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Governance and the Local Integration  
of Migrants and Europe's Refugees

# Integration Governance in Sweden: Accommodation, Regeneration and Exclusion

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## Executive Summary

1. This report answers questions about how accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees is constituted as a field of policy and regulation at the national level; how these policies and regulations are interpreted and adopted in their implementation at the local level, and how this is experienced by persons who are in the asylum process, or have recently received their residence permit in Sweden.
2. The changing migration and reception regimes are import backgrounds as to how accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees is developing. Among these important changes are:
  - In November 2015 the government implemented ID control at the borders to Denmark and Germany in order to reduce the immigration of asylum seekers.
  - In March 2016 Sweden introduced a national refugee settlement dispersal scheme, the Settlement Act (*Bosättningslagen*), that makes it mandatory for municipalities to accept a specific number of refugees and to arrange for their accommodation for a period of at least two years.
  - In July 2016 the government implemented a temporary law that minimised the use of permanent residence permits in favour of temporary permits. It also minimised family reunification.
3. On a policy level four accommodation pathways for asylum seekers and refugees can be identified: accommodation pathway for refugees via Facility Accommodation; accommodation pathway for refugees via Own Accommodation; accommodation pathway for unaccompanied minors, and accommodation pathways for resettled refugees.
4. The Settlement Act is not accompanied by any guidelines, and its implementation varies between municipalities, as regards, for instance, the kind of accommodation and its standards, renting costs, and the length of renting contracts. This is perceived as unfair.
5. In the municipal management, the implementation of the Settlement Act cause tensions between the refugees assigned according to the Settlement Law, other newly arrived, and homeless, three vulnerable groups in society.
6. Poor housing standards, abuse and violence in Facility Accommodation (*Anläggningsboende, ABO*) can create a push factor into Own Accommodation (*Eget boende, EBO*). This in turn can lead to homelessness and vulnerable situations for the individua



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## I. Introduction

This report is about accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees in Sweden, with a particular focus on the region of Skåne and the municipalities of Malmö and Eslöv. In contemporary Sweden housing and migration are politicised and contested issues. Housing inequality and segregation has reached new levels, and the role of public housing is now high on the political agenda. Migration, and in particular refugee immigration, has become radically politicised and outspokenly anti-immigration, as anti-immigrant opinions have gained ground into mainstream politics and media. These developments have far reaching consequences on all levels of society. In the view of this report, the introduction of a constrained refugee immigration policy from November 2015 and of a state-led dispersal scheme of refugees from March 2016 are of particular interest. Both regulations have had impact on the pressure on accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees in significant ways.

This report answers questions about how accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees is constituted as a field of policy and regulation at the national level, how these policies and regulations are interpreted and adopted in the implementation process at the local level, and how this is experienced by persons who are in the asylum process or have recently received residence permit in Sweden.

Below, we first sketch out how contemporary regulations of accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees are shaped in Sweden. In Sweden the responsibility for asylum seekers and refugees with residence permit is strictly divided; the responsibility for asylum seekers is with the national government, while the responsibility for refugees with residence permits is with the local authority. Here, we also give a brief background to the development of this organisation. Furthermore, we refine the scope of the report and describe the research methodology.

The analysis is divided into three parts. Drawing on regulations and their administrative logic. The first part outlines four alternative accommodation pathways through the asylum process and during the first period of residence as a refugee in Sweden. The second part describes and discusses how housing for refugees is handled at regional and local levels, and the third how accommodation is experienced by asylum seekers and refugees. Empirical focus in the second and third, is in parts of Malmö and Eslöv, two municipalities in the county of Scania (*Skåne*), the most southern region in Sweden.

### I.1 The governance of accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees

In general, increased numbers of asylum seekers and refugees fuels political and popular debates about refugee reception. These debates tend to be biased towards 'the burden' of receiving refugees into 'our' society. In part the issue is about how many refugees should be accepted into Sweden; how 'the refugee burden' should be shared between countries, and in part, where in the country refugees should settle down; how 'the refugee burden' should be shared between regions and municipalities. This was the case as the number of asylum applications peaked in the early 1990s due to the Balkans War, and it was again the case when asylum applications peaked in the mid-2010s due to the Syrian Civil War, together with other armed conflicts.



In response to the growing numbers of asylum seekers that entered Sweden in 2015, the government and the opposition sat down to discuss how the situation could be changed, and on 23 October 2015, they presented the *Agreement about interventions due to the refugee crisis*<sup>1</sup>. This involved several restrictions on the refugee immigration policy, including a tightening of the asylum application pathway and access to permanent residence permits, but also a widening of the resettlement pathway. This was the first step of a number of decisions that have drastically changed immigration policy for refugees to Sweden. On 11 November 2015 the government issued temporary ID controls at the border<sup>2</sup>, primarily on the borders to Denmark and Germany, and on 20 July 2016 the grounds for asylum and family reunification were reduced to correspond with EU minimum levels<sup>3</sup>. Both regulations are temporary, but are both still in place<sup>4</sup>. In addition, in November 2015 the government commissioned a governmental inquiry, The Reception Inquiry (*Mottagandeutredningen 2015:02*), to oversee and propose a reform of the reception and settlement of asylum seekers and newly arrived refugees and their families. The inquiry report, *An orderly reception – a joint responsibility for fast integration or repatriation*<sup>5</sup> was presented in March 2018 and underwent public consultation until November the same year. A government bill has not yet been published (March 2019).

The immigration, reception and integration regimes for refugees are in flux, with far-reaching consequences for accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees. Here we shall describe the current regulation of accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees, and give a background to current controversies and developments. In this we focus on legal pathways for asylum, free and dispersal schemes for settlement, accommodation for unaccompanied minors, and the role of civil society in this.

## 1.2 Changing immigration pathways

There are two immigration pathways for refugees to Sweden. One is as an asylum seeker and the other as a resettled refugee. An asylum seeker is a person who register an asylum application after having entered the country. During the asylum investigation, the person can stay in the country. If a positive decision is reached, the person will receive a temporary or a permanent residence permit. After a negative decision, the person will, in principle, have no right to stay in the country<sup>6</sup>. A resettled refugee is a person in a third country who is selected by the UNHCR for resettlement in Sweden, and after an investigation and positive decision by the Swedish Migration Agency, is transferred to Sweden. Sweden has received resettled refugees since the 1950s, but many more refugees have come through the asylum seeker pathway compared to the resettlement pathway.

The main path way for refugee immigration to Sweden has been the asylum seeker pathway. This was also the case in 2015, when approximately 163,000 asylum applications were registered. It was this comparatively large numbers of applications that encouraged the government to implement temporary laws that restricted

<sup>1</sup> *Överenskommelsen av insatser med anledning av flyktingkrisen* (Agreement about interventions due to the refugee crisis), see information notice on the government webpage <https://www.regeringen.se/informationmaterial/2015/10/insatser-med-anledning-av-flyktingkrisen/>

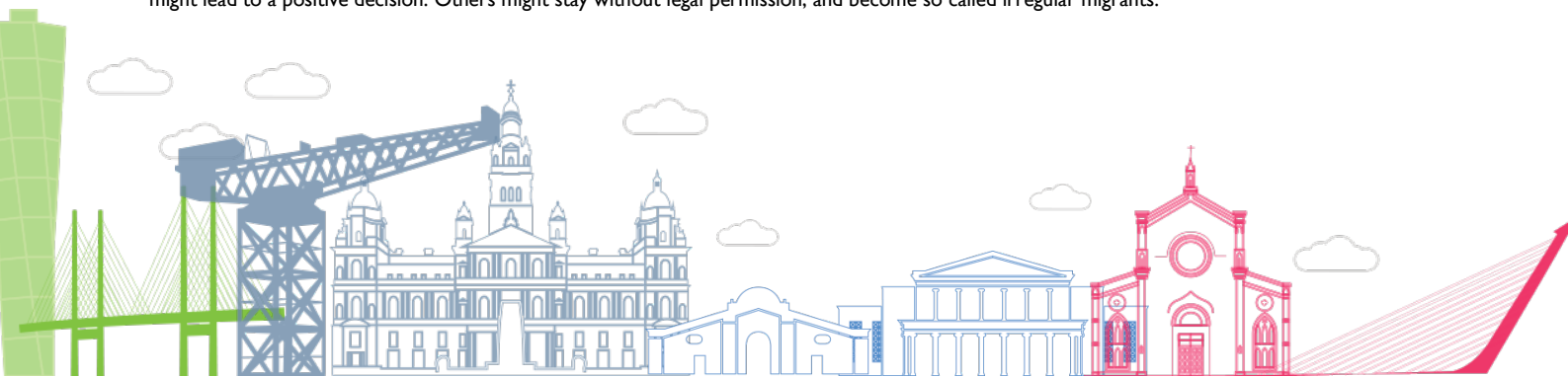
<sup>2</sup> Initially following a parliamentary decision, and from December 2015 enabled through a new law, see government bill (Prop. 2015/16:67) and regulations (SFS 2015:1073; SFS 2015:1074)

<sup>3</sup> See government bill (Prop. 2015/16:174) and regulation (SFS 2016:752).

<sup>4</sup> The temporary regulations on border control are currently valid until 11 May 2019.

<sup>5</sup> SOU 2018:22 Ett ordnat mottagande

<sup>6</sup> Some persons with a rejected asylum application will stay in the country due to impediment of enforcement (SOU 2017:84). In some cases this might lead to a positive decision. Others might stay without legal permission, and become so called irregular migrants.



refugee immigration. Before the laws were in place, from 11 November 2015, the government implemented ID controls on transports arriving to Sweden from Denmark and Germany, hindering people without IDs to enter the country. Persons (with IDs) who claimed asylum would be taken aside and transported by the police to the Migration Agency for registration of their application. This intervention led to a drastic decrease in the numbers of asylum seekers. Needless to say, this also lessened the pressure on accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees. While many accommodation facilities had been fast established, sometimes with absurd pricing, after the implementation of ID controls many closed down. The ID controls have later been replaced by temporary border passport controls. Hence, today, we have a situation where comparatively few refugees enter the country through the asylum seeker pathway. The implementation of border controls has also impacted on the geographical location of the immigration pathways. Today the majority of asylum seekers enter the country by air, arriving at Arlanda Airport outside of Stockholm, instead of entering the country in the south of Sweden, most commonly to Malmö via the bridge from Copenhagen, Denmark.

Another part of this shift of the Swedish refugee immigration policy relates to residence permits and family reunification. Sweden had a long history of granting permanent residence permits to refugees on several asylum grounds. This was an important aspect of, not only an humanitarian statement, but also its policy for refugee integration. In July 2016, the government issued a law temporarily restricting access to residence permits (SFS 2016:752). The law also limited the grounds for asylum and put restrictions on family reunification.

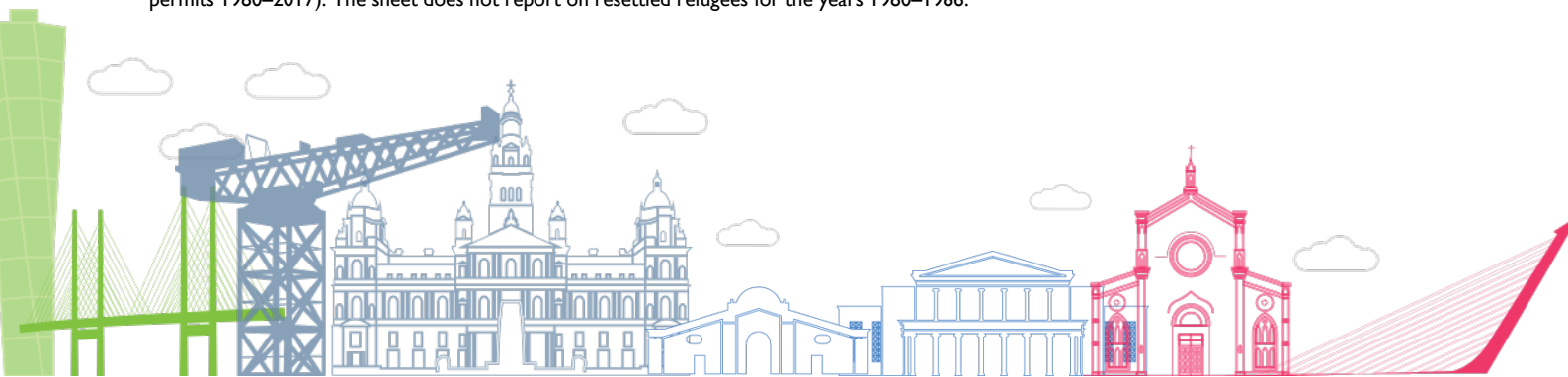
The number of resettled refugees has recently increased. The Migration Agency decided on residence permit for 4,846 resettled refugees in 2017 and 5,000 in 2018, and then agreed to give residence permit to 5 000 persons in 2019. Over the last decade the number of resettled refugees has been around 1,900 per year<sup>7</sup>, so this is an increase compared to the numbers from previous years. Yet, the resettled refugees are still outnumbered by refugees who have reached Sweden through the asylum pathway.

In contrast to asylum seekers, resettled refugees already have a residence permit when they arrive, and they arrive directly to a municipality for settlement. This means that since the asylum process takes place before the refugee enters the country, there is no pressure on accommodation facilities for asylum seekers. It also means that resettled refugees in general have no previous knowledge and experience of Swedish language or society.

### 1.3 Free settlement vs. dispersal schemes

The responsibility for asylum seekers and refugees is divided between different authorities. The responsibility for asylum seekers is with the national authority, the Swedish Migration Agency, and the responsibility of refugees with a residence permit is with the local municipality where the refugee resides. This division of responsibility was established in 1994 when the Law relating to reception of asylum seekers and others (*Lagen om mottagande av asylsökande m.fl., LMA*) (SFS 1994:137) was introduced.

<sup>7</sup> Migrationsverket, tillståndsstistik. Beviljade uppehållstillstånd 1980–2017. (The Migration Agency, residence permit statistics. Issued residence permits 1980–2017). The sheet does not report on resettled refugees for the years 1980–1986.



Starting in 1985, the strategy for the reception of asylum seekers and refugees was called the Whole-of-Sweden-Strategy (*Hela Sverige strategin*). This was a strategy aiming at dispersal of asylum seekers and refugees across the country in order to prevent their settlement in immigrant concentrated urban areas. It was also based on a rhetoric valuing the local context for the integration of asylum seekers and refugees (see government bill, Prop. 1983/84:124). It relied on voluntary agreements between the Migration Agency and the municipality, which was critiqued before its implementation. As the number of asylum seekers increased already from the mid-1980s, and more dramatically so in the early 1990s due to the Balkans War, the strategy never worked as intended; many municipalities did not agree to receive asylum seekers and refugees, and many were locked in facility accommodation provided by the Migration Agency, even after a positive decision on their residence permit. The 1994-law about the reception of asylum seekers was implemented in response to this difficult situation, and it is also this reception system that currently is under reconsideration by the *Reception Inquiry*.

The 1994-law did not only clarify the division of responsibility for asylum seekers and refugees between the Migration Agency and the municipalities, it also enabled what is called Own Accommodation (*Eget boende, EBO*) as an alternative to Facility Accommodation (*Anläggningsboende, ABO*). Facility Accommodation refers to accommodations, of various kinds, that the Migration Agency arrange for asylum seekers during the asylum process. Own Accommodation refers to various forms of accommodation that the asylum seeker arranges him- or herself during the asylum process. In the preparatory work before implementation, it was argued that this system would encourage the asylum seeker to more actively contribute to his/her integration process in the society; that it would prevent clientification of the asylum seeker (see government bill, Prop. 1993/94:94). After a positive decision on the asylum application, the Facility-Accommodation refugee will be transferred to a municipality for domicile registration in Sweden, and the Own-Accommodation refugee will be domicile registered in the municipality she/he is already residing. Unsurprisingly, and due to dynamics in the housing and labour markets, Own Accommodation has led to an uneven distribution of asylum seekers and refugees across the country, with increased concentrations in certain neighbourhoods in urban areas, including Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö (Boverket 2008). Following on this, the system has been much critiqued for worsening the situation in already deprived areas, and for delaying the integration process of the newly arrived.

Initially, the asylum seeker in Own Accommodation was eligible for a daily allowance and an accommodation allowance. The accommodation allowance was abolished in 2005 as a way to prevent asylum seekers from choosing Own Accommodation (see government bill Prop. 2004/05:28). Yet, over the period 1999–2017 the proportion of asylum seekers in Own Accommodation continued to vary between 30 and 50 per cent (SOU 2018:22, p. 179). The withdrawal of the accommodation allowance did not have any effect.

Dispersal of asylum seekers and refugees continues to be a contested issue. A new law about municipal dispersal of refugees was proposed in the government and gained opposition agreement from October 2015. In the directives to the Reception Inquiry that opened in November 2015, dispersal of asylum seekers in Own Accommodation and of refugees are lifted as particular issues to be overseen (Dir. 2015:107). Already in March 2016 the Law on reception for settlement of certain newly arrived immigrants (SFS 2016:38) was issued. Often referred to as the Settlement Law (*Bosättningslagen*), the law concerns refugees and their family members who have resided in Facility Accommodation during the asylum process and resettled refugees,



and it stipulates that municipalities are obliged to arrange reception for these refugees, including their accommodation, after an assignment (*anvisning*) from the Migration Agency. The Migration Agency calculates dispersal across the country on the regional level. It is primarily based on labour market conditions, but also the size of each region and the number of asylum seekers and refugees already residing in each locality. The number for each region is reported to the County Administrative Board (*Länsstyrelsen*) who decides how the refugee reception is to be divided between the municipalities within its county area.

The Reception Inquiry committee report proposes that municipalities shall have an increased responsibility for accommodation during the asylum process; that the Settlement Law will be applicable also during the asylum process, and that restrictions on Own Accommodation shall be implemented (SOU 2018:22). For asylum seekers who settle down in Own Accommodation in certain 'socially vulnerable areas' (*socialt utsatta områden*)<sup>8</sup> not approved by the Migration Agency, their daily allowance shall be withdrawn. However, following previous experiences it is unlikely that the withdrawal of the daily allowance will have effect on Own Housing.

#### 1.4 Unaccompanied minors

Unaccompanied minors or children refers to persons who are under the age of 18, who have no legal guardian, and who apply for asylum. The Migration Agency uses the terminology of Children without Legal Guardian (*Barn utan vårdnadshavare, BUV*). An issue regarding this group, is whether they are primarily an asylum seeker or primarily a minor. While asylum seekers are primarily the responsibility of the Migration Agency, minors are also the responsibility of the social welfare department at the municipal local authority. In 2005, the rights of unaccompanied minors as minors were strengthened due to changes in the Law about reception of asylum seekers and others (SFS 1994:137). The government bill that preceded the amendment, put much emphasis on the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (Prop. 2005/06:46).

This meant that municipal local authorities were made responsible for the reception of unaccompanied minors already through the asylum process. After registration of an asylum application in the arrival municipality (*ankomstkommun*), the Migration Agency assign minor applicants, without a legal guardian, to a reception municipality (*mottagandekommun*). The reception municipality has the responsibility for the practical reception of the minor, while the asylum process is still under the responsibility of the Migration Agency. If the minor reaches the age of eighteen, or if the Migration Agency changes the age to eighteen years or more due to age assessment, the full responsibility of the asylum seeker is transferred to the Migration Agency. Obviously, this has several implications for the person in the asylum process, including his/her accommodation arrangements.

#### 1.5 The role of civil society organizations

The understanding of the role of civil society organisations in the production of social services has shifted. Expectations on civil society organisations to contribute in the delivery of social services was initiated in the

<sup>8</sup> This is part of the January Agreement that the Social Democratic Party concluded with the Green Party, the Liberals and the Centre Party in January 2019.





1990s. While progress has been slow, following a government bill about the principles for a new policy about the civil society (Prop. 2009/10:55), two national agreements between the government, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (*Sveriges kommuner och landsting, SKL*) and civil society organisations within the field of social work and integration respectively was concluded in 2008 and 2009<sup>9</sup>. These agreements are not binding, but rather a form of an agreement of intent. In the aftermath of the so-called 'refugee crisis' of 2015, the initiative to involve civil society organisations was accentuated. On 21 January 2018 a new agreement replacing the previous one on the social field was signed. The new structure for collaboration, National organ for dialogue and collaboration between the government and the civil society (*Nationellt organ för dialog och samråd mellan regeingen och det civila samhället, NOD*) builds on the previous, but is broader spanning beyond the social field, and focussed primarily on the national level<sup>10</sup>. This has also meant that the development of collaboration on the regional and local levels are now developed by an umbrella organisation *Nätverket – Idéburen sector i Skåne (The Network – Third sector in Scania)*<sup>11</sup>.

In the fall of 2015 civil society organisations took on a central role in the first reception of asylum seekers. This has been much evaluated (e.g. SOU 2017:12). Among the questions that are frequently lifted in relation to this regard, for instance, how durable services provided by civil society organisations are, how the quality of the services can be controlled and maintained, as well as a worry about the lack of control of who the volunteers are, not least since they sometimes work with children. From the perspective of civil society organisations, relevant questions need to be asking to what extent should civil society organisations take on the work of social service production that was previously the task of public organisations; and if they enter agreements, what will then happen to the voluntary basis that is fundamental to their existence.

In the directives of the Reception Inquiry, it was argued that the involvement of civil society organisations in the asylum and integration processes of asylum seekers and refugees is unsatisfactory. The report proposes that the Migration Agency should be made responsible for the collaboration with civil society organisation as regards 'activities for a meaningful everyday and interventions to facilitate repatriation to another country' for persons residing in arrival and departure centres. It also stipulates that the Migration Agency is responsible for basic checking of the organisations that offer services and activities in their Facility Accommodations (SOU 2018:22, p. 61, 366–8).

A major obstacle for collaborations between public organisations and civil society organisations, is public procurement as regulated by law. In public procurement processes, civil society organisations cannot, at least not generally, compete with market driven organisations and companies. In order to circumvent this and enable collaboration with civil society organisations, Voluntary Sector Organisation Public Partnerships (*Idéburet offentligt partnerskap, IOP*) are sometimes implemented. This is a model for public partnership

<sup>9</sup> Överenskommelsen mellan regeringen, idéburna organisationer inom det sociala området och Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting [Agreement between the government, civil society organisation within the social field, and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions], Dnr IJ2008/02110/UF; and Överenskommelsen mellan regeringen, idéburna organisationer inom integrationsområdet och Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting [Agreement between the government, civil society organisation within the integration field, and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions ], IJ2009/2235/UF.

<sup>10</sup> Överenskommelsen om en stödstruktur för dialog och samråd mellan regeringen och det civila samhället på nationell nivå [Agreement about a support structure for dialogue and collaboration between the government and the civil society on national level], Dnr

<sup>11</sup> Information from the Agreement [Överenskommelsen] webpage, link: <http://overenskommelsen.se/news/nu-breddas-dialogen-mellan-civilsamhallet-och-regeringen/>



between civil society organisation and a public organisation, originally initiated by *Forum*, a civil society umbrella organisation, in 2010 (MUCF 2018).

## 1.6 Scope of the report and research methodology

This report answers questions about accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees in Sweden with a particular focus on the Malmö region. It sees to how the regulation is constructed, its dynamics at the level of implementation, and how this is experienced by asylum seekers and refugees. Of particular interest, is the role of civil society organisations in these dynamics.

In order to enable an analysis of the dynamics at the local level and how these might vary, we selected two local contexts, the municipality of Eslöv and of Malmö. These municipalities are geographically close, but different in many aspects as we describe below. For the analyses, we have collected empirical material in the form of steering documents, statistics, interviews and field visits. We have selected central steering documents regarding housing for asylum seekers and refugees at the national level, in the region of Scania, and at the local level. Likewise, we have interviewed civil servants and case workers working with accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees at the national level (the Migration Agency, 2 persons), the regional level (The Scania County Administrative Board, 2 persons), and at the local level (in the municipalities of Eslöv and Malmö). We have, in both Eslöv and Malmö, interviewed professionals working with the reception for settlement of refugees and with homelessness (10 persons). We have also visited the Arrival Accommodation for asylum seekers in Malmö and various forms of accommodations for refugees in Eslöv and Malmö. In order to grasp the experiences of the asylum seekers and refugees, we interviewed newly arrived refugees in both municipalities (approximately 20 persons). These interviews were conducted with an authorised interpreter, all interviews were conducted face-to-face, sometimes with the interpreter present in the room and sometimes via loudspeakers on the phone. In order to reach an understanding of the role of civil society organisation we organised an Urban Living Lab together with twelve persons from eleven different organisations or networks. We have also made individual interviews with five representatives from different civil society organisations and we have participated in civil society meetings.

## 2. Accommodation pathways in the asylum and settlement process

The accommodation pathway for asylum seekers and refugees depends on a number of intersecting factors, including contextual circumstances such as dynamics in housing market, formal and informal support structures, as well as the legal categorisation and the agency of the individual asylum seeker or refugee. We shall here outline the formal pathways as regulated by law, policies and administrative instructions. However, and as we describe in the subsequent sections, in their implementation and in the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees, these pathways are not as straight forward as described here. Before outlining the pathways, we shall need a short clarification of the terminology.

An asylum seeker is a person who has applied for asylum while in Sweden. If the application is accepted, the asylum seeker becomes a refugee. A refugee is a person with a temporary or a permanent residence permit.



In Swedish administrative and policy language, the term ‘newly arrived’ is frequently used. Of particular interest here, is how it is defined within the frames of the Introduction Program as regulated through the Act about introduction for certain newly arrived immigrants (SFS 2010:197). Newly arrived here refers to refugees and their family members who have received a residence permit on grounds of family reunification. The time length of ‘new’ in ‘newly arrived’ varies with different laws, in the case of the introduction program for refugees and their families, it lasts for two years.

When a person arrives in Sweden with the purpose to claim asylum, s/he must have his/her asylum application registered with the Swedish Migration Agency (*Migrationsverket*). In the very first interview for the registration of the application, the applicant is asked if s/he is in need of accommodation. If the answer is yes, s/he will be offered a place to stay by the Migration Agency. If the person remains within the reception system, s/he will eventually, after a positive decision, be assigned (*anvisad*) to a municipality for settlement. We call this group *assigned refugees*.

If the asylum seekers has a place to live, the person will be registered at an address that s/he reports to the Migration Agency. If the person remains in this kind of accommodation, s/he will be eventually, after a positive decision, be placed (*placerad*) within the municipality s/he resides. We call this group *selfsettled refugees*. The distinction between assigned and selfsettled refugees has become increasingly important since the implementation of the Settlement Law in March 2016.

In the very first registration interview, children without legal guardian are also identified and transferred to the municipal local authorities. Here we refer to this group as *unaccompanied minors*. Finally, *resettled refugees* are persons who arrive to Sweden with a residence permit; they do not go through the asylum process in Sweden. Below we describe the ideal typical (in a Weberian sense) pathways for these four categories of refugees: assigned refugees, selfsettled refugees, unaccompanied minors and resettled refugees.

## 2.1 Accommodation pathway for assigned refugees

An asylum seeker typically arrives to the country and make a physical visit to one of the three Migration Agency Application Units (*Ansökningsenheter*) in order to have the asylum application registered. The Application Units are located in Malmö, Stockholm and Gothenburg. For instance, currently, in Malmö, part of the Migration Agency Application Unit is located together with the Migration Agency Arrival Accommodation in a building that was previously a Best Western Hotel. The former hotel reception is transformed into four reception windows. As you arrive you take a number ticket and wait for your turn. If you express a claim for asylum, the receptionist will remit you to a registration interview, which will take place on the second floor, just above the reception. You sit down in the waiting hall until a case manager will call your name. The registration interview is a rather short interview aiming only at the registration of the application. After registration the applicant will have to wait for an interview of his/her case, which might take months. It is in the registration interview that the applicant is asked if s/he has access to accommodation or not. If the answer is no, s/he will be offered to stay in the Arrival Accommodation, which is basically a full-board bed in a shared (hotel) room. Breakfast, lunch and dinner is served in the former hotel restaurant. The



applicant will receive a kit of bed linen and towels and some additional hygiene items. The residents can access a laundry room and rooms are cleaned every day.

As it is right now, the applicant will stay in the Arrival Accommodation for about a month, but this varies due to application pressures. In the fall of 2015 most people stayed only for a day or two. A month is what it takes to have the applicants 'ready-to-move' (*flyttklara*), says one of the officers we interviewed. Ready-to-move means that the asylum application is registered, and the applicant has received a card which shows that s/he is an asylum seeker (*LMA-kort*), and as such s/he has the right to stay in the country without a permit, and, lastly, the applicant has been given access to a banking account, so that s/he can receive his/her daily allowance.

Once the person is ready-to-move, s/he will be transferred to a Facility Accommodation. This can be located anywhere in Sweden, and be of various types and standards, varying from a camping cottage in the woods, to an apartment in a city. The applicant cannot choose, but it is the decision of the Migration Agency where s/he should go. The applicant is offered to stay in the Facility Accommodation during the asylum process. After a positive decision about their residence permit the person is to move on to a municipality for settlement. This is a crucial part of the reception system, and it is also a phase that has been problematic. Ideally, the period of time in Facility Accommodation after decision of residence permit, should be as short as possible. However, from time to time, this period has been extended. It is precisely this that the new Settlement Act is targeted to solve. The Settlement Act enables the Migration Agency to assign refugees in Facility Accommodation to municipalities, which are then obliged to arrange reception, including accommodation, for the refugee. It is stipulated that there should be no more than two months from decision of residence permit to settlement in a municipality. How the reception is arranged, each municipality and is discussed below varies between.

## 2.2 Accommodation pathway for selfsettled refugees

If the person applying for asylum states that s/he has arranged an accommodation on his/her own, s/he will need to report an address to the Swedish Migration Agency. It is important that the applicant receive mail sent to this address, but there is no control of the address or checks to confirm if the person actually lives there. In fact, it can even be a poste restante address, and one of our interviewees stated that this might be better, since it might increase the chance that s/he receives the postal mail. The most important mail to be sent out is information about when and where their asylum interview will take place.

When asylum seekers in Own Accommodation receive a positive decision on their asylum application, the Migration Agency will make a municipal placement (*kommunplacering*) to the municipality they are already registered in. This is a rather swift administrative procedure.

## 2.3 Accommodation pathway for unaccompanied minors

If the person applying for asylum in the first registration interview states that s/he is under the age of 18 years and is without legal guardians, the Migration Agency will transfer the person to the local authorities in the



arrival municipality so that s/he can be cared for in suitable accommodation with trained personnel. This first accommodation is typically a transit home, where the minor can stay while the arrival municipality manage the assignment to a municipality for settlement. The receiving municipality will place the minor in a accommodation suitable according to thier age and needs, it can, for instance, be a foster home or an institution (*Hem för vård och boende, HVB-hem*). This means that while the asylum application is managed by the Migration Agency, the accommodation of unaccompanied minors is organised by arrival and receiving municipalities.

Sweden has received high numbers of unaccompanied minors compared to most other European countries, and accommodation for these children is much debated. There is also quite a bit of research done on this group of asylum seekers and refugees.

## 2.4 Accommodation pathway for resettled refugees

Resettled refugees receive their residence permit while in a third country. Hence, they have no contact with accommodation in Sweden during the asylum process. After their residence permit is approved it can take time before the person can be transferred to Sweden. When municipal settlement depended on voluntary agreements from the side of the municipalities, resettlement refugees could wait for a long time before transfer to Sweden could be made. This situation has changed drastically with the Settlement Law. The Migration Agency assign resettled refugees to a municipality for settlement, and the municipality will arrange the reception of the resettled refugee as s/he arrives in Sweden.

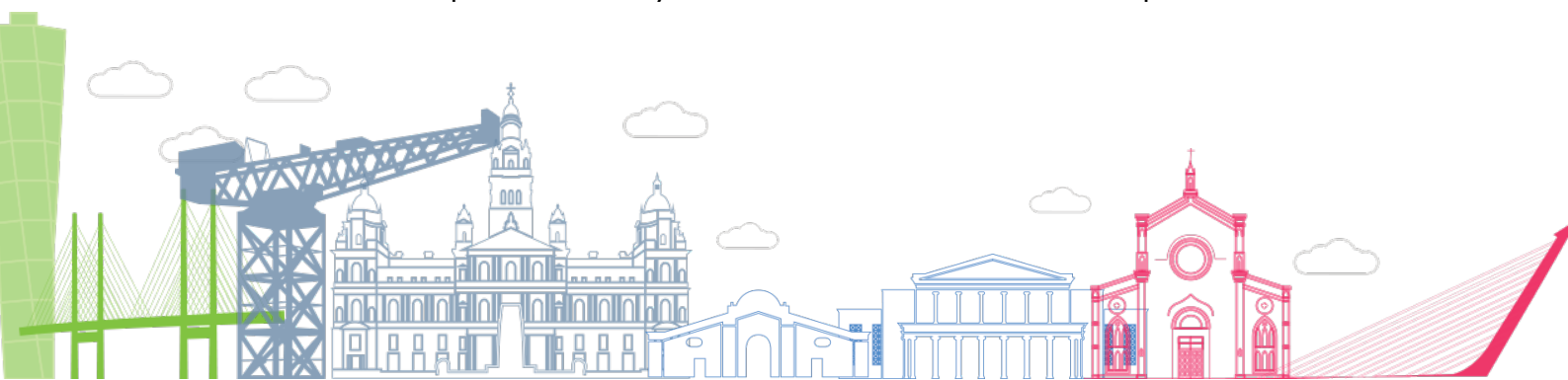
While the number of resettlement refugees has increased recently, their numbers are still low compared to refugees coming through the asylum pathway. The experiences of reception of resettled refugees is still limited in the municipalities.

## 3. Local contexts and implementations

This study is focused on the reception and integration of asylum seekers and refugees in the region of Scania in the south of Sweden and the municipalities of Eslöv and Malmö. Below we first briefly introduce this geographical context and its refugee immigration. We then refer the varying responses to the Settlement Act that can be seen across the region of Scania, before we describe how it is dealt with in the municipalities in focus. We end with a discussion about the role of the civil society in the reception of asylum seekers and refugees.

### 3.1 Sweden, Scania, Malmo, Eslöv

Malmö is Sweden's third largest city, and the municipality has a population of around 340 000 inhabitants. Eslöv is part of the Malmö region, that in turn is part of the Öresund region in western Scania, that connects Denmark to Sweden via the Öresund bridge. Eslöv municipality has a population of around 33 500 inhabitants, out of whom some 8 000 persons leave daily for work and studies, while some 4 000 persons commute from



other places to studies and work in Eslöv. Although Eslöv is well connected by train to larger cities, including Malmö, Lund and Kalmar, it carries the air of a small city town. The city centre is concentrated to a few streets with restaurants, offices, shops and a mall, and the housing is a mix of rental apartments, condominiums and villas. The contrasts to Malmö are many; the city is growing and there is pressure on work opportunities and the housing market. Malmö is also marked by housing segregation where some areas, such as Herrgården in Rosengård, have high unemployment and overcrowded housing. In Herrgården, seventeen per cent of the families report that they live in overcrowded housing, compared to the average of four per cent in the whole of Malmö. In western parts of Malmö, the numbers are almost inverted with high income, low unemployment and dominantly privately owned housing; in addition, here only one per cent report that they live in overcrowded housing (Malmö stad 2013). Although areas in Eslöv have variations in relation to income and private house owning, it is far from as accentuated as the situation is in Malmö.

Looking at the statistics of refugee reception, obviously these vary each year, not least due the size of asylum applications and immigration. Just to give an idea of the distribution between the localities, here we shall focus on the year 2018, the year of this study. The number of newly arrived, that is refugees and family reunification, amounted to 44 217 persons, out of which almost half were family reunification. Almost half of the persons were also under the age of 18 years.

| <b>Newly Arrived</b>        | <b>Number (share)</b> |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Total                       | 44 217                |
| <i>Resettled refugees</i>   | 5 028 (11,37)         |
| <i>Assigned refugees</i>    | 11 068 (25,03)        |
| <i>Selfsettled refugees</i> | 7 856 (17,77)         |
| <i>Family reunification</i> | 20 265 (45,83)        |
| <b>Age distribution</b>     |                       |
| Under 18 years              | 19 298 (43,64)        |
| 18–19 years                 | 4 766 (10,78)         |
| 20–64 years                 | 19 615 (44,36)        |
| 65 years and older          | 538 (01,22)           |

Numbers (and proportions) of 'Newly Arrived' according to category and age, in 2018 in Sweden

Source: Swedish Migration Agency (2019)

If we instead see how the persons were distributed in Scania, proportionally few persons were assigned to Malmö. This is because the calculation of assignments accounts for previous reception of refugees. In addition, when we look at the total reception of newly arrived, the distribution between Sweden, Scania and the municipalities of Malmö and Eslöv is more even.



| Municipality | Population | Assignments according to the Settlement Act | Newly Arrived  |
|--------------|------------|---------------------------------------------|----------------|
| Eslöv        | 33 557     | 63 (0,188)                                  | 164 (0,487)    |
| Malmö        | 339 313    | 155 (0,046)                                 | 1 488 (0,438)  |
| Scania       | 1 362 164  | 1 800 (0,132)                               | 6 231 (0,457)  |
| Sweden       | 10 230 185 | 15 200 (0,149)                              | 44 217 (0,432) |

Number of assignments and received refugees in 2018 in Eslöv, Malmö, Scania and Sweden in numbers (and as proportion of population)  
Source: Swedish Migration Agency (2019)

### 3.2 Scaniaan experiences of the Settlement Act

The Settlement Act assigned a new role to the Regional County Administrative Boards across the country. While the Migration Agency decide on the number of assigned refugees for each region, it is the County Administrative Board that decides on the number for each municipality. While this can be viewed as a multilevel structure of governance, much of the implementation power remains with the municipalities. Yet it is within the interests of the County Administrative Board to oversee the situation and that all refugees can settle in the assigned municipalities. As for the region of Scania, most municipalities respond within frames that must be considered adequate, but there are some municipalities that stand out.

In a survey about the refugee reception in 2017, the majority of the municipalities in the Scania region reported that it was challenging to manage sustainable housing for assigned refugees. In Sweden, municipalities typically access rental apartments through the public housing company owned by the municipality or a private housing company. In Scania, with a total of 33 municipalities, one municipality reported that all, and four that none accommodations were contracted with the public housing company (24 answers). At the same time, one responded that all, and six that none, were contracted with private housing companies (23 answers). None report that they have achieved all accommodations through private persons, four that half of all, and eight that none, accommodation was achieved in this way (24 answers) (Länsstyrelsen 2018). This means that in the majority of the municipalities that answered, contracts were signed with both public and private housing companies. Interestingly, the municipalities have very disparate experiences of the involvement of private persons.

When asked to what extent they offer permanent or temporary contracts, and shared or individual accommodation, the answers are mixed. Sixteen responded that they do not offer permanent housing, and four that they offer this to all (29 answers). A vast majority offer second-hand contracts, including all four municipalities that offers permanent housing (25 answers).



One municipality offer shared apartments to all refugees, seven offer this to none (24 answers). One municipality offer corridor accommodation to all, and ten to none (26 answers). Five municipalities offer accommodation in modules (26 answers) (Länsstyrelsen Skåne 2018). The kind of housing appropriate to offer is a contentious issue. In several interviews it is pointed to that it is challenging to offer housing to newly arrived, while many of inhabitants in the municipality suffer from homelessness. Staffanstorp is infamously known for its provision of low-quality housing solutions, including shared caravans (also in the winter) with only access to toilets and showers through outdoor exits, bad heating and malfunctioning electricity (Magnusson 2018). For the individual, the consequences of being assigned accommodation in shared accommodations or a caravan can be far-reaching, not only for the individual dignity and process of integration, but also since family reunification can be denied due to inadequate housing.

The survey also indicates that many municipalities experience a lack of relevant housing solutions for LGBTQ persons. It is well-known that these persons experience abuse and other difficulties in collective accommodation facilities, often heteronormative in their categorization of persons and unable to provide private hygiene facilities. It is often single men that are offered accommodation in shared facilities.

Overall, the County Administrative Board Skåne report concludes that while geographical and demographic conditions are important for the refugee reception, the impact of the political will in the municipality is vast. Unsurprisingly, in the municipalities where the case workers are allowed to build up an infrastructure for refugee reception, the ability to respond to refugee immigration is better compared to the municipalities that do not have this (Länsstyrelsen 2019, p. 26).

### 3.3 Local variations of the municipal organization of accommodation – for refugees and for homeless

The organization and management of accommodation for assigned and resettled refugees differ between Eslöv and Malmö. This is due the sizes of the municipalities and their different organisational structures, as well as dynamics in the local housing markets, including the municipal collaboration with public and private housing companies.

In Eslöv the organisational structure has not changed after the implementation of the Settlement Act, instead these new, and mandatory, tasks were integrated into the already existing organisation. The managers working with assigned accommodation are part of the municipal welfare department and its housing unit. They work directly with landlords and handle the contracts of the tenants. Initially the tenant contract is signed as a second-hand contract with the municipality, but the managers strive to make them first-hand contracts with the landlords. It is the task of the managers to communicate with landlords and to evade any potential problem or miscommunications between tenants and landlords. This is a crucial part of the work, since relations with landlords is important for the municipality to be able to fulfil its obligations towards the Settlement Act. It is also considered a way to prevent eviction of tenants and, as a consequence, homelessness. The work is much guided through active personal contacts with tenants and landlords. There are no formalized procedures for issues that arise, but much is dealt with on an *ad hoc* basis, such as when a tenant wishes to change their housing (which is not a formal right). Interviewees with different positions within the organisation, articulate a will to respond to needs of the tenants, such as when a refugee's family





arrives in Sweden and there is a need for larger accommodation. The understanding is that although the Settlement Act does not make it mandatory for the municipality to provide accommodation for family members, if the municipality does not help out they might end up homeless and it becomes the of the municipality anyway.

In Malmö a specific housing unit for the reception of assigned refugees was created during the municipal reorganisation in 2017. The municipality underwent an reorganisation during 2017, but adjusted already in 2016 to fit the mandatory work according to the Settlement Act. A accommodation unit for assigned refugees was created within the welfare department of special needs (*Sociala resursförvaltningen*). This unit arranges and maintains accommodation facilities for assigned and resettled refugees following preliminary estimates of the number of refugees to arrive and their household compositions. It is expected that the Technical management unit will provide the housing unit with adequate accommodation, including accommodation in former preschools, retirement homes, corridor housing, municipal owned apartments, module housing and a small number of municipal owned condos. Since the estimates are preliminary, the municipality continuously has to accommodate to real number of family compositions throughout the year.

In Malmö, all tenant contracts for the assigned refugees are signed with the housing unit and time limited to four years. They do not offer or have strategies to arrange permanent housing solutions, such as first-hand tenant contracts. In 2018, additional support was employed to assist the tenants in finding new housing solutions before the four year period ended. At the time of interviewing (late spring/summer 2018), a training program guiding newly arrived on the housing market was about to be established, including how to find housing, how to care for housing and Swedish regulations of housing. The aim is not to provide housing, but to support the training of housing searches.

As an obstacle, very few housing companies in Malmö accept allowances, including social welfare and daily allowance paid as part of the Introduction Program, as income. Instead, persons dependent on allowance are regarded as having no income, and unable to pay a rent. Obviously, the problem to find for many newly arrived is not only related to lack of information, but is linked to, first, a general lack of housing and, second, institutional discrimination.

The organisation has routines and instruction for how to transfer tenants from one kind of accommodation to another. The tenants can refuse, but have no right to claim change of the accommodation offered, and there is no queueing system. Instead the housing unit makes an assessment of the need to change. In the interviews, large families residing in small apartments and LGBTQ-related matters are mentioned among the cases that have been transferred to alternative accommodations. The understanding is that the municipality has no responsivity to provide accommodation upon family reunification, instead this is the responsibility of the receiving family member.

It is obvious that the Settlement Act has led to the development of particularistic services. While the Settlement Act demands that the municipalities provide accommodation for assigned and resettled refugees, it does not demand this for selfsettled refugees and family members, that is, the all persons categorised as 'newly arrived'. From the perspective of the municipalities, the accommodation situation of selfsettled refugees and family members is estimated in relation to homelessness in the municipality. An officer in Malmö,



explained in an interview<sup>12</sup> that the municipality must separate the management of accommodation for the assigned and resettled refugees from the management of homelessness, since the problem of homelessness is infinite. The tasks made mandatory by the Settlement Act is limited in time (the act stipulate that the municipality shall provide accommodation for two years, but in Malmö they provide it for four), but the problem of homelessness has no end.<sup>13</sup> This also brings in the distinction between social and structural homelessness.

In Sweden, homelessness is growing, but also changing in character; the proportion of persons in social homelessness is decreasing and the proportion of persons in structural homelessness is increasing. Here, social homelessness refers to persons who are homeless primarily following on social problems, such as drug or alcohol addiction or mental sickness, on the individual level, and structural homelessness to persons who are homeless primarily following on a lack of adequate housing, such as affordable apartments. Foreign born and persons with children are overrepresented among the homeless. In Malmö, homelessness has increased since 2012, with an intensification from 2014 and 2015. In Malmö in 2017, 1,752 persons were in acute homelessness and over a thousand children were homeless. Significantly, there is a dramatic increase of foreigners with less than three years of residence in Sweden among the homeless. The situation in Eslöv is different, here there are no persons that are homeless in terms of sleeping in the street and there is no homelessness among the assigned and resettled refugees<sup>14</sup>.

The homelessness among the newly arrived is above all an issue of structural causes. The Settlement Act makes it mandatory for municipalities to arrange accommodation for assigned and resettled refugees; it can be argued that they receive a form of particularistic accommodation services. However, the act is rather constructed to support the Migration Agency, rather than individuals and families in need of support. It is only mandatory for municipalities to arrange accommodation for individuals and families who are within the national refugee reception system, so that they can leave this system. To an extent these persons, for one reason or another, as we shall see below, have already left the national system of refugee reception, it is up to the municipality to do as it finds relevant. In many cases this means that selfsettled refugees and refugees with newly arrived family members, but also individuals and families that have dropped-out of the assignment system, access no support<sup>15</sup>. In the long run, this delays inscription to the Introduction Program and integration.

### 3.4 Local variations of accommdations

Housing and home making are central parts of integration. If housing is not sufficient, the integration might fail. The Settlement Act makes it mandatory for municipalities to arrange accommodation for assigned and resettled refugees for a period of at least two years, that is the time of the Introduction Program. However, precisely how this shall be done, is not regulated, but is left to be interpreted by the municipality. Unsurprisingly, accommodation varies.

<sup>12</sup> 180621 Interview Malmö municipality

<sup>13</sup> Also 180823 Interview Malmö municipality

<sup>14</sup> 180821 Interview Eslöv municipality

<sup>15</sup> Interview, 180822, Malmö city,



In both municipalities there is variation of renting costs and accommodation standards. Accommodation provided to assigned and resettled refugees in Malmö and Eslöv includes corridor housing, apartments and small individual house units or villas. In Malmö, module housing units were granted construction permission, but the construction has been problematic due to weather conditions and moisture damaged. Both municipalities struggle with finding larger apartments for families with many children, often the only solution is to rent a house. In Eslöv there are examples of how former pre-schools or other municipal buildings have been converted into housing for large families.

The length of contracts differs between the two municipalities, as already mentioned, in Eslöv there is an aim to transform contracts into permanent first-hand contracts between the tenant and the landlord; in Malmö the tenant contracts are limited to four years. The four-year limit is due to Swedish legislation, which says that after four years the second-hand contract holder can claim the first-hand contract. However, in practice the contracts vary much more, also within each municipality.

Out of the refugees that we met and interviewed, most express that they are content with their accommodation and housing does not seem to be a critical issue. Some have had bad experiences of low standard and small-size apartments, of being located in marginalised urban areas or in remote rural areas. Being located in remote destinations with limited access to public transportation, reduces the possibilities of activities and interaction in everyday life as well as making it difficult to cope with practical work such as grocery shopping, access to Swedish language training and the medical care. From our interviews, collective forms of accommodation, such as corridor accommodation, seem to cause the highest levels frustration. In both municipalities, it is primarily single men who are housed in corridor housing.

In Malmö one corridor accommodation is located in a former hospital housing unit, constructed in the 1930:s as a mental hospital. The hospital was closed in 1995 and some of the buildings have remained empty. In 2015 it became a temporary accommodation for asylum seekers, including for unaccompanied minors. Since the implementation of the Settlement Act in 2016 it has been used as accommodation refugees, mainly single men. The rooms are furnished with a bed and a closet. Each floor have a shared kitchen and shared hygiene facilities. One informant residing in one of the corridor rooms, had tried to furnish it, but found this difficult.

*“It is not a home, I want a real apartment and I want to begin my life in Sweden. But to find an apartment in Malmö is impossible or I would need a lot of money to find an apartment. There is noise all the time, it is very stressful to listen to. Everyone is stressed of their situation. And there is nothing to do, I do not have internet and I need Internet access to communicate with my family. Internet is very expensive.”<sup>16</sup>*

From the perspective of the individual, corridor accommodation can be very challenging. At the same time, it is a comparatively cheap solution, compared to, for instance, individual apartments. Considering that the assigned refugee tenant usually have low incomes, being dependent on the Introduction Allowance, the renting cost is relevant to consider. Again, this highlights the general situation of structural homelessness and access to adequate housing.

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<sup>16</sup> 180621 Interview Malmö



In Eslöv, corridor accommodation is located in the city centre, in building with varied forms of accommodation, including apartments for assigned and resettled refugees. Although the location of this corridor accommodation is incorporated into a regular housing unit in the city centre, reflections expressed in interviewees residing here reassembles the one made in Malmö. Shared spaces such as the kitchen, language miscommunication and conflicts between the tenants, and lack of spaces to invite friends and guests, seems to be general problems.

### 3.5 The role of civil society organizations

While it is the will of the government to engage civil society organisations in the reception of asylum seekers and refugees, formally it still the sole responsibility of public organisations. The Migration Agency have collaborations with civil society organisations. In the Arrival and Facility Accommodations we visited, civil society organisations offered complementary support, including activities for children, Swedish language training, yoga, and other activities to enhance wellbeing, especially for women and children<sup>17</sup>. The activities were not concerned directly with the accommodation situation; they are not activities that are aimed at the betterment of accommodation, but of the social environment within it.

Civil society organisations also assist asylum seekers by giving advice, as well as more practically by providing food and clothes as well as a place to stay and/or sleep<sup>18</sup>.

The Malmö municipality strives to find ways to collaborate with civil society organisations in their work with refugees, with for instance Refugees Welcome Sweden and Save the Children. In 2017 the City of Malmö signed an Voluntary Sector Organisation Public Partnership with Refugees Welcome Sweden. The task of the Refugees Welcome Sweden was to find private accommodations, for instance families who would be willing to sublet a room, and to match these hosts with refugees. The collaboration with Save the Children is focussed on children in accommodation facilities managed by the City of Malmö<sup>19</sup>.

In part, the establishment of projects led by the third sector, depend on what funding that is available. This means there are some projects that, while not being explicitly focussed on asylum seekers and refugees, many of the attendants are. One such example is *RådRum*, that is established in several municipalities in Sweden. In Malmö, *RådRum* is a cooperation between the municipality, the Scania Region, the study association *Sensus* and the network *HUT*. It aims at informing newly arrived about their rights and responsibilities in their mother tongue as well as in Swedish, but also to advise on practical issues, including payment of invoices, letters from authorities, questions related to housing, social service etc. The municipality refer newly arrived to *RådRum* when they are in need of advice.

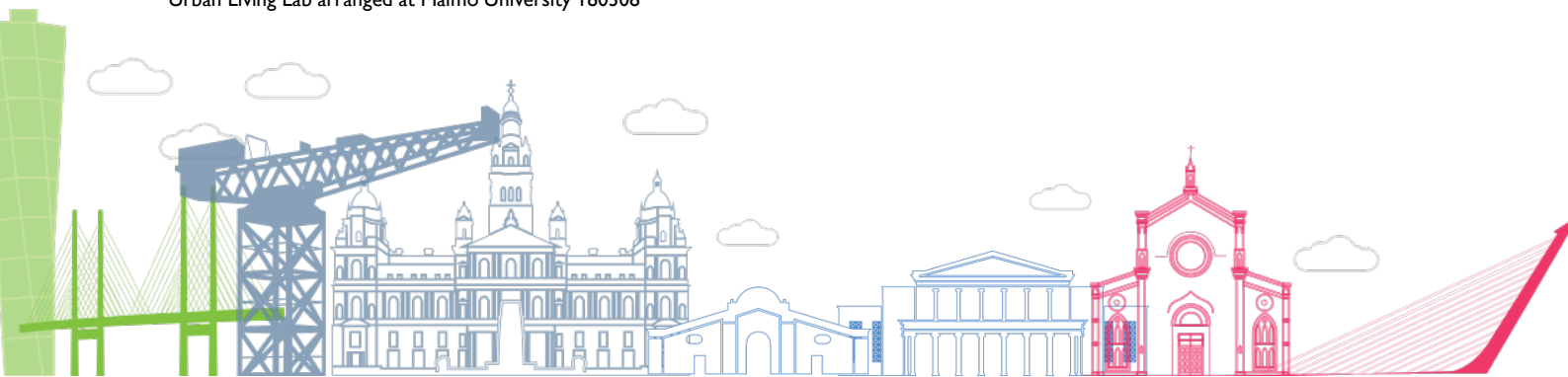
In an Urban Living Lab organised with representatives from different civil society organisations, we asked questions about accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees<sup>20</sup>. While all agreed that this is a field with

<sup>17</sup> Field visits.

<sup>18</sup> Urban Living Lab; interviews with organisations and refugees

<sup>19</sup> City of Malmö webpage with information about the reception of refugees, link: <https://malmo.se/Service/Om-Malmo-stad/Sa-arbetar-vi-med.../Nyanlanda.html>

<sup>20</sup> Urban Living Lab arranged at Malmö University 180308



serious fallacies with far-reaching consequences for individuals and in a huge need of intervention, it was also agreed that this was not the responsibility of civil society organisations, at least not beyond acute situations such as it was in the fall of 2015 when large numbers of persons arrived to Malmö Central with train from Denmark.

#### 4. Experiences of being inside and outside the reception accommodation system

Being within or outwith the reception system of mandatory accommodation provision has far reaching consequences for the individual. As an asylum seeker you can chose between Own Accommodation or Facility accommodation, and this choice has consequences for what service the municipality will offer you. As outlined above, the Settlement Act makes it mandatory for municipalities to arrange accommodation for resettled and assigned refugees, but not for selfsettled refugees or persons arriving as family members of a refugee. In the light of this, it might seem surprising that such substantial proportions of all asylum seekers prefer Own Housing as shown in the table above. This suggests that is relevant to look into why individuals and families opt for Own Accommodation instead of Facility Accommodation, even though it leads to less, or no, accommodation service provision. Drawing on interviews with newly arrived refugees, below we present, first, some reasons for leaving the Facility Accommodation provided by the Migration Agency, and, second, reasons for leaving the assigned accommodation provided by the municipality.

##### 4.1 Own Accommodation vs. Facility Accommodation

On a general level, the reasons why asylum seekers choose Own Accommodation before Facility Accommodation are multiple. Some persons choose to reside in Own Accommodation directly when they arrive to Sweden. Others reside first in Facility Accommodation, and choose to leave that housing at a later stage. A decision to reject can be foregrounded by information through personal contacts and social media. Our interviews indicate that a decision to relocate, and move into Own Accommodation, can depend on a will to move closer to family and friends or on unsatisfactory conditions at Facility Accommodation, including overcrowding, low standards of living, distance to school, work and urban centres. More seriously, some move due to fear of violence in Facility Accommodation. Prior research indicates that, even if the police is contacted and arrive at the Facility Accommodation in cases of violence, they have little power to intervene. This creates a rational for persons to move out, and into Own Accommodation (Öberg 2015). Other reasons include decision to relocate from rural to urban areas in search of paid work. Some asylum seekers might also seek to 'change track'; that is, transforming their asylum application into an application for a work residence permit. Debts due to costs during the refuge is also non-neglectable; asylum seekers might find themselves in tight economic situations that affect family members in the country of origin or other locations. In addition, needs of income, might also mean that some persons find themselves in vulnerable and precarious situations as workers in the unregulated labour market (Öberg 2015).

Drawing on our interviews, below we provide three examples of decisions to relocate from Facility Accommodation to Own Accommodation.



*Example 1: Choosing Own Accommodation prior to arrival*

Social media and contacts sometimes play an important role for the dissemination of information about the reception system in Sweden, including about the Facility Accommodation organized by the Swedish Migration Agency. Hamid, an economic adviser from Iraq explain how they ended up in Own Accommodation three years ago in Malmö:

*“We had investigated the housing options before coming to Sweden ... and heard so many persons discussing, not only rumours but their experiences of the horrible situation in the camps [Facility Accommodation arranged by the Swedish Migration Agency], about the poor living conditions, the criminality and the drugs. We did not want that for our children. Therefore, we looked for other opportunities, otherwise we would not have come to Sweden, we chose Sweden because of the housing opportunity that we had found and of course we also had knowledge of Sweden’s international reputation and the human rights. <sup>21</sup>”*

Hamid and his family made the decision to move in with a friend in Malmö, thus staying in Own Accommodation. Evidently, there are both positive and negative sides to the housing in which Hamid lives together with his wife and two sons. Hamid himself has developed a strong social network in Malmö and he feels that he genuinely belongs to the city. His eldest son has been able to finish his education and find a job. The youngest son is under eighteen and is still in school. The housing situation is cramped and it is especially difficult for the sons. They often sleep over at friends but cannot invite friends. Besides paying rent, their entire life has become dominated by caring for the friend. The wife washes the friend’s clothes, cook his food, cleans the apartment. Hamid does the shopping for groceries and helps out whenever needed, because it is difficult to say no. And as he explains: *“...we sleep when our friend sleeps, we shut off the television when he says so. I am grateful but it is true that it is difficult too...<sup>22</sup>”*.

Asylum seekers who reside in Own Accommodation is a contested topic in Sweden, on the one hand Own Accommodation is blamed for making individuals vulnerable to greedy landlords, and it is argued that housing in overcrowded apartments is a path to less integration and fuels the grey housing market. At the same time almost fifty per cent of the asylum seekers prefer to stay in Own Accommodation and research shows that persons in Own Accommodation enter the labour market faster (Bevelander & Pendakur 2017).

*Example 2: LGBTQ+ discrimination and violence*

Yet another reason that has come out as central is how identities of LGBTQ play out in accommodation. This is pointed to in interviews with case workers at different organisational levels, and also by the organisation *Svenskt Hbtq Initiativ – SQI Syd* (Swedish LGBTQ Initiative – SQI South). This organisation meets asylum seekers and assigned refugees that experience violence and abuse due to sexual orientation and/or identity in accommodation arranged by the Swedish Migration Agency and by municipalities. In an interview, an worker from the organisation describes how young people during the asylum process are, first, stimulated by the Swedish Migration Agency to discuss their sexuality and to develop their sexual identity as a part of a ‘coming out process’. This identity can also be important as a ground for asylum. But then, at the same time,

<sup>21</sup> Interview, I80823, Malmö

<sup>22</sup> Interview I80822, Malmö



there is no protection offered. This sometimes leads to a decision of the asylum seeker to leave the Facility Accommodation; resulting in homelessness, living in the streets or in vulnerable housing situations where they are sexually abused, including risks of transactional sex. Some of these persons find temporary shelter for the night at the *Skåne Stadsmission* (a social NGO) that is open for men. The *Skåne Stadsmission* also offers accommodation to women, but these are not one-night shelters, rather accommodations for extended periods of time.

## 4.2 Leaving assigned accommodations

During our research we met refugees, who left the assigned accommodation offered by the municipality. We shall here provide two examples, first a case when this appears to have happened accidentally, and then when this is estimated a solution to move out of deprived areas hindering their integration into Swedish society.

### *Example 1: Attempts to speed up the (assigned) settlement*

This example draws on the situation of a family of three, a man and wife and their son, who left Syria in 2014. They first arrived in Turkey but decided they would move on, due to the wife's serious medical conditions of diabetes and spinal disc herniation. The family continued through Europe and arrived in Malmö where they registered an asylum application and were then transferred to a Facility Accommodation, a remote tourist camp in the woods of mid-Sweden; during one period, in the harsh winter, they shared a cramped camping cabin with another family. The family experienced two difficult years in this circumstance, much due to the wife's bad health, which worsened. Due to the asylum seeker-status she was only entitled to emergency health care and no treatments or preventive health care.

When the decision for a temporary residence permit finally came through, they were assigned to settle in Eslöv. The practical arrangements of the transfer took time, and because of the wife's urgent need for medical care, they arranged a renting contract for an apartment on their own and moved to Eslöv. After arrival, the second hand renting contract for their apartment proved to be incorrect, and after three months the family had to move out of the apartment, with nowhere to go. They then turned to the municipality asking for an assigned apartment. However, since they had left the Facility Accommodation on their own, without waiting for the municipality to assign them an apartment, their claim was not approved. That is, even though they had received temporary residence permits and the Migration Agency had assigned them to Eslöv, from an administrative perspective they were categorised as selfsettled refugees.

As the wife's health condition deteriorated, she was too ill to take part in the Introduction Programme, and was at this point of receiving welfare benefit through the municipal welfare department. A social inquiry was made by the welfare department, to see if the family were eligible for social housing, which they were not. It was estimated that the family had the resources to find their own housing. At the time we meet them, the family is residing in an acute accommodation for homeless, paid for by the municipality. The accommodation is far from the city centre, located in the country side with bad communications. The accommodation is a former B&B. The room and corridor smelt of cat urine and mould. The steep stairs that do not allow his wife to exit the room, thus while her husband is in class learning Swedish, where participation is mandatory, the wife is in reality a prisoner in their room. The social and medical consequences for the family are severe.



The family is full of despair not knowing how to manage the situation. They had power to act, but somehow everything went so wrong.

*Example 2: Moving out of marginalised areas*

One informant argued that he refused to live in segregated areas in Malmö and to work in the unregulated labour market. He had found an opportunity to co-habit with a man that he got in contact with through a friend who was an asylum seeker at the same time he was himself. After years of struggles as an orphan child labourer, and later a flight to Europe due to the war in Syria, in Sweden he was determined to learn how to read and write, and to grow as a human. To him, the refusal to live in a segregated area in Malmö was an active choice and part of a strategy to integrate faster, but at the same time he argued that despite his choice to live in a more mixed and diverse area, he had not been able to make friends to speak Swedish with.<sup>23</sup>

Another interviewee provides a different example. This woman also resided in a segregated area of Malmö, together with her husband and two children. They moved out, but eventually became homeless. When homeless, she and her family were offered social accommodation in a place called *Disponentvillan* in Arlöv, just outside of Malmö. This is a house with small apartments for families who are homeless and, in many cases, suffer from various kinds of social problems. For the interviewee, here, other issues arose. Her worries primarily regarded the situation of her children in the *Disponentvillan*:

*“Late in the night, the other children are running around outdoors, my children do not understand why I forbid them to do so. //...// When we are at home, the other children come knocking at our door, there is so much noise, my children cannot sleep..”*<sup>24</sup>

Moving to Arlöv has also meant that the logistics between home, children’s school and her school for Swedish language training has become complicated; she now needs to leave class before it is finished, in order to meet up with the children after their school in order to bring them home. Since Swedish language training is part of her individual plan of the Introduction Program, and connected to a daily allowance, this is problematic.

These two examples show that people struggle to overcome marginalisation, and how the location of their accommodation is perceived in this. Where you live is perceived as important, at least by some, and they are prepared to take risks to get out of marginalised and poor areas in the city. However, the situation achieved is not necessarily for the better.

## 5. Conclusions

This report answers questions about how accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees is constituted as a field of policy and regulation at national level, how these policies and regulations are interpreted and adopted in their implementation at local level, and how this is experienced by persons who are in the asylum process or recently have received their residence permit in Sweden. The changing migration and reception

<sup>23</sup> 180612 Interview Malmö

<sup>24</sup> 180612 Interview Malmö





regimes are identified as import backgrounds for how accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees is currently developing and we have outlined these, they include:

- In November 2015 the government implemented ID control at the borders to Denmark and Germany in order to reduce the immigration of asylum seekers.
- In March 2016 Sweden introduced a national refugee settlement dispersal scheme, the Settlement Act (*Bosättningslagen*), that makes it mandatory for municipalities to accept a specific number of refugees and to arrange for their accommodation for a period of at least two years.
- In July 2016 the government implemented a temporary law that minimised the use of permanent residence permits in favour of temporary permits. It also minimised family reunification.

On the level of national policy, we identify two immigration pathways for refugees and outline four ideal typical accommodation pathways for asylum seekers and refugees. Refugees can immigrate as resettled refugees, as an asylum seeker residing in Facility Accommodation arranged by the Migration Agency, as an asylum seeker residing in Own Accommodation, and as an asylum seeker under the age of 18 without a legal guardian, a so-called unaccompanied minor. Unaccompanied minors are under the responsibility of a municipal welfare department and in this report we have not focussed on this group.

The implementation of the Settlement Act in March 2016 has several implications of interest for the questions studied in this report. The act makes it mandatory for municipalities to arrange accommodation for resettled refugees and refugees from Facility Accommodation assigned by the Migration Agency to the municipality, that is, two groups of newly arrived that are under the responsibility of the Migration Agency. Other groups of the newly arrived, refugees who have resided in Own Accommodation during the asylum process and who have selfsettled in the municipality, and family members that have arrived on grounds of family reunification are not included in the law.

In this conclusive discussion we will highlight three issues. First we will problematise the effects of the law pointing to the varied ways of implementation that can be identified across municipalities. Second, the current development with many asylum seekers in Own Accommodation, in spite of the obvious difficult consequences of this choice to reside outside what the government calls the 'orderly system', begs for a discussion of why individuals and families choose this. Third, we will discuss implications of Settlement Act, as a particularistic solution for selected groups of homeless, in relation to other groups of homeless.

### 5.1 A non-regulating act

The Settlement Act makes it mandatory for the municipalities to arrange accommodation for refugees assigned by the Migration Agency. As it is not accompanied by any regulations about, for instance, the kind of accommodation and its standards, its location, renting costs, and the length of renting contracts (beyond two years), the implementation of it varies vastly between municipalities. In this sense, the act legitimises a fragmented and unfair reception system across the municipalities, and this is why we choose to call it a non-regulating act. The non-regulation opens up for varying accommodation solutions between municipalities, sometimes with far-reaching consequences for the individual. From what it seems, the political will can



sometimes replace the lack of regulation. Equally important, the lack of political decisions on the local level, that supports and guides the work of municipal officials, tend to undermine long-term strategies of accommodation, housing and larger strategies of integration.

## 5.2 Accommodation inside and outside the orderly system

A substantial proportion of individuals and families chose to reside in Own Accommodation during the asylum process. It is known that this has multiple foundations, including obstacles with the Facility Accommodation itself, such as poor standards, abuse and violence. Other obstacles include the location of the accommodation, following, for instance need to access health care, schools, and working opportunities, or a will to stay close to family and friends. While the division between the refugees who have arrived from an Facility Accommodation and the selfsettled refugees is not new, the Settlement Act has contributed to sharpened and enlarged the division. Moreover, the Reception Inquiry is proposing that selfsettled refugees should be rejected daily allowance when settling down in 'vulnerable areas'. As argued in this report, there is no reason to assume that this would constitute an incentive for asylum seekers to choose Facility Accommodation in front of Own Accommodation. Instead, as it seems, a more relevant question to ask is why so many asylum seekers avoid Facility Accommodation and where they reside when in Own Accommodation. It is surprising that the Reception Inquiry does not pose these questions.

## 5.3 Homelessness vs. homelessness

The Settlement Law is a particularistic law in the sense that it enforces municipalities to arrange accommodation for a particular group. Hence, the implementation of the Settlement Act cause tensions between, on the one side, the accommodation management of refugees assigned according the Settlement Law, and, on the other hand, the accommodation management for homeless. In different municipalities this tension is managed in different ways, yet, as it seems, the Settlement Act contributes to a fractioned service system within the municipalities. This is not unusual for particularistic solutions, and it begs a discussion about general solutions. It is indisputably that the implementation of the Settlement Act is only partly a result of the refugee immigration in 2015; it is also a consequence of the structural homelessness. Historically the government has been unwilling to implement particularistic housing solutions for refugees, and the question is what kind of turning point this law actually constitutes. It is our view, that Own Housing and the Settlement Act should be discussed in the view general housing policy and housing market dynamics, instead of a particular groups in precarious housing situations. We hope this report will contribute to this debate.



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