception of gender roles in society. For example, the cultural background of asylum-seeking women raised in specific settings which clearly determine roles of women and men in society. This was noted as a great obstacle that may hinder their involvement in educational activities and activities aiming to promote their involvement and participation in Swedish society. A public officer working at a county administrative board points out this cultural discrepancy:

We have according to paragraphs 37 and 37A an agreement between the government and civil society and the municipalities that can ask for funding from us, so that women will be supported and will also come out and work. I think that the problem with that is that governmental institutions don't know where the problem is situated. Women's lives are influenced by many factors: their families are very important, their men's social standing is very important, their religious adherence is very important, and what her imam says and ordains, for example, has much more gravity than what the Public Employment Service says. It affects her life much more. Therefore, they might be registered somewhere and receiving aid, but in practice, they receive no education. It doesn't work. There's sometimes a willingness from the woman herself and perhaps even her man, but the social pressure they're subjected to is much stronger than the individual is (SE_Meso_Interview no.5).

Cultural resistance may take even an aggressive form:

[...] It has come to my attention that some men have called and threatened the project coordinators. Some allow their wives to go thinking that it will be just for a while, but in some cases, the women have gone further and found a job! Then [their men] call and say, 'If you call my wife again, I'm going to kill you.'

Instead of assigning such incidents to a specific culture or religion, it is more important to understand the re-production of 'masculinity' and the changing gender roles in the migration context. Looking from this perspective, reception period is a transitional *passage* where norms, values and identities are continuously negotiated. While living within the web of people from the same country, speaking the same language and sharing largely similar religion and culture provides a 'safety zone' for newcomers, it also impedes the interaction of newcomers with local host populations, and thus, becomes a source for segregation and alienation.

5. Conclusion: Challenges, prospects and policy recommendations

This report aimed to provide an explanation for the causes and implications of the restrictive turn in Swedish migration and reception policy by tracing back the formation of these policies in their historical context, and looking at their implications at the individual level by capturing asylum seekers' experiences in relation to reception policies.

Sweden's reception policy has historically been characterised by a welcoming rhetoric, favourable to the reception and integration of individuals seeking asylum, aiming to promote welfare citizenship, fostering belonging, and early inclusion into the labour market. The 1994 law on the reception of migrants, introduced after the Balkan War, and subsequent legislation on migration has been quite generous, and generally in line with EU policy directives. This welcoming rhetoric continued up until 2015, when the country started to receive around ten thousand asylum seekers weekly. This in turn, resulted in a backlash in the rhetoric around migration and consequently in its policies. The Temporary Act and Amendments to the 1994 law introduced in 2016 that limit permanent residence permits, family reunification and rights to material reception and housing after rejection of an asylum claim, illustrate a political shift away towards more restrictive reception politics. The right-wing surge after 2015, provoked an increase in xenophobia and misconceptions about the future of the Swedish welfare state, issues that were largely fuelled by right-wing rhetoric. The Swedish parties' political discourse took up the notion that reception standards in Sweden should not exceed minimum EU reception standards, putting into question the non-excludable accessibility of the Swedish welfare state.

In recent years Swedish reception policy has taken a more centralist governance route where state agencies such as SMA, CABs and PES have become the main actors in providing reception governance. In the new constellation, the role of municipalities, especially in the early phase of reception is limited to organizing the reception of UAMs and providing schooling to children. Civil society organizations are only involved in certain areas (e.g. legal advice, language courses, educational/leisure activities during waiting time). Some services such as housing were outsourced to the private sector, more extensively during the peak of the 2015 'migration crisis'. The organization of reception during the asylum application phase is mainly governed by the SMA.

Reception of newcomers is perceived by some municipalities as a 'burden' but by some municipalities as a way to overcome the problems of an aging population, depopulation of small municipalities and the consequent impacts on local welfare services. The centralised organisation of reception in Sweden could be put into question considering varying capacity and infrastructure among municipalities, creating diverse reception experiences for asylum seekers. Moreover, there is a reverse correlation between labour market and housing: in smaller remote areas there are more housing opportunities but the labour market is rather weak. Whereas in bigger cities with a larger population and the higher interest of asylum seekers, the labour market seems more attractive, while housing constitutes the main problem causing common discontent between locals, immigrants and municipalities.

The capacity of the reception system as a whole was pushed to its limits in late 2015 and caused diverse backlogs and challenges in the reception system. Mainly, it resulted in extremely long waiting times for the processing of asylum claims, lasting up to over two years. The protracted delays testified by newcomers, created both practical as well as psychological problems – such as lack of access to proper language classes and labour opportunities, uncertainty about one's legal status – thereby prolonging a 'life in limbo'.

During this extensive period, asylum seekers naturally transit from the introductory period of reception into the integration phase. Establishing social networks, learning the language, adapting to the new culture, the asylum seekers root themselves in Sweden, while not considering return or alternative destinations. This makes a negative asylum decision dramatically devastating. Fear of deportation leads to increasing number of adult refugees and unaccompanied minors living in Sweden in an irregular situation. The absence of legal status along with the lack of information about their rights in terms of access to public services have resulted in risks of physical and mental health deterioration, lack of protection and the risk of involvement in deviant activities.

As also revealed in the empirical material, housing/accommodation is one of the main problems during the reception period. Psychologically, housing is deeply connected with the idea of creating a 'new home' and thus, feeling safe. This is equally important as employment for further integration of newcomers. The majority of our respondents being settled in the municipalities' accommodation list numerous complaints and inconsistencies with the regulations of Article 18 of the Directive 2013/33/EU. Among them is being placed in shared accommodation facilities disregarding gender, age, health conditions and traumatic experience (vulnerable groups), which made them feel unsafe and being treated inhumanely. The isolated location of some facilities is associated with the problems and challenges related to the lack of infrastructure, obstacles in accessing health care services, poor representation of CSOs, and the feeling of being segregated as they are surrounded mainly by other asylum seekers. This creates the feeling of disconnection from the broader society. Notably, municipal facilities were called 'camps' by the majority of the respondents, regardless of their location. Additionally, lack of regulation on the number of people in the rooms for families resulting in deprived privacy and psychological pressure was observed as a significant shortcoming of the housing policy. Thus, we have concluded that there is a strong relationship between an asylum seeker's housing situation, mental state and feeling welcomed.

Sweden has accepted one of the largest numbers of unaccompanied minors. However, their vulnerability seems to be underestimated. Health care officials simply affirm that there is a lack of relevant professionals specialised in working with traumatised children. Additionally, the housing situation does not fully respect the needs of the children and in some cases causes their re-traumatisation.

UAMs transitioning into adulthood continue to lack accommodation, despite new regulations allowing them to prolong their housing facility for the time of their education in Sweden. Cases of the missing UAMs and young adults are relatively low, however, the reasons for disappearance deserve higher attention. In most cases, it is associated with a lack of legal knowledge (poor guardian's consultancy) and fear of deportation. The special training and voluntary basis of the work of guardians of the UAMs could be reconsidered and improved.

The perception of a welcoming culture is largely dependent on individual experiences and the circumstances of the asylum seekers. It was observed that one of the defining differences in feeling welcomed and supported is associated with the way asylum seekers came to Sweden. The reunification with relatives eases the process of arrival both psychologically and practically. Those who live with relatives already settled in Sweden are in a better position than those lacking this network support. Consequently, those supported (and empowered) by a family/friend network face fewer obstacles with Swedish public services and tend to feel more welcomed. Whereas those who come to Sweden without having anyone in the country and live in shared accommodation facilities, manage asylum procedures and study the Swedish culture's peculiarities all alone, feel more stressed and overwhelmed with the asylum process. As was stated earlier, reception is experienced differently by individuals depending on their resources. These include but are not limited to financial means but most importantly involve family and social support, mental health, legal knowledge, level of education and strong resilience. In short, the reassurance that there is access to opportunities for improvement in any situation.

Cultural differences also challenge the experience of reception, especially when it comes to the perception of and expectations from 'health care' services. Indeed, the cultural discrepancy

disrupt the efficiency of health assessment: The Swedish healthcare system is oriented towards more independent self-care and insistently expecting this kind of attitude from newcomers. Whereas the cultural and religious background of newcomers requires a more attentive approach and sometimes brings challenges in the verbalisation of their problems (gender and taboo-charged matters). It is important to increase awareness among healthcare personnel of the cultural differences and consider the elaboration of more culturally-sensitive practices, since the misunderstanding in interaction may lead to somatic and mental health deterioration.

Civil society organisations played an increasingly important role since 2015, providing support in the reception system where the state and municipalities were unable to do so. In 2017, the role of CSOs is formalised with an agreement, and some of the SMA's tasks for providing meaningful activities for asylum seekers during reception handed over to NGOs. The range of activities is from leisure to legal consultancy. Moreover, grassroots initiatives and CSOs organised by asylum seekers to support new arrivals constitute an important part of the civil society contribution. The importance of support of CSOs along with FBOs was recognised and underlined by many respondents. However, some difficulties were also observed in equal distribution of venues and thus in equal access to their services around Sweden.

When it comes to reception policy the Swedish governing model is inclusive. Local authorities, civil society actors and all relevant public and private actors are consulted in the preparation phase of a new law and provision services of reception. The governance model underlines the importance of cooperation and coordination in public policymaking. There is no policy divergence in the implementation of reception policies, but a variation in the implementation practices, leading to the numerous shortcomings. This complicates smooth access of asylum seekers to reception services.

Policy Recommendations

- The issue that needs most attention in Swedish reception policy is housing. Especially, the standards at accommodation centres should be carefully monitored in order to protect basic human rights of asylum seekers. In general, the minimum space per person at accommodation centres should be increased in order to respect the individual's right to privacy and protect her/his resilience and mental health.
- It is highly important to increase safety measures, especially for vulnerable refugees and handle cases of harassment experiences during the reception phase more strictly.
- Moreover, eligibility for safe housing should be extended for individuals with experiences of trauma and with critical mental health issues, and this criterion should be included in the initial vulnerability assessment.
- Accommodation centres should not be placed in too isolated areas, which considerably limit asylum seekers' access to basic rights and services of reception. Alternatively, remote areas must be well-equipped in terms of infrastructure, nearness to health care services and shops, venues for meetings and leisure activities, including the presence of civil society organisation, providing community engagement and educational classes. A serious consideration should be given to increase the availability of general housing in Sweden considering the growing population.
- Culturally-sensitive and more person-centred approaches in the healthcare sector are necessary to ensure the quality of health checks and prevent the deterioration of public health.
- Increase in knowledge about rights and existing regulations in Sweden may reduce the number of missing unaccompanied minors who are experiencing a strong fear of deportation.
- Special trainings should be provided to social workers dealing with UAMs on a regular basis.

- More attention should be given to mental health and leisure/ educational activities of minors and young adults through organisation of non-formal trainings and more active involvement of youth workers with the support of NGOs, CSOs and folk high schools.
- The long waiting times for processing asylum claims are one of the main problems experienced in the reception system. Especially since many of the integration services are only accessible upon being granted a residence permit (for example, SFI). Limited access to language classes, private housing and the labour market during reception do not only take a toll on asylum seekers' psychological well-being but may also prolong their integration and successful participation in society in the long-run. Thus, more language classes and integration services should be made available even during the reception period.

Appendices

Annex 1. Coding Framework for guidance

Regulations and Policies

- EU and Int. Law (e.g. EU Directive on reception; Geneva Convention)
- National law (e.g. Asylum Seekers Benefit Act; Residence Act)
- Administrative statutes

Major Changes in Regulation between 2011 and 2017 – Mismatches

- National law not compliant with EU or international law
- Regional/municipal regulations not compliant with national law

Actors involved in Reception Policy Making

- European Union
- Int. Orgs (e.g. UNHCR, IOM)
- Federal Ministries
- Municipalities
- NGOs (e.g. Refugee Councils)

Dominant narrative in Reception Policy Making

- Abuse of procedures
- Humanitarian Crisis
- Irregular migration
- Respect for human and protection rights
- Responsibility and/or burden
- Security threat
- Solidarity

Measures/solutions envisaged in Reception Policy Making

- Harmonizing reception standards (e.g. across the EU or across several regional units in a country)
- Improving knowledge - evidence
- Enhance compliance with European or international regulations

Implementation, Practices and Experiences of Reception Housing

- Accommodation Centres (size, occupancy, catering, security)
- Decentral housing (e.g. private apartments)
- Difficulty to move from central to decentral housing

- Transaction costs (charges for accommodation or housing agent)
- Spatial Separation of vulnerable groups (e.g. women, UAMs, religious or ethnic minorities)

Early access to Education and Labor Market (prior to asylum decision)

- Access to elementary language classes
- Access to orientation classes (e.g. political and legal system as well as code of conduct)
- Working permit
- Preparatory measures for labour market inclusion (e.g. specific language classes, internships)
- Recognition of educational qualifications in the country of origin
- Access to daycare for small children
- Access to schooling (preparatory or regular classes)

Services and Allowances

- Regular monetary allowance (frequency, amount, conditions)
- Benefits in kind (e.g. clothing, furniture, books)
- Counselling (e.g. legal counselling)

Medical care

- Provision of initial health check-up
- Provision of basic medical treatment
- Provision of psychotherapeutic treatment

Encounter with administrators, civic actors and the receiving society

- Administrators (e.g. perceived to helpful/unhelpful)
- Civil Society Actors (e.g. perceived to fill gaps in the public reception system or to be supportive/paternalistic)
- General 'Welcome Culture' (e.g. experiences of being welcome and supported vs. Hostile or even violent treatment)

Annex 2. Interview questionnaire (only related to 'Reception')

Accommodation centres

- What kind of: size, occupancy, catering, security, closed/open?
- Spatial separation of vulnerable groups (e.g. Women, UAM, religious or ethnic minorities)
- Protection guidelines/standards/procedures: yes/no, what kind of, how implemented

Housing (outside accommodation centre)

- Difficulty to move from central to decentral housing
- Decentral housing (e.g. Private apartments)
- Informal settlement (staying with friends, in squats, makeshift camps)
- Transaction costs (charges for accommodation or housing agent)

Experiences (problems,)

- Lack of privacy
- Isolation
- Protection/safety/insecurity
- Hygienic situation

Early access to Education (prior to asylum decision)

- Access to elementary language classes
- Access to orientation classes
- Counselling on the recognition of educational qualifications
- Access to schooling, to university (preparatory or regular classes)
- Good practices
- Other practices

Early access to Labour Market (prior to asylum decision)

- Preparatory measures for labour market inclusion (e.g. specific language classes, internships, apprenticeships etc.)
- Access to day-care for small children

Employment/Apprenticeship/training/entrepreneurship (work of asylum seekers during procedure)

- Legal status: work permit? Formal vs. informal employment?
- The way how the job was found (own initiative, employment promotion measures, brokerage by other actors)
- Work conditions (also exploitation)
- Discrimination at work place (low wages, long hours, lack of safety, not getting salaries)
- Good practices
- Other practices

Services and Allowances

- Regular monetary allowance (frequency, amount, conditions)
- Benefits in kind (e.g. clothing, furniture, books)
- Counselling (e.g. legal counselling, social/gender counselling)

Medical care

- Health problems: mental, somatic problems, diagnosed PTSD
- In need of medical treatment: Granted? Difficult to get? Withheld
- Initial health check
- Psychotherapeutic treatment: Granted? Difficult to get? Withheld

Encounter with state, non-state-actors and the receiving society

- Administrators (state, welfare organisations, NGOs etc. perceived to be supportive/repressive)

- Security personnel
- Civil Society Actors, (e.g. perceived to fill gaps in the public reception system or to be supportive/paternalistic)

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