

Seeking Asylum - Finding a Home?

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LINA SANDSTRÖM

Seeking Asylum - Finding a Home?
**A qualitative study on asylum seekers' integration in two
different housing contexts**

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Abstract

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The overall aim of this thesis is to contribute to our sociological understanding of integration by exploring how asylum seekers in Sweden make sense of their own position in relation to the society they are living in. Integration is conceptualised as a mutual process, the end goal of which is equal participation and belonging to a given society. Syrian refugees were interviewed on two occasions in order to follow their integration process as they moved from the precariousness as asylum seekers to the relative stability as residents. The thesis also aims to explore what role different housing forms have in shaping their integration process, and the interviews were conducted in two locations: one dominated by Migration Agency housing (ABO) the other by 'own housing' (EBO). EBO is often portrayed as an 'integration problem' but when such arguments are made, the asylum seeker's perspective is rarely considered. This study addresses this shortcoming and asks: How do asylum seekers make sense of their integration process? What obstacles and opportunities do they experience in this process? What role does the type of housing, and its context, play in this process?

Using Ager and Strang's ten core domains of integration as an analytical framework, the study shows how asylum seekers' access to participation is severely limited, not least because they lack the *foundation* of formal rights. A residence permit does offer a sense of *stability* in this respect, but stability in other domains is still elusive. *Social connections*, *employment* and *housing* are central domains where stability in one domain often has to be sacrificed to achieve stability in another.

Viewing these results through the lens of classical sociology, and the concepts 'community' and 'society', shows how the participants make sense of integration on a more abstract level. Society, defined as a sense of belonging based on contribution (through paid work), was important in both locations. Community, defined as a sense of belonging based on similarity, was emphasised more in the EBO location. However, portraying this as an 'integration problem', as is often done in policy, misses the complexity of the situation and the 'solutions' presented risk being counterproductive.

Keywords: Refugee, migration, residence permit, belonging, work, social capital, integration policy, housing policy, segregation, dispersal, Sweden.

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As I sit down to write this, the world is in the grip of a global pandemic. The Coronavirus has affected our everyday lives to such an extent that it is difficult to think, talk or write about anything else. It is tricky to steer away from clichés in acknowledgement sections at the best of times, and I find it even harder now. At a time when it seems nothing can be taken for granted, one really *does* start to reassess what, and more importantly, *who* matters most in life. This also makes the task of acknowledging the people who have been important to me throughout this project seem more monumental than I suspect it would have been otherwise.

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So yes, it is with a hint of self-pity that I write this. Thanks to the Coronavirus, the concluding part of this project has not panned out quite as I had imagined it would. Maybe the worst is yet to come, but considering the topic of this thesis, it might be appropriate to try to put things in perspective. What I am experiencing now are but minor inconveniences compared to what millions of refugees go through every day, Corona or no Corona. While I worry about how the Swedish healthcare system will cope, I realise that we are relatively lucky. After all, how does one practice social distancing in a refugee camp? How can one wash one's hands for the recommended 30 seconds when there is no running water?

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Lina Sandström, Örebro, April 2020

Abbreviations and relevant terminology

Abbreviations

ABF: The Workers' Educational Association

ABO: Migration Agency housing, either apartments or large-scale accommodation centres.

AT-UND: Exemption from a work permit

Brå: The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention

CSN: National Board of Student Finance

EBO: Housing that asylum seekers find on their own. Typically involves staying with friends or relatives.

LMA: Law on reception of asylum seekers and others (SFS 1994:137)

LMA-card: A card with a person's photo on it. It is used to show a person's asylum-seeking status (and possible AT-UND) but it is not an ID card.

MSB: Swedish Civil Contingency Agency

Prop.: Government Bill

RiR: Swedish National Audit Office

SCB: Statistics Sweden

SFI: Swedish For Immigrants

SOU: Swedish Government Official Report

UDHR: Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Other terms

Asylum seeker: someone who is seeking international protection but whose claim for refugee status has not yet been determined. When 'asylum seekers' and 'refugees' are treated as separate categories in this thesis, it is meant purely in terms of legal status and it is not a comment on the validity of the asylum seekers' claims.

Convention refugee: someone who has a 'well-founded fear of persecution' on any of the grounds specified in the 1951 refugee convention (see section 2.2.1).

Exceptionally distressing circumstances: Someone who is not considered a convention refugee, or in need of subsidiary/other protection, may still obtain a residence permit due to exceptional circumstances (for example, those with serious illness or those who have already spent a long time in Sweden). Since 2016, this option is only applied if it contravenes international obligations to deny residency.

New refugee resident: Used in this thesis to refer to refugees for the first two years after residence. During this time, they have access to a number of targeted integration measures (in Swedish: 'nyanlända').

Other grounds for protection: someone in need of protection but who does not qualify as a convention refugee or for subsidiary protection. Protection from environmental disasters, for example, fall into this category. In 2016, this category was removed.

Refugee: Depending on the context, the term 'refugee' can be used for any of the categories described in this section.

Resettlement refugee: Apart from those that seek asylum upon entry, Sweden also receive a number of resettlement refugees every year according to a set quota. These refugees apply for asylum through the UNHCR and their refugee status has already been determined when they arrive in Sweden.

Subsidiary protection: someone who is not a refugee according to the refugee convention, but who is need of protection for other reasons. For example, those at serious risk of bodily harm due to an armed conflict.

1. Introduction

The title of this thesis is ‘Seeking Asylum – Finding a home?’ The home in the title should be interpreted both literally and as a metaphor for integration. This thesis will explore both, and it will do so from the specific perspective of asylum seekers.

When this project was in its infancy, in autumn 2014, I had recently moved back to Sweden after over a decade of living in Ireland. The topic of asylum seekers and integration had interested me for some time, but the move brought with it a change in perspective. What intrigued me was the peculiar position of asylum seekers in their host society: they are neither temporary guests nor permanent residents but exist in a sort of limbo; a state ‘in between’. In terms of integration, the question that interested me was whether asylum seekers can be seen as part of a given society or whether they somehow exist outside it. This could potentially depend on the kind of barriers that the host society put in place to limit participation and, initially, my ‘outsider’ perspective made me view Sweden in quite a favourable light in this regard. Compared to Ireland at least, Sweden seemed to put up less barriers to integration and asylum seekers are granted certain rights that are not granted in many other European countries.¹

Adding to this was the general perception that Sweden was a particularly *generous* migration country, offering protection to far more refugees than other comparable countries. In this respect, much has changed since the start of this project. In 2015, an unprecedented 162 877 asylum seekers entered Sweden (Migrationsverket 2020a). Many came during the autumn, reaching a peak in October when close to 40 000 arrived, which put the reception system under a lot of strain. The situation came to be referred to as the ‘refugee crisis’ and although applying ‘crisis’ terminology to what happened in *Sweden* has been questioned (e.g. Hansen, P. 2016)—both on factual and moral grounds—this perceived crisis has had real consequences: Sweden went from having one of the most generous asylum policies in Europe to adapting to the minimum standards of the EU.

Although this policy reversal was mainly aimed at discouraging asylum seekers from entering Sweden in the first place, it also directly and indirectly

¹ For example, the right to work and the (now limited) right to choose one’s own housing. See Andersson & Nilsson (2011) for a European comparison.

affects the integration of asylum seekers already in Sweden. Before the ‘crisis’, refugees were generally given permanent residence permits. Since 2016 they get temporary permits, lasting 13 to 36 months depending on their specific refugee status.² In other words, the state of ‘limbo’ described at the start of this introduction is extended past the transition from asylum seeker to resident and it is not unfeasible that this will have a negative effect on integration. An awareness of the ‘refugee crisis’ and its aftermath is also important in order to contextualise this study: it was conducted at a time when the standards in the reception system were temporarily lowered and the waiting times for a decision in asylum cases significantly increased. This too, may mean that conditions for integration were less favourable than what would normally be the case.

Questions relating to the integration of asylum seekers may have faded into the background somewhat during the crisis, but they soon resurfaced. Asylum seekers’ housing was one question that received renewed attention. Since 1994, asylum seekers in Sweden have had two options: they can either live in accommodation offered by the Migration Agency (ABO) or they can choose their own housing (EBO), which normally involves staying with friends or relatives already in Sweden.³ Ever since the right to choose housing was introduced it has been a contested issue, not least because it is believed to have a negative effect on integration.⁴ Sometimes it is the housing conditions that are referred to when such arguments are made: overcrowding, for example, can be a problem in EBO. More commonly, however, the *context* of the housing, is seen as the main issue. EBO can often be found in ethnically, and socio-economically, segregated areas in larger cities. Contact with ‘Swedish’ people can be limited in such areas and this is often framed

²Another indication that refugees are no longer seen as permanent settlers is the restrictions that have been placed on family reunification. There are two main types of refugee status in Sweden: those who qualify as refugees under the UN Refugee Convention and those in need of subsidiary protection. After July 2016, only the former had a right to family reunification. However, as the new law also required that the person is able to financially support their family, in reality most refugees are excluded from reunification (SFS 2016:752). Some of these restrictions were lifted in 2019 (prop. 2018/19:128).

³ The two housing forms are usually referred to as ‘ABO’ (Anläggningsboende) which is the state-run option, and ‘EBO’ (Eget boende) which is the ‘own housing’ option. These abbreviations will be used throughout the thesis.

⁴ See SOU 1996:55, SOU 2003:75, SOU 2009:19 and SOU 2018:22 for an overview of how the issue has been discussed over the years.

as an integration problem. ABO, on the other hand, is usually located in more rural locations where affordable housing is available. Although placing asylum seekers in areas that are *too* sparsely populated is occasionally framed as an integration problem, ABO is usually seen as the better option in terms of social integration as most asylum seekers in ABO live in fairly close proximity to Swedish people.

Despite a general agreement regarding EBO's negative consequences, for a long time other aspects weighed in favour of keeping the option in place. The principal of equal rights made it hard to justify restrictions but there were also important economic incentives for keeping the system: EBO costs considerably less than ABO. The latter argument weighed particularly heavy during the 'crisis' when limiting EBO was simply deemed too costly. But the aftermath of the crisis brought with it a new restrictive mood and in 2019, political consensus had turned in favour of a change in the EBO law. A government bill (prop 2019/20:10) was passed in parliament and since January 2020, the right to choose EBO has been restricted: asylum seekers who still choose to live in a disadvantaged area will lose their right to financial support.

The debate surrounding EBO suggests two things: one, that some form of integration is possible for asylum seekers and two, that the likelihood of 'successful' integration is at least partially dependent on the initial form of housing. This, I would argue, makes housing forms a fruitful starting point to explore my initial question regarding the extent to which asylum seekers can be seen as part of their host society. The role that housing plays in the integration process of asylum seekers is still poorly understood and in need of further research. In the debate that eventually led to a change in EBO law, two crucial aspects were missing: the first was a thorough assessment of the integration prospects of the ABO alternative, and the second was the perspective of asylum seekers themselves. Without a careful consideration of the integration prospects of *both* housing forms, it would be difficult to conclude that one is better than the other. And without acknowledging the individual circumstances behind different housing choices, it is also difficult to see the possibility that the best option for one person, may not be the best for another. Evidence from previous studies is inconclusive. On the one hand, there is some support for the thesis that ethnic segregation can have a negative effect on the integration of refugees (e.g. Andersson 2016; Wimark et al. 2017). On the other hand, dispersal strategies have either proved to be ineffective (SCB 2016a) or detrimental to integration (Edin et al. 2004). These quantitative studies define integration quite narrowly as

labour market integration. Another limitation is that they use register data which does not include asylum seekers, hence the effect of the initial EBO or ABO choice remains unclear. Previous qualitative studies can offer some important insights into the lived experience of asylum seekers but only a few make an explicit connection between housing and integration (e.g. Brekke 2004; Lennartsson 2007). They too, lack the important comparison between the housing forms.

One could, of course, argue that the extent to which asylum seekers are excluded from society makes it meaningless to speak of integration at all, regardless of their more particular circumstances. Although there is some merit to this objection, it treats integration as an either/or position: either one is part of a society or one is outside it. I would argue that the very 'in betweenness' of asylum seekers' situation suggests that a more partial, incomplete integration is possible. Asylum seekers differ from temporary visitors on one crucial point: many want to make Sweden their new home country. Hence, it is likely that they will try to make sense of this new society and what their place in it might be long before they receive their residence permit.

Integration can be a problematic concept to use, however. Not least because it has been defined in various, often contradicting, ways. This problem of definition, as well as my reasons for using the concept, will be explored further in Chapter 3. For now, it will hopefully suffice to present the basic assumptions underlying the use of the concept in this thesis.

The first is that unless we speak of a global society, integration implies boundaries of some kind. The boundaries of a nation-state naturally spring to mind, but more local forms of integration are also important. This in turn implies some form of *membership*. In this regard, asylum seekers' status is highly precarious but the very act of seeking asylum is in a sense also an act of seeking membership. This brings us on to the second assumption: for it to be meaningful to speak of integration with regards to asylum seekers, it needs to be viewed as a *process* rather than an end-state. The third assumption is that this process needs to be one based on *mutual* acceptance rather than one-sided adaptation: potential members cannot become full members unless they are accepted as such by both the formal structures of the state and by the host population more generally. Full membership implies equal membership, and this is the final point I wish to make: *equality* plays a central role in integration. Although this is partly motivated on normative grounds as a question of social justice, it is also possible to argue

that equality is an important condition for solidarity—which in turn can be seen as a necessary condition for an integrated society.

The assumptions stated above are largely compatible with the official Swedish integration goals of ‘equal rights, duties and opportunities for all regardless of ethnic and cultural background’ (prop. 2019/20:1). This compatibility is important as policy serves as an important backdrop to this study. As part of my aim is to examine the claim that the conditions for integration differs depending on the housing form, I need to speak of integration on roughly the same terms as those making the claim. I have, however, settled on a different definition of the end goals of the integration process as *equal participation in, and belonging to, a given society*. The reason for this requires a lengthier discussion than is necessary here, and we will return to this question in Chapter 3.

For now, it is enough to note that asylum seekers’ ability to both participate and belong are seriously hampered by their lack of formal rights and formal membership status. This makes asylum seekers interesting as a type of ‘critical case’ that has the potential to contribute to our sociological understanding of the *boundaries* of integration: what type of participation and belonging is possible in the absence of the rights associated with formal membership?

I would argue that such knowledge can only be gained by viewing the process of integration from the perspective of asylum seekers themselves. Hence the overall aim of this thesis is to contribute to our sociological understanding of integration by exploring how asylum seekers make sense of their own position in relation to the society they are living in. An additional aim is to explore what role the different housing forms have in shaping the integration process of asylum seekers. The starting point is that integration is something that happens in a particular *place*; hence both the actual housing and its wider context are of importance. The comparison will take both objective indicators and subjective aspects into account. Stable housing is an important indicator of integration but as Sweden is in the midst of a housing crisis, it is an indicator that is difficult to achieve for asylum seekers and new residents with very limited resources. Feeling ‘at home’ is also an important subjective aspect of integration, whether it is locally in a specific place, or more generally in Sweden as a country.

To meet the aims of this thesis, a qualitative interview study with Syrian refugees in two different locations was conducted. One where ABO is the main form of housing and one where EBO is. The initial interviews took place in 2016, when most of the interviewees were asylum seekers. Follow-

up interviews were conducted in 2017 when they had received their residence permits. The purpose of the second round of interviews was to explore what the change in legal status meant to their integration process and to see whether the initial housing form had set the participants on different paths in terms of integration. The following research questions have served as guidelines throughout the project:

How do asylum seekers make sense of their integration process?

What obstacles and opportunities do they experience in this process?

What role does the type of housing, and its context, play in this process?

The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows: the next chapter will provide an overview of migration and integration policy in Sweden, as well as a discussion of recent developments in these areas. The chapter is more than mere background information as policy serves as an important point of reference throughout thesis. Chapter 3 contains a theoretical discussion of the integration concept, centred partly on the problem of using a concept as both an analytical tool and as an object under study. The chapter also presents the analytical framework used in the empirical chapters: Ager and Strang's (2008) core domains of integration. In Chapter 4, the analytical framework is elaborated further, both theoretically and in the form of a literature review structured according to domains of the framework. Chapter 5 discusses the methodological choices made. Chapter 6 to 9 include the main empirical analysis. These chapters are also structured based on Ager and Strang's framework. In the final chapter, I summarise and discuss the findings of the study both in light of the theoretical framework used and in light of recent policy changes. The aim of this final chapter is not to come to a conclusion regarding which housing form is 'better for integration' but rather to show that viewing the issue from the perspective of the asylum seekers themselves casts doubt on the specific conceptualisation of integration used to motivate the recent policy changes.

2. Swedish asylum policy

Migration to and from Sweden has both changed in form and numbers over the years but since World War II, Sweden has been a country of net immigration. The refugees that came during the war were followed by mainly labour migrants in the 1950s and 1960s. The economic crisis in the 1970s led to more restrictions on labour migration and since the 1980s migration to Sweden has been dominated by asylum seekers. In 1992 the numbers peaked at over 84 000 due to the war in former Yugoslavia. Since then the numbers have fluctuated but they have been consistently high in recent years reaching the highest number on record in 2015, over 160 000, not least because of the war in Syria (Migrationsverket 2019; 2020a). This peak led to a number of restrictions, both nationally and internationally.

International agreements naturally affect migration to Sweden, as do border closures at home and abroad, but Sweden has little influence over conflicts abroad and it is generally much harder to regulate the number of asylum seekers than the number of labour migrants. As a signatory of the UN refugee convention, Sweden is obliged to let anyone apply for asylum once they have entered the country.⁵ Despite, or perhaps because, of this obligation attempts are still made to restrict this form of migration. This is done by either making it more difficult or less attractive to enter the country in the first place. That access to entry is limited is clear: there is essentially no legal way for most asylum seekers to enter the country since asylum is not considered a valid reason to apply for a visa. The question of limiting ‘attractiveness’ is more complex, and it is a question we will have reason to return to.

Although this chapter discusses ‘immigration policy’ and ‘integration policy’ as two separate entities, they are usually intertwined, and a restrictive immigration policy can be difficult to combine with an inclusive integration policy. As Bridget Anderson (2017) puts it:

Importantly, immigration controls are not simply about conditions of entry but about conditions of stay ... [they] are not simply taps that attempt (successfully or not) to control the flows of entry of non-citizens, but they are moulds, that shape social relations (p. 1532).

⁵ Subject, of course, to the so called ‘Dublin regulation’ whereby an asylum application should be made in the first EU country one enters. If there is proof that a person entered another EU state prior to coming to Sweden, they can be sent back to the relevant country (Regulation (EU) No 604/2013).

The fact that migration policy not only controls flows but also *shape social relations* is one of the main reasons why the aim of migration policies often contradict other policy aims, particularly those relating to integration. This contradiction will be explored in the final section of this chapter.

The chapter should not be read as a comprehensive overview of policy in these areas. It will paint overall developments in quite broad strokes and give a few examples of important policy changes. While I acknowledge the importance of the European context, the focus will primarily be on national policy rather than EU policy. A final delimitation of the whole study as well as this chapter, is that the focus lies *after* an asylum seeker arrives in Sweden. Hence the treatment of border control issues is kept to a minimum.

2.1 Immigration policy

In an influential paper from 2004 entitled ‘Why migration policies fail’, Stephen Castles puts forward a convincing case for why policies attempting to control migration rarely achieve their stated goal. Bridget Anderson (2017) counters this claim and suggests that migration policies *do* often succeed in limiting migration, a ‘success’ that usually comes at a high human cost paid by the migrants themselves. She uses the EU – Turkey deal in March 2016 as an example of this. In short, the agreement involves sending asylum seekers who travel from Turkey to the Greek islands back to Turkey. In return, Turkey will receive a substantial payment from the EU in order to finance their refugee reception (European Council 2016). The deal has been criticised by human rights organisations as a violation of the fundamental human right to seek asylum; unlike most other signatories of the 1951 refugee convention, Turkey excludes all non-Europeans from full refugee status.⁶ The assumption that Turkey is a safe country to return to has also been questioned (Human Rights Watch 2016).

Although Castles (2017) himself acknowledges that Anderson has a valid point when saying that policies often do ‘succeed’, much of his earlier argument still rings true today. Castles highlights the complexity of migration processes and why it is misguided to think of migration as something that can be ‘turned on and off like a tap with the appropriate policy settings’ (2004, p. 208). Part of the reason why migration policies fails, he argues,

⁶ The convention was originally conceived with refugees from World War II in mind and was limited to ‘event occurring in Europe before the 1st of January 1951’. The refugee definition was made universal in the 1967 protocol but some countries, Turkey included, chose to keep the geographical limitation (UNHCR 2015).

is that they apply a national logic to a transnational phenomenon. For example, the fact that only persons from so called ‘safe countries’ can travel without a visa, which excludes most asylum seekers, does nothing to address the global inequalities that drive migration in the first place. People in politically and economically unstable countries will still migrate in order to improve their life chances and they are not blindly going to follow bureaucratic rules. Visa restrictions on asylum seekers also show some inherent contradictions in the political systems enforcing migration policy. On the one hand, countries try to uphold human rights and on the other hand, they try to discourage ‘illegal’ immigration —both policy goals are clearly incompatible with the policy of visa restrictions. Adding to this is the self-sustaining nature of migration processes once they are in motion. Previous immigration has led to the formation of migrant networks that strongly influence the choice of destination for new migrants.

In other words, when Syrian asylum seekers chose Sweden over other European countries back in 2015, it was partly due to such networks and not purely a reflection of the country’s migration policies.

Does this mean that Sweden’s self-proclaimed image as a ‘humanitarian superpower’ is completely unfounded since migration is due to factors beyond their control? ⁷ Not quite, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to defend that image. The number of asylum seekers per capita may have been higher in Sweden than in any other European country until recently, but the share of asylum applications that are actually approved, is lower than in several other European countries (Eurostat 2019). Until recently, the country also fared well comparatively speaking regarding access to permanent residence, citizenship and family reunification (Huddleston et al. 2015) but much of that changed with the so-called policy U-turn in 2016 (Scarpa & Schierup 2018; Dahlstedt & Neergaard 2019). Although the changes implemented then were drastic, they were not completely unprecedented: an increase in the number of asylum seekers has been met with restrictions on previous occasions as well. The next two sections will cover two policy areas that are sometimes subject to restrictions: refugee status and permanent residence. They will be followed by a section on citizenship, a policy area that has remained relatively unchanged but that is affected by changes in other areas.

⁷ See, for example, former Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt’s speech from 2014, where he declared that Sweden is a ‘humanitarian superpower’ and appealed to people to ‘open their hearts to refugees’ (Moderaterna 2014).

2.1.1 Who is a refugee?

According to the 1951 convention relating to the status of refugees, the term refugee applies to:

Any person who [...] owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

Sweden ratified the convention in 1954 and the above definition of a refugee was incorporated in Swedish law in 1980 (SFS 1980:376). In 2005, gender and sexual orientation was added as possible grounds for refugee status (SFS 2005:716). Sweden has also recognised the need to offer protection to people that do not qualify as ‘convention refugees’ but the extent to which such additional protection is offered has varied over the years.

In the period between the Second World War and the early 1970s, the number of refugees seeking protection in Sweden was relatively low. This was at least partly due to the open labour market policy at the time: many of those who escaped dictatorships in Southern Europe simply came to work instead of applying for asylum (Abiri 2000, p.13). When restrictions on labour migration were implemented, the number of refugees gradually started to increase. The end of the Cold War saw a significant rise in applications and in 1989, the government took the drastic decision to only grant asylum to individuals who could be classified as ‘convention refugees’ (Abiri 2000, p. 15). The decision was overturned two years later. Since then, the categorisation of different grounds for asylum has changed on a few occasions (e.g. prop 1996/97:25; SFS 2005:716) and before the temporary law was enforced in 2016, five possible grounds for asylum were given: resettlement refugees, convention refugees, those in need of subsidiary protection, those in need of ‘other’ protection, and those in exceptionally distressing circumstances. In 2016, the last two categories were removed (prop. 2015/16:174).

Although the law itself can be restrictive or generous regarding who is considered a refugee, it is also a matter of how the law is applied. This includes more general assessments about the security situation in various countries as well as an individual assessment of the trustworthiness of an asylum seeker’s claims. Up until 1985, most asylum applications were granted (Abiri 2000, p. 13). Since then, approval rates have fluctuated but

there has been a significant decline overall. In 2018, only 39% of first-time applicant received a positive decision (Migrationsverket 2020a). Whether this is due to an increase in the number of asylum seekers without a genuine need for protection or a more restrictive application of the law is an open question. A comparison with Germany, the other main receiver of refugees in Europe, does at least dispel the idea that Sweden is exceptionally generous. Both countries offered protection to nearly all Syrian applicants in 2016 but for many other nationalities, the approval rates were considerably higher in Germany. Another noticeable difference is the *kind* of protection offered. Whereas Germany recognised 57% of Syrian applicants as convention refugees, only 10% of Syrian applicants in Sweden were given the same status (Burmam & Valeyathepillay 2017). That Sweden tends to give subsidiary protection rather than offer full refugee status is not a new phenomenon and it is one that has been subject to critique.⁸ The distinction between convention refugee and subsidiarity protection is not just symbolically important, it is also important in terms of the different rights attached to each status. This last point has become particularly salient post 2016 and it is one that we will have reason to return to.

2.1.2 Temporary and permanent residence

Until 1984, refugees and other immigrants to Sweden generally received a temporary one-year residence permit upon arrival. When the first year came to an end, they could apply for permanent residence. As only a handful of cases were denied permanent residence on grounds of misconduct, the question of whether this was an efficient system was raised. It was deemed better for the immigrants themselves, as well as more cost effective, if permanent residence was granted from the start (prop. 1983/84:144). This became the main rule and until July 2016, most refugees received permanent residence permits. Exceptions were made before 2016, however. The war in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, and the refugee movements that followed, is an interesting example as the option of offering *temporary* protection was explored around this time. While the rest of Europe generally responded to the situation by offering temporary protection, Sweden initially took a more generous stance and offered 40 000 Bosnians permanent residence on humanitarian grounds. The generosity of this decision was ‘balanced out’ by

⁸ See, for example, Wettergren & Wikström’s (2014) study on asylum seekers from Somalia. They argue that the narrow definition of a refugee is particularly problematic for women who are less likely to be seen as political subjects.

restrictions in other areas, most noticeably the reinstatement of the visa restrictions on Bosnian citizens that had been lifted in 1992. An increased focus on repatriation and on the possibility of offering temporary protection ‘in situations of mass-flight’ was also the focus of later reforms (prop. 1993/4:94; SOU 1995:75). This policy change was put to use in 1995 when a group of Bosnians with Croatian passport were offered temporary resident permits (see Appelqvist 2000; Slavnic 2000).

Some parallels can be drawn between events that took place in the 1990s and what has happened in the policy areas since 2015. At both times, an unprecedented number of asylum seekers led to policy restrictions and a move away from the rule of permanent residence. Interestingly, both times are also seen as a ‘turning-point’ in Swedish asylum policy.⁹

In the intervening years, permanent residence for refugees remained the general rule although some exceptions were made. The Aliens Act (2005:716) in place until 2016, stated that refugees should be given permanent residence or a temporary permit of at least three years. If the Migration Agency made the assessment that an armed conflict was temporary in nature, they sometimes gave three-year temporary permits. Based on their initial assessment of the security situation in Syria, the Migration Agency granted permanent residence only to those who qualified as convention refugees, those in need of subsidiary protection were given temporary permits. In 2013, the Migration Agency changed their assessment. Their conclusion was that since the security situation had deteriorated drastically since the start of the conflict and as no resolution was in sight, all refugees from Syria should be given permanent residence (Migrationsverket 2013). Sweden was the only country in Europe offering permanent residence at the time and this proved to be a considerable pull factor: the number of asylum seekers who chose Sweden as their destination increased significantly after the decision (Jörum 2015; Andersson & Jutvik 2019). A change in government in 2014 did not lead to any immediate changes in policy and during speech in September 2015, the prime minister Stefan Löfven famously stated that his ‘Europe does not build walls’. His speech stressed Sweden’s continued commitment to helping refugees, as well as the need for the rest of Europe do more (Regeringen 2015a). Less than three months later, Löfven held a press conference with a drastically different message. In the preceding months,

⁹ See, for example, Kadhim (2000); Slavnic (2000) and Södergran (2000) on the refugee politics of the 1990s and Scarpa & Schierup (2018) and Dahlstedt & Neergaard (2019) for recent year’s policy changes.

Sweden had seen a record breaking 80 000 new asylum application and the situation was declared unsustainable. Sweden needed a ‘breathing space’ and in order to achieve this, policy had to be adjusted to the EU minimum standard (Regeringen 2015b).

A temporary law (SFS 2016:752) was introduced that made temporary residence the main rule. From 20 July 2016, convention refugees are given three-year temporary permits and those in need of subsidiary protection 13-month permits.¹⁰ The permit can be renewed if the person still has a need for protection. The new permit will also be temporary although those who can support themselves, through employment or self-employment, may be eligible for a permanent residence permit. With the new law, the grounds for protection affect not only the length of the permit but also a person’s right to family reunification. While convention refugees retained this right, those in need of subsidiary protection did not. The temporary law was initially valid for three years but was later extended until 2021. Some of the restrictions on family reunification were, however, lifted. In 2019, subsidiary protection refugees were given the same right to family reunification as convention refugees but the more general restriction on reunification remain in place: those applying for reunification now needs to have sufficient means to support not only themselves but also those seeking to join them. Refugees are only exempt from this rule under certain conditions (prop 2018/19:128).

2.1.3 Citizenship

Access to citizenship may not be the most immediate concern of an asylum seeker new to the country but when it comes to long-term integration and equality, it is of central importance both in terms of its symbolic value and the more concrete rights that comes with it.

Unlike other policy areas covered here, rules surrounding citizenship have not been subject to the same restrictiveness in recent years. However, policy changes in other areas have had an indirect impact access to citizenship: since one of the requirements for citizenship by naturalisation is that the person has a *permanent* residence permit, the changes discussed in the previous section affect access to citizenship as well (prop. 2018/9:128). Regarding more direct measures, changes have tended to go in a more inclusive direction: residence requirements for citizenship through naturalisation has

¹⁰ An exception was made for families with children under 18 who arrived before the 25 of November 2015, they were still eligible for permanent residence. Those that arrived before this date could also apply for family reunification.

been lowered, the income requirement has been dropped and as of 2001, dual citizenship is allowed (Boguslaw 2012, pp.97-207).¹¹ Although some conditions apply relating to the ‘good conduct’ of the applicant, Sweden does not tie citizenship to any kind of ‘integration’ requirements. In a European context, the country is quite unusual in this regard. Most other western European states have some form of ‘citizenship test’ that usually include tests of language proficiency and country-specific knowledge. Whether the primary function of these tests is to encourage integration or limit immigration is a contentious issue (Goodman & Wright 2015) and when the Swedish Liberal Party suggested such a policy in 2002, they were met with strong opposition, but they also doubled their support in that year’s general election (Svensson 2018). The party has brought up the issue several times since then and after the tumultuous 2018 election, it appears they may finally be successful in implementing such a policy. In the so called ‘January agreement’ with the ruling party, The Social Democrats, one of the conditions that they managed to include was a language and civic information test for citizenship.¹² The motivation given was that this would ‘strengthen the status of citizenship and help promote a more inclusive society’. When, or if, the policy will be implemented is still unclear at the time of writing.

2.2 Integration policy

In the post-World War II period, when Sweden first went from being a country of emigration to one of immigration, the government had a rather laissez-faire attitude towards integration. By the end of the 1960s it had become apparent that although some immigrants were only in Sweden temporarily, many were here to stay and they should not ‘risk being treated as “guest workers” who cannot make claims to full social care, equality in terms of educational opportunities, and security measures at times of threatening or existing employment difficulties’ (prop. 1968:142, p. 49, own translation). A lengthy inquiry in to the ‘immigrant situation’ resulted in a government report in 1974 (SOU 1974:69) and a year later, Sweden’s new

¹¹ Continuous residence for at least five years is usually required for citizenship. Some exceptions apply: stateless people and convention refugees can, for example, apply after four years (Migrationsverket 2020b).

¹² The agreement between the Social Democrats, the Green Party, the Centre Party and the Liberals included 73 conditions that the two latter parties had for approving Stefan Löfven as Prime Minister. The agreement was reached after several failed attempts to form a government after the 2018 election (Socialdemokraterna 2019a).

‘immigrant policy’ was presented (prop. 1975:26). The new policy was a clear move away from assimilation and towards multiculturalism. Of central importance were the three guiding principles: equality, freedom of choice and cooperation. In terms of *equality*, the goal was for immigrants to have the same opportunities, rights and obligations as the rest of the population. *Freedom of choice* referred to minorities’ opportunity to decide to what extent they wanted to keep their cultural and linguistic identity. The third goal was for *cooperation* between immigrant groups and the majority population. This cooperation should be built on ‘mutual tolerance and solidarity between immigrants and the native population’ (prop. 1975:26, p.16).

Although the policy is generally considered ambitious and well-intended, some argue that in retrospect, the policy and its implementation had some negative consequences. Lena Södergran (2000), for example, argues that the policy is based on a clear separation between ‘us’ (the native Swedes) and ‘them’ (the immigrants), which has contributed to integration problems being treated as ‘their’ problems. A related problem is that the tendency to view integration through a cultural lens left questions of socio-economic inequalities and power relations relatively unexplored (e.g. Ålund & Schierup 1991; Molina 1997). Also noteworthy is that this ‘inclusive’ integration policy was introduced simultaneously with restrictions to labour market migration. The 1975 government bill stated that in order to meet the equality goal, immigration had to be adjusted according to the society’s ability to provide immigrants with ‘work, housing, social care and education on the same terms as the rest of the population’ (prop. 1975: 26, p.15). Hence *integration* became an excuse to limit *immigration* (Johansson 2015).

While the integration policy introduced in 1975 has remained influential, it has also been the subject of internal critique over the years. In the 1980s, the immigration of people from geographically, and presumably culturally, distant countries had increased significantly and the feasibility of the ‘freedom of choice’ goal was called into question. The solution was a stricter definition of the goal as the possibility to develop one’s own cultural heritage *within the boundaries of the fundamental norms* in Swedish society (SOU 1984:58; Södergran 2000, pt. 3, pp. 26-27). The 1990s saw more extensive reforms in the integration area. The 1997 government bill (prop. 1997/98:16) outlining the new policy recognises some of the criticism the previous policy faced by proposing a move away from an ‘immigrant policy’ and towards an ‘integration policy’. Whereas the previous immigrant policy had emphasised difference and contributed to immigrant marginalisation in

an unfortunate way, the new integration policy would treat integration as a question for the whole of society. Specific measures directed at immigrants should be limited to those new to the countries, other integration measures should be an integral part of general politics (prop. 1997/98:16, pp. 20-21). The bill also suggested that integration issues needed to be clearly separated from immigration issues and the establishment of a new government agency was proposed. Apart from being tasked with evaluating developments in the area, the agency would be responsible for new arrivals introduction in Sweden.¹³ Despite limited support from the opposition parties, the Integration Board (Integrationsverket) was established in 1998. While the new Board was put forward as an inclusive measure, the 1990s also saw more excluding measures, such as an increased focus on repatriation. A United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) statement that claimed voluntary repatriation was the best solution for people living in exile played a role in this development (Södergran 2000, pt. 3, p. 33). In Sweden this resulted in the contradictory aim of preparing new arrivals for integration and return simultaneously. Temporary permits were used around this time and those who had been given temporary permits were especially targeted for repatriation measures. The policy has been criticised as there is little evidence that repatriation is indeed the best or 'more natural' solution for refugees. Furthermore, such a discourse could have negative implications not just for the refugees who are 'encouraged' to go back but also for those who end up staying in Sweden (e.g. Slavnic 2000; Södergran 2000).

Despite the high ambitions of Swedish integration policy, inequality between the foreign- and native-born part of the population remained a problem in the decade that followed. Part of the problem is that the ambitions were rarely matched by a similar generosity in the resources provided to fulfil the integration goals (Södergran 2000). Another aspect that came into focus in the 2000s was the existence of structural discrimination in Swedish society. This was the topic of an inquiry, led by Masoud Kamali, that proved controversial.¹⁴ The inquiry was tasked with identifying structural discrimination and analysing the mechanisms behind it. It concluded that

¹³ At that time, the Swedish Immigration Board (later Migration Agency) was responsible for both assessing (and possibly rejecting) asylum claims and integrating new arrivals. This dual purpose of exclusion and inclusion was seen as problematic (Södergran 2000, pt. 2, pp. 48-49).

¹⁴ The inquiry resulted in twelve reports. *The black book of integration, an agenda for equality and social cohesion* (SOU 2006:79, own translation) was the final one.

discrimination was wide-spread and that not only did the current integration policy do nothing to alleviate problem, it was in some part to blame for it (SOU 2006:79). The Final report was published shortly before the Social Democrats lost the election, it was not well-received by the new, right-wing, government and in the end the report had little impact on policy development.¹⁵ With this government, who stayed in power for eight years, integration policy took new a direction and integration became more or less synonymous with labour market integration (Hellgren 2015).

The Social Democrats came back in power in 2014, albeit as a minority government that relies on substantial concessions to other parties (see section 2.1.3). They did not include a minister for integration in the cabinet, a decision that was criticised by some who saw it as a sign that they were not prioritising integration issues. Prime Minister Stefan Löfven defended the decision by saying that integration should be every minister's responsibility (Salö 2014). This move could be seen as a commitment to earlier Social Democratic policy of making integration a question for general politics rather than an 'immigrant issue' and the Minister of Employment at the time, stated in 2013: 'bringing up integration issues separately only creates a feeling of us and them' (Ljungberg 2013). Coincidentally, as Minister of Employment, she was also responsible for what was previously called 'integration issues'. Despite this move away from the concept of integration, in terms of actual integration measures, little has changed since the previous government. The focus is still very much on immigrants (especially new arrivals) and how to make 'them' employable.

2.2.1 Reception of asylum seekers

At the start of this chapter, I brought up two possible ways to try limit the number of asylum seekers despite a commitment to the Refugee Convention. The first one is to stop people from entering the country in the first place through visa restrictions and border controls. The second is to limit the *attractiveness* of coming to a particular country. Sweden's decision to go from permanent to temporary residence permits can be seen as an example of the latter strategy. There are also other, more indirect, ways of achieving this aim. This strategy involves keeping asylum seeker's rights to a bare minimum and it is one that has been commonly used in several European

¹⁵ The closure of the Integration Board was one of few recommendations followed. It is unlikely this had much to do with the report. The right-wing alliance (with the exception of the Centre Party) had been critical of its establishment from the start.

countries in recent decades.¹⁶ Sweden, however, has gone against this trend of indirect measures and increased some rights for asylum seekers. The most notable examples are perhaps asylum seekers' right to choose their own accommodation and their right to work (Andersson & Nilsson 2011).¹⁷ Despite the comparative 'generosity' in this area, asylum seekers' status is clearly different from that of a citizen or resident of the country. The uncertainty of not knowing whether they will be allowed to stay or not—coupled with the aforementioned need to 'limit attractiveness' that deliberately excludes them from participation—leaves asylum seekers very restricted regarding of what is possible, or even desirable, in terms of integration. The limitations listed in SOU 2003:75 (p.38, own translation) are still relevant:

- Great resources should not be spent on those who may leave the country before long.
- Integration efforts must not give the asylum seekers false hope that they are allowed to stay in the country.
- The asylum process should not be made so appealing that it attracts individuals without valid reasons to seek asylum in Sweden.

The principles of equality, freedom of choice and cooperation clearly do not apply to asylum seekers. The situation is further complicated by the fact that the number of asylum seekers fluctuate, sometimes drastically, which makes planning for and implementing integration measures for asylum seekers difficult. At the same, it is precisely such fluctuations that often brings the question of integration of asylum seekers to the fore: a greater number of asylum seekers means longer waiting times for a decision, which in turn leads to an increased need to make this waiting time meaningful.

Until 1985, the National Labour Market Board was responsible for the reception of resettlement refugees.¹⁸ Asylum seekers who came on their own accord simply stayed in the municipality where they had applied for asylum

¹⁶ Valenta and Thorshaug (2013) question the effectiveness of this strategy. Correlating work policies with the number of asylum seekers in five different European countries, they found little support that restrictive policies decreased the number of asylum seekers. Instead, they argue, it is more likely to lead to further marginalisation of a vulnerable group and increased activity in the informal labour market.

¹⁷ Although clearly a restriction, the recent change in housing policy does not appear to be motivated primarily as a means to limit attractiveness (see section 2.2.3).

¹⁸ The National Labour Market Board (Arbetsmarknadsstyrelsen) was replaced by the newly formed Public Employment Service (Arbetsförmedlingen) in 2008.

which was usually in one of the larger cities. The municipalities could apply for compensation for cost of living and emergency health care, but the involvement of the municipalities often extended beyond this, for example by helping asylum seekers find housing. By the early 1980s, spontaneous asylum seekers outnumbered the resettlement refugees, and the situation in the receiving municipalities was increasingly strained. A reform of the system was needed, and the Immigration Board took over the responsibility of both asylum seekers and refugees.¹⁹ Both would initially be housed in reception centres for up to four weeks after which they would be placed in a well-prepared municipality. At the time, most asylum seekers' claims were approved, and it seemed appropriate that they would get the same treatment as resettlement refugees. By the time the new policy was implemented, the situation had changed dramatically. Both the number of asylum seekers and the number of rejected claims increased significantly which meant that the stay in the temporary reception centres became much longer than intended. The number of municipalities involved also increased. Instead of the roughly 60 initially intended, nearly all municipalities were included and not all of them were 'well-prepared' for the task (Migrationsverket 2008). These developments brought the question of integration to the fore; conditions that may have been acceptable in the short time span intended can be intolerable if extended for months or even years. To this day, many of the measures directed at asylum seekers are not integration measure in the traditional sense but rather a way of trying to counteract the detrimental effects that a long, passive wait can have on a person's well-being.

Initially, asylum seekers were occasionally offered some activities but were generally not included in introductory activities offered to those with a residence permit (prop 1989/90:105). In the early 1990s, it was argued that the waiting time could be used more efficiently to prepare for the asylum seekers' future integration. It was also suggested that prolonged passivity could lead to welfare dependency after a residence permit (prop. 1993/94:94, p. 23). As a move away from more paternalistic policies, asylum seekers' right to work was introduced in 1992. The aim was for asylum seekers to be under the same obligation as the rest of society to support themselves if possible. It was also believed that the passivity of asylum seekers might affect the public perception of them negatively (prop. 1993/94:94). As the policy was introduced at a time of economic crisis and

¹⁹ Statens Invandrarverk (Immigration Board) became Migrationsverket in 2000 (initially Migration Board, later Migration Agency in English).

high unemployment, it was unlikely that many asylum seekers would find work. Whether it had any obvious value as an indication of what was *expected* is also unclear. Although extending a right to asylum seekers almost seemed secondary to other aims, this could still be seen as a step in a more inclusive direction.

Swedish policymakers were not completely unconcerned about the ‘pull factor’ such a policy could have, however. Hence, the right to work only applied to those whose expected waiting time exceeded four months. This time limit was set in order to discourage an increase in ‘illegitimate’ asylum seekers; the concern was that seeking asylum in order to work temporarily could be tempting for those without a real need for protection (prop. 1993/94:94, pp. 36-37). In 2010, the four-month limit was dropped on the condition that the asylum seekers cooperate in clarifying their identity (prop 2007/08:147). This time, the right to work was used as an incentive to counteract the growing problem of identification but it was also seen as an important way to start the integration process early. A further incentive for asylum seekers to work was given in the form of an option to ‘change queues’: an asylum seeker whose claim is denied but who has been working for at least six months can now apply for a work permit without leaving the country (prop. 2007/8:147).²⁰ Despite these measures, the number of asylum seekers who actually work has been consistently low.²¹

Introducing the right to work was a part of the overall strategy of making the wait for a decision more active and meaningful. To ‘encourage’ activity, and to tie said activities to the previously stated obligation for asylum seekers to provide for themselves if possible, the daily allowance became a conditional payment that could be reduced if the person refused to take part in organised activity.²² Around the same time, the amount given as a daily allowance was lowered. This was done as part of a general savings package,

²⁰ This measure was part of a larger reform to labour migration that saw Sweden go from one of the more restrictive policies to the most liberal one in the OECD. Instead of using labour market tests, it lets the employer decide whether recruitment outside the EU is needed. This has opened up for the immigration of low skilled workers who, not unlike asylum seekers who ‘switch tracks’, are more dependent on their employer and more vulnerable to exploitation (Frödin & Kjellberg 2017).

²¹ In 2014 around 25 000 asylum seekers were exempt from the work permit rule, but only 424 actually worked (Migrationsverket 2014a).

²² Organised activity often involved Swedish language or civic information classes but it could also involve working in the reception centre with cleaning or other tasks (Migrationsverket 2008).

but it was also deemed reasonable for asylum seekers to have a lower economic standard than those living in the country on a permanent basis. The allowance had previously been based on the social welfare payments given to residents, with a small deduction as asylum seekers generally did not have the same expenses (furniture, TV license etc.). When the allowance was lowered, it also stopped being based on general welfare payments (prop. 1993/94:94, p. 46). It is noteworthy that the amounts that were set in in 1994 have not been changed since.²³

Despite the economic incentive to participate, the success of the strategy has been rather limited and participation in organised activities has been low (SOU: 2009:19; RiR 2012:23). In reality, The Migration Agency was never even close to achieving the goal of offering eight hours of activities every day. The main reason for this was lack of resources. The few activities they were able to offer were often of poor quality, something that contributed to the low attendance (Migrationsverket 2008).

There is little to suggest that things have improved since, especially as recent years has seen a shift in the priorities of the Migration Agency. Their main focus in recent years has been on shortening waiting times and they were at least partly successful in doing so until the ‘refugee crisis’ in 2015. This has meant other areas have been deprioritised; one significant change is that since 2012 Swedish for immigrants (SFI) is no longer offered to asylum seekers (Migrationsverket 2012).²⁴

The question of meaningful activities for asylum seekers was brought back into the spotlight when waiting times increased again around in 2015. The government solution was to fund ‘early activities for asylum seekers’ provided mainly by civil society organisations. A large part of the funding has gone to adult education associations offering Swedish classes to asylum seekers. As a part of this reform, the responsibility for such early integration measure was also moved from the Migration Agency to the County Administrative Boards. They did not, however, take over the responsibility for work placements for asylum seekers and this option is now highly restricted; employers can still offer asylum seekers work placements, but they receive

²³ A single person gets 71 SEK/day, 24 SEK if in accommodation that includes free food. If part of a couple, this is reduced to 61 SEK and 19 SEK respectively. Children receive 12 SEK if food is included and 37-50 SEK, depending on their age, if food is not included (Migrationsverket, 2020d).

²⁴ SFI offers publicly run and funded Swedish classes to all immigrants registered as residents, free of charge.

no help with administration or insurance from any government agency. Part of the reason for this was that an increased number of asylum seekers also meant an increased number of new residents and it was argued that the latter should be prioritised for work placements (Regeringen 2017a).

In summary, the importance of offering some form of integration measures to asylum seekers has been emphasis for at least a quarter of a century; if not for their immediate integration as asylum seekers than at least for their future integration as potential residents. The resources given to actually provide these services, however, have been rather limited. Because of their precarious status, asylum seekers are not a prioritised group and they are in a position that makes it difficult for them to make demands for change. Adding to this is the contradictory aim of preparing the asylum seeker for residence and return simultaneously. The focus on return was particularly strong during the 1990s when repatriation was heralded as ‘in the best interest of the refugee’ (Södergran 2000; Slavnic 2000). During this time, it was seen as important to inform all refugees of the possibility of return, whether they were legally allowed to stay in the country or not. In more recent years, promoting return has mainly been targeted towards those whose claim was denied. The prospect of return does, nonetheless, remain an integral part of the reception system as a large proportion of asylum seekers will not be given the right to stay.

2.2.2 Reception of new refugee residents

The refugee reception system that was put in place in the mid-1980s remained more or less intact for two decades. When the number of refugees increased shortly after the system was implemented, it came to be known as the ‘Sweden-wide strategy’ (hela-Sverige-strategin) and most municipalities were involved in the reception (Södergran 2000). Not all of these were well suited for this purpose and many had available housing, but weak labour markets. Since the Immigration Board and other government agencies left much of the running the system to the municipalities themselves, there was also a great variation in the quality of the introduction the refugees received.²⁵ Different municipalities had different ideas on which department was best suited for the task, resources available also varied and smaller municipalities with little previous experience of this type of work sometimes struggled to maintain the same level of service as their larger counterparts

²⁵ The immigration board is currently known as the Migration Agency. From 1998 to 2007, the Integration Board was responsible for the integration of refugees.

(SOU 2008:58).²⁶ Despite some positive examples, the municipal reception system as a whole proved disappointing in terms of outcomes, especially with regards to refugee labour market participation (Edin et al. 2004), and a comprehensive reform of the system was initiated (prop. 2009/10:60).

The result of the reform was the ‘establishment programme’ introduced in 2010. With this new two-year programme, the main responsibility for the introduction activities was moved from the municipalities to the Public Employment Service. The intention behind moving the responsibility to a government agency was that it would create a more efficient and more equal system than the one previously in place. The Public Employment Service was chosen on the grounds that the introduction should have a clear focus on employment from day one. The Public Employment Service was also tasked with housing refugees in need of such help. The idea was that the refugee’s skills could more easily be matched to a location with a suitable labour market this way. With the reform, the conditionality of the allowance paid to refugees was emphasised: full payment would only be paid to those participating in activities on a full-time basis.²⁷ The Public Employment Service was made responsible for checking participation and administering the allowance accordingly (prop. 2009/10:60).

An evaluation (Andersson Joona et al 2017) of the reform shows some success in terms of labour market participation: refugees that have taken part in the programme are more likely to be employed than those that took part in the previous programme and their earnings are higher. That the results are modest could be due to the fact that the actual content of the programme is not all that different from what was previously the case.²⁸ The main difference is in how the programme is run (Qvist 2016). The conditionality of the allowance, as well as the variety of public and private actors involved, also means that a lot of time is spent on administration and control. Attention is diverted from the goal of employment and towards the task of ensuring the participants are kept ‘activated’ (Larsson 2015).

²⁶ For example, placing the responsibility on the Labour Market Department or the Social Service Department may lead to different outcomes. For further examples of how different municipalities implemented the policy and some of the struggles they faced, see Södergran (2000, Part 1) and Kadhim (2000).

²⁷ In 2020, those that take part in full-time activities receive 308 SEK/day.

²⁸ The main component of both the establishment programme and the earlier introduction programme in the municipalities is SFI (Swedish for immigrants). Civic information, other forms of education and work placements are also relatively common (Arbetsförmedlingen 2018).

The establishment programme was subject to another, less extensive, reform in 2018 (prop. 2016/17:175).²⁹ The main objective of the reform was to bring the introduction of refugees more in line with the kind of measures offered to the rest of the population through the Employment Service.

During the 1990s, when the repatriation discourse was at its peak, those with temporary permits were not targeted for integration measures as they were only meant to stay a short time (prop. 1993/94:94). It is worth noting that the latest policy does not make similar exclusions with regards to the many refugees who have been given temporary permits since 2016 (prop. 2016/17:175). Because the shorter permit was set at 13-months, it entitles the permit-holder to register as a resident. Registering as a resident requires a permit of at least one year and it is a condition for taking part in the establishment programme as well as many other services. It was also decided that if a temporary permit expires before a renewed permit has been obtained, the person in question will still keep their place in the establishment programme. This means that, apart from a practical difficulty in planning for activities over one year, those with temporary permits are actually included on similar terms as permanent residents. While the uncertainty of their situation should not be underestimated, what this seems to indicate is that the expected stay of these refugees is not quite as temporary as their permits suggests.

2.2.3 Housing policy

This earlier section on the reception of asylum seekers left out one aspect that is central to this thesis: housing. This too, is a policy area that has been the subject of changes over the years. Until the mid-1980s, asylum seekers stayed in the municipality where they initially applied for asylum, usually one of the bigger cities. When this proved unsustainable, it was replaced by a dispersal strategy (prop. 1983/84:124). In 1994, partly in response to the failure of the earlier dispersal strategy, the right to choose one's own housing (EBO) was introduced. This was seen as a move towards independence, responsibility and a life that was as 'normal' as possible under the circumstances (prop. 1993/94:94, p.34).³⁰ Prior to 1994 asylum seekers could

²⁹ Since the field work in this study was conducted in 2016-17, the interviewees were part of the 'old' programme.

³⁰ 'Normality' was also strived for in ABO housing; independent living in apartments was favoured over large accommodation centres.

choose their own housing under certain conditions but the rules were complicated, restrictive and it normally meant losing their financial support. After 1994 the option was open to all and they not only got to keep their daily allowance, but they also got an additional payment of 500 SEK/month for single people and 1000 SEK/month for families. The policy soon became popular with asylum seekers and equally unpopular with the municipalities that received them. Instead of the 10% expected nearly 60% ended up choosing their own housing and most of them were located in municipalities around the bigger cities where segregation was already considered a problem (Migrationsverket 2008, p.18).

Since then, several official reports have been critical of the policy. In 2003, one report stated that EBO has three main disadvantages: firstly, the living conditions are damaging for the asylum seekers themselves, especially children; secondly, the integration process of the hosts is made more difficult; and finally, once they get their residence permit asylum seekers tend to stay on in municipalities where they ‘contribute to their own exclusion and ethnic segregation in an unfortunate way’ (SOU 2003:75, p.41). To make EBO less attractive, the housing supplement was lowered in 2003 and dropped altogether in 2005 (prop. 2004/05:28). But the right to choose remained and the numbers in EBO remained high (around 50%) despite the withdrawal of the supplement. The numbers in EBO have fluctuated over time and in 2015 and 2016, the height of the ‘refugee crisis,’ the proportion housed in EBO was down to about a third of all asylum seekers (Migrationsverket 2020a). This decrease in EBO might have been welcomed by some, but it added pressure on the Migration Agency who often struggle to find suitable, and *affordable*, housing. There was a clear economic incentive to keeping the EBO legislation intact, despite its problems, as EBO costs considerably less than ABO.

The advantages and disadvantages of EBO and ABO from an integration perspective will be discussed further in coming chapters. It is worth mentioning, however, that some of the arguments used against EBO, such as cramped living conditions, are often equally applicable to ABO as well. This was particularly the case in the wake of the ‘refugee crisis’. Although ABO and EBO are normally referred to as two distinct forms of housing, one should in fact distinguish between two main types of ABO. Both tend to be located in more sparsely populated areas of the country (since this is where housing is available), but they differ in other respects. The stated aim of the Migration Agency is to provide housing in apartments where the asylum seekers can live an independent life. These apartments are a more long-term

housing solution and the Migration Agency is directly responsible for the daily running of this part of the reception system. However, at times when there is a high number of asylum seekers registered in the system and a shortage in suitable apartments, the Migration Agency also rely on so called temporary housing. This involves buying a service from private companies that offer food and board to larger groups of people, normally in disused hostels, hotels or campsites. (Migrationsverket 2020c). At the height of the crisis, the Migration Agency could not meet the demand for housing even when using this secondary option and had to introduce further temporary measures. These consisted of increasing the occupancy of existing accommodation centres, the usual standard of 5 m² per person was lowered to 3 m² per person and the maximum of four people per room was raised to six people per room. When this too proved inadequate, emergency accommodation in sports halls and, in one extreme case, tents were introduced.³¹

The crisis brought not only migration policy into the spotlight but also the apparent flaws in the reception system. An inquiry into the matter was published in 2018 (SOU 2018:22), the overall aim of which was to propose changes that would bring a ‘sense of order’ to the reception system. Although the report covered a wide range of topics, the question of where asylum seekers and new residents should live is of particular interest to this study. Some of what the report suggested was a continuation of measures that had already been put into place. A long-running problem in the reception of refugees is that it is not spread evenly across the country: a few municipalities take a very large share of the responsibility and others take next to none. This became unsustainable in 2015 when the housing shortage was extreme, and a new law was introduced that essentially forced all municipalities to receive a certain number of refugees (SFS 2016:38). SOU 2018:22 stated that this was a step in the right direction but that more needed to be done to ensure that responsibility for the reception is evenly distributed. One such measure was to limit an asylum seeker’s access to EBO in certain municipalities. Two suggestions were made: the first one was that EBO in certain areas should be examined and approved by relevant authorities before the person moves in. If the housing was not of sufficiently high standard (i.e. too crowded) the daily allowance would be withheld if the person still

³¹ These measures have since been phased out and as of 2018, most temporary accommodation centres had closed ((Migrationsverket 2020e; Folkhälsomyndigheten 2019a).

decided to move in. The second suggestion was more of a blanket solution whereby asylum seekers that choose EBO in a socially disadvantaged area would lose their right to a daily allowance regardless of the housing standards. Both options to limit EBO would only be available in 32 municipalities identified as having areas characterised by socio-economic challenges. In the subsequent government bill (prop. 2019/20:10), the option of limiting EBO on an area basis rather than based on housing standards was seen as more feasible. Some concerns were raised regarding not only the restriction of asylum seekers' rights but also how such a reform might further stigmatise disadvantaged areas. Also, it is likely that many would still choose EBO and removing the right to a daily allowance would make their situation even more precarious.³² The voicing of these concerns did not have much effect on the matter. The political consensus for a reform was strong enough for the bill to be passed in parliament and as of January 2020, asylum seekers who choose EBO in a disadvantaged area will lose their right to a daily allowance.³³

2.3 The changing context of Swedish policy

Based on Castles (2004) assertion that migration policies fail because they apply a national logic to a transnational phenomenon, it may be tempting to think that the EU is a more appropriate arena for migration policy. Castles (2004, 2017) himself points out that this has not proved to be the case. Other scholars agree. Peo Hansen (2009, p.20), for example, argues that far from fulfilling the promise of a 'human rights-based, "cosmopolitan Europe" capable of transcending the vices of national self-interest', EUs involvement in asylum policy has led to a 'race to the bottom' in which different European nations compete to be the least attractive destination for prospective asylum seekers. Whether this thesis holds true or not may depend on the measure of 'restrictiveness'. Comparing refugee recognition rates in different European countries in a 'pre-crisis' context, Toshkov & de

³² Bodies that objected to parts of the proposed changes include those work directly with asylum seekers such as FARR (The Swedish Network of Refugee Support Groups), the Church of Sweden and the Red Cross, as well Malmö University (See Regeringen (2018) for a full list of consultation bodies).

³³ The 32 municipalities included in this reform have been selected on the ground that they have areas defined as disadvantaged. However, it is up to the municipalities themselves to decide which areas should be exempt from EBO and there are signs of municipalities abusing this right by declaring the *whole* municipality as exempt from EBO (Zachrisson 2020).

Haan (2013) found some support of convergence (the countries are becoming more similar) but no overall trend towards restrictiveness. However, they did not find a similar convergence in the number of applications each country processed. This failure to 'share the burden' evenly has become one of the main stumbling blocks when it comes to reaching a European agreement in the asylum policy area 'post-crisis' (European Parliament 2020). When Swedish asylum policy took a restrictive turn in 2015, the move was largely motivated on the grounds that other European countries needed to 'share the burden'. Sweden, it was argued, had done more than its fair share and could no longer have an asylum policy that was significantly more generous than the rest of Europe (Regeringen 2015b).

The shared European borders, as well as a global context that has seen a record number of displaced people (UNHCR 2019), naturally affect policy developments in Sweden, but there are internal challenges to consider as well. This chapter has lifted some potentially interesting parallels between the 1990s and the 2010s regarding policy restrictions. While these restrictions can be understood as responses to external pressures it is worth noting that the political climate at both times also share some similarities. In the 1991 election, a right-wing populist party called New Democracy entered the parliament after winning 6.7% of the vote. Their election campaign was heavily centred on limiting immigration and although their direct influence may have been limited, their presence served to normalise a more restrictive stance on immigration (Södergran 2000, pp.28-29). New Democracy only last three years in parliament and it was not until 2010 that another party successfully ran a campaign with a distinctively anti-immigration stance. This time, the party was the Sweden Democrats (SD), a party which unlike its predecessors, have only increased their support since (up from 5.7% in 2010 to 17.5% in 2018). Another noteworthy difference is that SD have a much murkier past in the neo-Nazi movement.

Jens Rydgren's 2002 article asked why Sweden, unlike many other European countries, did not have an extreme-right party in parliament. Less than two decades later, a follow up article asked what had changed (Rydgren & Van der Maiden 2019). The answer given was, firstly, that class and socio-economic issues had lost ground to socio-cultural issues in Swedish politics. Secondly, since the mainstream parties had all moved towards the middle, many voters were left with the impression that they are 'all the same', which in turn has made SD seem like an attractive alternative to some. Finally, while SD were still seen as too extreme for most people back in 2002, they have since tried to distance themselves from the more extreme factions of

the party and their attempts at creating an image of a legitimate political party have been fairly successful. While the most marked difference between SD voter and other voters is their attitude towards immigration, it is interesting to note that the rise of SD does not seem to have coincided with an overall rise in xenophobia.³⁴ In this respect, the situation is quite different from the 1990s. The share of survey respondents that agreed with the statement that ‘Sweden should accept less refugees’ reached a peak of 65% in 1992, coinciding with both the rise of the New Democrats and a record number of asylum seekers. In 2017, the share that agreed hit the highest level since the mid-1990s (53%) but the *lowest* number on record was noted in 2015 (40%), at the height of the ‘refugee crisis’. In other words, the change in attitudes only occurred *after* the restrictive policy turn had taken place (Demker 2018).

Until recently, mainstream parties have been reluctant to cooperate with SD but their appearance in Swedish politics has politicised the immigration issue and the restrictive turn can be understood as an attempt from mainstream parties to win back voters from SD (Jylhä et al. 2018). The influence of SD can be seen not only in the more restrictive immigration policy but also in how views on integration have shifted: a few recent proposals appears to take it in a more assimilationist direction. This includes the aforementioned language test for citizenship (see section 2.1.3), the suggestion that all asylum seekers’ daily allowance should be cut if they do not attend obligatory language classes (Socialdemokraterna 2018), and the recent call for the civic introduction given to new arrivals to focus more on ‘Swedish values’ (Regeringen 2017b). What these proposals suggest is that ‘integration problems’ are largely due to immigrants’ failure to fit in and that a lack in motivation is contributing to this failure. The solution to these problems is to ‘encourage’ new arrivals to adapt, either by disciplining those who fail or by rewarding those who succeed. The disciplining strategy involves cutting welfare payments if an immigrant makes the ‘wrong’ choices, for example if they fail to attend language classes or if they choose to live in EBO in the wrong area. The reward strategy is seen in the proposed language test for citizenship as well as in the rule stating that refugees who find employment and can provide for themselves are entitled to permanent residence. The latter is particularly problematic as it indicates that a person’s right to

³⁴ A survey from 2018 (Jylhä et al.) shows that 99% of SD voters think that immigration to Sweden should be reduced compared to 39% of Social Democratic voters.

protection is no longer solely dependent on their protection *needs* but also on what they can *contribute* to Swedish society.

In summary, the prospect for a more inclusive turn in the near future looks increasingly bleak. EU negotiations seem more focused on making ‘fortress Europe’ impenetrable than on international solidarity and the national political climate is heading in a similar direction. Regarding immigration policy, the government appointed a cross-party commission of inquiry in June 2019. The aim of the inquiry is to establish a system that is sustainable in the long-term (Dir. 2019:32). The Migration Minister at the time of writing, has indicated that the Social Democrats will take a restrictive stance in this work. It would not, he argues, be sustainable for Sweden to be the only country in Europe to offer permanent residence to refugees. Since most other parties agree with this view, a return to a more generous system looks unlikely (Torén Björling 2019). Regarding integration, the old Social Democratic principles of equality, freedom of choice and cooperation seem largely forgotten about.

2.4 Immigration and integration policy: contradictions and conclusions

In order to bring together the two policy areas discussed in this chapter, it is worth returning to the question introduced in section 2.1: why do migration policies fail? When integration policy is seen in relation to immigration policy, both Anderson (2017) and Castles (2004) offer important insight. If, as Anderson’s (2017) suggests, migration policies not only control flows but also *shape social relations* it follows that a migration policy can be both a ‘success’ in terms of its effect on migration flows and a ‘failure’ in terms of its effect on integration. This tension between immigration and integration policy has been apparent throughout the time period covered in this chapter, but I will focus on the most recent developments here. The decision to only grant temporary residence to refugees, as well as the decision to restrict access to family reunification, may have been successful in reducing the number of people that apply for asylum, but it is unlikely to have a positive effect on the integration of those who are already here. The uncertainty of not knowing if one will be allowed to stay long-term does not make for a good foundation when one is trying to start a new life. Nor does the uncertainty of not knowing if one’s family is safe and having no means of bringing them to safety.

The above are examples of why ‘limiting immigration for the sake of integration’ is a problematic strategy. Asylum seekers are also the target of a

separate strategy where *integration* measures are kept to a minimum in order to limit *immigration*. The logic behind this strategy is that if the standards in the reception system are kept to a bare minimum, only 'genuine' refugees will be desperate enough to apply. Despite such measures, many of those who apply for asylum are not deemed to be in need of protection and will not be allowed to stay. This leads us to another contradiction whereby asylum seekers are meant to be prepared for integration and return simultaneously, usually with the end-result that they are ill-prepared for both.

The idea that immigration needs to be limited for the sake of integration was first put forward in the mid-1970s when equality was introduced as an integration goal. The argument was that for immigrants to have *equal* access to all that society has to offer, it was necessary to limit their numbers. Although equality was never formally abandoned as an integration goal, is rarely spoken of today and it was not an important motivating factor behind recent policy changes. The idea that integration should be a question for all of society rather than an 'immigrant question' is also largely abandoned and integration measures are almost exclusively targeted at immigrants. When the more specific topic of asylum seekers' integration is broached, the focus is rarely on expanding rights or access to participation. One might, for example, be excused for thinking that a good place to start regarding language classes would be to ensure that all asylum seekers actually have access to such classes and that they are of good quality. Instead, the chosen strategy is to suggest that attending classes should be made a 'duty'. If the duty is not fulfilled, the daily allowance will be cut. The changes in the EBO regulation leads to similar penalties if an asylum seeker chooses to live in the 'wrong' area. These developments place the responsibility for integration squarely on the shoulders of asylum seekers themselves and by extension, they can also be blamed for integration-related problems such as unemployment and segregation.

Another question worth asking is whether such policies are likely to achieve their stated aim, i.e. does cutting payments actually help asylum seeker learn Swedish or move to a more 'integration-appropriate' area? Regarding housing, Castles' (2004) claim that migration is a self-sustaining process is applicable to not only migrants' choice of destination country but also *where* in the country they choose to settle when they have a choice in the matter. As Castles also reminds us, migrants are not guided purely by cost-benefit calculations, they are *social* beings with agency. In other words, it is far from certain that cutting payments would be an effective way of 'encouraging' asylum seekers to move elsewhere.

One final point that has been alluded to already, but that cannot be emphasised enough, is that policies can have both intended and unintended consequences. The main intended outcome when changing from permanent to temporary permits, was to signal to potential asylum seekers that Sweden had reached full capacity and that they should try their luck elsewhere. The trouble is that ‘signals’ have a tendency to reach past their target audience and one must also ask what this change signals to asylum seekers and refugees already here, as well as the general population in Sweden. On this note, it is worth reminding ourselves that Swedish attitudes toward the reception of refugees were at their most generous in 2015, at the height of the crisis. It was only after mainstream parties decided that restrictions were needed that the public followed suit and their attitudes became less generous and more protectionist. Permanent residence was an important signal that refugees should be seen as settlers and as such they should be afforded equal rights. Now, their status is far more uncertain and increasingly dependent on ‘deservingness’ through employment rather than humanitarian needs. If—as Anderson suggests—migration policies shape social relations, they also shape the conditions for integration. Judging by the old standards of ‘equality, freedom of choice and cooperation’, one can only conclude that recent developments have created conditions that are far from favourable for integration.

3. Theorising integration

The task of defining the concept of integration is complicated by the fact that in the social sciences, unlike the natural sciences, the objects of our study are concept-using beings. Lay concepts often find their way into sociological theory, but it also works the other way around: sociological concepts are sometimes taken up by the social actors we study. Anthony Giddens (1987) calls this the ‘double hermeneutic’. Integration is a prime example of a sociological concept that has been adopted, and changed, by lay people which in turn affects how the term is used in sociology and related disciplines. This makes it especially important to clarify *how* the concept of integration is defined and used in this thesis; what aspects it does and does not include.

In the introductory chapter of this thesis, I stated a few basic assumptions that underlie my use of the concept and they are worth restating here. The first is that integration should be viewed as a process rather than an end state. The second is that it needs to be a mutual rather than a one-sided process. The third is that it implies some form of membership in the society in question. The final assumption is that equality is a central part of integration. The end goal of the integration process could be stated as equal participation in, and belonging to, a given society.

The final section of this chapter will elaborate on these assumptions and it will also present the analytical framework used. Ager and Strang’s (2008) ‘core domains of integration’ is the central component of this framework but it also draws on classical sociology, primarily in the form of Émile Durkheim’s (1893/2013) mechanical and organic solidarity. However, as the chosen approach uses the integration concept as both an analytical tool and as an object of analysis, I will first need to say a few words on how integration as a sociological concept relates to integration as a policy concept, and how it can be understood in relation to other concepts such as assimilation, multiculturalism and social inclusion.

3.1 Integration: a general theory and a specific policy?

Naturally, sociologists did not invent the word ‘integration’ and in its most basic sense it simply means the ‘composition of a whole by adding together or combining the separate parts or elements’ (Oxford English Dictionary 2019). This could work as a fairly uncontroversial definition of *social* integration as well. It would not be very informative however, as it says nothing

about how integration works or why it is important. If we turn to a dictionary of sociology instead, the definition reads: ‘a mode of relation of the units of a system by virtue of which, on the one hand, they act so as collectively to avoid disrupting the system and making it impossible to maintain its stability, and, on the other hand, to “co-operate” to promote its functioning as a unity’ (Parsons, quoted in Scott & Marshall 2009). The dense language of this distinctively functionalist definition makes it unlikely to be adopted by many lay users of the term, but the functionalist emphasis on social order at the expense of conflict is problematic to many sociologists as well.

In terms of its sociological foundations, functionalism and the concept of integration can be traced back to Durkheim (1893/2013). Although I would argue that some of his ideas are relevant to this day, I find David Lockwood’s (1964/1992) assessment of Durkheim largely valid. Lockwood argues that Durkheim’s treatment of social disorder as abnormal is flawed, and he tries to incorporate both order and conflict into his theory of social and system integration. Whereas social integration refers to the orderly *or* conflictual relationships between actors, system integration refers to the orderly *or* conflictual relationships between parts of a social system’ (Lockwood 1964/1992, p.400). What Lockwood argues is that any theory of social change needs to take both these aspects into account.

Whilst the distinction between social and system integration will not be used beyond this point in the thesis, I take from Lockwood the importance of acknowledging both order and conflict when discussing integration. The question of Durkheim’s continued relevance will be explored further towards the end of this chapter, but in order to address the ‘double hermeneutic’ presented in the opening paragraph of this chapter, it is worth noting that Durkheim did not write with today’s society in mind. To him, the ‘threat’ to integration was not immigration but modernity and individualism. Despite the obvious difference in circumstances, I would argue that the core problem remains the same: i.e. how is social integration possible in diverse societies?

Diversity can, of course, take many different forms, but in lay terms and in policy, the concept is now mostly associated with immigration. This, in turn, has led many scholars to also use the term in a similar manner. Peninx and Garcés-Mascreñas (2016) argue that this has problematic normative implications as integration policy also tend to categorise ‘integration problems’ as ‘immigrant problems’. It follows that when explanations for these problems are sought, the answers are usually found in some form of

‘immigrant deficit’ and any problems in the receiving society are left unexplored. Penninx and Garcés-Masareñas (2016) argues that despite these drawbacks, integration can still be useful analytical tool. For this to be the case, integration needs to be defined in a ‘non-normative’ manner and their suggested definition of integration is as ‘the process of becoming an accepted part of society’. The openness of their definition has some benefits. For one, it does not assume a host society that is normatively coherent, nor does it specify what form of adaptation, if any, is required of the newcomer. The focus on ‘acceptance’ also shift attention away from the newcomer and to the receiving society. I would, however, argue that it is a bit too vague on the question of equality: acceptance does not necessarily mean ‘acceptance as an equal’.

Equality is not only an important part of how I have chosen to define integration, a point we will return to later, but it has also been a central part of Swedish integration policy since the mid-1970s. However, the question of how this goal of equality is best achieved has been approached differently over the years. The meaning of integration as a policy concept is not fixed, it is highly context-dependent and varies with both time and place. In the section below, I will illustrate this point using Swedish integration policy as a starting point. The section will also discuss two related terms that are often seen as opposed to each other: assimilation and multiculturalism.

3.2 Integration, assimilation and multiculturalism

In the first few decades of Sweden’s newfound status as a country of immigration, there was no integration policy as such. Once it had become clear that many of the ‘guest workers’ that had arrived in the post war period were likely to stay permanently, these immigrant settlers were simply expected to *assimilate* to Swedish society (Diaz 1993). In 1975, an ‘immigrant and minority policy’ (prop. 1975:26) was introduced and this took a completely different approach. The policy’s main goals were *equality* in terms of opportunities, duties and rights; *freedom* of choice regarding cultural identity; and *cooperation* based on mutual tolerance and solidarity. The second goal in particular was a clear rejection of assimilation as it entailed not only an acceptance but an active support of difference. Although the term was not used at the time, it has later been described as an embrace of *multiculturalism* (Ålund & Schierup 1991).

When Sweden’s first official *integration* policy was introduced (prop. 1997/98:16) the preferred term was ‘diversity’ rather than ‘multiculture’.

This was partly because diversity allowed for a less narrow focus on ethnicity and culture, and partly because ‘multicultural’ was a loaded term that had been given a variety of different, and sometimes contradictory, meanings over the years. In terms of the actual integration goals, however, there was no clear move away from ‘multiculturalism’ and they were stated as: Equal rights, duties and opportunities for all regardless of ethnic and cultural background; sense of community based on diversity; and a social development that is characterised by mutual respect and tolerance, and which everybody regardless of background is participating in and share responsibility for. In 2009 the right-wing government that had come into power a few years previously dropped the last two goals (prop 2008/09:01) and equal rights, duties and opportunities’ have remained the sole integration goal since then despite the Social Democrats’ return to power in 2014. If assimilation, on the one hand, and multiculturalism, on the other, are seen as the extreme poles of integration, it is not entirely clear where Swedish policy currently stands.

Naturally, Sweden is not isolated from international developments and internationally, multiculturalism has increasingly been called into question. Some scholars have spoken of a ‘retreat of multiculturalism’ (Joppke 2004) and a ‘return of assimilation’ (Brubaker 2004). Some politicians have put it more bluntly as the *failure* of multiculturalism and they see it as the cause of social division, even terror attacks (see Modood & Meer 2012). Proponents of multiculturalism has questioned the critique on several points: firstly, there is little evidence that multicultural policy has actually been a failure or that so-called multicultural policies are being abandoned (Kymlicka 2012). Secondly, if assimilation is the preferred option it raises the question of *which* culture migrants should assimilate into as most host societies are characterised by cultural diversity. Finally, if even those unwilling to assimilate are expected do so, it would be a case of forced assimilation which is not compatible with the ideals of freedom and equality that are supposedly also valued (Uberoi and Modood 2013). Karin Borevi (2011; 2014) sees Sweden as something of an exception with regards to this ‘multicultural retreat’ and many policy measures that could be considered to ‘multicultural’ are still in place: the right to native language education for example, or the financial support given to ‘ethnic’ organisations. There are, however, signs that Sweden too is going in a more assimilationist direction: a language test for citizenship and a civic information class for new arrivals that is more focused on norms and values are two proposals currently on the table (see Chapter 2).

Assimilation may seem like a morally reprehensible policy goal but in terms of conceptual clarity, it does appear to have a slight advantage over integration: in a most basic sense, it simply means the ‘process of becoming similar’ (Brubaker 2004). On closer inspection, it is not quite as simple as that. The first thing to note is that American scholars and policy makers use the concept of assimilation differently to their European counterparts, and Schneider and Crul (2010) argue that the European perspective on the US often ‘overlooks that the notion of ‘mainstream’ (into which immigrants are supposed to assimilate) is not static and that it implies processes of change on *both* sides’. It is also important to separate assimilation as a policy goal from the process of adaptation that immigrants go through. Alba and Nee (1997) argue that while the former is problematic as it implies that adaptation to the, supposedly superior, majority culture should somehow be enforced—it is actually a fairly accurate description of how immigrants spontaneously adapt to a new society: in time newcomers do indeed become more ‘American’. Other American scholars, such as Portes and Zhou (1993), question why assimilation is usually assumed to mean assimilation into white, middle class America *and* why this is assumed more beneficial to the immigrant. They use the term ‘segmented assimilation’ to describe the various paths an assimilation process can take. New immigrants assimilate into the ‘segment’ of society available to them which, depending on their resources, may not be the white middle class. Many assimilate into ethnic minorities and this can have either positive or negative consequences depending on the characteristics of both the immigrant group and the context they are assimilating into.

Even though American scholars have studied assimilation in a way that is more open to difference than what is usually the case when the term is used in a Swedish context, it remains problematic as policy goal. If assimilation does *not* happen spontaneously, as Alba and Nee (1997) suggest, how should it be enforced? How does one define the mainstream that one is supposed to assimilate into? Is assimilation into the dominant majority preferable, regardless of the outcomes on other indicators such as employment?

As there is reason to suspect that the multiculturalism that characterised Swedish policy since the mid-1970s is now in retreat, the above questions are relevant in the Swedish context as well. Assimilation may still be a too loaded a term for most political parties but the concept of integration has

proved remarkably flexible and has been used to describe both multiculturalist and assimilationist policies.³⁵ My reasons for using the concept despite these obvious ambiguities will be discussed in the section below.

3.3 Analytical framework

As sociologists, we cannot completely ignore the normative connotations that words have in their everyday use, and because immigration is a loaded issue, ‘neutral’ terms that describe and explain the process that new immigrants go through are hard to find. This ‘double hermeneutic’ is not restricted to the concept of integration and but applies to related concepts as well.

One could still argue that there are other concepts that more accurately describe this process. Although I remain open to that possibility, the particular starting point of this project makes it necessary to deal with the concept of integration in one way or another. Since there is a comparison implicit in my approach—i.e. does the way that asylum seekers experience integration either support or contradict the claims made by policymakers? —the analytical framework had to be constructed on the policy makers’ terms to a certain extent. While this only addresses policy relevance, this thesis also claims to be of sociological relevance. On that note, I would argue that ‘integration’ as it is understood in general sociological theory and the way that the concept is used in integration policy can be combined in a fruitful way: concepts dating back to the early days of sociology capture ideas about how society is held together that remains powerful to this day, not least in policy.

The remainder of this chapter will clarify how I use the concept of integration. This clarification will be given alongside a presentation of the analytical framework used. The first section is devoted to Ager and Strang’s ‘core domains of integration’. The benefit of this framework is that it makes the rather abstract concept of integration more concrete and it allows for a thorough analysis of asylum seekers everyday lived experience. However, abstract notions of integration cannot be disregarded completely: when examining policy, they are a crucial part of trying to understand why integration is seen as desirable in the first place; when the focus on the asylum

³⁵ The Sweden Democrats is the only party that endorses assimilation, but other parties are moving in that direction. Ulf Kristersson, the Moderate Party leader, stated in 2019 that the idea of a two-way integration process is ‘treacherous and wrong’, ‘you [immigrants] should adapt to Sweden, Sweden will not adapt to you’. He does, however, maintain that this is *not* assimilation (Sydsvenskan 2019).

seekers' lived experience, they may help explain how a sense of belonging is (or isn't) established. These questions will be addressed in the second section below, which draws primarily on the work of Durkheim.

3.3.1 The core domains of integration

An integrated society, on the one hand, and the individual process of becoming integrated, on the other, are essentially two sides of the same coin. While studying the latter side has the potential to illuminate the former, this study views integration from the perspective of asylum seekers. Hence the definition used needs to primarily be fit for that purpose. At the time of writing, the integration policy goals in Sweden are stated as *Equal rights, duties and opportunities for all regardless of ethnic and cultural background* (prop. 2019/20:1). While they are certainly relevant goals, they give little guidance as to how an individual process striving for integration might work. Instead, I have settled on a definition of the integration goals as 'equal participation in, and belonging to, a given society'. This, I would argue, highlights two separate aspects of integration that a focus on formal rights and duties miss: participation and belonging. 'Equal' refers to both opportunities and outcomes: an absence of formal and informal obstacles to participation and belonging may not be enough, and some form of redistribution of resources could be required.³⁶ Including 'equality' as a goal, even though it is clearly not applicable to asylum seekers whose existence is largely defined by an *absence* of rights, can be justified on several grounds: firstly, on strictly normative grounds as a matter of social justice; secondly, as way of keeping the definition compatible with the policy goals stated above; and thirdly, because there are good reasons to believe that stark inequality is not compatible with an orderly and socially cohesive society.³⁷

Related to the issue of equality is the fact that some form of *membership* is a crucial component of integration. Few would probably argue that a

³⁶ Absolute equality in substantive terms may be an impossible goal, but the guiding principle ought to be that a person's background should not determine their level of participation or belonging. When formal rights cannot ensure this, other measures could be necessary.

³⁷ Social cohesion or solidarity can be difficult to measure but one possible indicator is generalised social trust, i.e. the belief that most other people can be trusted. This has been shown to correlate strongly with equality in terms of both income and opportunity: people in more equal countries are far more trusting (Rothstein & Uslaner 2005).

tourist visiting Sweden on a short-term basis should be integrated into Swedish society, but the boundary between members and non-members is far from clear. Some would draw the line at citizenship; to others, long-term settlers are also included. The membership status of asylum seekers, who are at best considered potential settlers, is precarious to say the least. However, if one sees integration as a *process* rather than an end state, it opens up possibilities for asylum seekers as well.

Full participation and belonging are dependent on formal rights, but some form of both is at least theoretically possible even for asylum seekers. In order to make the rather abstract notion of ‘participation in society’ more concrete, Ager and Strang’s conceptual framework of integration is a useful as an analytical tool. The framework is based on their review of integration policy as well as fieldwork done in areas of refugee settlement in the UK. Through this process, the authors identified several recurrent themes. Instead of relying on a narrow definition of integration, they see it as a multi-dimensional concept that can be divided into ten ‘core domains’ as outlined in figure 1 below.

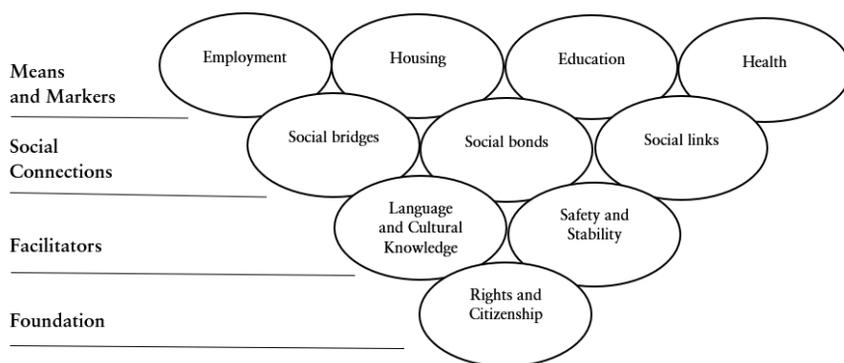


Figure 1

As the shape of the framework suggest, the idea is that the ‘facilitators’ and ‘social connections’ serve as links between the foundation and the ‘means and markers’. However, other forms of connections going in the opposite direction are also possible: employment could, for example, lead to new social connections. Ager and Strang view integration as a *mutual* process. What is of interest is not only how asylum seekers ‘adapt’ through these domains but also how the host society adapts to newcomers: how may it help or hinder participation? ‘Host society’ is defined in a broad sense and

includes both the state and other structural aspects, as well as everyday social interaction. The state can, for example, limit participation by curtailing both social rights and the right to work. But it can also encourage participation through various integration measures, for example through providing access to education. In terms of social interactions, the host population may or may not be accommodating to newcomers.

Ager and Strang's core domains of integration are not only central to my understanding of integration, they are also used to structure this entire thesis. Because of this, and because not all domains are as 'concrete' as I have made it appear here, a more in-depth presentation of the different domains will be given in Chapter 4. That chapter will also include a review of relevant studies in each domain.

3.3.2 Community and society

While I find that Ager and Strang's framework is useful for analysing the 'building blocks' of integration, it is missing a clear overarching conceptualisation of integration that ties everything together: for it to make sense to even speak of integration, the *parts* have to somehow make up a *whole*.

Earlier in this chapter, I argued that the ideas on social integration presented in classical sociology have proven surprisingly persistent and I mentioned that Durkheim would be the main source of inspiration in this section. The title of this section, however, is 'community and society', alluding not to Durkheim but his contemporary, Ferdinand Tönnies. In the German original 'community and society' was termed 'gemeinschaft und gesellschaft' and these terms are frequently used untranslated. I have chosen to primarily use the English translation as find that they capture the ideas on integration that I will propose in this section in a more intuitive way. Also, as the terms community and society are not as closely related to Tönnies, they seem better suited for this attempt at a more generally held view of integration, drawing on ideas from both Tönnies (1887/2003) and Durkheim (1893/2013).³⁸

Although there were some undeniable similarities between the two theorists, they were by no means in total agreement. They both described two distinct forms of social life, a traditional community and a modern society, but their naming of these social forms reveal differences in how they viewed modern society (Aldous 1972). Tönnies saw *gemeinschaft* as the 'organic'

³⁸ Admittedly, it draws more on Durkheim than Tönnies, but I find Durkheim's 'mechanical' and 'organic' solidarity equally unintuitive.

or 'natural' form of social life and *gesellschaft* as the 'mechanical' or 'unnatural'; To Durkheim, 'society' was no less natural than 'community' and he named them accordingly: community is his view was characterised by 'mechanical solidarity' and society by 'organic solidarity'. Their views on community did not differ substantially: they both saw it as the dominant social form in traditional societies; a form characterised by similarity and close ties, common norms and ways of life. Society, the dominant social form in modern times, was seen by both as characterised by difference and individualism but they differed significantly in other respects. Whereas Tönnies was pessimistic about modern societies, which he saw as plagued by rampant self-interest, Durkheim took a more positive view.³⁹ He did not see an end to solidarity in this type of society. Instead, he saw in modern societies an interesting paradox: both individuality and solidarity appeared to have grown stronger. He argued that the type of solidarity found in traditional societies had been replaced by a new type of solidarity based on the interdependence brought about by the increased division of labour; whereas people in traditional communities were relatively self-reliant, people in modern societies would struggle to get through the day without the work done by other people.

This interdependence was not enough on its own, however, to tie society together. Durkheim also saw the need for a *moral* basis for integration. First of all, he argued that the division of labour brings with it a kind of moral duty to specialise and the 'categorical imperative of the moral conscience' assumes the following form: 'make yourself usefully fulfil a determinate function' (Durkheim 1893/2013, p.43). Second of all, even though the 'collective conscience' had generally weakened in modern societies it had strengthened in one regard: the way in which we view the dignity of the individual. Durkheim called this the 'cult of the individual' (1893/2013, p.116); a cult that he believed would gradually replace traditional religions. Finally, for division of labour to produce solidarity there needs to be some sense of justice: it is not enough that 'each have his task; it is still necessary that this task be fitting to him' (1893/2013, p.225). Justice to Durkheim was a matter of equal opportunity: a person's position in life should not be determined by birth or inheritance but by their ability and performance.

³⁹ While optimistic about the possibility for solidarity in modern societies, he did acknowledge the existence of 'abnormal forms' where it did not occur (Durkheim 1893/2013, pp. 213-243).

Tönnies and Durkheim did not write with today's ethnically diverse societies in mind, but I would argue that their ideas are still highly relevant: even when the terminology changes the underlying assumptions often remains the same. Social inclusion/exclusion is a case in point. Although not exclusively applied to the situation of immigrants, immigrants are often overrepresented among the 'socially excluded' and inclusion is sometimes held up as better, less normative, alternative to integration. Ruth Levitas (1996, 2005) offers a very comprehensive critique of how the social exclusion concept has come to be used and she has identified three distinct 'social exclusion discourses'. When the term was first used in the British context, the *redistributionist discourse* (RED) dominated. This discourse expresses a concern with inequality and a need for a more complex view on poverty: it argues that a substantial proportion of society have incomes so low that they are 'unable to participate in the normal life of society' (Levitas 1996, p.7). Gradually though, two other discourses have largely taken over: The *moral underclass discourse* (MUD) which shifts the focus to the individual and 'blames the poor' for the 'culture of dependency' they live in (Levitas 2005, p.14). Here, social exclusion becomes a question of morality and culture and those excluded are seen as culturally distinct from mainstream society. The *social integrationist discourse* (SID) on the other hand, treats social exclusion primarily as exclusion from the labour market. Levitas argues that this discourse not only fails to take unpaid labour into account, it also fails to acknowledge that one can be included in the labour market but excluded from other aspects of society. Durkheim's influence can be seen in both the MUD and the SID discourse. The former assumes that there is a 'mainstream' society with shared norms and values (mechanical solidarity) that some are excluded from (or exclude themselves from). The SID discourse argues that the problems of social exclusion can be solved by integration into the labour market, which should in turn lead to a solidarity based on reciprocity and interdependence (organic solidarity). Levitas's main objection to this, is that if integration into the (capitalist) system (through employment) is seen as the main goal, it leaves little room for criticism of inequalities inherent in the system itself.

Although Levitas (1996, 2005) writes from a distinctively British perspective, I would argue that these discourses are evident in Sweden as well. This is a point that I will get back to in the concluding chapter of this thesis. For the time being it will suffice to say that the current discussion of segregation on the one hand, and the labour market participation of new refugees on the other, as the two main challenges to integration, shows clear signs of

the MUD and SID discourse respectively. The RED discourse, on the other hand, is conspicuously absent.

The continued relevance of ‘community’ and ‘society’ as two aspects of integration should, of course, not be entirely credited to Durkheim and Tönnies. In scholarly work on immigration, ‘community’ and ‘society’ in various guises have played a central role in the conceptualisation of problems associated with multiculturalist societies. For example, when Robert D Putnam (1995) writes about the decline of social capital in diverse areas, it is the loss of ‘community’ he is mourning.⁴⁰ Portes & Vickstrom (2011), on the other hand, disagree with Putnam and argue that what is needed in modern, diverse societies is Gessellschaft: too much ‘community’ will only lead to segregation and conflict. In other words, what one sees as ‘successful’ integration in many ways depend on whether one gravitates towards the community or society pole.

However, I see two main benefits of ‘going back to the roots’. The first is that it serves as an important reminder that ‘integration problems’ have existed for a long time. The crucial difference is that back then, they saw it as a distinctly modern problem caused by individualism and the division of labour, *not* migration. This emphasis on modernity brings us to the second reason why I find Durkheim and Tönnies particularly useful when studying asylum seekers’ integration. The dichotomy community-society can be understood in terms of the related dichotomy of traditional-modern and I would argue that the way in which ‘rural’ is associated with traditional communities and ‘urban’ is associated with modern societies has implications for how asylum seekers’ integration in different types of locations is assumed to work.

Community and society can also be linked to Ager and Strang’s framework in a fruitful way. While their ‘domains’ give an idea of how integration works in practice, the concepts of community and society allows us to view the results on a more abstract level. Including community and society into the analysis is also a way of dealing with the problems stated in the opening paragraph of this section. These concepts are not just useful on a macro-level, they can also help explain subjective feelings of belonging: one does not *belong* to the domains of an integration model, one belongs to a community or a society. It is not necessarily the case that the nation-state is the most appropriate unit of analysis in this regard. In order to avoid the problem of ‘methodological nationalism’ that both policymakers and scholars in

⁴⁰ See section 4.3.1.

the field have been charged with (Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2002), both transnational and local ‘communities’ will also need to be considered.

One final point needs to be made regarding my use of Durkheim’s theory in this thesis. By claiming that it is still *relevant* I am not saying that it is necessarily an *accurate* description of how society works. Whether society is held together by shared norms or interdependence—or neither of the two—is somehow beside the point; it could well be the case that social cohesion is largely an illusion and that society is characterised far more by conflict. Nor does the use of this theory imply that this is how integration ‘should’ work or that it is normatively desirable. Instead, the analysis depart from the Thomas theorem: ‘if men define their situations as real, they are real in their consequences’ (Thomas & Thomas 1928, p. 572) and Durkheim’s theory is applied mainly as a way of conceptualising underlying assumptions that can help explain decisions made by both policymakers and asylum seekers. If, for example, policy is based on the assumption that Swedish society is held together by normative consensus and newcomers are assumed to deviate from these norms, then the policy measures put in place to correct this ‘deviance’ will have real consequences whether the underlying assumptions were correct or not.

4. The core domains of integration

This chapter will put some flesh on the bones of the analytical framework that was introduced in the previous chapter. It will give the reader an idea of both *why* each domain is important and *what* we already know about these domains. Regarding the latter, the chapter will also serve as a literature review. My general assessment of the state of knowledge in the field is that, while research dealing specifically with asylum seekers' housing is relatively sparse, there is an abundance of studies in the wider field of migration studies that is relevant to this thesis. Hence delimitations had to be made and structuring the literature review around the core domains of integration was a way of both delimiting its scope and ensuring its relevance for the subsequent empirical chapters.

In the sections below, some will take the form of a conceptual discussion; others will rely more heavily on empirical work. The number one criterion for inclusion in this chapter is that the work contributes to the understanding of asylum seekers and refugees' integration in Sweden. It is not limited to work done in sociology but contains both theoretical and empirical work done by scholars from a variety of disciplines. Since it was important to acknowledge the relatively few studies that take the asylum seeker's own perspective into account, I have also included a few studies that may otherwise be dismissed as 'grey literature'.

4.1 Foundation

Ager and Strang (2008) place *rights and citizenship* as the foundation of integration. By doing so they are going against the current in the sense that many states increasingly view citizenship and rights as 'rewards' given to those who have successfully integrated. Using economic self-sufficiency, language skills and civic knowledge as requirements for citizenship is a common practise across Europe (Goodman & Wright 2015). Despite a restrictive turn recently (see Chapter 2), Sweden remains an exception to this in some respects (Sainsbury 2012). Although citizenship is based on the principle of *Jus Sanguinis* rather than the more inclusive *Jus Soli*, Swedish citizenship is fairly easy to obtain through naturalisation,⁴¹ and although the

⁴¹ When principle of *Jus Soli* (right of soil) is applied, a person's place of birth determines their citizenship, whereas *Jus Sanguinis* (right of blood) bases citizenship on the parent(s) nationality. Naturalisation involves obtaining citizenship through application after a certain length of residency. See section 2.1.3 for details.

question is currently discussed, Sweden has yet to introduce any ‘integration’ requirements for citizenships.

Borevi (2014, p.714) argues that ‘the core idea of Swedish welfare state universalism is that integration presupposes that citizens enjoy equal access to a bundle of fundamental rights. Rights are particularly crucial for integration, as they provide the necessary integrative glue for the entire society’. The type of integration tests currently used in many other countries follow the opposite logic: access to rights is used as an incentive to fulfil certain obligations. It could be argued then, that Sweden’s integration policy lines up quite well with Ager and Strang’s argument that citizenship and rights serve as the foundation of integration. At the same time, there is a risk of overstating the claims to universality in the Swedish welfare state. A Norwegian report (NOU 2011:10) about asylum seekers describes their situation as being in the ‘waiting room of the welfare state’ and the same could be said about asylum seekers in Sweden. Although most social rights in Sweden have been expanded to include not only citizens but also all permanent residents, asylum seekers are still excluded (Sainsbury 2012). In other words, the equality principle does not apply to asylum seekers and their entitlements are limited to bare necessities.

This absence of social rights is one of the ways in which asylum seekers are clearly separated from citizens and permanent residents, and their status is sometimes referred to as a ‘precarious citizenship’ (Lori 2017; see also Anderson 2010; Goldring et al. 2009, 2011). Noora A Lori (2017, p.4) defines precarious citizenship as the ‘structured uncertainty of being unable to secure permanent access to citizenship rights’ and the negative consequences of this are substantial as living with a precarious legal status is closely associated with precariousness in many other areas of life including employment, health and housing.

May Mzayek’s (2019) study on Syrians in the US has a slightly different take on the ‘in between’ status of asylum seekers. Mzayek uses the anthropological concept of liminality and her focus is not so much on loss of citizenship rights but on loss of status and identity. Many asylum seekers, she argues, have cut ties with their home country but have yet to form new ties to their host country, leaving them in a liminal state ‘in between’. Although permanent liminality may be a possibility, it is usually seen as a transitional stage. Asylum seekers are, presumably, either given the right to stay permanently or they return home. In practice, however, a rejected asylum claim may not lead to return but to a transition to undocumented status. It could also lead to a ‘track change’, an option introduced in 2008 that lets some

rejected asylum seekers change their status to labour migrant without having to return to their home country first.⁴² Since stable employment is a requirement for track change, and few asylum seekers work, the option is closed to most. Mona Hemmaty (2019) argues that this opportunity comes at a high cost: ‘track changers’ are highly dependent on their employers and their status remain uncertain and temporary for a number of years. She also suggests that track changes need to be seen in the light of a more fundamental shift in Swedish migration policy. From the 1970s until 2008, Sweden was characterised by a restrictive stance on labour migration but a generosity towards refugees. Starting with the 2008 introduction of one of the most liberal labour migration policies in the OECD and ending with the restrictions on humanitarian migration introduced in 2016, the situation is now the opposite. Refugees’ access to permanent residence, and family reunification, is increasingly dependent on showing *deservingness* through employment (see Chapter 2). From right-wing parties in particular, there has also been some recent calls for welfare restrictions directed at new refugee residents. The idea is that access to the welfare system is something that should be *earned* through paid work.⁴³

This casts doubt on the statements made at the start of this section regarding the exceptionality of Sweden’s integration policy as rights are increasingly something that is earned rather than a foundational aspect of integration. In addition, it is important to acknowledge that citizenship, or even ‘denizenship’, is not only increasingly hard to obtain, but it is no guarantee of equal status.⁴⁴ Racial discrimination and other exclusionary forces mean that *formal* citizenship is not necessarily accompanied by *substantial* citizenship in the sense of ‘full and equal rights and opportunities’ (Lister 2003). To give but two examples: economic inequalities persist between native-born and foreign-born citizens (Engdahl 2014), and the political rights that separate citizens from denizens are not exercised equally: in the 2018 Swedish election, only 74% of foreign-born citizens voted compared to 90% of citizens born in Sweden (SCB 2019).

⁴² Work permits are usually applied for from abroad.

⁴³ See Motion 2019/20:2442 for an example from the Moderate Party. A similar reform in Denmark did lead to a short-term increase in employment among men, but women withdrew from the labour force, school enrolled decreased and crime increased (Højsgaard Andersen et al 2019).

⁴⁴ Denizenship is used by Hammar (1990) and others to denote the status of long-term non-citizens with access to many, but not all, citizenship rights.

Naturally, all of this complicates the issue of asylum seekers' integration. Citizenship, as suggested above, may not guarantee equality but it is even more difficult to speak of integration when the group in question is lacking even the formal rights associated with citizenship. This problem lies at the heart of this thesis and what it is trying to do is, in a sense, to test the boundaries of integration: i.e. what kind of integration is possible when participation on equal terms is denied?

4.2 Facilitators

The two domains that Ager and Strang see as facilitators to integration are 'language and cultural knowledge' and 'safety and stability'. That knowledge of the majority language facilitates integration is widely accepted as it would be difficult to participate fully in a society without it. While there may be individual exceptions to this rule and the level of language proficiency required for participation is open for discussion, few would probably argue against the general importance of language.

One could argue then, that a basic 'common sense' understanding of language is sufficient to appreciate its integrative value. The meaning of culture, on the other hand, is far more open to interpretation. Stating a need for cultural knowledge could be also more controversial, especially if it implies that newcomers should not only learn but also adapt—or even assimilate—to the host society's culture. Because of these differences, language and culture will be treated somewhat differently below: the former will mainly be discussed in term of access to, and experiences of, language learning; the latter will take the form of a more conceptual discussion.

The approach to the second domain, safety and stability, can be described as follows: firstly, the safety of the different forms of housing and the type of location where they are typically found is discussed; secondly, drawing on previous research in the field, the variety of ways in which asylum seekers' lives are characterised by instability will be explored.

4.2.1 Language and cultural knowledge

Although the onus is usually on the newcomer to learn the language of the host society, Ager and Strang argue that in the early stages of integration at least, it needs to be seen as a mutual process. In order to ensure access to important services, the availability of translators and interpreters, as well as written information in other languages, are important. Although asylum seekers and refugees have the legal right to an interpreter when in contact

with government agencies and health care services, there are some indications that this service does not always work satisfactorily. Feijen & Frenmark (2011) evaluated the asylum process on behalf of the UNHCR and they found that half of the interpreters used by the Migration Agency were unqualified and they had quality concerns with a significant number of the interviews they studied.

Regarding access to language classes, the option for asylum seekers to attend SFI was removed in 2012 (Migrationsverket 2012). Since then, the opportunities for asylum seekers to learn Swedish are mainly limited to services provided by volunteers. In this respect, the ‘refugee crisis’ actually brought with it a slight improvement in terms of availability and funding. The government allocated funds for ‘early activities for asylum seekers’ that actors from the civil society can apply for in order to provide services (especially language training) to asylum seekers. The Workers’ Educational Association (ABF: *Arbetarnas bildningsförbund*) was one of the organisations that came to play an active role in the reception of asylum seekers as a result of this. Fejes et al. (2018) interviewed both members of ABF and asylum seekers who participated in their activities, and they highlight both positive aspects and challenges. From the asylum seekers’ perspective, ABF was greatly appreciated not just as a means to learn the language but also as a ‘breathing space’ in a difficult situation. At the same time, the situation they were in made it difficult for some to focus on studying. The organisers found their work both important and rewarding but noted that the interest to help out had cooled down significantly since the peak of the refugee crisis; it was increasingly difficult to find volunteers. As the number of asylum seekers also decreased, they had to cut back on classes offered. In the smaller towns, it was no longer possible to offer classes at different levels which makes progression in learning difficult.

Asylum seekers whose asylum claim is successful have access to a wider range of integration measures through the ‘establishment programme’ that spans the first two years after a residence permit (see Chapter 2). SFI is a dominant part of this programme for most refugees. Since its inception in the 1960s, SFI has been criticised for underperformance and it has been through a number of reforms over the years. These reforms are the subject of Jenny Rosén’s (2014) study and her discourse analysis of course syllabi and other documents show how changes in the perception of SFI largely correlates with the changes in integration policy described in previous chapters of this thesis. SFI went from being a response to immigrants’ ‘adaptation problems’ in the 1960s to a focus on enabling active participation in

society the 1970s. The responsibility also shifted from the immigrant to the receiving society through this reform and the language used in the latter reform denotes a need for care of the immigrant. In the 1990s the discourse of care was replaced by a discourse of deficit: immigrants ‘alarming lack of language skills’ was seen as the cause of their weak position in society. Finally, in the 2000s, the focus shifted away from participation in society in a wider sense to labour market participation. The immigrants were also perceived as unmotivated and in need of strict rules and incentives to complete their courses.

Regarding refugees’ perception of SFI, a recent interview study (Bucken-Knapp 2019) with Syrian refugees who arrived after 2014 is of particular interest. The interviews covered both the participants’ views on the integration programme and integration more generally. One thing they revealed was that while a majority saw language as an essential part of integration, their satisfaction with the language training on offer was quite low. Many described teachers who did not do much teaching and they questioned the lack of transparency in the progression between levels as this seemed completely based on the teacher’s arbitrary decision. The authors conclude that when Sweden is held up as a good example for integration measures such as SFI, it is often done from a policy maker’s perspective. Viewing it from the perspective of those that take part in the programme instead could be more helpful in explaining why integration programmes do not always meet their intended aims.

What Ager and Strang mean by *cultural knowledge* and whether the aim of obtaining this knowledge is to enable some form of adaptation or assimilation is not entirely clear. Unfortunately, they have little to offer in terms of definition other than to say that ‘cultural knowledge’ should include both refugees’ ‘knowledge of national and local procedures, customs and facilities and, *though to a lesser extent*, non-refugees’ knowledge of the circumstances and culture of refugees’ (2008, p.182, my emphasis). In other words, it is partly a mutual process, but the focus is on the refugee learning about the host society’s culture. An imbalance in this regard is perhaps understandable: the incentive for the newcomer to learn about the host society is bound to be stronger as it is where the integration takes place. In addition, the cultural diversity of refugees from a great variety of countries places limits on what can be expected from the host population. That being said, if awareness and respect of cultural difference is essential in a diverse society, some level of cultural knowledge is required on both ‘sides’.

The ‘procedures, customs and facilities’ that Ager and Strang bring up as examples of important cultural aspects does not fully capture what is typically seen as part of cultural integration. A standard textbook definition describes culture as ‘the values, norms, habits and ways of life characteristic of a coherent social group’ (Giddens & Sutton 2017, p.995) and this might be a better starting point. ‘Values’, for example, has been the subject of some debate, particularly the question of what Swedish values are and even if there is such a thing.⁴⁵ An often-quoted source on this matter is the ‘World Values Survey’ (WVS). This survey covers a wide range of values and an equally wide range of countries, Sweden being one of them. Interestingly, Sweden stands out as a particularly extreme country in terms of values. Based on the WVS data, Inglehart et al. (2014) have identified two main domains of cultural variation: one is *traditional values vs secular-rational values* and the other one is *survival values vs self-expression values*. Sweden scores higher than nearly all other countries on both ‘secular-rational’ and ‘self-expression’ values. On aggregate then, it is possible to discover a pattern that clearly separates Sweden from other countries, despite internal differences.

But culture is not only about what we *value* but also what we *do* and these two things do not necessarily correspond to each other. In a classic text on culture’s causal role, Swidler (1986) questions the dominant idea that it is cultural values that shape action. Instead, she argues that culture is like a ‘toolkit’ of ‘habits, skills and styles’ that people use to shape their ‘strategies of action’ (1986, p.273). Swidler uses the so-called ‘culture of poverty’-theory as an example of how values cannot explain action. According to this theory, poor people stay poor because they develop a certain ‘culture of poverty’ that values other things than mainstream society. Empirical evidence contradicts this theory as lower-class people generally value the same things as people of other social classes (a steady job, a stable marriage etc.). In other words, class-based cultural differences are not, Swidler argues, a difference in values but a difference in skills and habits. Hence the lack of social mobility is not explained by a lacking desire among the poor to improve their situation, but rather by a difficulty to ‘pursue success in a world where the accepted skills, styles, and informal know-how are unfamiliar’ (1986, p. 275). Missing from the ‘culture of poverty’ theory is also

⁴⁵ See Fjellman (2016); Silberstein (2016) and Åbonde (2016) for examples of news coverage of ‘Almedalsveckan’, an important political forum in Sweden, where in 2016, ‘Swedish values’ came to be a dominant theme.

the relationship between the poor and the non-poor. Studying the poor in isolation from the rest of society in this way often leads to the assumption that the poor are to blame for their own poverty. Bourdieu (1984/2010), with a similarly practice-oriented view of culture to Swidler but with a stronger focus on socialisation, shows not only that culture is linked to class but also that the culture of the dominant classes can be used to exclude and prevent social mobility of those of lower social classes.

There are, of course, other ways of conceptualising culture but viewing it as values and/or practices could serve as a useful point of reference in the coming chapters. Even if one accepts Swidler's claim that practices—not values—shape action, it is difficult to disregard values entirely. Values make up an important part of the discourse surrounding cultural differences, and they potentially also affect how asylum seekers and refugees perceive of cultural difference. Value surveys may show some national tendencies, but they still include a lot of internal variation and practices vary a great deal, not least by social class. Considering this diversity, the question of *which* culture a newcomer should gain knowledge of—and potentially adapt to—is an interesting one with no easy answers.

4.2.2 Safety and stability

The second facilitating domain suggested by Ager and Strang is entitled 'safety and stability'. Had this thesis been written in Swedish, the word 'trygghet' would probably have been used as it encapsulates the meaning of both: in order to feel 'trygg' one needs to feel both safe and stable. It implies a sense of security, that one is out of harm's way, but also a sense of predictability and comfort. None of this is easily accessible to asylum seekers. They may be out of harm's way in the sense that they have managed to escape a war zone, but their new existence is often fraught with uncertainty.

Safety concerns do not necessarily end after arriving to a new country. Ager and Strang point out that refugees often find the area they live in unsafe and this has a negative effect on their well-being. In Sweden, many EBO residents live in so called disadvantaged areas that are generally perceived of as unsafe. The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå: Brottsförbyggande rådet) has conducted yearly surveys for a number of years on exposure to crime and perception of safety. These reveal that people in disadvantage areas are considerably more likely to be victims of crime. They are also more likely to feel unsafe, especially women (Brå 2018). The topic of safety has also been approached qualitatively. In a focus group study with youths in a disadvantaged area (Becevic et al. 2018), a conflicting

picture of safety emerged. On the one hand, the youth felt that the media exaggerated crime in the suburbs and that the stigmatisation this caused was more of a problem than the crime itself. On the other hand, they often told stories of how crime brought fear to everybody who lived in the area.

The Brå survey shows that people in rural locations are both less likely to be victims of crime, and they feel safer in their neighbourhood than urban dwellers do (Brå 2019). Findings from studies on refugees in rural settings also bring up the perceived safety of these areas as a major benefit of living in a rural location (e.g. Forsberg et al. 2012). That is not to say that ABO residents are necessarily safer than EBO residents. Even if the *location* is perceived as safe, the *housing* may not be. The Migration Agency (Migrationsverket 2020d) website stresses the importance of safety for all residents and that ‘respect and consideration should be shown to all regardless of religion, culture or sexuality’ but media reports of conflict and harassment in accommodation centres are not uncommon (e.g. Hansen, J. 2016; Mårtensson 2016; Sandels 2016). Rebecka Lennartsson (2007) interviewed asylum seekers in EBO, many of whom had chosen that option after an initial stay in ABO. She found that conflicts in the ABO centre was a contributing factor for moving (see also Hadodo and Åkerlund 2004). The participants in Lennartsson’s study that lived in disadvantaged areas were aware of the stigma of living there and many expressed a desire to move elsewhere when possible, but their own perceived unsafety in these areas was not brought up as a prominent theme.

The participants in Lennartsson’s (2007) study do, however, bring up a theme that relates more to *stability* than safety: frequent moves. The number varied but most had moved several times; one had moved 20 times. Frequent moves is an EBO problem brought up by a number of other studies as well (e.g. Brekke 2004; Hadodo & Åkerlund 2004; Björnberg 2013). Other aspects of stability are not related to different types of housing but rather the asylum seeker’s legal status (see section 4.1). Not knowing whether one will be allowed to stay or not can be extremely destabilising and if there is one aspect that all studies on asylum seekers bring up it is the difficulty of waiting for a decision (e.g. Brekke 2004; Norström 2004; Lennartsson 2007; Rosengren 2009). The wait is especially difficult for those who have received a negative decision and who are waiting for their appeal. Lundberg & Dahlquist (2012) studied unaccompanied minors and found that they sometimes became physically ill after a rejection and could no longer attend school.

Staying on the theme of waiting, Jan-Paul Brekke (2004) draws attention to the ambiguous situation the asylum seeker is in. Policymakers struggle to create conditions that simultaneously promote integration, deter new applicants and prevent rejected asylum seekers from over-staying their welcome. The asylum seekers are faced with a similar dilemma: should they prepare for integration or deportation? In his interviews with asylum seekers, Brekke found that most refused to see deportation as a real option. At the same time, the stress and uncertainty of waiting for a decision made integration difficult. Brekke makes use of Antonovsky's (1987) 'sense of coherence' to explain how asylum seekers experience their situation. According to this theory, people find it easier to cope with difficult situations if the situation is comprehensible, manageable and meaningful. The situation of the asylum seekers in Brekke's study failed on all three accounts.

Finally, stability is not only about what one experiences in the present but also about what one left behind. Björnberg (2013) interviewed families of a mostly middle-class background and they found it difficult to adjust to the material deprivation they now lived in. Apart from the loss of economic capital that fleeing their home country had caused, the family had also lost social and cultural capital. The families found it difficult to make up for this loss. Bad experiences during the flight, being distrusted by Migration Agency officials and moving on a regular basis all contributed to their difficulty of building enough trust to sustain relationships outside the family. Forced migration entails a violent rupture with one's former life that is, without a doubt, one of the most destabilising things a person can experience.

4.3 Social connections

That social connections matter when it comes to integration might be stating the obvious. How and why they matter, on the other hand, is more open to interpretation. One of the most fundamental question is whether social connections should be valued in their own right or as social capital that can be used to access other resources.

Ager and Strang draw on Putnam's theory of social capital and use his terminology of social bridges (with other communities) and social bonds (with family or co-ethnic communities). Drawing on Wolcock (1998), they also add a third type: social links (with structures of the state). Putnam (1995) takes a very positive view of the integrative function of social capital and he argues that 'life is easier in a community blessed with a substantial stock of social capital [as] networks of civic engagement foster sturdy norms

of generalized reciprocity and encourage the emergence of social trust' (p. 67). Considering the positive effects of social capital, Putnam is concerned that social capital has declined substantially in recent years, especially in ethnically diverse areas. He argues that people that live in diverse areas tend to 'hunker down': they are less trusting, they have fewer friends and they are less likely to form associations. Interestingly, he finds a significant decline in both *social bonds* and *social bridges* in diverse areas: people tend to distrust not only other groups but also their own (Putnam 2007).

One of Putnam's main indicators of social capital is the prevalence of voluntary associations. Jeffrey C Alexander (2006) question his assertion that all forms of voluntary associations necessarily lead to social trust. For the trust that sustains a particular association to become trust in strangers outside the group, he argues, the group needs to be 'oriented to interests outside of itself' (p. 7). Far from all voluntary associations fulfil this condition. Putnam has also been criticised on the grounds that inequality is a far better predictor of social distrust than diversity (Portes & Vickstrom 2011; see also Rothstein & Uslaner 2005 and Hooghe et al. 2009).

Although these are valid criticisms, Putnam does at least show that the transformation from a community based on social bonds to one based on social bridges is not always easy. One of the supposed benefits of living in ABO is that it is easier to form social connections of the 'bridging' type in the rural context where this type of housing is often located (SOU 2003:75; Boverket 2015a). Such an assessment does not take into account that the, supposedly, stronger sense of community in rural places might depend on the relative homogeneity of the people living there. A small place is not necessarily more welcoming to people perceived as strangers.

The critical points mentioned above are not the only ones Putnam's theory of social capital has faced. Virginia Morrow (2001), for example, states that individuals need to recognise their network as a *resource* for it to be considered social capital and James DeFilippis (2001) argues that Putnam ignores aspects of power and how social capital is tied in with other forms of capital. What these critics call for is a more Bourdieuan use of the word where power is of central importance. To Bourdieu (1986), social capital is mainly *exclusionary* and it plays an important role in the social reproduction of class: to gain, or maintain, an advantageous position in society is not only a question of *what* you know but also *who* you know. When applied to ethnicity, this way of viewing social capital could explain how ethnically homogeneous social networks can enable one group (i.e. 'ethnic' Swedes) to

retain a privileged position in the labour market (e.g. Åslund & Skans 2010; Urban 2016).

Regarding the question of which type of social capital is most valuable as a resource for integration, social bridges is usually seen as particularly important. Seen in purely instrumental terms social bridges could, for example, assist in learning the Swedish language. Others take the argument much further and claim that social bridges are more or less synonymous with integration. Peter Blau (1977), for example, argues that if there is no interaction between groups they cannot be said to belong to the same structure.

At the same time, social bonds can clearly be valuable to newcomers to a country: the very fact that EBO residents find a place to stay through their social networks show that social bonds can be used as a resource. Of course, it does not have to be an either/or question, and a reasonable starting point is that both social bridges and social bonds can be valued: both as resources *and* in their own right.

But before we can even start to evaluate the relative value of bonds and bridges, people need to be differentiated and categorised in one way or another. All too often when social bridges are discussed, a crude division of 'Swedes' on the one hand and 'immigrants' on the other, is used. This division ignores both the considerable overlap between the categories and the obvious heterogeneity within them. For example, should the 'Swedish' category be based on ethnicity, citizenship or something else? The immigrant category also includes a great deal of diversity in terms of origin, reasons for migrating and length of stay. Even when narrowing it down to the specific subcategory of refugees of a specific nationality, considerable diversity persists. Unlike many other countries, Sweden does not collect statistics on race, ethnicity or religion. The argument against such data collection is that it could lead to the reification of the categories used, and the data could be used to worsen the position of ethnic minorities. On the other hand, without such data it is difficult to identify discrimination on racial or ethnic grounds (Gordon 1992). Whether the advantages of collecting data of this kind outweigh the disadvantages or not, the fact remains that Swedish register data hides important ways, other than nationality, in which people categorise themselves and others. Syria is a prime example of this and The World Factbook lists Syrian ethnicities as follows: Arab 50%, Alawite 15%, Kurd 10%, Levantine 10%, other 15% (includes Druze, Ismaili, Imami, Nusairi, Assyrian, Turkoman, Armenian); and religions as: Muslim 87% (includes

Sunni, Alawi, Ismaili, and Shia), Christian 10% (includes Orthodox, Uniate, and Nestorian), Druze 3% (Central Intelligence Agency 2020). These figures give an indication of the kind of diversity concealed by the national category 'Syrian'.⁴⁶

Roger Brubaker (2004) points out an additional problem when categorising people. He argues that despite the almost complete consensus within the social sciences that categories such as ethnicity, race and nation are socially constructed, the tendency to essentialise and treat these categories as 'bounded groups' has remained widespread. He suggests a number of ways in which this 'common sense groupism' can be avoided. One such way is to view ethnicity, race and nationhood 'not as things *in* the world, but perspective *on* the world' (Brubaker 2004, p.17). This does not mean that ethnic groups are not real, or not important, but the level of what he calls 'groupness' is not fixed or given but variable and context-dependent. I find much of Brubaker critique valid and when 'ethnic groups' are referred to in this thesis, they should not be understood as 'substantial entities to which interests and agency can be attributed' (Brubaker 2004, p.8) but mainly as commonly used ways in which people categorise themselves and others.

As it can be difficult to determine the level of 'groupness' in national, ethnic or religious categories, it is also difficult to clearly separate social bonds from social bridges. When little information is given about the ethnic, religious or even national background of the participants, as is the case in some of the studies cited below, the separation of bonds from bridges is even more complicated. For these reasons, the two are discussed under the same heading below. Both section 4.3.1 and section 4.3.2 on social links will focus on what previous studies can tell us about asylum seekers' and refugees' experiences of different types of social connections.

4.3.1 Social bonds and bridges

The religious diversity within Syrian nationality is reflected in the sample used in this study and both Muslims and Christians were interviewed (see Chapter 5). Regarding the latter category, a few studies on the Assyrian/Syriac community in Sweden are of interest as they show the complexity of

⁴⁶ Apart from the potential political bias of using a CIA source, the Agency itself states a lack of reliability and all the figures cited should be read as rough estimates.

ethnic and religious belonging.⁴⁷ Fuat Deniz (1999) offers both a history of the Assyrian people and insights into the life of an ethnic minority in Sweden, examining amongst other things, how the Assyrian identity is sustained and transformed in a new context. Oscar Pripp (2001) examines the role of ethnic networks among Assyrian/Syriac entrepreneurs and Jennifer Mack (2017) explores how the group has impacted on the built environment in one Swedish town. What all three books describe is a community with strong social bonds. The Assyrians/Syriac ‘group’ is also a clear example of how, as Brubaker (2004) puts it, ‘groupness’ can intensify in exceptional circumstances. A long history of religious persecution as a Christian minority in majority Muslim countries; losing group members to conversion (forced or voluntary), war and genocide; being forced to flee and live in diaspora, have all meant that strong social bonds are seen as an important part of the group’s survival (Deniz 1999; Pripp 2001). The studies also show that internal boundaries exist within the group, as indicated by the fact that it is now commonly referred to as Assyrians/Syriacs. The whole group was initially called Assyrian by Swedish authorities but part of the group rejected that term, they preferred the term Syriac. While ‘Assyrian’ is an ethnic group that emphasise their common heritage, ‘Syriacs’ base their identity mainly on their belonging to the Syriac Orthodox Church (although some also identify with the ethnic group ‘Arameans’) (Mack 2017). This is a somewhat simplified version of the name conflict (see Deniz 1999), but it is hopefully sufficient to show the complexity involved in categorising people according to ethnicity.

To the best of my knowledge, there are no studies that deal specifically with Syrian Muslims in Sweden. Hence previous research can offer little guidance when it comes to the social bonds of this group. Treating all Muslims in Sweden, regardless of nationality or denomination, as one ethno-religious group when it comes to social bonds would be taking the generalisations too far. When it comes to *social bridges*, however, more general studies could be of interest. Opinion polls (Ahmadi et al. 2018; Weibull 2019) show that Swedish attitudes towards Islam are far more negative than attitudes towards other religions. This could constitute a barrier when it

⁴⁷ Assyrian/Syriac is an approximate translation of the Swedish ‘Assyrier/Syrianer’. The initial settlers came to Sweden from Turkey (via Lebanon). In later years, many Assyrian/Syriac refugees have come to Sweden from Iraq and Syria (Mack 2017). Several of the interviewees in this study identify as either Assyrian or Syriac.

comes to social bridges for all Muslims, regardless of their more specific background.

With regards to studies where ‘asylum seeker’ is the main category of interest rather than any specific ethnic or religious category, there are a few that tackle the question of bonds and bridges. Ager and Strang define social bonds as connections between co-ethnics, co-nationals, co-religious or other forms of social groups. Perhaps stretching the meaning of ‘other social group’ beyond its original intension, it could be used to refer to the category of asylum seeker. Doing so could be useful in order to see how similarities come in many different guises. Several qualitative studies (e.g. Slavnic 2000; Hadodo & Åkerlund 2004; Lennartsson 2007) on asylum seekers’ experience of ABO have found that one of the major drawbacks of the housing form is that one is surrounded by other people who are in the same difficult situation as oneself: other people’s suffering become a constant reminder of one’s own suffering. The central similarity here does not rely on ethnicity or nationality but rather the situation they are in. For those who have the option of EBO, being isolated with other asylum seekers in ABO can be a contributing factor to moving. In Lennartsson’s (2007) interview study, participants often express that moving to EBO meant they could live a more normal life and make contacts with people that were not in the same situation as themselves. In contrast, in Hododo and Åkerlund’s (2004) study, many participants still found that they spent most of their time with other asylum seekers as most other people were busy with work and other obligations. The two studies also differ in the sense that Lennartsson did not find that closeness to family or the own ethnic group was a major contributing factor for choosing EBO whereas Hadodo and Åkerlund did. EBO may have been seen as the better option in both studies but that did not mean that the participants wanted to live *with* their relatives and all participants expressed a desire for their own accommodation. In Lennartsson’s study, many also stated a wish to live in an area with more Swedish people and they were aware of the stigma attached to the immigrant-dense areas they lived in.

Despite the difficulties described above, other studies show that friendships often form in accommodation centres (e.g. Rosengren 2009; Bergman 2010). These friendships can form both within ethnic groups (social bonds) and between them (social bridges). The same applies to conflicts, which were also common. Zoran Slavnic (2000), for example, found both inter-ethnic conflict and solidarity amongst refugees from former Yugoslavia.

Whilst social bridges between ethnic minorities is undoubtedly important, what is usually held up as central when the prospects of social integration in different housing forms is the bridges between refugees and members of the majority population, i.e. 'ethnic' Swedes. The overall impression given by studies on both EBO and ABO is that neither is particularly conducive to such connections. There are no clear indications that a smaller town or a rural area would be better in this sense, as is sometimes assumed. Since living in an accommodation centre can be a hindrance to social connections, it is worth looking at what happens after a residence permit as well. In this case, the evidence is mixed. Stenbacka's (2016) study on refugees in a rural setting describe the possibilities of forming social bridges in mainly positive terms. Valenta (2007) writes about refugee integration in Norway but his conclusions are potentially applicable to Sweden as well. He found that a few of the refugees he interviewed had settled in well in a smaller town and they had established meaningful connections with the local population. Others struggled making connections and felt like outsiders in the tightknit community. Some ended up moving to bigger cities where they found social connections more straightforward. Even in cases where social connectedness remained weak, it was experienced as easier to bear in an urban context (see also Hagström 2009).

At the start of the section on social connection I suggested that one of the more fundamental question regarding bonds and bridges is whether they should be seen as social capital that can be converted into other valuable resource, or whether they should be valued in their own right. Since social bridges with native Swedes appear relatively rare in the studies reviewed, it is difficult to say to what extent they are useful as social capital. It is clear, however, that lack of contact with Swedes is something that is missed by asylum seekers in both ABO and EBO. That social bonds, or bridges with other ethnic minorities, can be a valuable resource is clear from studies on both EBO and ABO. In Annette Rosengren's (2009) study, for example, Swedes outside the accommodation centre kept their distance, but inside the centre, friendships were formed. These were important not just for emotional but also material support. Different strategies were used to make the meagre daily allowance last. A few had managed to buy cars and by joining together to buy petrol, they could go to a cheaper supermarket in a nearby town to buy food in bulk. An informal market also existed in the centre itself. When people left, they sold whatever belongings they could not bring with them. While this shows that working together can clearly be beneficial

in the short term, it is unclear what effect it will have on long-term integration. Slavnic (2000) shows that contact with other people from former Yugoslavia helped asylum seekers in EBO find work and housing. While this was beneficial to them in the short-term, Slavnic expresses doubts about the long-term benefits. When the participants finally received permanent residence, after years of uncertainty, EBO residents had a tendency to continue using the temporary and informal strategies that had proved useful during their time as asylum seekers. In comparison, Slavnic found that the ABO residents that he followed seemed better prepared for 'genuine integration' in society but he does not specify why this was the case or how this difference manifested itself.

4.3.2 Social links

Ager and Strang add a third category to Putnam's bonds and bridges: social links. What this entails is connections between the individual and structures of the state, such as government services. The aim here is for refugees to receive equal access to services despite such obstacles as being new to the country and not speaking the language. Efforts to remove such obstacles could include the use of interpreters and providing information about what services are available, but it could also involve ensuring equal treatment once the refugee is in contact with different services.

Asylum seekers' access to services overall is limited, hence their contact with government services are also limited. Since the Migration Agency decides over most aspects of asylum seekers' daily life, as well as their possibilities of staying in Sweden, links to the agency are of central importance. Previous studies show that there may be room for improvement in how these links work. Eva Norström (2004), for example, argues that Sweden's asylum policy may be generous in theory but how it is interpreted in practise leaves a lot to be desired. The migration agency is an organisation that places increasing demands on efficiency, and the number of cases processed is prioritised over the quality of the work involved. This makes it difficult to give each individual case the attention it deserves. The need to be objective is often referred to but in reality, subjective opinion plays a large part when deciding if an asylum seeker is telling the truth or not. Rather than giving unclear cases the benefit of the doubt, a culture of distrust has become prevalent. This lack of trust is brought up in qualitative interviews with asylum seekers as well (eg. Lennartsson 2007; Björnberg 2013).

After a residence permit, social links may be less preoccupied with potentially fateful decisions, but they are not without their difficulties. The integration of newly arrived refugees has been the subject of several policy reforms in recent years (see Chapter 2) but since 2010, The Public Employment Service has been the main agency responsible. Jennie K Larsson (2015) studied the 2010 reform from the perspective of employment service officials and she found that heavy workloads and extensive administration requirements meant they had little time for actually finding work for people in the programme. When the municipalities were responsible for the introduction, the Social Services played a central part. The move to the Public Employment Services meant the employment officers were also tasked with providing social support, a task that was not officially theirs, but many felt obliged to fulfil.

Brännström et al. (2018) explore the same reform but from the refugees' perspective. They interviewed one group of refugees who had taken part in the old 'introduction programme' and one group who had taken part in the newer 'establishment programme'. What they found was that those who had taken part in the earlier programme were positive regarding the overall level of support they got but some were critical of the limited role that the Employment Services played. The Employment Services were central to those that took part in the latter programme and while some were satisfied with their work, others found the agency impersonal and focused only on integration through work. Bucken-Knapp et al. (2019) also interviewed refugees in the establishment programme. They found that the refugees generally had a high level of trust in authorities and the rule of law in Sweden. For some participants, however, this trust stayed on a very abstract level and they had far less trust for the individual bureaucrats that they had contact with. Many also felt that the slow-moving bureaucracy was at odds with the expectations of speedy integration.

While the reception of new refugee residents may not function perfectly there is at least an integration policy, and a fairly clear plan for its implementation, in place. The reception of asylum seekers is far less structured. With the government funds for 'early activities for asylum seekers', the responsibility for asylum seekers' integration shifted from the Migration Agency to the civil society. This may have been an improvement in some respects, such as the increased access to Swedish classes, but it is also a step away from the traditional Swedish model where the state provides such services. Looking at the topic from the perspective of the civil society actors, Osanami Törngren et al. (2018) show that the change was welcomed as a

sign that their efforts were acknowledged and valued, but there was also a worry that they would be expected to take full responsibility for integration. Many believed this responsibility should remain with the public sector. Another worry was that working in close cooperation with the public sector could have a negative effect on these organisations' independence.

Fejes et al.'s (2018) study on one of these organisations, ABF, is covered in further detail in the earlier section on language. It is worth adding, however, that they found that the kind of support such organisations can offer often goes far beyond teaching the Swedish language and that they can serve as a very important link to other sectors in society. In other words, when social links to government services work imperfectly, the voluntary sector can step in as an important intermediate link.

4.4 Means and markers

The final category, 'means and markers', includes the domains 'employment', 'health', 'education' and 'housing'. The domains in this category are perhaps the most readily measurable ones and as such they often serve as *markers* or indicators of integration. That they can serve as *means* to integration is also clear: ill health, for example, naturally limits participation in society whereas a good education, for example, may enable participation.

As an introductory comment on the domains in this section, it should be noted that in terms of access, asylum seekers are faced with considerable barriers: the right to work is only granted on certain conditions, healthcare is limited to emergency care, education is only open to asylum seeking children and full access to the housing market requires resources that most asylum seekers do not have.

Regarding the structure of the remaining sections, the first three will take the form of brief literature reviews. The remaining section on housing will take a slightly different form. Housing forms is an important point of departure in this study; hence this section will assess not only the direct impact of housing forms on integration but also how it relates to other domains. The chapter ends with a summarising statement on what previous research can and cannot tell us about the integration of asylum seekers and how this may be related to housing.

4.4.1 Employment

When Sweden is held up as an integration role model, the focus is usually on policy.⁴⁸ This can give the impression of equality even though the outcomes are far from equal. When, on the other hand, Sweden is reported as being ‘bad at integration’ the focus is usually not on policy but rather labour market integration outcomes (e.g Weisbrock 2011). Figures released by OECD (2016) show that out of all the OECD countries, Sweden has the largest employment gap between native- and foreign-born in the population. A partial explanation for this is that the type of immigration in the various countries studied differ. Labour migrants, who are positively selected in terms of education and skills, generally have much higher employment rates than refugees. Sweden stands out as a country with particularly high proportion of refugees. Bevelander and Pendakur (2014) takes this into consideration in their comparison of labour market integration in Sweden and Canada. The total employment gap is much smaller in Canada than in Sweden but when looking specifically at outcomes for refugees and family reunification migrants, the two countries are actually quite similar. Others are less optimistic. In line with the OECD figures, Szulkin et al. (2013) compare 15 European countries and find that the employment rate gap is indeed largest in Sweden. Controlling for region of origin (which is at least partially linked to reason for emigrating) only explains some of the difference between countries. On a more positive note, when looking at those that have been in a specific country more than ten years Sweden is no longer ‘the worst in Europe’. The authors conclude that labour market integration simply takes much longer in Sweden than in the rest of Europe.

Andersson Joonas et al. (2017) show that the establishment reform (see section 2.2.2) led to some improvement in the employment rates of new refugees. The difference was negligible the first year after finishing the programme but after three years, participants were 7.5% more likely to be either working or in further education. More recent figures show that in 2018, 45% were in either employment or education 90 days after the programme. This is the highest figure to date, up from 34% the previous year.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ The Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), for example, places Sweden in the top position (Huddleston et al 2015). It compares policies in mainly EU countries in areas such as like education, the labour market and citizenship. Considering recent changes, it is worth noting that the index is based on data from 2014.

⁴⁹ Although, critics may be keen to point out that only 6.7% are in employment that is not subsidised by the state (Arbetsförmedlingen 2019c).

However, the difference between men (55%) and women (30%) is substantial (Arbetsförmedlingen 2019c).

Considering the challenges that new arrivals face after a two-year introduction programme it should come as no surprise that few asylum seekers work, despite the fact that many have the right to do so.⁵⁰ A website was launched in 2017 where asylum seekers can upload their CV but apart from this, they receive no support in finding employment.⁵¹ A report from 2009 (SOU 2009: 19, p. 92) shows that asylum seekers in EBO were more likely to be in employment but since the employment rates were very low for both groups, it is difficult to put much weight on this difference.

Regarding the more long-term effect of ABO and EBO on labour market integration, there is no clear evidence in support of either form of housing. The National Board of Housing, Building and Planning (Boverket 2008, 2015a) has released two reports on the housing situation of asylum seekers in recent years. The earlier report concluded that EBO had a positive effect on employment and income. This turned out to be a flawed conclusion as the categories ABO and EBO were used incorrectly. Statistics Sweden (SCB), who supplied the data, include all those who find their own housing *after* their residence permit in the category EBO, including those who previously lived in ABO. The second report did confirm the results of the first in the sense that choosing where to live after one receives a residence permit does increase the chances of labour market integration slightly.

One explanation for the poorer outcomes of those that were assigned housing is that the location of these placements is mainly determined by available housing, not employment opportunities. In recent years, this may primarily be an unfortunate side-effect of the housing shortage but in the 1980s, asylum seekers were deliberately placed outside of ‘immigrant-dense’ cities in order to counteract the negative aspects of segregation (see Chapter 2). In retrospect, this policy proved to be a failure. In comparison to an

⁵⁰ Asylum seekers who have identity documents, or who are working with the Migration Agency to obtain such documents, can receive an ‘AT-UND’ (exemption from a work permit). In 2015, only a third received AT-UND but this was partly due to the high number of asylum seekers. The Migration Agency focused on processing asylum applications and work permits were deprioritised (Fallenius 2016). 2000 asylum seekers were working in 2012-2015 (RiR 2016:32). In the same time period, over 340 000 asylum applications were lodged (Migrationsverket 2020a).

⁵¹ The website, called *jobskills.se*, is controversial. It has cost more than anticipated and few employers use it which limits its function as a meeting place. In addition, serious data security flaws have also been detected (Grill Pettersson 2018a, 2018b).

earlier cohort of refugees, those that took part in the Sweden-wide strategy were far less likely to be in employment eight years after arrival. The negative effect was tempered somewhat because many moved from their assigned municipality; had they stayed they would have fared significantly worse (Edin et al. 2004).

A more recent report from Statistics Sweden (SCB 2016a) is somewhat less conclusive. It describes the moving patterns of refugees arriving in 2006-2010 within their first five years in Sweden. It also examines whether moving affected the chances of employment. The overall result showed that both stayers and movers fared better in rural places and large cities than in medium-sized towns. As is often the case, it is difficult to draw any conclusions regarding causation: i.e. are the rural stayers employed because they stayed, or did they stay because they found employment? The latter is more likely considering how few stayed: less than 14% of those that were placed in such an area were still living there five years later.

Whereas the SCB report examines staying in or moving to broadly defined labour market areas,⁵² Wimark et al. (2017) examine the ‘neighbourhood effect’ on labour market outcomes. They found that although variables such as age, gender, level of education and reasons for migrating were better predictors, the initial neighbourhood did matter: initial settlement in a disadvantaged area had a significant negative effect.⁵³ Roger Andersson (2016) reaches a similar conclusion. He looks at the employment outcomes of Somali, Iraqi and Iranian refugees six years after registering as a resident on different geographical levels. On the municipal level, most of the best performing municipalities are in the Stockholm region but bigger is not necessarily better: Gothenburg and Malmö fare considerably worse than the national average. Strong and weak regions can be found in all parts of the country and the successful regions also vary a lot in size. On the neighbourhood level, Anderson finds some support for a negative effect of ethnic segregation: a higher concentration of the own ethnicity had a negative effect on employment outcomes for some the groups studied.

⁵² Local labour market region is a categorisation used by SCB based on the relative independence of different areas. Regions have merged over the years and the number of regions have decreased from 126 in 1985 to 70 in 2017 (SCB 2017).

⁵³ Based on where the refugee is living one year after a residence permit. Prosperity/disadvantage was based on the neighbours’ level of employment, income, education, the share who received social welfare and the share of foreign-born neighbours.

The three studies discussed above indicate that *where* a refugee starts his or her life in Sweden does seem to have an impact on their future employment outcome. On a regional level, the relative strength of the local labour market explains some of the variation. On a neighbourhood level, ethnic segregation is brought up as a potentially negative contributing factor in the last two studies. On this note, it is worth mentioning that other studies have found that ethnic clustering can be beneficial in the short term but in the long term it has mainly negative effects (Musterd et al. 2008); that it can be beneficial for self-employment (Andersson & Hammarstedt 2015); that it can have a positive impact of income, especially if employment levels in the area are high (Klinthäll & Urban 2014); and that neighbourhood effects are primarily socio-economic rather than ethnic in character (Urban 2009). Because it is difficult to untangle from socio-economic segregation and because it can be either positive or negative depending on the group studied, the effects of ethnic segregation on labour market integration is, in other words, far from straight forward.

I have focused here on the importance of the location of initial settlement for labour market integration as it is of particular relevance to this thesis. However, that refugees often start out in areas that are not beneficial to labour market integration is only a partial explanation of their low participation rates. So is the relative lack of the kind of low-skilled jobs that usually serve as an introduction to the labour market, and the fact that Sweden has a higher proportion of refugees than many other countries. That none of these reasons can fully explain the employment gap has led scholars to conclude that discrimination is widespread on the Swedish labour market. Some use statistical means (le Grand & Szulkin 2002), others are more experimental. Carlsson and Rooth (2007), for example, sent out fictitious CVs with either a Swedish or a Middle Eastern sounding name to a large number of employers. Although the CVs were otherwise identical, the Middle Eastern applicants received far fewer responses. Moa Bursell (2012) also found evidence of discrimination using similar methods, but only for men.

In conclusion, asylum seekers and new refugee residents face a number of challenges when trying to enter the Swedish labour market. Firstly, many asylum seekers still lack the legal right to work. Secondly, whether they are assigned housing or choose their own, they tend to be in locations with unfavourable labour market prospect. Thirdly, they are potentially faced with discrimination in the labour market and finally, they do not necessarily possess the type of qualifications in demand in the labour market. On this last point, it is worth asking whether the integration measures in place do

enough to try to bridge the gap between native and foreign-born. These measures were touched upon already in section 4.2.1, 4.3.2 but will be explored further in the section below, on education.

4.4.2 Education

The general education level of refugees in Sweden is considerably lower than that of the rest of the population. While the proportion with a third level degree is relatively high, they are also far more likely to have very little education. Syrian refugees are no exception: of those who arrived between 2006 and 2017, over a third have some form of third level education, which is similar to the native population, but 38% were in the ‘elementary school or less’ category; for those born in Sweden, the figure was 11% (SCB 2018).

It follows that the gap in employment rates discussed in the previous section could partly be explained by a gap in education levels. The answers to the question of what could—or should—be done about this gap varies. One approach is to ignore the education gap and focus solely on reducing the employment gap. According to this line of thought, the problem is that the wage structure in Sweden is unfavourable to newcomers and the solution is to make it easier for employers to pay newcomers less to perform ‘simple jobs’. This approach is favoured by The Confederation of Swedish Enterprise (Svenskt Näringsliv) and the Swedish Labour Policy Council (AER - arbetsmarknadspolitiska rådet) (Calmfors et al. 2018).⁵⁴

If the goal integration is *equal* participation, consigning immigrants to a lowly paid sub-section of the labour market is a somewhat problematic suggestion. Ensuring access to education is probably more likely to lead to equal opportunities in terms of work, but for the roughly 50% of refugees in the establishment programme with less than nine years of formal education, catching up with the rest of the population will be a formidable challenge (Arbetsförmedlingen 2017). The government response to this challenge is the introduction of an ‘education duty’ for all those in the establishment programme that are deemed unlikely to find employment due to their low level of education. If a participant declines an offer of education, his or her introduction benefits can be cut (Regeringen 2017b).

⁵⁴ Svenskt näringsliv funded AER until 2018. Several right-of-centre parties have also suggested a new form of employment were newly arrived refugees on their first employment in Sweden can be paid substantially lower wages (see, for example, Lööf et al 2016).

Higher education generally leads to higher likelihood of employment and refugees in the establishment programme are no exception (Andersson Joona et al. 2017).⁵⁵ Hence highly educated refugees are not the main targets of ‘simple jobs’ or ‘education duties’ but they do face a different kind of integration challenge: they do not necessarily work with what they are educated to do. A third of all foreign-born believe that they are overqualified for their job compared to 17% of those born in Sweden (SCB 2016b). Ekberg and Rooth (2006) shows that occupational mobility typically follows a ‘U-curve’ for highly qualified refugees. The first job in Sweden tends to be a lower status job than the last job they had in their homeland. The probability of having a job of equal status increases with time, but only half had a job of equal status after 14 years in Sweden.

The first step towards obtaining an ‘equal status’ job for many refugees is to get their qualifications validated. This is done by the Swedish Council for Higher Education and it is a process that can be started while the applicant is still an asylum seeker. In February 2020, the waiting time for recognition of a university degree was two to six months, down from three to ten the previous year (UHR 2020). Bucken-Knapp et al. (2019) interview study with Syrian refugees found that the validation process was often fraught with frustration and disappointment. Long waiting times, missing documentation and Syrian qualifications with no Swedish equivalent were common problems. For many, the end result of the process was dispiriting. Some managed to get only parts of their education recognised and would need several years of supplementary studies, other found that their degree had no value at all in the Swedish context.

Katarina Mozetič’s (2018) interviews with doctors who came to Sweden as refugees show the difficulties of living at the interception of the categories ‘refugee’ and ‘highly-skilled’ (a term usually associated with labour migrants). These difficulties involved the decision to leave countries where they were desperately needed as doctors in order to save their own lives, only to be faced with a lengthy validation process that devalued their expertise. The long period of time when they could not practise medicine led to an identity crisis for some and they struggled with being treated as ‘one of the refugees’. Lisa Salmonsson (2018) shows that the challenges of being a refugee doctor do not end with gaining permission to work. The doctors she interviewed

⁵⁵ University educated immigrants, refugees especially, are still less likely to be employed than native-born with less education. Interestingly, amongst university educated refugees, women fare slightly better than men (Irastorza & Bevelander 2018).

described how, even though they were formally accepted as doctors, they were continuously seen as ‘outsiders’ and struggled to feel a sense of belonging.

Regarding the importance of the location where the initial settlement takes place, access to education clearly differs in different parts of the country. Those that live in smaller towns who wish to attend university, usually need to move elsewhere. A move to a larger, more diversified labour market may also be needed to make full use of one’s qualifications. This largely depends on the type of qualifications a person has, and in some sectors, the lack of qualified personnel is a particularly urgent problem in rural areas (SOU 2017:1).

One such sector is, as it happens, education: many smaller municipalities struggle to compete with the larger towns and cities for qualified teachers (SOU 2017:1). Although this thesis focuses on the integration of adult asylum seekers, many of the interviewees have children of school age. Since their schooling emerged as an important theme in the interviews (see section 9.2.2), a few words on the educational prospect of refugee children could be in order. The first thing that should be noted is that despite the goal of equal access to good quality education, there are considerable differences in schools across the country.⁵⁶ Whereas ABO increases the likelihood of going to a smaller rural school, asylum seeking children in EBO are more likely to go to a suburban school near a bigger city and these school type face different challenges. A literature review (Åberg-Bengtsson 2009) of research done on rural school shows that despite a lower proportion of qualified teachers, children who attended rural schools generally achieved equal, or better, results than those in larger towns and cities. The main threat to rural schools is not, Lisbeth Åberg-Bengtsson concludes, a lack of quality but the considerable risk of school closure when the number of pupils dwindle. Against this background, refugee children can be seen as both an asset to rural schools and a considerable challenge. A higher number of pupils is positive for schools at risk of closure, but a large and sudden influx of pupils can make it difficult for small schools—that already have significant problems recruiting qualified personnel—to maintain high standards (Zetterqvist Nelson & Hagström 2016).

⁵⁶ See www.skolverket.se for statistics on typical quality measures such as number of teachers per student, number of qualified teachers and school results on both the municipal level and for individual schools.

Similar recruitment problems can be found in some typical ‘EBO schools’ as well. In addition, these schools tend to be ethnically, and socio-economically, segregated which could have a negative impact on both language learning and the overall education received. Unlike the quite sparsely researched topic of rural schools, the school segregation in urban areas has received considerable attention. Both the causes of school segregation and its consequences have been interpreted differently by different scholars. Some argue that the school reform of 1992 (Prop. 1991/92:95), that allowed for private schools to be publicly funded and for parents to freely choose what school to send their children to, is the major cause behind increased segregation (e.g. Bunar 2009); other suggest that increased residential segregation is a more important explanation (e.g. Böhlmark et al. 2015). There is also some disagreement as to consequences of school segregation: Brandén et al. (2019) argue that the existence of ‘peer effects’ is a relatively weak explanation of differing school results in schools of different ethnic and socio-economic composition. Family background, they found, is much more important. Whether this also apply to newly arrived refugee children is unclear. Considering the specific challenges they face, it is doubtful whether concentrating a large number of such pupils in a relatively small number of schools is the best way to meet their needs—regardless of where the school is located.⁵⁷

4.4.3 Health

Considering its centrality to our very existence, it is perhaps of no surprise that the topic of health has generated an extensive amount of research. The more specific topic of migrants’ health is no exception. Apart from countless studies in medical and health studies, health is also a topic broached by many studies in the social sciences albeit in a more indirect manner. Naturally, this short section on health will not be able to do this vast field of research justice. What it can do is to give a general idea of the state of health of refugees in Sweden and some of health-related challenges they face.

Starting off on a more general note, a common finding in research on migrants’ health is what has come to be known as the ‘healthy immigrant

⁵⁷ Having to catch up after potentially missing years of schooling, whilst simultaneously learning a new language and all under very difficult circumstances, it is perhaps no surprise that less than 30% of refugee pupils with less than four years in Swedish school finish elementary school with sufficient grades to continue to secondary school (Skolverket 2018b).

effect’ or the ‘immigrant paradox’. These terms refer to the fact that immigrants new to a country are generally in significantly better health than the native population (as well as the population in the country of origin). However, this advantage tends to diminish over time and in the long term, immigrants’ health is often worse than the native population. Attempts to test the ‘healthy migrant’ hypothesis in Sweden has led to different results. The Public Health Agency (Folkhälsomyndigheten 2019b) found support for the hypothesis, Helgesson et al. (2019) used different indicators for health, and they only found an effect for Western migrants. Non-Western migrants, of whom many were presumably refugees, were generally not healthier than the native population and on some indicators they fared worse.

One such indicator was mental health, and this is a topic explored in more detail in a study conducted by Tinghög et al (2016). Drawing on results from a survey with asylum seekers and new refugees, the study shows that mental ill health is widespread in both groups. Around one third of the refugees suffered from one or more of the following: anxiety, depression, PTSD or low well-being. The figures for asylum seekers were even higher. In terms of risk factors, the study identified both pre-flight and post-flight factors. In terms of post-flights factors, close to 60% of refugees (again, the figures for asylum seekers were higher) indicated that they had weak social support. This lack of support correlated strongly with all types of mental ill health. A small and unrepresentative sample means that the results for asylum seekers should be treated caution and since all asylum seekers that took part in the survey were in ABO, the study does not allow for comparison between housing forms. An older study on EBO residents (Lennartsson 2007) indicates that they too have a low sense of well-being, but it also shows that the social support that EBO can provide is one of the advantages of the housing form.

Tinghög et al. (2016) focus mainly on living conditions and social aspects post flight as risk factors, but the asylum process in itself can also be detrimental to a person’s well-being. A meta-analysis of a number of international studies on the relationship between policy and health shows that restrictive migration policies have a negative effect on immigrant mental health (Juárez et al. 2019). Reaching a similar conclusion through a very different approach, Norström (2004) manages to show the human consequences of the legal system by focusing on one individual: Ahmed, whose case she carefully examines, went from being a well-adjusted young man to being suicidal after years of failed applications and appeals. The detrimental effect

that long waiting times—and the uncertainty of not knowing what that decision will be—can have on the well-being of asylum seekers is a reoccurring theme in a number of other qualitative studies on asylum seekers as well (e.g. Slavnic 2000; Brekke 2004; Rosengren 2009; Lundberg & Dahlqvist 2012).

The prevalence of mental ill health among asylum seekers is worth bearing in mind when considering their restricted access to health care. Although they pay a reduced fee for medical care, it may still be prohibitive considering the precarious financial situation most asylum seekers are in.⁵⁸ Also, health care is limited to ‘care that cannot be deferred’ (SFS 2013:407). What this should include is open to interpretation and access to mental health care has proven particularly problematic (Alexander 2010). Staying on the topic of access, Jonzon (2019) examines why less than half attend the free health assessment that is offered to all asylum seekers. While low attendance rates are usually assumed to be due to the asylum seekers’ unwillingness to attend, Jonzon identifies structural barriers like poor communication. It was unclear to many of the asylum seekers he interviewed what the purpose of the assessment was. Those that had attended the assessment stated that it was primarily about disease control, not about their own health needs. Since most of the participants described significant health problems the failure to address their concern is problematic. Jonzon concludes that this imbalance between control and care means that health assessments do not fulfil asylum seekers’ human right to health care.

This section has gone through a few of the challenges that asylum seekers face that could have a negative effect on their health, the sections describing the other domains should make it clear that there are many more. Using health as a *marker* of integration, it appears we have a long way to go before asylum seekers are anywhere near equal to the rest of the population. Viewing health as a *means* to integration, there is no doubt that ill health could be an obstacle to integration for asylum seekers.

4.4.4 Housing

When examining the connection between asylum seekers’ housing and integration, three separate issues need to be considered, namely: how does housing *conditions*, housing *forms* and housing *location* affect integration?

⁵⁸ Asylum seekers pay 50 SEK, the standard fee is 150-300 SEK. Precarity is in itself a risk factor. Tinghög et al. (2016) show that those that often find it difficult to buy basic necessities are far more likely to suffer from mental ill health.

EBO's effect on integration has been a contentious topic since it was introduced in 1994, but it was not until 2018 that the political consensus had swayed in favour of limiting EBO (see Chapter 2). Somewhat simplified, the report (SOU 2018:22) recommending a change, and the governmental bill (prop. 2019/20:10) proposing a law change, address the three points above in the following manner: one housing *form* (EBO) is detrimental to integration because the housing *conditions* are overcrowded and because its concentration to certain *locations* leads to increased segregation. For these reasons, limiting EBO is expected to have a positive effect on integration, but why integration conditions are *better* in ABO is never clearly explained. An earlier report (Boverket 2015a), on which the conclusions of SOU 2018:22 are partly based, also focus primarily on the negative effects of EBO. The report outlines the extent of housing-related problems such as overcrowding and black-market rental agreements and shows that they are widespread in urban areas with a high EBO reception, although the differences are not as extreme as one might expect. The average living space of newly registered refugee residents is much lower than the national average of 42 m²/person, regardless of location: it ranges from 23.2 m² in rural locations to 19.4 m² in the larger cities. The average in cities where EBO is common may be overestimated as asylum seekers are not included in official statistics. This also means that asylum seekers in EBO are likely to be more crowded than these figures indicate. That being said, it is worth remembering that the minimum required space per person in ABO accommodation centres was lowered to 3 m² at the height of the 'refugee crisis' (Folkhälsomyndigheten 2019a). Crowded living conditions are, in other words, not only an EBO problem.

Boverket (2015a) also categorises five locations based on their conditions for economic and social integration.⁵⁹ Regarding economic integration, urban EBO locations should be favourable as they are within commuting distance of strong labour markets. Locally, however, unemployment rates can be high. The smaller municipalities are seen as favourable in terms of social integration. This is based purely on the fact that the ethnic segregation in these places are less prominent. In other words, geographic proximity to 'Swedes' is assumed to automatically lead to better social integration.

⁵⁹ Two urban locations with a high EBO reception, two smaller municipalities where EBO is less common and one medium-sized town that falls somewhere in between.

This categorisation is based on the descriptions given by representatives from the municipalities and government agencies.⁶⁰ The picture the larger municipalities paint of EBO is exceptionally bleak. EBO is seen as the driving forces behind: severe mental health issues, domestic violence, children who cannot keep up with their schoolwork, gang related crime, religious radicalisation, recruitment to terrorist organisations and gender-based oppression. The conclusion is that asylum seekers that stay in disadvantaged areas ‘do not get integrated into Swedish society. Instead, they are integrated into criminal gangs and social structures based on violence’ (Boverkett 2015b: 23). It is on descriptions such as these that Boverket bases its recommendation that EBO should be limited in municipalities with disadvantaged areas. The negative outlook is in some ways understandable. Whereas EBO is economically beneficial on the state-level (it costs considerably less than ABO), this is not the case on a municipal level. A high EBO reception usually mean high costs in terms of social welfare and when EBO does not work out, as is often the case according to the report, the municipality will have to find temporary and expensive housing solutions to avoid homelessness (Boverkett 2015a, 2015b). Letting municipalities with an interest in limiting EBO define the problem is still problematic, however, as such a one-sided description makes it difficult to see why anybody would choose to live in EBO in the first place. Previous research can give us some indication of what the possible advantages of EBO may be. Lennartsson (2007), for example, interviewed asylum seekers living in EBO and found they all preferred EBO to the ABO alternative. Both those with and those without previous experience of ABO had a very negative view of what it was like. They felt that EBO offered a better chance at integration and more contact with the rest of society. It was deemed easier to live a ‘normal’ life, with more freedom and independence than in ABO. ABO was described as prison-like and excluded from the rest of society. This sense of exclusion was strengthened ABO’s often rural location: to the participants this implied isolation.

What this shows is that the benefits of EBO cannot be properly assessed without also including ABO into the discussion. From the asylum seekers’ perspective EBO as a housing *form* may offer greater opportunities for integration than the more institutionalised living in ABO. While forced passivity can be a problem in ABO, some studies paint a more nuanced picture. Jonny Bergman (2009), for example, focus on the ways in which asylum

⁶⁰ A few asylum seekers and refugees were also interviewed but these interviews only get a brief mention in the appendix to the report (Boverkett 2015b).

seekers in ABO seek empowerment through activities that they find meaningful: some of the participants in his study engaged politically; others found meaning in more mundane everyday activities. Another example is Herrman & Kullgren's (2018) study on asylum seekers at a large-scale accommodation centre who started their own support group when they were dissatisfied with the activities on offer.

In terms of housing *conditions*, several studies confirm problems reported by Boverket (2015a). Overcrowding and frequent moves do appear common in EBO (e.g. Brekke 2004; Lennartsson 2007; Björnberg 2013). Boverket (2015a) suggests that overcrowding can be particularly difficult for children and this too is supported by Kristina Alstam (2013), who focuses specifically on how asylum-seeking children cope in these circumstances. The children she interviewed longed for a more 'normal' life. The lack of space made both homework and friendships difficult as they were too embarrassed to invite friends to their home. However, lack of space can be a problem for children in ABO as well. Karlsson's (2018) study focus on the lack of space for play in the accommodation centre where she did her field work. The children were only allowed to play in their small private rooms, not in the public spaces. Some of the children adopted strategies for trying to find alternative spaces for play, for example by staying late in school.

ABO may mean that it is easier for authorities to control the quality of the accommodation, but it does not necessarily mean that the quality is higher. One of the few larger surveys done on asylum seekers shows that those who live in EBO are generally more content with their living conditions than those in ABO (Esaïasson & Sohlberg 2018). Åsa Wettergren's (2013) comparison of the reception of asylum seekers in Sweden and Italy shows that despite clear differences in the systems, in both countries the standards of housing and other services offered to asylum seekers are deliberately kept lower than those available to residents.

Regarding the housing *location*, the mostly urban areas of EBO has been contrasted with the more rural areas of ABO in several of the sections in this chapter. In terms of social integration, Boverket (2015a) suggests that smaller municipalities with less pronounced segregation are better. The studies reviewed in section 4.3.1., however, show that this may not be the case. In fact, building *social bridges* with Swedish people, seems to be difficult regardless of the location or form of housing (cf. Lennartsson 2007; Rosengren 2009). *Social bonds*, and bridges to other ethnic minorities, were helpful in some cases and the cause of conflict in others (cf. Brekke 2004; Rosengren 2009).

Taking all the different domains discussed in this chapter into account, the findings of available studies are inconclusive and neither housing form stands out as particularly favourable in terms of integration. While there is little to suggest that EBO is worse for the integration prospects of the individual asylum seeker, one could still argue that EBO has negative consequences for integration on a societal level by contributing to segregation. The question then becomes: is limiting EBO likely to be an efficient way to combat segregation? A good place to start is by looking at whether segregation is generally forced or voluntary. When it comes to socio-economic segregation, the degree of voluntariness naturally depends on the individual 'choosing' where to live: a person with few resources, economic or otherwise, may have no other choice but to live in a so-called disadvantaged area. Economic inequality is an important explanatory factor when it comes to ethnic segregation as well and the two forms of segregation largely coincide (Urban 2016). Sometimes ethnic segregation is also given cultural explanations and segregation is seen as driven by immigrants' desire to live with their own 'people'. Irene Molina (1997) rejects this explanation as most immigrant-sense areas in Sweden are characterised by a great diversity in terms of background, not by the concentration of a specific ethnic group. It is unlikely, she argues, that immigrants would prefer to live with other immigrants, regardless of their background. Instead, the 'choice' to live in an ethnically segregated area is usually due to circumstances that leave them with few other options. Lennartsson (2007) draws a similar conclusion. In her interview with EBO residents, few expressed that a desire to live near co-ethnics or family was the main reason for choosing EBO. Instead, they chose it because their only other option (ABO) was considered even worse. There may be exceptions to this rule and Assyrians/Syriacs (see section 4.3.1), who have tended to form ethnic clusters in a few of the larger cities in Sweden, could be one of them.⁶¹

Ethnic segregation is, of course, not only affected by the choice made by ethnic minorities (or the lack of choices available to them). In fact, it would

⁶¹ Deniz (1999) argues that this tendency to self-segregate is both a way of coping with life in exile and an expression of historical segregation. In their homeland close family ties offered security in an often-hostile environment and they usually lived villages or neighbourhoods separate from the Muslim majority. The group's residential segregation in Sweden must be understood against this background (p.251).

be more correct to speak of whole cities rather than specific areas as segregated: immigrants would not be overrepresented in some areas if they were not also underrepresented in other areas. There is reason to believe that segregation in Sweden is also driven by what is sometimes called ‘white flight’ or ‘white avoidance’. What this means is when the proportion of immigrants in an area reach a certain point, the Swedes start to leave (or avoid moving to the area). Aldén, Hammarstedt & Neuman (2015) studied this phenomenon and they found that the ‘tipping point’ is surprisingly low: at 3-4% of non-Europeans in an area, the native Swedes start to leave. A qualitative study (Lilja 2015) on Swedish mothers reveal some of the reasoning behind this behaviour. Although the mothers expressed positive views regarding cultural and social diversity in general, they did not want their own children to grow up or go to school in areas characterised by diversity. The main worry was not necessarily the quality of education their children would get, but rather the kind of friends they would make there.

Another part of the segregation problem is that once in place, it is difficult to change. People will continue to move away from disadvantaged areas when their financial circumstances improve or avoid moving to one if they have better options. The change in the EBO law may be more focused on preventing people from moving *to* than *from* disadvantaged areas but this too is unlikely to succeed unless the alternative is perceived as better. This last point applies to both EBO and former ABO residents. Asylum seekers who choose ABO, unlike those who choose EBO, are offered assigned housing after residence. Despite the failure of the ‘Sweden-wide strategy’ examined by Edin et al. (2004), refugee placements continued to be based on available housing rather than job opportunities in the decades that followed. Many were placed in smaller towns and rural areas where the population was in decline. A report by SCB (2016a) examines the moving patterns of refugees who were assigned housing in a municipality between 2006 and 2010. Out of those who were placed in a rural area, nearly nine out of ten had moved elsewhere five years later. Most had moved to larger towns and cities. It is reasonable to assume that these secondary movements will have a similar effect on segregation as EBO, albeit in a more indirect way. The 2016 law (SFS 2016:38) that obliges all municipalities to offer housing to a certain number of refugees should increase the likelihood of being placed in a more attractive municipality (see section 2.2.3), but there are drawbacks to this as well. The housing shortage in many municipalities means they have had to rely on temporary solutions in order to meet their obligations:

in a survey done by Boverket (2019) less than half of the municipalities said they offered new refugees permanent housing contracts.

4.5 Concluding remarks

What this chapter set out to show was both *why* the different domains in this framework are important and *what* previous research can tell us about them. Where possible, a comparison has been made between asylum seekers in EBO and ABO. The housing section, in particular, was built around this comparison. My argument in that section was that critique against EBO on integration grounds does not pay sufficient attention to the integration prospects of the ABO alternative. Looking at both housing forms, housing conditions and housing locations, the evidence that ABO is considerably better than EBO is weak.

Although housing is an important domain for this thesis, and one that could impact on other domains as well, it should be noted that many of the challenges that asylum seekers face regarding access to the various domains do not depend primarily on housing but on their precarious legal status. Not knowing whether one will be allowed to stay or not can be extremely destabilising and if there is one aspect that most studies on asylum seekers bring up it is the difficulty of waiting for a decision.

Quantitative research on asylum seekers is limited to say the least. Since they are not registered residents, there is no register data available and large-scale surveys with a representative sample are next to impossible to achieve. Some clues regarding, for example, employment outcomes can be found in studies on refugees registered after residence but there are some considerable uncertainties involved. Data available from SCB makes it possible to separate those who are assigned housing from those who choose their own housing after residence. While the former category would consist of primarily (if not only) former ABO residents as this option is not available to EBO residents, the latter category includes *both* former EBO and former ABO residents. The impact of the *initial* housing choice thus remains largely unknown.

It is not within the scope of this qualitative study to try to rectify this quantitative shortcoming. The shortcoming is worth pointing out, however, as it is a possible explanation to why the reform to the EBO system is based on the statements of municipal and agency officials rather than previous research. As this chapter has shown, there are a number of qualitative studies on asylum seekers—some of which challenge the assumptions made by the policymakers—but it is doubtful whether these carry the same weight as

a quantitative data in this context. It is also important to remember that asylum seekers are extremely marginalised as a group. In the descriptions given of EBO in the Boverket (2015a) report, there is a clear tendency to view asylum seekers as a group acting against their own best interest. This idea that they do not themselves know what is best for them may also affect their ability to make their voices heard.

There are, however, real limitations to the qualitative studies reviewed that need to be acknowledged. The main one being that they do not allow for an easy comparison of ABO and EBO. Most studies were conducted in *either* ABO or EBO. This means that a comparison of the two is also a comparison of very different studies conducted with different refugee group, during different time periods and under very different circumstances. These studies also differ in their methodological and theoretical approaches which further complicates the comparison. As this chapter has hopefully shown, previous studies do give important insights into some of the difficulties that asylum seekers face with regards to integration. When viewed through the framework laid out by Ager and Strang however, it is clear that many pieces of the puzzle are still missing.

This thesis contributes by laying a more complete integration ‘puzzle’. It can add to our understanding of asylum seekers’ integration both by providing a more systematic comparison of the two housing forms, and by using a multidimensional framework that highlights the complexity of the integration *process*.

5. Methods

As this study seeks to understand what integration means from the specific perspective of asylum seekers, the research design had to be both open to the unanticipated and able to capture the complexity of the lived experience of asylum seekers. Therefore, a qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate and semi-structured interviews was the main method used. The overall research design also contains several comparative elements. The most central comparison is the one between the two housing forms and the interviews were conducted in two different locations: one where ABO is the main form of housing and one where EBO is. The experiences described by asylum seekers in these two locations were then analysed using the theoretical framework outlined in the previous chapters. Comparison was not the only purpose of this analysis, the asylum seekers' perspective in a more general sense remained central, but I did look for ways in which context might shape their understanding of the integration process.

The comparative aspects were not limited to a comparison between housing forms. Two rounds of interviews were conducted: one where most of the interviewees were asylum seekers and one follow up round with some of the interviewees after they had received their residence permit. Hence the research design also allowed for a comparison of the integration process before and after a residence permit. Finally, since policy serves as an important backdrop to this study a third form of comparison is also incorporated in the research design: the comparison between an asylum seeker's and a policymaker's perspective on integration.

Focusing on two municipalities had some distinct advantages. The practical advantage cannot be denied. More importantly, however, it offered an opportunity to contextualise the study in a way that would not have been possible with a wider geographical spread. Although the focus was on asylum seekers, they do not exist in a vacuum. Whether integration is described in normative, economic or other terms, it is always in some respect an interactive process. Hence it would have been futile to try to understand the integration of asylum seekers without also trying to understand the place where integration potentially takes place. To fully understand integration as an interactive process that involves both established residents and newcomers, one would have had to include both groups in the research design. Since this is a PhD project with limited resources, it was not feasible to conduct interviews with a representative sample of local residents in both municipalities. I did, however, try to form as full a picture as possible of the

two locations where the study took place in other ways. This process involved both extensive reading about the two places and interviews with some key informants. This contextualisation informed the next, and in my view the central, stage in the research process: semi-structured interviews with asylum seekers in both locations. The choice of methods was mainly pragmatic: semi-structured face-to-face interviews seemed the most likely method to generate meaningful results after various practical and ethical concerns had been taken into consideration. Although there is a difference between what people say about their experiences and what they actually experience, I believe that what the interviewees did decide to share with me still provides valuable insights: what they shared is what they believed is important that I, and the potential readers of this thesis, know about their particular situation.

The semi-structured part of the interviews may seem at odds with what I have said so far about this being an explorative project that values the perspective of asylum seekers themselves. There are two reasons why the interviews could not be completely unstructured. The first is the comparative aspect of this project: I needed to ensure somehow that the data generated in the two locations was comparable. The second reason is that while the meaning of integration is sometimes contested, I am not starting from a completely blank slate: integration cannot be anything one wants it to be. It is a concept that comes loaded with meaning, and while that meaning varies depending on perspective, there is at least some consensus that it relates to the ways in which different parts (or people) of society make up a whole. Dividing 'society' into different components that can be studied separately was for me a way of avoiding at least some of the more normative connotations of the concept. Ager and Strang's (2008) core domains of integration is the most comprehensive framework I have found for this purpose and it was a valuable analytical tool throughout the project. In terms of the interviews, it helped give them structure without predetermining what each 'domain' *should* mean to the participants (see section 5.5).

The data collection can be divided into three different phases. These three phases, as well as the analysis of the data generated, will be described below. Some methodological choices will also be discussed. The chapter ends with a few notes on the ethics and it begins, below, with a brief description of the two municipalities under study.

5.1 The municipalities

This study was conducted in two different municipalities in Sweden. Showing a slight lack of imagination, I have chosen to call these ‘Land’ (country-side in Swedish) and ‘Stad’ (Swedish for town/city). These municipalities were chosen because they are in some sense ‘typical’ of ABO and EBO respectively, but they also have some rather distinct features and the decision to anonymise the locations was not taken lightly. The context is of utmost importance to this study and my initial thought was that it would be impossible to offer a sufficiently thick description of this context without identifying the two municipalities. At the same time, revealing the locations would be ethically problematic as it risks revealing the identities of the interview subjects as well. This applies to Land especially as the small size of this municipality makes identification more likely. One possibility initially considered was to anonymise the smaller municipality but not the larger one. I decided against this approach as I believe it would create an odd imbalance in how they are presented. For one thing, I did not want to risk implying that larger towns and cities are somehow more ‘unique’ than smaller ones.

Although the ethical aspect might be the most important argument against identifying the location, it was a different argument that eventually tipped the scales in favour of anonymising. The problem, as I came to see it, with identifying the two municipalities was that the study risked becoming *about* the municipalities rather than the asylum seekers who live there. If the municipalities were named and described in detail the study could potentially be read as an evaluation of these two municipalities, and both the asylum seeker’s perspective and more general points about integration would be lost.

The decision to not reveal the identity of the municipalities in the study does limit what can be written about them, hence the description given here will be brief. A more nuanced picture of the two places will hopefully take shape in the empirical chapters but some background information could be useful as an introduction. Land is in many ways the typical ‘ABO municipality’: it is a small municipality in a rural location that suffers from many of the problems associated with rural Sweden today, including economic difficulties and a population that is both aging and rapidly decreasing. According to municipal staff at least, receiving asylum seekers and refugees is a welcomed chance to reverse this trend. Stad, on the other hand, is a medium-sized municipality near a bigger city where EBO is the dominant form of housing. Stad has been one of the major receivers of refugees since the option to choose one’s own housing was introduced, and the municipality

is openly critical of the EBO law. A larger than average proportion of population in Stad are now of foreign background, the segregation in some areas of the municipality is quite extreme and EBO is seen as one of the main driving forces behind this segregation.

In the remainder of this thesis, I have tried to find a balance between adding contextual information when needed and concealing the identity of both the places under study and its inhabitants. This means that some details are kept deliberately vague and it also means that I have not always been able to cite certain sources used as doing so would reveal the locations. Despite such efforts, there is a definite possibility that the municipalities could be identified. Because of this risk, additional precautions to protect the anonymity of the interviewees have also been taken (see section 5.6).

5.2 Phase one of data collection

What I describe here as the first phase of data collection, was in reality a process that spanned the entire project. Both at the interview stage and the analysis stage, new ‘gaps’ in my knowledge appeared that had to be filled. Added to this was the fact that the policy landscape changed significantly over the course of the project and keeping up to date with the latest developments was an ongoing and challenging process.

Much of the early work done in this phase consisted of reading a variety of policy documents relating to migration and integration in wider sense, but also sources relating to the two locations such as local policy documents, statistics, media reports and, especially in the case of Stad, previous research. When sufficiently familiarised with the municipalities, it was time to enter the field, i.e. the two municipalities. Once there, the data collection methods varied from relatively structured interviews to more informal observations and conversations with key informants involved in the reception of asylum seekers in various ways. Since policy is an important reference point, it was of interest to find out how integration policy is interpreted locally. Hence municipal officials directly involved with integration issues were interviewed in both Land and Stad. These interviews were semi-structured and lasted around one hour. They were recorded and later transcribed. The interview guides used on these occasions were fairly similar, but they also covered some of the more specific opportunities and challenges of receiving asylum seekers in these particular municipality. The interviewees in both locations were very accommodating but the actual interviews differed somewhat, not least because the individuals interviewed had different roles within the municipality. In Land, the interviewee had more ‘hands

on' experience whereas in Stad the interviewee's role was as a communications officer. This meant that both the dynamic of the interview situation and the kind of answers I got differed in these interviews.

Various different actors in the voluntary sector also played an important role in the first phase of data collection: they provided valuable contextual knowledge and were also important when establishing contact with asylum seekers. In Land the municipality has established an 'asylum network' and I was invited to one of their meetings. The network consists of representatives from the municipality, the accommodation centre and a few different voluntary organisations and churches. Representatives from the Migration Agency attend when possible but they were not present on the occasion when I visited. At this meeting I gained insight into the kind of work that is being done in Land and how the different actors interact with each other. Apart from this network meeting, I also attended a 'language café' in one of the local churches and a civic information class given by an adult learning association. Attending these classes proved valuable, not only as a way of observing the interaction between the different parties but also because I got to experience first-hand some of the environments that asylum seekers in Land frequent. Above all, it gave me the opportunity to visit the accommodation centre, a place that might otherwise have been difficult to access. On these occasions the data collection consisted of both observation and informal conversations with both volunteers and asylum seekers. None of these conversations were recorded but detailed notes were taken that were typed shortly after to avoid later misunderstanding.

In Stad, I started with a visit to the Church of Sweden. This decision was based on a recommendation from the municipal staff. As this is a much larger town than Land, it was more difficult to get an overall view of what actors were involved in the reception of asylum seekers. As it turns out, the Church of Sweden also saw this as a problem. Although a lot of good work was clearly done by a number of different organisations, there was little awareness within these organisations about what other actors were doing. In a bid to change this, and to facilitate better cooperation between groups, the Church of Sweden had appointed a coordinator whose task it was to set up a 'migration network' where different actors could meet. Whilst the interview I conducted with this coordinator was valuable in its own right, it also gave me important guidance in where to go next. I contacted several adult learning associations and other voluntary organisations that offered Swedish classes to asylum seekers. At ABF, the largest of these associations, a quick chat turned into an hour-long conversation that turned

out to be highly informative. I also visited a Swedish class in a Syrian cultural organisation, and I visited one of the Syriac Orthodox churches in Stad. Not only did these visits allow me to see the issue of asylum seekers' integration from different perspectives, they also proved very helpful in finding asylum seekers to interview. Apart from the first interview with the coordinator at the church of Sweden, none of these conversations were recorded but careful notes were taken. A list of key informants from this phase of the data collection can be found in table 3, appendix 1.

5.3 Phase two of data collection

The main part of this project consists of seventeen semi-structured interviews with asylum seekers in the two municipalities: eight in Land and nine in Stad. A short presentation of the interviewees can be found in table 1 and 2 in appendix 1.

By calling this phase the 'main part' of the study, I am partly referring to the fact that the bulk of my material comes from this phase, but it is also the section that contributes the most to the overall aim of viewing integration from the asylum seekers' perspective. Apart from being the focal point of the study, this is also the part of the project where ethical considerations were of most concern. For these reasons, the methods used will be described in more detail.

5.3.1 The participants

Estimating the sample size in qualitative research is far from straightforward. Kvale (2007, p.43) answers the question of sample size the following way: 'Interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know.' This implies reaching some kind of saturation which is not always feasible. There are practical limitations that might come into play before one reaches that point. My initial estimate of fifteen to twenty interviews was based on what was practically possible to achieve rather than an ideal of saturation. Although my final sample of seventeen individuals is within that range, the interviews stopped when it became difficult to find new participants rather than when I had reached a specific number. A larger sample may have added additional insights, but it is doubtful whether this would make up for the difficulty of analysing large quantities of data in a satisfactory manner.

In terms of recruitment, the first three interviewees in Land were recruited through the language café in the church. Snowball sampling was then used as these people recommended others who could be interested. I also got one

participant who replied to an ad that I had placed in the local library. In Stad, all participants were recruited through various voluntary organisations and churches.

So far ‘asylum seekers’ have been referred to as if they are a homogenous group. This could not be further from the truth. Differences in gender, age, religion and socio-economic background—as well as country of origin, personal experiences and reasons for seeking asylum—are all likely to influence how integration is experienced. Since a small sample could never hope to be representative of *all* asylum seekers in Sweden, the selection had to be based on some other criterion. Due to the comparative element of this study, one criterion was that the sample in each municipality was comparable to the other. For this reason, the study was limited to asylum seekers from Syria. There were additional advantages to this strategy apart from enabling a comparative analysis. Firstly, for the past few years, Syrians are by far the largest group of asylum seekers in Sweden (Migrationsverket 2020a) and they were well represented in both municipalities which facilitated sampling. Secondly, due to the extremely volatile situation in Syria, Syrian asylum claims were normally accepted and they were, at the time of the interviews, given a permanent residence permit.⁶² Previous studies (Brekke 2004; Lennartsson 2007) describe the difficulty of working towards integration when one is under constant threat of being deported. Some uncertainty will always remain but focusing on Syrian asylum seekers meant that this obstacle was at least partly removed. This, potentially, makes the focus on integration more meaningful.

Within the group of Syrian asylum seekers, the aim was for as much variation as was practically possible whilst still keeping the samples in the two locations comparable. In terms of gender and age this was at least partly achieved. On several occasions, there were more than one person present at the interview (see section 5.3.2.), but out of the ‘main’ interviewees, nine were women, eight were men and they were aged between 19 and 58. In terms of age the range was similar in both locations but there were more male participants in Land and more female in Stad.

⁶² In 2016, the acceptance rate for Syrian asylum claims was close to 100 % (excluding so called ‘Dublin cases’ that are sent back to other European countries). The rate for Afghanistan and Iraq, two other countries with a high number of applicants was less than 50 % (Migrationsverket 2020a). Most interviewees were not affected by the law changed that made temporary permits the norm (see section 2.1.2).

As I did not have access to an interpreter, the interviews had to be conducted in either English or Swedish. Since English is mainly spoken by highly educated Syrians, the sample has a strong middle-class bias: most of the participants have a university degree. As this applies to both Land and Stad, it does not affect the comparability, but the reader should bear this in mind as a person's class background is likely to affect how they experience integration. The language limitation also made it more difficult to find interviewees and because of this I included a few people in the sample that had already received their residence permit. This also meant that the amount of time spent in Sweden ranged between six months and three years. Although this did not follow my original plan, it showed some interesting contrasts between new arrivals and those that have been in Sweden for a longer time, something that was explored further in the follow up interviews in the final stage of the project.

A final limitation, and the one with the most serious implications for the comparability of the sample, is that the participants religious affiliation differed between the two municipalities. This was partly anticipated as Stad is quite unusual in that it attracts a specific group of immigrants: Christians from various countries in the Middle East, particularly those that identify as Assyrians or Syrians. Since official statistics are based on country of origin rather than religious or ethnic belonging, it is difficult to say exactly how large this group is, but the communications officer I interviewed at Stad municipality, estimates that around a third of Stad's population are Christians with Middle Eastern roots. As expected, all but one of my sample in Stad were Christians. In Land, the situation was the opposite and all but one were Muslim. In terms of comparability, untangling what is caused by a difference in housing form and what is caused by a difference in the characteristics of the individuals who choose a particular housing form is always difficult. This difference in religious affiliation naturally complicates things further and it is an issue that will be discussed further, mainly in chapter eight on social connections and chapter ten that presents the conclusions of the study.

5.3.2 The interviews

Coming to the interview-setting as an outsider, in my case as a Swedish citizen interviewing asylum seekers from Syria, the researcher may find it challenging to establish trust and rapport with the interviewee (Ryen 2001, p. 337). Although a good interpreter from the same cultural background as

the interviewees may help with establishing trust, it could also have the opposite effect. It can be difficult to determine beforehand what the 'right' cultural background might be, especially when the interviewees come from a country at war and trust is an issue. I conducted several interviews where the person's trust in other Syrian people was very low and, in these cases, a Swedish interviewer without a translator was probably the better, and in some regards more 'neutral', choice.

It is also more difficult to establish rapport with a person when one needs to speak 'through' a third person. Furthermore, just as the researcher undoubtedly influences the data generated in an interview, so does the interpreter (Temple 1997, p. 608; Edwards 1998). In other words, the researcher is left interpreting an interpretation of someone's words not the words themselves, bringing it one step further from the perspective of the person interviewed. On a few occasions, I conducted interviews with people that had quite limited English and Swedish. On these occasions there were other people present that could translate if necessary, either a volunteer from some organisation or a relative of the interviewee. Although this worked fairly well at times, one particular interview was a classic example of why a *professional* translator is preferable: long answers in Arabic were translated into one or two words in Swedish and much of the interview proved unusable.

The most obvious drawback of using English as the main interview language is that the risk of misunderstanding is much greater and the level of detail with which a person can speak about a subject is lower than when using their first language. The participants in this study varied quite a bit in their mastery of the English language. Both misunderstandings and a certain superficiality was a problem in some of the interviews where the participant's English was limited. In some cases, these shortcomings were partially compensated by an imaginative use of both English and Swedish. In one case, a young man who had lived in Sweden for seven months and studied Swedish for five months did most of the interview in Swedish, using English only when he could not find the right word. Although this is clearly impressive, it placed certain limitations on the interview as well.

Although much of what they describe may be standard practise when conducting qualitative interviews, I found the problem-centred interview method developed by Witzel and Reiter (2012) quite useful when planning my interviews. Inspired by this method, my initial plan was to conduct semi-

structured interviews with some narrative elements.⁶³ An important aspect to this method is that the interviewer should come to the interview with previous knowledge in the form of everyday experience, contextual knowledge, theory and previous research done in the field (Witzel & Reiter 2012, pp. 39-51). This ‘sensitizing framework’ is valuable when defining the research problem and knowing what questions to ask. At the same time, it is important that this framework does not control the interviews to such an extent that the researcher is no longer open to new knowledge. When I conducted the interviews, I used an interview guide (see appendix 2) based on my ‘sensitizing framework’. The purpose of this guide was to keep the interviews focused on the topic at hand and to ensure that they generate comparable data, while at the same time keeping them open enough not to lose sight of the asylum seeker’s perspective. The extent to which I followed the interview guide differed somewhat in the interviews. Again, language abilities played a part in this as well. Unsurprisingly, limited language skills led to shorter, less detailed answers and they required more input and guidance from me. Other participants were more talkative and more likely to go off in unexpected directions. Others still came to the interview with what seemed like a clear agenda: they had something specific that they wanted to talk about which made it more difficult to follow the interview guide. In most cases, however, I managed to cover most of the central themes. With the exception of a few interviews that were closer to two hours, most interviews lasted around an hour. All these interviews were recorded with the participants’ informed consent.

As mentioned briefly already, on several occasions there were more than one participant present at the time of the interview. This was the case in both Land and Stad. In Land, half of the interviews were conducted in people homes (they lived in Migration Agency apartments). In these cases, it may have been a case of the whole family simply being home at the time of the interview. The remaining interviews were conducted in a private room in the local library or, in one case and at the participant’s request, at Örebro University. On two of these occasions, the participant brought along a family member. In Stad, as in Land, the participants were asked to suggest an interview venue where they might feel comfortable. None suggested meeting in their home. This may not be all that surprising since it is rarely ‘their’

⁶³ Due to the language problems mentioned above, the ‘narrative elements’ were not quite as abundant as I would have hoped, however.

home but rather the home of a relative. Instead, these interviews were conducted in cafés, the library or (on one particularly nice summer's day) in a park. With one exception, a woman who brought her teenage daughter along, the first five interviews were individual. The last three interviews were conducted in one of the Syriac Orthodox churches in Stad. In these cases, a man who was an active member of the church had helped me find participants. It was clear that he saw the family as the most appropriate unit of analysis and he specifically looked for *families* for me to interview. The actual family constellations differed somewhat. In one case it was a father and his children (the mother was working), in another it was a married couple and their children and in a third case, a married couple, their children *and* a couple of cousins.

Although there were several people present at many of the interviews, there was generally a clear main interviewee. This was typically the person who was better at, or felt more comfortable, speaking either English or Swedish. In two cases in Stad where both parents were present, the mother took this role. In another, particularly problematic case, a young girl had to act as translator when her father struggled to find the right words in Swedish. In the three families in Land, the father took on the role of the main interviewee. When the interview was conducted in their home this created a situation that I was not entirely comfortable with. While I interviewed the man of the house, the wife was busy serving me coffee, cake and an assortment of Arabic treats that they wanted me to try.

The dynamics of these different interviews varied substantially. Some took the form of a lively group interview and everybody took an active part. In other cases, family members seemed to play the role of curious bystanders rather than participants and they said very little even when I tried to include them. When there were younger children present, I myself struggled to be inclusive and to adapt the questions to suit children better. This was not helped by the fact that I did not know beforehand who would be present at the interview. Finally, there were a few cases where the additional people present proved valuable both by translating and by adding their own perspective on things.

In conclusion, these unexpected group interviews were both rewarding and, in some cases at least, problematic. Needless to say, it is difficult to achieve any kind of narrative flow when other people are trying to have their say but at the same time, these interviews produced a different type of data that actually added something meaningful to the individual interviews

I did. Above all, I got a chance to see the same thing from different perspectives: It is one thing to hear a father say how much his sons enjoy playing football and quite another to hear these sons speak with pride of how they beat another team 19-0.

As Gunaratnam (2003) points out, ‘ethnic matching’ is often advised when conducting interviews as this is seen as reducing the distance between the interviewer and interviewee. However, there is a risk that the interviewer makes assumptions based on their own experiences and therefore focuses too much on similarities with the interviewee and not enough on differences. In some cases, the interviewees even find it easier to talk to an outsider about certain issues (Gunaratnam, 2003, p. 98). While the possible advantages of interviewing as an outsider should not be exaggerated, there were definitely times during the interviews when Gunaratnam’s last point seemed valid. But just as there may be things that the participants would feel more comfortable sharing with me than a Syrian person, there are bound to be other things that they would rather not share with me. Perhaps the best way to view it is that the data obtained in an ‘ethnically unmatched’ interview will be *different*, not necessarily better or worse. One thing that struck me was how clearly I represented Sweden to the participants. A couple of individuals actually stated this as a reason for taking part in the study: it was a way of giving something back to Sweden. This did not, as one might expect, lead to an overly positive picture of Sweden. In fact, it was quite common that they compared Sweden unfavourably to other European countries (especially Germany). When they talked about things that they found difficult to comprehend, for example the long waiting times and the Migration Agency’s housing policy, they often questioned me directly about this.

Although this put me in a difficult position at times, what I found far more challenging was the way in which the boundaries between my role as a researcher and as a private person were sometimes blurred. Many participants spoke of the importance of making Swedish friends and in a few cases, it was clear that they saw me as a potential friend. Perhaps because interviewing people in their homes created a more intimate setting, this was more common in Land than Stad. I was invited to stay for lunch after one interview, an offer which I accepted. I have also stayed in touch with a few of the participants after the interviews. On one occasion, I was invited to a party to celebrate that a participant had received his permanent residence permit and I have helped with practical issues like house hunting and spell-checking a CV. It is clear then, that I have not been entirely successful in maintaining a professional boundary. It is less clear whether this needs to

be seen as a problem. While conversations inside the interview setting needs to be clearly separated from those outside it, I believe that these additional meetings have contributed to my understanding of the participants in a meaningful way and I do not regret my choices in this regard.

5.4 Phase three of data collection

The third phase of data collection consisted of follow up interviews with eleven of the asylum seekers and these took place approximately a year after the initial interviews. If the focus of the first interviews was on what it was like for the interviewees to come to a new country, these interviews focused more on the difference between being an asylum seeker and a new resident. This part of the study also examined whether living in different types of housing and in different types of locations may have shaped their views on integration and their plans for the future.

The relatively short time span of this project makes it difficult to draw any definite conclusions on the matter; the participants were still very much in the early stages of their integration process even at the second interview. Nevertheless, it was interesting to see how much *had* changed in the year that passed between the interviews. The most immediately obvious change was the progression in terms of language skills. Out of the eleven follow up interviews I conducted, only two were in English. The rest were primarily in Swedish, using English only as an occasional back up. The level of proficiency varied, however. With one young woman in Stad, one would struggle to tell by her accent that she was not born in Sweden. At the other end of the scale, there were interviews that may have been more rewarding if they had been conducted in English. They were conducted in Swedish mainly because the interviewees valued any opportunity to practise their Swedish and as this was important to them, I honoured this request. The progression in Swedish language skills also gave me access to people that had previously been difficult to access. As described in the previous section, there were families where the husband spoke English but not the wife. In two of these families, the wives were also present at the follow up interviews and since they now spoke a little bit of Swedish, they could be included to a greater extent. Also, the young woman whose initial interview was translated in an unsatisfactory manner had no need for a translator at the time of the second interview which made for a much more rewarding interview experience.

The interview guides used at the follow up interviews followed roughly the same themes as the initial interviews but this time they were more individualised. I used this interview occasion as an opportunity to clarify things

that were unclear from the first interview, and as an opportunity to explore themes that they themselves had brought up in more detail. The interview questions were also more targeted towards their new, more 'settled', status as residents: what had this change meant to them? Another central question was how they described their decision to either stay in the same location they were in previously or move somewhere else. Finally, I also included a direct question about what integration meant to them. Responses to this question varied. While some seemed to interpret it as a test of their knowledge rather than an open-ended search for meaning, other did give their own, interesting take on things.

As mentioned in passing, I only conducted follow up interviews with eleven of the seventeen original interview subjects. As the focus of these interviews was partly on the change in status from asylum seeker to resident, interviewing those that were already residents at the first interview was not seen as a priority and because of this, three of the interviewees in Stad were not contacted for a follow up interview. Two additional interviewees in Stad were contacted but did not have time to meet. I did, however, receive a written update from these individuals. In Land all but one of the interviewees were interviewed again.⁶⁴ I chose not to conduct a follow up interview with the one individual whose claim was denied since the topic of integration seemed both less relevant and less appropriate in such circumstances. This brings the total of follow up interviews in Land to seven whereas only four were conducted in Stad. Although this makes the 'before and after residence permit' comparison more difficult in Stad, it is uncertain to what extent additional interviews would have contributed as those excluded were already residents at the time the first interview.

5.5 Data analysis

The data collected in the interviews were transcribed word for word. The transcribed material was then interpreted and coded based on themes drawn from the theoretical framework. The material from Land and Stad was analysed separately first. Only when I had a good understanding of each place did I compare the two. This was a way of making it more manageable, but I also wanted to avoid overemphasising the contrasting element of the study.

⁶⁴ 'From Land' would be more correct as several of the participants had moved elsewhere. Fortunately, they were still within relatively easy reach. In Stad, all the participants still lived there after their residence permit.

I wanted each place to be a valid case in its own right and I did not want to risk leaving things out because there was no equivalent in the other town.

In retrospect, there were more deductive elements to the interview process than I had initially intended or realised. Ager and Strang's ten domains of social integration informed the interview guide in the sense that I tried to ensure that all domains were covered in the interviews. This in turn influenced the data analysis as well.⁶⁵ I started out by coding the data based on these domains, looking for interesting differences and similarities within and, later on, between groups. Although the framework shaped both the data collection and the analysis process, it is important to note that it did offer a great degree of flexibility. The main 'themes' may have been predetermined but each of those could have any number of possible 'subthemes' not predicted by the framework itself. I also made a conscious effort to look for themes that emerged in the coding process that did *not* fit neatly into the framework. My own perspective and the theoretical framework I used naturally influenced the interpretation of the results, but I have also aimed to reconstruct knowledge as faithfully as possible to the perspective of the asylum seekers interviewed. Although identifying general themes and pattern was obviously important, it was equally important to me not to 'depersonalise' the data too much. Throughout the empirical chapters I make frequent use of direct quotes from the interviewees, not just as a way to illustrate certain points but also in effort to preserve their individual voices. Whilst many quotes are used to illustrate general themes, I have also included a few dissenting voices. This was done in order to show that what I call the 'asylum seekers' perspective' is in fact not a single, coherent perspective but several, sometimes conflicting, perspectives. Since some participants expressed themselves more eloquently, they may be overrepresented in the quotes, but I have tried to include all voices in the overall narrative.

Finally, the aim to give the participants a voice also has an impact on how the data is presented. This proved something of a challenge as the use of mixed languages (English and Swedish) and the sometimes-imperfect use of grammar in both languages resulted in quite 'messy' transcripts. In order to make quotes more readable, Swedish words were translated into English

⁶⁵ The interviews with municipal and volunteer staff were not structured around this model to the same extent but it did influence the analysis of the data generated in these interviews as they were coded according to the same themes. This helped illuminate both aspects where there is general agreement and aspects where there is a clear contrast between, for example, the perspective of a municipal officer and an asylum seeker.

and some grammar mistakes were corrected. Although I consider these changes necessary, there is a risk that the person's 'voice' got lost in the process. The aim to stay as close as possible to the participants' perspective also needs to be carefully balanced with the need to protect the participants' identity (Marshall & Rossman 2011, pp. 49-50). This is one of the several ethical considerations that will be discussed in the section below.

5.6 Ethical considerations

Before the fieldwork commenced, the proposed study was approved by the Ethical Review Board (ref. 2015/463). Although this procedure may be seen as a mere formality, it did provide me the opportunity to carefully consider the ethics of this study. As with all research that involves people, obtaining informed consent was essential. Before each interview the participants were given written and verbal information about the purpose of the study, the method used and who was conducting it. They were told that taking part was completely voluntary and that they could stop the interview anytime they pleased. They were also told that no unauthorised access would be given to their personal information and that no personal details would be published. Once they understood what was involved, they were asked if they agreed to participate and if they allowed the interview to be recorded. Overall, I had no problem obtaining the participants' consent. It was more difficult to explain *why* this was important. A common response was: 'you can print my name if you want', or 'I have nothing to hide'. *Informed* consent is particularly important when there is an unequal power balance at play. Studies on asylum seekers (see for example, Martin Pérez 2006) often point out the difficulty in gaining the trust of individuals who, often with good reason, distrust authority figures. The danger is that the researcher is seen as such a figure. It was crucial that the participants understood that I as a researcher am in no way affiliated with authorities that could affect their asylum claim, whether positively or negatively. Although I think I managed to convey this message clearly enough, I could not completely rule out that some participants might feel pressured to participate in other ways. This was particularly the case when other people—mainly volunteers in different organisations—recruited participants on my behalf.

As Marshall and Rossman (2011, p. 44) rightly points out, there is more to ethics than informed consent. Instead, ethics is something that should be considered throughout the research process. This is all the more important when interviewing a group in such a vulnerable position as asylum seekers.

Creating an interview-setting where the participant felt comfortable was essential, both for the quality of the data and the well-being of the participant. Unlike the often-stressful interrogative interviews that they may have gone through with the Migration Agency, I aimed for a relaxed setting where the participants could speak freely about what is important to them. Some questions that could be sensitive were deliberately avoided and topics like war, trauma and reasons for seeking asylum were only discussed when they were brought up by the participants themselves. This was done for several reasons: I did not want to cause unnecessary stress, nor did I want to risk creating a therapeutic situation that I was ill equipped to handle. In addition, I did not want to give the participants any reason to believe that I questioned the validity of their asylum claim by asking too many questions about their background.

As previous studies (eg. Lennartsson 2007) show, however, it is not always easy to know beforehand what topics are sensitive. Even seemingly neutral questions can trigger a strong emotional response. In one of my interviews, a woman started crying when I asked about her educational background. She explained that one of the greatest regrets in her life was that she never got a university degree. In a few other cases, the emotional reaction was more expected as participants themselves brought up especially painful things that they had experienced during the war. Although it is always painful to watch someone cry and not being able to help, somehow these situations were less difficult than I imagined. Crying seemed like such a natural response to the horrors of war that there was no awkwardness, no expectation that anything I would say could make it better. After the interviews, I never got the impression that I had left someone in a more vulnerable state. Talking about difficult things does not have to be a negative experience and many participants expressed that they were glad they had taken part.

Ethics is not just important during the field work but also in the analysis, writing and publication stages of the project. Although it should be acknowledged that the researcher plays an active part in the construction of knowledge it would not be ethically defensible if the interpretive work distorts the meaning of the data to the extent where it no longer represents the perspective of the participants. What results are reported and how this is done also had to be carefully considered. To protect the privacy of the individuals that took part in this study I did, after much deliberation, decide to anonymise the locations (see section 5.1) but there is still a considerable risk that someone familiar with the locations would recognise them based

on the descriptions provided and that this in turn could lead to participants being identified. Although it is impossible to make any guarantees, I have tried to minimise this risk. Naturally, I will not print the participants' real names and I have kept all other personal information that can make a person identifiable to a minimum. Above all, I will not knowingly write anything that could put a participant in any kind of trouble should they be identified: legal, personal or otherwise. It should also be noted that, as the interviews were conducted before the decision to anonymise the locations was made, I informed all of the participants that I might publish the name of the town and none of them objected to this.

Finally, an ethical study requires consideration of trustworthiness. The idea that the trustworthiness of a qualitative study should be judged by the usual standards of validity, reliability, generalisability and objectivity has been challenged in various different ways (Marshall and Rossman 2011, p. 39). The oft-quoted Lincoln and Guba suggest alternatives better suited for qualitative research: credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability (1985, pp. 218-219). They also suggest different procedures for how these might be ensured (1985, pp. 301-331). The practical limitations of this project made some of them difficult, but others were taken on board. For example, to increase the *credibility* of the study the participants were offered to read the transcribed text in order to check for misunderstandings and the analysis was done in dialogue with supervisors and peers in order to stay open to alternative interpretations.⁶⁶ Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 316) reject the idea of generalisability in the conventional sense: findings are always context dependent. Instead one should aim for *transferability*.⁶⁷ If one provides a thick description of the context studied, the reader can determine whether the findings might be transferable to other contexts. Naturally, in a study of this kind, it would be hard to make any claims of statistical generalisability. However, on a theoretical level the study could lead to insights that may be transferable to other contexts. One final thing that could potentially affect the trustworthiness of this study is the insider-outsider dynamic of this study. This is discussed in more detail in section 5.3.2 above.

⁶⁶ However, only one participant asked to read to transcript.

⁶⁷ Anonymising the locations does make this more difficult.

6. Foundation

To Ager and Strang (2008) *rights and citizenship* make up the foundation of integration. Thus, asylum seekers are on shaky ground as what defines their situation is rather an *absence* of rights on even the most fundamental level: they do not yet know whether they will be allowed to stay in the country they are supposed to integrate into. This chapter will look at some of the ways in which the asylum seekers in this study reflect upon this issue. It opens with a section on the right that in many ways define their situation: the right to seek asylum and the difficulty involved in waiting for a decision. This is followed by two related sections on why they chose Sweden over other countries and how this to some extent also connects to rights. The remainder of the chapter will discuss how a legal change in status may affect how they view their rights: first as residents and then as (potential) citizens. Since many of the themes brought up in this domain were common to participants in both Land and Stad, the participants will be treated as one ‘group’ throughout most of the text.

6.1 Waiting for asylum

Placing rights *and* citizenship as the foundation of integration suggests that there is a clear connection between the two concepts. Although such a link exists, not all rights are subject to citizenship. Crucially, article 14 in The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (UN General Assembly 1948)—and the fact that Sweden is a signatory of the declaration—gives people the right to seek asylum in Sweden. Tellingly, rights were reflected upon in various ways in the first round of interviews, but citizenship was never brought up. The immediate concern of the asylum seekers interviewed was not citizenship but simply the right to stay in the country on a more long-term basis. The new law in 2016 (see section 2.1.2), which made the standard form of residence temporary rather than permanent, did affect a few of the participants but as Syrians they were still amongst the fortunate ones.⁶⁸ Unlike asylum seekers from other countries with lower acceptance rates, they were fairly certain not to face deportation. Their wait for a decision may still have been problematic but it was not tainted with as much uncertainty as some other asylum seekers’.

⁶⁸ Out of the 17 asylum seekers interviewed, 13 got a permanent residence permit. Two got a 13-month temporary permit and one a three-year temporary permit. Only one claim was rejected.

Despite this relative lack of uncertainty, obtaining a residence permit was central to the interviewees. Most saw the ‘starting date’ of their integration process in the (hopefully not too distant) future: the first day as residents would be the day when their integration process could truly begin. To them at least, it might be more appropriate to speak of permanent residence rather than citizenship as the foundation of integration. The rights of permanent residents are not too far behind those of citizens and if *equal* rights is the foundation of integration, permanent residence does level the playing field.⁶⁹ At the time of the first interviews, most participants are still asylum seekers and few have given citizenship much thought. Permanent residence, on the other hand, is seen as the solution to many of their problems.⁷⁰ In these interviews, many speak of waiting for a decision as the worst part of being an asylum seeker and they question why it takes so long:

If I come to any country and I want to stay in that country, tell me when I come, in one month, if you want me, I will stay. If you don’t want me, tell me to leave. Because, if you lose one month, or one year, and then you are told ‘ok, we don’t accept you in this country’, I’m not talking about myself, but I talk about it in general. About that. Eh, if you lose one year, after that you have broken your feeling here (Ali, Land, 2016).⁷¹

In the quote above, Ali describes the wait as a kind of emotional deterioration (‘breaking his feeling’); he will be worse off after a year of waiting than he was when he arrived. Others describe it as being stuck or frozen in time:

You feel like you are chained, you can’t do nothing, while you wait [...] We learn useful things but the last eight months feel like a non-existing period, we can’t do anything so it’s like just time passing. Of course, I work very hard to get close, even a step closer. You kind of like have to start to feel like you are, yeah, getting closer (Hanna, Stad, 2016).

Hanna wants to study at university, and she knows that she has a long and difficult process ahead of her. She finds her inability to start that process whilst waiting frustrating. Many others share this feeling of time passing without any progression. Comparisons of various kinds are also common. Some compare themselves to others and ask why some get their answer in

⁶⁹ Naturally, there are still some advantages to becoming a citizen. Not least because it is only as a citizen one is completely protected from the risk of deportation.

⁷⁰ The nature of these problems will be discussed in more detail in coming chapters.

⁷¹ All interview quotes from 2016 are from the first round of interviews, all quotes from 2017 are from the second round.

a few months when they themselves have waited nearly a year. Others compare Sweden to other countries—Germany in particular—and wonder why the process is slower here. Khaled, for example, suspects that the Swedish authorities are deliberately slow in order to discourage people from coming here. He still believes it will be worth the wait: decisions may be faster in Germany but once they have a decision, they will be better off in Sweden. For him, as for most of the people interviewed, it is a question of *when* rather than *if* he gets to stay. The only exception to this rule is Leah, a woman who may face deportation since her initial asylum claim was denied. When asked about where she sees herself in the future, she responds:

If you had asked me this question three months ago, when I hadn't received the decision, I would have told you that I need to stay here, I see my future here. But when [the Migration Agency] gave me this decision, I was shocked. Yes. And now I am waiting for the second decision. I appealed and now I am waiting for the second [...] I am lonely woman with my children, what can I do? If they give me another negative, what can I do? What shall I do? Where I will go? Many, many questions. This question, you give me one question, but I give myself every day more than 15 questions, where, where, what, what? But I don't know. It is very hard (Leah, Land, 2016).

Uncertainty permeates Leah's everyday life and she cannot make any plans for the future. It affects her children too: her son asks why he must go to school if they are not welcome to stay. For the rest of the participants, the wait is more a matter of frustration than uncertainty, but there is still a nagging 'what if' that will not be eliminated until they have their decision from the Migration Agency. This too, can be difficult to deal with if one has children. Khaled, for example, tells a story of how his children came home crying from school one day asking if they were going to be sent back to Syria. He soon found out why: their teacher had asked why they were still waiting for a decision when their cousins got theirs the previous month. Khaled and his family got their residence permits shortly after the incident but trying to keep his children from worrying about something that he himself was concerned about was difficult.

6.2 Rights as a pull factor

Overall, there was a definite sense of optimism about what their lives would be like when they got their permits. The interviewees spoke with great appreciation of Sweden and a few described it as the best possible country to live in. Sweden is not within easy reach from Syria and the journey to get

here is often long, arduous and expensive. Despite the risks involved, many had made an active choice to come to Sweden. This applies to asylum seekers in both locations, but they differ somewhat in their motivation for choosing Sweden. Those in Land were slightly more prone to offer explanations as to why they wanted to come to Sweden. That Sweden is a democracy and a free country that respects human rights are some of the reasons they brought up. They also made frequent comparisons with other countries when they explained why Sweden was the best option for them.

In Stad, most interviewees have a strong connection to the town through members of their extended family, many of whom have lived there for several decades. This was a strong motivating factor for choosing Sweden and their choice was perhaps seen as too obvious to warrant much further explanation. That is not to say that those in Stad did not also value other aspects of Swedish society. To Asim, even having rights is a novelty and he describes his first encounter with the Migration Agency as follows:

It was a long queue and I left there at ten o'clock in the evening, I think I came there at eight o'clock at morning. But still, nevertheless, the people, the staff was very nice and I still remember when I finally got my finger prints taken and it was time for the first interview, and the lady there she started to explain to me what that means and she told me 'these are your rights' and I was wondering 'I have rights here?' That was a nice surprise for me (Asim, Stad, 2016).

Others focus on specific rights. Children's rights, in particular their right to education, is mentioned by several parents as important. Participants in both locations also value the right to freely practise their religion. A few of the Christians in Stad, who lived as a religious minority in Syria, mention freedom from religious persecution as a determining factor in coming to Sweden. To Adnan in Land, religious freedom means he can practise Islam in his own personal way and to Asim it simply means the right not to practise religion at all:

What [my daughter] loves about Sweden is the freedom: that nobody will judge her if she doesn't believe in Allah or if she doesn't believe. This is a very important part for her [...] she doesn't like the Islam that they are teaching her in the school. And well, I raise her to, on freedom of expression, but if she says that in the school it could be a real, a real issue for us. Because it is not a free country there [...] She cannot say 'I don't believe in God'. It's a very serious issue [...] It's a dilemma for me, if I tell her not to say that in the school, I am teaching her to lie. Which is wrong for me as a parent to do. In

the same way, for her safety, I cannot tell her ‘no, you go and tell them whatever you believe’. So it is a very tricky balance. (Asim, Stad, 2016).

Asim’s quote shows that in the absence of freedom and rights it is difficult to live a life according to one’s own principles. Although it goes against his own beliefs, he has to tell his daughter to lie in order to protect her. Leah also talks about offering her daughter a better life, but her focus is more specifically on women’s rights:

In the Middle East, women are very oppressed. You know that? When I was little girl, it was my dream to be lawyer and help the women in the Middle East. And I knew that in Europe [...] men and women are the same, not like the Middle East. In the Middle East it’s different, men in our countries are better than women. What the man says the woman will do [...] Because of things that I saw with my mother and my aunt, I wanted to become lawyer to help the women in the Middle East, in Syria. I couldn’t do it because the tragedy in Syria is that when you are 19 years old you must marry, you must be a housewife, you must have children. If you wait till you are 25 it’s not good for a woman [...] Now that I am here, I feel that my daughter will be more free and safe here. That is the difference (Leah, Land, 2016).

Leah refers to Europe rather than Sweden but the gender equality that she brings up is something that several of the participants describe as specifically Swedish. Equality, and the role it plays in Swedish culture, will be discussed further in the next chapter. For now, it will suffice to say that equality is far from expected in *all* manner of rights and the participants tend to speak more of negative rights rather than positive rights. To be more precise, *freedom from* oppression and persecution is emphasised rather than *access to* a welfare state.

6.3 Citizens’ rights vs human rights

Although Marshall’s (1950/1992) civil, political and social rights refers specially to the rights associated with citizenship, it is still a useful distinction. Not least because it shows where the status of asylum seeker comes up short. Civil rights mainly refer to the type of rights that protect an individual’s freedom. As shown above, these rights are an important part of why the participants consider Sweden a good place to live. It is doubtful, however, whether they connect these rights to citizenship. Instead, they are more likely to consider them *human* rights. Despite their supposed universality human rights are not a reality in many countries, including Syria and

when Rania speaks of why she sees her future in Sweden she poignantly says it is because she feels more *human* here.

Human rights go beyond merely protecting an individual's freedom: the UDHR covers social (for example art. 22) and political rights (art. 19) as well. In the interviews though, political rights are rarely mentioned and when they are, it is typically in reference to the political system as a whole rather than their individual (lack of) political rights. Jacob, for example, has this to say about democracy:

You know what democracy means. You know 100% what it means. When I was in my country I kind of knew what it meant but not like here [...] I came here one and a half years ago, and I have learnt a few things. Not a lot. But you *know* what democracy means. Exactly what it means. It is important (Jacob, Stad, 2017).

The quote above is part of Jacob's response to a question on what he sees as the biggest differences between Syria and Sweden. Having grown up in Syria, he has only ever known democracy as an abstract concept. In Sweden, he argues, people have lived in a democracy and therefore they know what it means in practise, something he has yet to learn.

Regarding social rights, none of the participants question their limited rights nor the lack of equality between them and citizens. Although most acknowledge that it is difficult to make ends meet as an asylum seeker, there is also a certain reluctance to complain about this. Rania, for example, goes as far as saying that the Migration Agency must know exactly how much they need since the amount they are given is 'just enough' to live on: with careful planning one can make the monthly allowance last till the end of the month. These types of statements could seem unexpected as, even with an extremely modest definition of what counts as 'adequate living standards', it is difficult to fathom how one can make 19-71 SEK/day cover even the most basic needs. As we will see in coming chapters, the interviewees do express dissatisfaction with other aspects of their situation but regarding *monetary* benefits none describe themselves entitled to more than what they are getting. When one considers that social rights are often contested even for citizens, the participants' reluctance to complain is more understandable. It is reasonable to suspect that they too are affected by negative stereotypes of asylum seekers as being drawn to European states because of their more developed welfare systems (Bloch & Schuster 2002). In this context, it may seem wise to express gratitude rather than disappointment and Zina's response to the question of how she makes the money last is typical:

Yeah, it's hard [to make the money last] but there is a lot of people, eh, coming to Sweden so we should respect that [...] I try not to spend money and to buy only the important things. Sometimes I need something, and I can't buy it, but I say 'no problem', I will wait (Zina, Land, 2016).

Zina says she knows of asylum seekers that come to Sweden to live on benefits and she worries that Swedish people will think that all asylum seekers are like that. To her it is important to contribute through working and studying hard. The idea that a few 'bad eggs' ruin the reputation of all asylum seekers is a reoccurring theme in the interviews and like Zina, other participants also try to distance themselves from these people in various ways.

6.4 Residence: entitlement vs indebtedness

In the second round of interviews, most of the interviewees have gone from the uncertainty of being an asylum seeker to the relative security of being a permanent resident. This has not increased their sense of entitlement, however. Instead their wish, and perceived need, to contribute seems to have grown more urgent. As asylum seekers the wait for their integration process to begin was indefinite: there was no reliable way to even estimate when they would get an answer, all they could do was wait. Now that they have their permits, the clock is counting down to a finishing date of sorts. Most refugees, unless they are unable to work or are already in employment, are given an individual 'introduction plan' that specify what activities that they need to take part in over the next two years in order to obtain their introduction benefits. The aim of the plan is that the person should be in full-time work or education when the two-year introduction period is over (see section 2.2.2 and 4.4.1). In reality, only a minority are, but several of the interviewees take this as a surprisingly literal aim. It is a source of stress for Adnan:

But the introduction plan in Sweden, I think it is too short. Two years [...] I think the introduction plan must be different for different people. Not two years for all people. I think some people don't want to continue their studies, they want to speak simple Swedish, just some SFI and a work placement and then have a job. But some people want study (Adnan, Land, 2016).

Adnan studied IT but he never worked in that field and his degree is out of date. He needs to start from scratch, and he is worried that two years is not enough time to make him 'employable'. Others echo this sentiment. Ending up on social welfare after the two years are up is something that most regard as a great shame rather than a safety net that they are entitled to.

For an asylum seeker, it may be difficult to imagine *on what grounds* one can claim to have rights other than as a human being with a fundamental right to survive; additional rights, social and political rights in particular, are typically claimed as a citizen. This may also explain why the change in status from asylum seekers to permanent residents only has a limited effect on how the participants view their rights: their actual rights may have expanded, but the grounds on which they claim them are still uncertain.

Citizenship is a symbolic status associated with rights but also with *duties*. Marshall describes a citizen's duties as follows: 'His [sic] acts should be inspired by a lively sense of responsibility towards the welfare of the community' (1950/1992, p.41). He also claims that there has been a potentially worrying shift in focus from duties to rights when it comes to citizenship (1950/1992, p.7). The interviewees in this study may not be formal citizens but they do have a 'lively sense of responsibility' towards Swedish society. The supposed shift in meaning from duties to rights does not seem to apply here: the participants are more likely to speak of indebtedness than entitlement. They all express a great deal of gratitude to Sweden for 'opening the doors' to refugees and for helping them in their time of need. This gratitude creates a sense of debt for many of the participants, a debt that they feel like they have to pay back somehow. If some asylum seekers and new residents are hesitant to claim rights, it may very well be because they have been unable to perform what they believe to be their duty.

This idea of paying back a debt is something that plays an important part in how the interviewees perceive integration and it is an idea that we will have reason to return to. Regarding the foundational aspects of rights and citizenship, I suggested earlier that perhaps permanent residence is a more appropriate 'foundation' than citizenship. In many ways it is, not least because of the added sense of security it provides compared to being as asylum seeker. When asked what the biggest difference is between being an asylum seeker and a resident the most common answer by far is exactly that: security. Kareem describes it as finally standing on 'firm ground': he is no longer afraid that he will be sent back to Syria.

In terms of stability then, permanent residence can be seen as a foundation in its most rudimentary sense. But it is a clear improvement on being an asylum seeker in many other respects as well. The participants may be reluctant to speak of social rights as *rights*, but they do acknowledge that their financial situation improved significantly with their new status. Marta describes receiving her residence permit as suddenly 'going upstairs', to a

different level where everything is much better. Not least because circumstances surrounding their flight left them heavily in debt to friends and family and now she finally had a chance to start paying off that loan. Although the benefit amounts are still modest, they are enough to restore a sense of normality to people's lives. Rania has this to say on the subject:

Before, when the children said they wanted toys, new toys, we said we can't. We can go to the Red Cross or second hand and you can have anything you want but we can't buy new games or toys. The same with clothes. They said they wanted Elsa [character from Disney's *Frozen*] dresses and we promised that when we have our permit you will get them. Also, they only had mattresses to sleep on. Now they have beds. We went to IKEA and they said 'we want this one'. So it is better now, when we have more money (Rania, Land, 2016).⁷²

Rania was particularly driven during her time as asylum seeker and she acknowledges that in some ways she may be unusual. When asked what the biggest improvement was now that she is a resident, she answers that the things that most people look forward to, like access to Swedish classes and work placements, she had already done before she got her permit. She could speak the language, she had volunteered in a few places and she had even found a home for her and her family. That their economic situation had improved was definitely appreciated but the biggest difference to her was that the permit made everything more *real*: They could finally sit down and make real plans for the future.

Rania's assessment of how other new residents view their new status is at least partly confirmed by the other participants: many of them do mention SFI and other activities as one of the main improvements on their previous situation. Partly, it is simply a relief to be free from the boredom of being an asylum seeker: the importance of having 'something to do' should not be underestimated. More importantly though, language skills in particular are seen as essential part of integration and the right to finally attend 'real' schools is highly valued.

6.5 Next step: citizenship?

Ager and Strang include citizenship as the foundation to integration because of its links to ideas of nationhood and national identity. They argue that a

⁷² Beds *are* provided in all accommodation offered by the Migration Agency. Rania, however, found her own house in Land whilst she was still an asylum seeker.

country's definition of citizenship in terms of inclusiveness and exclusiveness (*who* can become a citizen and *how*?) plays a large part in how they define integration as well: it says something about what is expected from (potential) new citizens and what new citizens can expect from their new home country.

While citizenship policy may well have an impact on integration policy, it seemed to have little bearing on how the participants viewed their own integration. In the follow up interviews, I asked specific questions about citizenship. The responses I got varied but it was clear that few had given the matter much thought. It was quite rare that they spoke about the *meaning* of citizenship in the terms used above. One man even struggled to understand the word 'citizenship', despite speaking both Swedish and English quite well. It was only when I mentioned Swedish *passports* that he understood what I was talking about. In fact, most participants were rather pragmatic about the prospect of becoming a citizen and having a Swedish passport was seen as advantageous. Adnan puts it like this:

I need a citizenship. To go on holiday for example. And I will be honest with you, a Swedish citizenship is better than a Syrian citizenship. Because you can travel to Africa and go on safari, eh, to the savannahs (Adnan, Land, 2017).

Adnan may be the only one that dreams of going on a safari, but he is far from alone in wanting to travel; ease of travel is the most commonly brought up advantage of Swedish citizenship. A Swedish passport opens up a lot of doors that are closed to Syrian citizens. A few mention holidays as an important part of having a 'normal' life in Sweden. Others want to visit family members who live in other countries and yet others consider working abroad in the future: with a Swedish citizenship they would always have a safe country to return to.

Although less frequent, a few of the interviewees do reflect upon the more symbolic meaning of citizenship. Adnan, for example, makes a point out of saying that Swedish citizenship will not make him Swedish: 'it is only a piece of paper'. Jacob says Swedish citizenship would make him happy, but he does not know what it would *mean*. When I ask if he thinks it would make him feel Swedish, he replies:

I understand you but I don't know. Why is it normal to ask? It's because I am in a different country. I have my country and I am in a different country. So that is why. I can't, I don't know if I will ever feel like you. Because you

were born here, and you live here, and you grew up here. Do you know what I mean? (Jacob, Stad, 2017)

It is understandable that it is difficult to know beforehand how something would feel and it may not be the most relevant question to ask. At this point it is pure speculation. Despite this uncertainty about what it would mean, all those asked were very positive towards the possibility to become a Swedish citizen and said they would apply as soon as they were able to. As Theresa says: 'it would be a great honour to be a citizen in a country that cares so much about human rights'. A few other participants express similar ideas.

Another, possible, contributing factor to why it may be hard to assess the meaning of citizenship is the relative ease with which it can be obtained. Unlike a growing number of European countries, Sweden has yet to introduce any form of citizenship tests that applicants have to pass. Although some argue that such tests benefit integration as they treat citizenship as a reward for 'good behaviour'; others maintain that in a diverse society citizenship rules should be as inclusive as possible (Goodman & Wright 2015). Openness implies that there is not one fixed way of being Swedish citizen. As such, at least in theory, all citizens are equal despite their differences which hopefully creates a better foundation for integration.

However, as I have touched upon already, the interviewees do not talk about rights and citizenship in terms of their own equality (or lack thereof) with Swedish citizens. Whether this is because they do not expect equality or whether they find it difficult to talk about it is uncertain. What is clear is that the situation that asylum seekers find themselves in is peculiar. They are part of a society but not on the same terms as citizens or even residents: the few rights that asylum seekers have are limited to bare necessities and are *not* based on an ideal of equality. One of the most striking example of this is that the benefits that asylum seekers receive are far below what is considered a 'reasonable living standard' for citizens (and residents) that are entitled to social welfare payments (see section 2.2.1). Other rights are also limited: the right to work, education and health care, for example, all come with restrictions.

At the same time, it would be misleading to say that integration is something that only happens between old and new citizens: the interview data simply does not support this. The asylum seekers interviewed in this study find themselves in an 'in between' state: they are not transient visitors but

at the same time they lack the certainty and permanency of a citizen. Crucially, only one interviewee says she would like to move back to Syria when the war is over. The rest all see themselves living in Sweden for the rest of their lives; they want to be part of Swedish society and if this is the goal of integration it is a goal that they start working towards long before they become citizens. Rights *are* important, but as asylum seekers the number one right may be the right to seek asylum: not the rights associated with citizenship. At the same time, residence is seen as a great leap forward in a person's integration process. Although not specifically stated this is precisely because the 'citizen-like' rights associated with (permanent) residence.

6.6 Foundation: concluding remarks

What this chapter has attempted to show is that rights, including those associated with citizenship, are closely related to integration but whether they should be seen as a necessary foundation to integration depends on perspective. If integration is defined as an end state where all those who live within a particular society are able to participate on equal terms, then citizenship and equal rights are a necessity for integration. If, on the other hand, integration is seen as a process, they may not be necessary.

From the latter perspective, a residence permit can be said to make a good foundation for integration in several ways: For example, it helps create a sense of security and it gives the individual access to some necessary tools (for example language skills) for integration. When it comes to equality and rights, however, it is still unclear whether residence is enough. The participants in this study do not *expect* equality of rights, maybe because – as I suggested earlier – they have not yet 'paid their dues'. Whether this is something that would only change with a change in status to citizen is difficult to tell but I suspect that time plays a big role in it as well: At the time of the second interview the participants had been in Sweden between one and a half and three years. In other words, they are all very new to Sweden. A resident of twenty years could potentially make more demands for equality with citizens.

The coming chapters will offer more concrete examples of how integration could be possible, although quite severely limited, for asylum seekers. The ways in which residence is helpful — but also the cause of new obstacles and sometimes disappointment — will also be discussed further.

7. Facilitators

If one views integration as a process rather than an end state, there is a definite possibility that this process will never be complete. One can imagine, both on an individual and a societal level, an ideal endpoint to this process but in reality, society is in an ever-changing state of flux. How one imagines the endpoint also depends on perspective. On an individual level the end goal could be described as living a ‘good’ life but what counts a good life varies a lot from person to person. Opinions also vary regarding what makes a good, integrated, society; the emphasis could be on equality, but it could also be on social harmony. Whether equality is a prerequisite for social harmony is also up for debate (cf. Koopmans 2010; Wright & Bloemraad 2012).

Despite the divergent views regarding the ultimate goal of integration, it is possible to identify aspects that should facilitate the integration process of most people. Ager and Strang’s (2008) core domains include two such ‘facilitators’: the first is ‘language and cultural knowledge’, the second is ‘safety and stability’. These two facilitators will be discussed separately in section 7.1 and 7.2. The concluding section, 7.3, will discuss the facilitators’ role in the wider framework.

7.1 Language and Cultural Knowledge

Whereas the integrative function of a common language is typically accepted without hesitation, the function of cultural knowledge is more contested. If the emphasis is solely on the newcomer learning about and adapting to the culture of the host country, the aim is *assimilation* rather than *integration*. Although the two are sometimes treated as one (see section 3.2), I am trying to maintain a distinct difference between them. Following Ager and Strang, I place the emphasis on a *mutual* process of cultural understanding between newcomers and established residents/citizens, or even between different established groups in a society, making ‘cultural knowledge’ more readily compatible with a form of integration that allows for diversity.

There are a number of ways in which one may learn a new language or learn about a different culture than one’s own. More informal ways will be discussed further in the next chapter on social connections. This chapter will focus on the more formal aspects, i.e. what is on offer in terms of language classes and civic information in the two locations and how are they perceived by the participants. It is worth noting at the outset, however, that

for asylum seekers, the line between formal and informal is not always so clear.

7.1.1 Swedish for asylum seekers

Since the possibility for asylum seekers to attend SFI classes was removed in 2012, language classes largely rely on organisations run by volunteers. There are some potential drawbacks to this. Firstly, it is not a universal solution that will benefit all asylum seekers. Unlike SFI for residents, classes are not given as a right as they rely on associations in the local area that are willing to provide this service. Secondly, the classes are heavily reliant on volunteers who are not trained teachers and there is no real quality control.

Considering the modest size of Land, the availability of Swedish classes was relatively good at the time of the interviews; three different adult education associations held classes once or twice a week. Two of these held their classes in one of the local churches. This church also had a so called ‘language café’, an informal gathering where church volunteers taught basic Swedish over a cup of coffee. One of the associations had a weekly class at the accommodation centre. This was the only regular activity provided at the centre, but many residents attended other classes as well. One of the associations had a more selective approach when admitting students. Its classes were run by one of the volunteers who taught at the language café and she invited some of the more ambitious students from the language café to attend extra classes. Although this may not be the fairest admission policy to a class, these classes were much appreciated by the attendees as the language café soon became too basic for those with more advanced skills.

All the participants in Land attended at least some of the classes on offer. The church was brought up frequently and it clearly played a central role for many asylum seekers in the town. Their activities were initially funded by the church but a few years after Land started to receive larger number of asylum seekers and refugees, the municipality introduced an ‘integration fund’ from which the church can apply for money to cover some expenses.⁷³

I attended a language café in the church where I had the opportunity to speak to some of the people running it. Apart from one sprightly 85-year-old man, all volunteers were women and all but one were of retirement age. They mentioned that it had been more difficult to get volunteers lately, especially younger people. On the day of my visit they were a few people short

⁷³ Land received extra funding through the government initiative described in section 2.2.1 and 4.3.2 because of the large number of asylum seekers received.

and they were somewhat concerned about this. The café is a carefully planned organisation with people assigned to different tasks: some are responsible for the kitchen, some for teaching and some for minding the children. After everybody has finished their coffee, the adults are divided into groups and one group goes upstairs. Since they were short on volunteers on this particular day, it meant that one teacher was on her own upstairs. This problem was solved by giving me the 'job' of keeping her company. They explained that they do not like leaving anybody on their own upstairs. Nothing untoward has ever happened but as they say: 'you can never be too careful'. That is only one of many rules: the doors open at 9.30 on the dot (if it is raining heavily the visitors may be allowed in the lobby), coffee is only served till 10.00 to avoid too much 'running back and forth', children are not allowed upstairs, eating is not allowed in the playroom etc.

Walking around with the volunteers as they explained all these rules, it seemed somewhat excessive to me as an outsider. There is certainly a possibility that this is how they run all their activities, regardless of the target audience, but one cannot help but wonder whether the prospect of spending an hour alone with a group of Swedish people be equally frightening?

This may be an unfair assessment as previous incidents may have given the church reason to believe that strict rules are necessary for everything to run smoothly. They used to give out second-hand clothing at the language café but when the number of people attending increased, the situation eventually got out of hand. One day, 120 people showed up, over 20 of which were children. They did not have the capacity to mind that many children and the adults did not follow the rules set up for the distribution of clothing. The queue system was ignored, as was the 'one item per person' rule; chaos ensued, and people were grabbing whatever they could get hold of. Now they have a small second-hand shop instead that opens once a week. Rather than giving away clothes for free, they charge a small amount for them. It is only a symbolic amount, but it is 'psychologically important', one woman explained: people behave differently, better, when they have to pay for something. This change also meant that only those interested in learning Swedish attended the language café. On the day when I visited, around 40 people showed up and only a handful of these were children. This number was quite typical and much more manageable than 120 people.

Although the language café is run with a firm hand, the overwhelming impression of the language café is one of warmth and compassion for the people they meet. They spoke of the people they have met over the years with a lot of affection and they all seemed to find their volunteering work

very rewarding. For the asylum seekers I spoke to on the day, the language café was not just a way to learn Swedish. For some it was simply something to fill their time with, for others it filled an important social function. The volunteers also helped asylum seekers with things like paperwork. The Swedish bureaucracy can be difficult to navigate, and they tried their best to explain the meaning of letters that the asylum seekers brought in.

Unlike Land, Stad does not have one central place where most activities for asylum seekers take place. Since the town is much larger it has a greater variety of organisations that offer activities such as language classes. I visited a few of the organisations involved and spoke to people that work with the integration of asylum seekers in various ways. My first meeting was with Emma who was employed by the Church of Sweden as a ‘refugee and integration coordinator’. Part of her job was to help establish a network consisting of the various organisations that work with asylum seekers and other migrants. In September 2016, the network included around 25 actors ranging from churches and cultural associations to adult education associations and charity organisations such as the Red Cross. Emma explained that much ‘integration work’ was being done in Stad, but there was little communication between the different organisations doing the work. The aim of the network was to make it easier to assess which needs were covered and which were not. Emma mentioned language classes as an area that could benefit from more cooperation. Many actors offered some form of language training, but participants were not spread evenly between them. Some had far too many, others too few to make it worthwhile. Cooperation could also make it easier to arrange classes for different levels of language skills.

Despite Emma’s role as a coordinator, the Church of Sweden did little practical work for asylum seekers. They did have a language café aimed at young mothers from different backgrounds that asylum seekers could attend but most of the practical work took place elsewhere. Emma explained that since most asylum seekers who come to Stad have relatives there, they tend to go to the churches that their relatives attend. Two large Syriac Orthodox churches and a number of smaller churches were therefore more likely to be their first port of call.

I visited one Syriac Orthodox church, a Syrian cultural organisation and the Red Cross, all of which had language classes. I also visited ABF, the adult education associations that seemed to dominate the field. They offered a range of classes and they also collaborated with a number of other organisations (classes in the church, for example, were run by volunteers from ABF). Samer, who works for ABF, told me that the previous year (2015),

500 people had attended their classes. Two thirds were asylum seekers, the remainder were residents. According to Samer, residents often attend ABF's classes instead of—or in addition too—SFI since they prefer their way of teaching. One benefit is that the groups are smaller: a so called 'study circle' in ABF has 12 participants, SFI classes are often double the size. Each of these circles run for 10 weeks, after which participants can move on to a more advanced group if they are ready. The association has some paid staff, but most are volunteers. Some are former teachers; others are not. Some are born in Sweden; many are themselves of foreign background. Teaching style varies between the circles depending on who runs them. Samer saw this mainly as a positive: it meant they 'have something for everybody'.

The asylum seekers interviewed in Stad and Land share the belief that learning Swedish is a crucial part of integration. As Ali puts it 'language is the key to society'. This may sound like a platitude, but it is one that participants in both locations take very seriously. Their views on the language classes offered also share similarities. The most common sentiment by far is gratitude. When I ask Maria what the best thing about Sweden is, she answers 'peace', a close second is 'the associations that teach Swedish'. At the same time, participants in both locations express some frustration at not being able to attend a 'real' school. In Land, some of these concerns revolve around a lack of progression. Ali, for example, says he goes to the classes every week, but he never learns anything new. He needs a more advanced class. He finds it difficult to be patient about having to wait for SFI:

My patience will be gone. Because I want to get started. Eh, I need maybe five years, five years to finish my plan. Of studying. If someone has a profession like a hairdresser or something, he can enter the community in six months maybe. He will take one course or, eh but for me it will take five years (Ali, Land, 2016).

Ali has a university degree from Syria but in order to work in the same field in Sweden he needs to study at least two years at a Swedish university. Before he can even apply to university he needs to pass 'Swedish as a second language', and before that he needs to pass SFI. Not being able to start SFI means not being able to start his five-year plan. Rania agrees that the level of Swedish in the free classes on offer is too basic, but she is slightly more optimistic. Although she has her permit already, she is still waiting to start SFI. In the meantime, she is taking every opportunity to learn. Being able to help others makes going to the class more meaningful:

I go there because even if you sit and listen to easy subjects you will learn some new words or some new grammar [...] I study at home, I am used to speaking to Swedish people, so I know Swedish but I still miss a lot. I know almost everything they have in the lesson because they are easy lessons for all sort of people so one day [when one teacher was absent] they asked me if I could help (Rania, Land, 2016).

Hanna, who lives in Stad, has a similar experience to Rania. Despite a greater variety of classes on offer in Stad, she quickly felt that they were too basic. Instead of attending classes she spends most days in the library, studying on her own. A few days a week she helps out at one of the churches:

I go a lot to a church that I help in, voluntarily. It was like three or four months ago, I reached a very good level of Swedish, so I started translating for newcomers that want to learn the language. So there is a Swedish teacher who is also working there voluntarily. So I help translating to Arabic, or English if the students are not Arabic. So it was good for me to better my language. I fill my time (Hanna, Stad, 2016).

Whereas Hanna's dissatisfaction with the language classes on offer is quite unusual amongst the interviewees Stad, it is less so in Land. It is not unexpected that Stad has more to offer in this regard: it is a much larger town with years of experience in receiving refugees. In Stad, a number of actors provide services for asylum seekers and one could, if one wanted, find a different class every day of the week. In Land the choice is much more limited. Whereas associations such as ABF offer classes of different difficulty levels in Stad, a similar sense of progression is missing in Land. Emir, who works for one of the adult education associations in Land, tells me that their classes often include both illiterate people and university educated people. They also change constantly as people leave and new people arrive. Those who have been in Land for a while find they have nothing new to learn. When possible, the teachers divide the class into two smaller groups, but it is difficult to achieve any real sense of progression. Fejes et al. (2018) report similar findings in their study on ABF which suggests that this problem is not isolated to Land but applies more generally to small municipalities.

The wider availability of classes in Stad is also an advantage as it gives the participants something to do. The importance of this should not be underestimated as boredom can be a real enemy to asylum seekers who are going through a difficult time. To Marta, attending Swedish classes got her through her first few months in Sweden:

We started from the beginning and we studied very well. I started from eight o'clock, there were days when I started at eight o'clock and finished at eight o'clock. I went to ABF, I went to the church and many other clubs where I thought that it could be beneficial, and I thought that I can develop my language better. And it was very good to forget, it was the most important thing to forget everything and to think that I am like the other people there. So, we studied so well (Marta, Stad, 2016).

Marta manages to fill full days with language classes: partly by going to different organisations and partly by, as she describes it, begging the teacher in ABF to let her stay on for another class. What she is hoping to forget is not just the war in Syria but a few very difficult years in Turkey.

In Land, the participants are less fortunate in this regard. Not only are there fewer language classes but less activities overall. Also, they lack the social support that the participants in Stad have in friends and relatives that help to keep them active. Many of the participants in Land try to fill their time by studying on their own. In this too, they encounter obstacles. The library is a valued resource, but it does not have the capacity to cater for over 500 asylum seekers. Ali explains that the waiting time for a particular book is three months. To buy the same book would cost 500 SEK, over a quarter of his monthly allowance. Rania use the library to borrow children's book in Swedish that she reads to her children as a way for both her and them to learn. Others try to learn Swedish by watching TV. Khaled and his family find TV programmes in Swedish too difficult to understand but they always watch *the Simpsons* with Swedish subtitles hoping to pick up a few words. Hasan's family do not have a TV at all as they are under the impression that it is illegal for asylum seekers.⁷⁴

The most popular way to study, however, is by using different online resources.⁷⁵ Many accommodation centres provide free Wi-Fi but for those who live in apartments it is more difficult. Hasan explains that he saved up to buy a cheap laptop only to find out that he could not get an internet

⁷⁴ The Migration Agency has been known to prohibit asylum seekers from obtaining a TV on the grounds that they are unlikely to pay the TV license (Rytterbrant 2012), but there were no legal obstacles to having a TV as an asylum seeker. It is one of few things that did not require a personal identity number, but the cost of a TV license would have been prohibitive. The license fee was replaced by a tax in 2019.

⁷⁵ That phones have become a vital tool when learning a new language was also clear in the interviews themselves: Google translate was used quite frequently when interviewees struggled to find the right word (the accuracy of this method is patchy but it is certainly convenient).

subscription without a personal identity number. Instead they must rely on costly mobile data plans, or the free Wi-Fi offered in the library and the train station. The free Wi-Fi might explain why the teenage son in one of the families says that his favourite place in Land is the train station, an answer that at first struck me as peculiar.

The participants in both Land and Stad clearly see learning Swedish as essential to their future life in Sweden and they want to get started as quickly as possible. Although there is some frustration in both locations, it is more apparent in Land and they are more likely to speak of obstacles to learning. These obstacles include the limited availability of classes but also more unexpected things like access to Wi-Fi. None of the participants in Stad brought this up as a problem. Presumably, many in Stad live with relatives who have an internet connection in their home. The public access to Wi-Fi is also greater in Stad and the library has generous opening hours; in Land they are probably fortunate to have a library at all.

How the participants approach language learning shows that the time as an asylum seeker is not a time of sheer passivity even though they may experience it as such at times. When they cannot find a teacher willing to teach, the participants find creative way to teach themselves. Despite this, most of the respondents in both locations long for the day when can attend 'real' schools like SFI.

7.1.2 Swedish for Immigrants

At the time of the second interview, most interviewees have some experience of SFI. In Stad, there is a sense of continuity as all participants still live there and they have all attended SFI classes in Stad. The same does not apply to Land. Several participants have moved elsewhere and only two have any experience of SFI in Land. Hence, the present section cannot comment on possible differences in how participants view SFI in Land and Stad.

However, it is possible to ask whether their experiences as asylum seekers shaped their current experiences in different ways: did the participants in Stad come to SFI better prepared than those in Land? Granted, it is not the right type of study to make such generalisations, but I did not notice clear differences in the level of Swedish between the two groups when conducting follow-up interviews. Participants in both locations had learnt a great deal between the interviews and many of the follow-up interviews were conducted, at least partly, in Swedish. There was some variation in the proficiency of the participants, but the most obvious point of difference was not location but age: the younger the individual was, the better the Swedish was.

Apart from the comparison between locations, it is also of interest to look for changes in perspective between the first and the second interviews. As previously stated, most participants looked forward to attending ‘real’ schools; did SFI live up to their expectations? Answers are mainly affirmative. Most of the participants compare it favourably to the classes they could attend as asylum seekers: SFI is generally seen as more demanding and the teaching is considered to be of better quality. To some, however, attending SFI meant reassessing their previous experiences. In the first interview, Asim is grateful to the volunteers that give their time to teach him, but he sees the fact that they are neither ‘Swedish’ nor ‘professional’ as a shortcoming:

Well, it’s very casual. You know, you come on Monday and on Wednesday. Eh, they decide, three or four volunteers, they decide how to split: ‘Ok, who is new? Come with me. Who is a little bit better? Come with me’. It’s casual. In ABF they have a little bit more of a strict programme but the problem with ABF is that all their volunteers, for whom I am very thankful by the way, but they are themselves foreigners, they are not Swedish, and they speak everything except Swedish. So they are teaching us Swedish but they are explaining in Arabic or English so we speak very little. So we know the grammatical rule but we don’t practise it (Asim, Stad, 2016).

In the second interview, he is not sure SFI is an improvement:

It was very helpful, the Red Cross, ABF, all the free courses for asylum seekers that I passed. It was a great experience, especially the Red Cross, even though it was not that frequent but it helped me a lot in SFI because, well maybe it is just SFI in Stad, I don’t know, but in SFI in Stad at least, I didn’t have any new knowledge [...] I already knew it from the Red Cross (Asim, Stad, 2017).

Asim was in full-time employment before he even had his residence permit and because of this he only attends SFI for a couple of evenings every week. He still lives in Stad but he works in a larger city nearby and recently moved to a more convenient SFI class in the city. His first impression of teaching in the new class is more positive. SFI is more structured than the classes available to asylum seekers, but quality can still differ between locations and between individual teachers.⁷⁶ The substantial increase in the number

⁷⁶ SFI is divided into four levels, each with its own syllabus. The syllabus includes course objectives that are assessed through regular examinations (Skolverket, 2018a). How the classes available to asylum seekers are structured is very much up to the person teaching the class. They can, of course, choose to teach in a very ‘structured’ way just as an SFI teacher could choose to teach in an ‘unstructured’ way.

of refugees in recent years has made it challenging for SFI to meet demands (Skolinspektionen 2018). This has meant employing more people that are not trained teachers. Jacob is not the only participant to notice the variation in quality this could bring. One of his former teachers was a retired politician who taught him interesting things about Swedish society but had no knowledge of how to teach someone a new language.

While most participants were eager to finish SFI as quickly as possible, Jacob was an exception. The language test he took shortly after he received his residence permit showed his Swedish was good enough to skip SFI and go directly to SAS.⁷⁷ Jacob was worried that he would not learn things properly if he skipped stages and asked to start SFI instead.

This highlights a difficult dilemma: on the one hand there is the impatience to finish as quickly as possible since so much time has already been lost; on the other hand, if one does not learn Swedish ‘properly’, one may not be able to achieve what one hopes to achieve at all. The younger participants all have plans to attend university in Sweden which requires a passing grade on SAS 3. I have no doubt that they can achieve this. However, passing SAS 3 is no guarantee that one’s Swedish language skills are sufficient to complete a university education in Swedish.⁷⁸

It is difficult to say which strategy will work best for the participants. At the time of the second interviews, all options are still open to them. Most are also quite positive both regarding their experience in SFI and their own achievements. Despite their earlier frustration, many say that they did learn a lot from the free classes they attended as asylum seekers, but they generally find SFI an improvement. The reasons for this vary as much within the locations as between the locations. For some it is a genuine learning experience whereas others see it as ‘ticking boxes’ necessary to move on to better things. Also, compared to their situation as asylum seekers, they finally have something to fill their time with. Although this is generally seen as a positive, there are some concerns regarding the extent to which their time is filled, and the limited control they have over how to fill it (see section 8.3.2).

One final, important aspect that is often brought up in both locations, is that language is not necessarily something you learn best in school. Kareem has particularly strong opinions on the matter:

⁷⁷ SAS (Swedish as a second language) is a continuation of SFI and consists of four levels (SAS grund and SAS 1,2,3). SAS 3 is required to study at a Swedish university.

⁷⁸ That the gap between speaking a language well and mastering academic writing can be very wide is something my own teaching experience has made me aware of.

So many people now come out from SFI and when they go to the streets they cannot speak. My children speak very, very nice Swedish but if I ask them about some rules, they tell me 'I don't know' [...] Here, when we are coming to SFI, or coming to church to take a lesson, or ABF, they begin with rules, rules, rules, rules. I think you must learn to speak the language; after that you can take the rules (Kareem, Land, 2016).

Kareem argues that adults should learn languages the way children do: by speaking it, not by learning rules and grammar first. What he misses above all is more opportunities to speak with Swedish people. As we shall see in the later chapter on social connections, this is seen as a major problem for asylum seekers in both Land and Stad.

7.1.3 Cultural knowledge

Culture, like integration, is a concept with a highly contested meaning (see section 4.2.1). The role it could, or should, play in integration is perhaps even more contested. Ager and Strang offer little guidance as to what they mean by culture but regarding its role in integration they are careful to avoid assimilationist connotations by saying that cultural knowledge should be a 'two-way process' (2008, p.182). One definition of culture that I used in chapter 4 is that it is 'the values, norms, habits and ways of life characteristic of a coherent social group' (Giddens & Sutton 2017, p.995). Although this definition introduces other difficult-to-define concepts (what, for example, counts as a 'socially coherent group?'), it is sufficiently wide to serve as a working definition for this chapter. The section below will discuss how those tasked with teaching Swedish culture talk, and write, about it. The section that follows deals with the asylum seekers' views on the matter. It is worth noting that if the focus seems mainly on Swedish culture rather than as a two-way process, it is simply a reflection of how the participants talked about culture.

7.1.3.1 Teaching culture

In Land, a couple of the adult education associations offer not only Swedish classes but also provide information about Swedish society. These associations are different from the church in that they are not rooted in the community in the same way. Instead they travel to various different accommodation centres in the region offering classes. Emir, who works for one of these organisations, explains that one of their tasks when they visit different centres is to speak of cultural differences. This, he says, is important in order to minimise tension with the local community. Many of the examples that

Emir attributes to ‘cultural differences’ are problems that by no means are limited to asylum seekers—scrumping apples and children not wearing bicycle helmets, for example—but they give an idea of what members of the local community might regard as problematic.

Apart from these more informal ways of dealing with specific problems as they emerge, the associations also hold formal classes in civic information. The textbook used is called *About Sweden* a book that is also widely used in the civic information classes given as part of the introduction to new residents. It includes different sections on living and working in Sweden, health care, family life, rights and obligations. It also includes a short section on Swedish culture. This section emphasises the diversity of Sweden but also the importance of a common language: ‘what is regarded as typically Swedish by one person need not be considered so by others ... Nowadays, Swedish people have many different origins. What Swedish people primarily share is the Swedish language’ (Göteborg stad 2015, pp. 24-25). After this initial caution, the book goes on to discuss some aspects of Swedish culture that could be considered typical: a relatively high trust in authorities and a love of nature to name but two examples.

Several of the interviewees in Land spoke of this book with enthusiasm. Hasan even suggested I should read it myself as I could not possibly know all there is to know about Sweden—to test me he asked if I knew how many lakes there are in Sweden, a question I could not answer. A few of the families that lived outside of central Land had come to an arrangement with one of the volunteers from the church: she came to their house to give them a lesson based on the book once a week. These lessons were appreciated but Khaled questioned their relevance to their current situation. Much of the information would only become useful *after* they have their residence permit. Attending a similar class at the accommodation centre in Land, I discovered he was not alone in thinking this way. One of the aims of this particular class was to inform about the possibility of getting a loan to furnish their new apartments. Having neither an apartment nor a residence permit, these were not amongst the most pressing concerns of those attending the class. The teacher was continuously interrupted with unrelated questions, mostly related to their asylum cases. The teacher tried his best to answer but most of the time, all he could do was refer them to the Migration Agency. As this example shows, it is not entirely clear what civic information for asylum seekers should include. Practical information could be useful but only if it is targeted more directly towards asylum seekers’ situation. Cultural knowledge could make it easier for asylum seekers to navigate

the new society they find themselves in, but it is uncertain what it should consist of.

In Stad, ABF offers civic information as a part of their study circles for asylum seekers. Samer gives me the textbook that they use to bring home with me. It is called *ABF Medborgarbok* (Citizen's book) and it covers similar topics to the book *About Sweden*. On the topic of culture, ABF's book does not emphasise diversity in the same way and it brings up 'social rules' that are 'uniquely Swedish'. These include punctuality, queueing, an aversion to littering and to wearing shoes indoors. These social rules are best learnt by 'meeting, spending time with and talking to people' which can be difficult as 'most Swedes have the same friends all their lives. It is not always easy for a newcomer to become part of the gang' (ABF 2009, pp. 23-24). This comparison is simply a reflection on how Swedish culture can be presented in different ways, it is *not* a reflection of how it was perceived differently in Land and Stad—both books are available nationwide. As none of the interviewees in Stad brought up civic information during the first round of interviewees, I cannot comment on how the book was received.

7.1.3.2 Learning culture

It was clear in both Land and Stad that many of the interviewees think that understanding Swedish culture is important. As Ali puts it: 'Because I live in Sweden, I should know how these people live'. Although a cautious generalisation, the participants in Land speak more about Swedish culture and they speak about it slightly differently than the participants in Stad. As Ali's statement shows, it is often expressed in term of living in *someone else's* culture. In Stad, it is more often brought up as a meeting of different cultures, or as a lack of such a meeting. Magdalena, for example, likes living in Stad but she sees segregation as a problem:

If we don't get to know each other, Swedes and immigrants, we can't understand each other. And that's not good. I don't understand Swedish traditions and culture and they don't understand me. Because we don't live together and get to know each other. It's a problem (Magdalena, Stad, 2016).

The type of cultural understanding that Magdalena is talking about is something that might be difficult to learn from books or in a classroom. Something that all participants agree on is that Swedish culture is best learnt through contact with Swedish people. Although most struggle to make such contacts (see section 8.2), they all have some ideas about what Swedish culture is like. Kareem, for example, makes the somewhat surprising statement

that he brought his family to Sweden because Swedish culture suited Arabic families the best. When I ask him to explain what he means by this he compares Sweden to Germany:

They don't like strange people. I asked about Sweden and they like strangers here. They don't care about your religion [...] the rules come first, not your religion. If you are black man, if you are white man, if you are Muslim, if you are Christian, here in Sweden it is the same. You can work? Come. You can speak Swedish? Come /.../ In Germany, if they see my wife putting on her hijab, they don't like her. Not all of Germany but many people in Germany. Here in Swedish, no one says 'what is this?' They are not looking for this. They look at: Is she speaking Swedish? Is she following the rules? She can do everything, so she is a nice woman (Kareem, Land, 2016).

To Kareem Sweden compares favourably to Germany because, according to his relatives who live in Germany, Swedish culture is more open to differences. Throughout the interview he keeps going back to the Swedish fondness for rules as something he values highly as it signals fairness and equality. Khaled and Hasan also believe that Sweden is particularly well suited for Muslim families but for a different reason. When they travelled through Europe, they saw prostitution conducted openly in countries like Italy. They heard that prostitution is illegal in Sweden and they believe that Sweden is more modest than many other European countries in this regard.

Adnan also has a positive view of Swedish culture and he can imagine fitting in quite easily despite religious and cultural differences. He is excited about his children having two cultures: a Swedish culture from school and a Syrian culture at home. When I ask if he is worried that the two cultures might clash, he says no. In order to explain his point, he uses the example of his first meeting with his case worker at the Public Employment Service:

I told [my case worker] I woke up at five. He said, 'why so early?' I told him I was praying [...] He said, 'In Swedish law, there is no time for prayer at work'. I said, 'I know, it is not a problem': He said 'How?' I said 'It is not a problem if I have a job and I cannot pray. I can pray, as you know, we have five prayer times. If I have a job and I cannot pray, I can pray at a different time'. [...] That is my point since you are asking about clashes. If you understand there are no clashes. It's really easy (Adnan, Land 2017).

While Adnan's example describing a need to *adapt* is quite rare in Land, an obligation to *learn* about Swedish culture is more commonly expressed. In Stad, they are less likely to speak of Swedish culture and how they may 'fit'

into it. The exception is Jacob who speaks extensively about what he appreciates about Swedish culture. His first few months in Sweden were very difficult and he struggled with homesickness. What eventually turned things around for him was having long conversations with his uncle, who has lived in Sweden for several decades, about what is good about Sweden. He realised there are a lot of things that he prefers about Sweden and it made him want to stay. The number one thing is respect. One of the most important aspects of this is that men and women are respected as equals. He explains:

My culture, I will tell you what the difference is. I have met many, they are refugees not Swedish, who say that my country is a man's country, Sweden is a woman's country. I have told them many times that they are wrong to think like that. They are right that my country is a man's country because they don't give women much respect. But here in Sweden there is so much respect. For women and men. Respect for human beings. So it is wrong to say that Sweden is a woman's country. [...] In Sweden women and men are the same (Jacob, Stad , 2017).

The quote above is from the second interview with Jacob but he expressed similar ideas in the first interview. Overall, the participants' views on Swedish culture did not change noticeably in the year that passed between the interviews. Their descriptions were a bit more nuanced but still overwhelmingly positive. There was one aspect, however, that had dampened their optimism somewhat. Those that did not have a job after they received their residence permit had to rely on introduction benefits to make a living. In order to avail of this one has to take part in certain activities, typically SFI but also other courses such as an obligatory civics information course. Some of the participants interpreted this rather strict schedule as a lack of trust in their ability to decide themselves what a meaningful activity is. In Land, a few of the participants had studied the book *About Sweden* quite extensively as asylum seekers. When they had to study it again as new residents just to fulfil their 60 hours of obligatory civics studies they were, quite understandably, frustrated. This is but one example of this; section 8.3.2 will discuss the participants' sometimes quite strained relationship with different government agencies in more detail.

In summary, a few general points can be made. The first is that none of the participants see any direct conflict between their own culture and Swedish culture. Instead they typically praise Swedish culture for its openness. Secondly, the participants often speak of culture in quite vague terms with no clear correspondence to either culture as 'values' or 'practice' (see section

4.2.1). Thirdly, culture could be hard to teach in a classroom setting and most respondents see culture as something they will ultimately learn about through contact with Swedish people. Finally: the participants' perception of Swedish *culture* as open does not always correspond with their perception of Swedish *people*. In fact, as we will see in the coming chapter on social connections, Swedes are experienced as quite 'closed' and many of the participants struggle to make meaningful connections.

7.2 Safety and Stability

Ager and Strang also consider *safety* and *stability* important facilitators to integration. When the interviews were conducted in Swedish, participants sometimes used the Swedish word 'trygghet'—a complex word that is difficult to translate but that seems to encapsulate both 'safety' and 'stability'. The line between the two categories is, in other words, often blurred and it is a matter of interpretation which category the participants' stories belong to. I have made a distinction of sorts by focusing the 'safety' section on more immediate concerns, in particular what it means to be in a safe place after escaping a country at war. This section also looks at how the reception of refugees may be perceived in terms of (un)safety by the local population, and how a sense of safety may be 'local' for the participants as well. The second part of this section focuses on the more long-term concerns that stability implies. The aim is to show that stability is, indeed, important but it is difficult to study in isolation; hence, frequent connections with other domains will be made. As in previous sections, both differences and similarities between the two locations will be discussed.

7.2.1 Safety

Considering that the interviewees in this study are refugees that have fled a country at war it is quite apparent why *safety* is of importance: their whole reason for being in Sweden is based on their perception that Sweden is a safe country. When they speak of safety, which they do quite frequently, it is usually this that they are referring to. Hanna, for example, has this to say when I ask what their first few weeks in Sweden were like:

It was strange at the beginning, we were happy, of course, we were in Sweden and we were safe here obviously. At first you are so astonished by everything. And you don't think a lot about what you went through, what happened. I mean, obviously it leaves marks, cause we went through a lot. But meeting our relatives that we haven't seen in so long, life keeps you busy, and then you, after a while, you start going through the shock phase. But the most

important thing is that it was safe here, we still haven't had time to adapt (Hanna, Stad, 2016).

Although I never ask specific questions about the war, it is a topic that sometimes comes up in conversation. Most speak of it in quite general terms: like Hanna does in the quote above. Her relief at being safe is shared with participants in both Land and Stad, but the way that Hanna's relatives contributed to this feeling of safety by distracting her from what she had been through is specific to the participants in Stad.

A few tell more personal war stories. Maria tells me she narrowly escaped death but had to witness her university friends die in an explosion. In the latter stages of the interview with Hanna and her mother Theresa, it becomes clear that they did indeed go through a lot: Theresa shows me pictures of their old house after it was bombed. Her family survived but her youngest son was traumatised and did not speak for several months.

It could be argued that safety on this level has more to do with survival than integration and in some respects that is true. However, trauma affects a person's psychological health, which in turn can have a negative effect on integration. Previous experiences can also have a more direct effect on a person's perception of safety in their new surroundings. Maria, for example, describes feeling paranoid walking around Stad. Although she knows on some level that she is safe now she is constantly on guard. She cannot shake the feeling that someone can grab her at any stage, hurt her or even kill her.

That many refugees come to Sweden with very difficult experiences behind them and that this might affect their feelings of safety is important to bear in mind when discussing integration. However, there is also another aspect to the topic of safety that needs to be considered. As Ager and Strang (2008, p. 183-184) put it, a safe area to live is generally considered a good area to live, and the level of safety can vary considerably *within* a predominantly safe country. In terms of refugee integration, they argue, safety is important not only because refugees tend to feel more at home if they feel safe but also because the local community sometimes needs to be convinced that refugee reception will not affect their safety.

7.2.1.1 Do the locals feel safe?

As this study's main focus is on how asylum seekers experience different aspects of integration, the ability to comment on the local community's experience of refugee reception is limited. A few general points regarding the difference between the two locations can be made, however.

In Stad, as in other cities with a high EBO reception, the local media frequently reports on negative consequences of the housing form: ‘failed integration’ in the form of extreme segregation, social unrest and high crime rates all form part of the narrative. That the areas where EBO residents tend to concentrate in are perceived as unsafe and undesirable places to live in, contributes to the high turnover of residents. Those that have better options move elsewhere, and since ‘ethnic Swedes’ are over-represented amongst those that leave, the end result is increased segregation.

Whereas segregation in Stad is something that has happened gradually over many decades, the situation in Land is quite different. Firstly, the composition of the local population differs. Although the proportion of residents of foreign background is not exceptionally low in Land, it is lower than the national average whereas it is far above average Stad. Hence, the ‘local community’ is more ethnically homogenous in Land than in Stad. Secondly, the change in population that refugee reception brought with it was not something that happened gradually but practically overnight. Finally, segregation is in some respects an integral, unavoidable, part of ABO when one considers the type of housing it involves. In Land, around a third of the asylum seekers live in a large-scale accommodation centre. Like most such centres, it is clearly separated from the local community. Only asylum seekers live in the centre and although there are houses in the proximity, they do not have neighbours in the traditional sense. Regarding the apartments that are run by the Migration Agency, the municipality has actively tried to disperse them. Instead of placing all ABO apartments in one building they place a few in each, mixed with standard residents. Despite such effort, the asylum seekers are concentrated in either the accommodation centre or in one particular housing estate in Land.

Land was only one of many small municipalities that received a large number of asylum seekers around this time, and media often reported of protests when new accommodation centres were due to open. Most of these protests expressed a classic NIMBY mentality, i.e. the locals felt the particular location was inappropriate in some way, but some also expressed fear of the cultural difference that the centre would bring and concerns about how it might affect their safety.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ The expressed concerns included: increase in crime (Sveriges Radio 2015), how ‘they’ treat women (Björk & Larsson 2016) and the need for old people in Danderyd to have ‘peace and quiet’ in their final years (Svanell 2015). As the last example shows, protests were not limited to rural communities.

When the accommodation centre opened in Land, it did not make the news. When I speak to Anna, who works with integration at Land municipality, she says that overall, the accommodation centre was well-received. She believes that part of the reason why it has worked so well is that the accommodation is centrally located. It may be *separate* but apart from a few apartments outside of the main town it is not *isolated*. This creates more opportunity for people to meet but proximity could also be seen as a negative:

Those that live closest to the centre were those that were the most worried. Maybe because no one really knew how many people were coming, what it would mean. Initially it was 100 or 120 people, now the Migration Agency has increased the occupancy, so I think it's closer to 170, 180 on the same surface. But that is what it's like all over Sweden. But, of course, people grumble. People complain when they don't know, when they don't get enough information.

What were their concerns?

It's hard to say really, it differed from person to person, so it's hard to say really what worried them. I guess they were thinking things like 'will they understand that this is my property, my garden? Will they understand even though there is no hedge or fence?' Really, it was these kind of basic things (Anna, Land municipality, 2016).

Whether Anna's impression that people only had minor complaints rather than more serious concerns about safety is accurate or not is difficult to tell. As an integration coordinator it is in her interest that things run smoothly so her account might be slightly biased. The same applies to other people I spoke to in Land, mainly those involved in the language and civic information classes. They too are overwhelmingly positive, but it is noteworthy that their classes are arranged in a manner that shows a slightly anxious awareness of cultural difference and its potential effect on their safety (see section 7.1.1).

If the established community believes that refugee reception will affect their safety negatively, it is bound to affect how the asylum seekers themselves experience integration. Due to differences in the size and composition of the local population, as well as the type of housing involved, the two locations are likely to differ significantly in this regard. Although this study is based on an understanding of integration as a *mutual* process, some necessary delimitations had to be made and this cursory glance at the established communities' views on safety will have to suffice.

7.2.1.2 Is the local area safe?

Despite the fact that most of the interviewees in Stad live in areas that are typically referred to as disadvantaged, none describe the area they live in as unsafe. On only one occasion does a participant bring up something relating to ‘social problems’: Sara mentions in passing that she finds it difficult to understand why people sometimes burn cars in her neighbourhood. Many of the people that live there are of similar background to herself; in Syria they didn’t burn cars, she says, so why do they do it here? It did not strike me as a question that expected an answer and the burning of cars seemed to have a negligible effect on her own quality of life and sense of safety.

A few of the participants in Stad do bring up segregation as a problem as it limits contact with ‘Swedes’, but they describe both their neighbourhoods and the town in general as safe and nice to live in. Although a large town in comparison to Land, most interviewees consider it small: Theresa even describes it as a ‘village’. That the town is perceived as small may add to some participants’ sense of safety but some of the interviewees, especially younger ones like Sara and Maria, would prefer a bigger, livelier city with more people and activities.

Land is also considered safe by most of the participants who live there. The small size of the town is a more central aspect in Land, and many compare it favourably to larger cities:

Land is a little, little village. It is very, very good. It is very peaceful and relaxing and without problems. And the people are very good (Leah, Land, 2016).

I’ve heard from other people that it is not good there [big cities like Malmö and Gothenburg]. To live there. Everything is fighting and crime (Khaled, Land, 2016).

Leah and Khaled both have families and like most parents in the study they prefer living in a small town. Social problems like drugs and crime are thought to be less prevalent in a small town but there is also an element of social control that may be harder to achieve in a bigger city. Kareem is also a father and he too believes that it is easier to keep his children safe in a small town. For one thing, if one of his sons is late home there are only a few places where he could be. Kareem also brings up the fact that everybody knows each other in Land as a protective factor:

In a big city maybe I can lose my children. And in a small town, like Land, everyone knows my children. They know I am their father, if they do any-

thing that is wrong, they will tell me, they say to me that your son did something wrong, so it is better for me if I am living in a small town. If I live in a big town, no one knows me, no one knows my children. Also, here in Land I have, until now maybe I know 100 persons they said to me hi, hi. Ok, they know me. If I have any problems, they can help me. In a big city you don't find people like this (Kareem, Land, 2016).

Although the participants are generally quite positive towards living in a small town, moving from bigger cities in Syria to the Swedish countryside is not always an easy transition:

The first day was very terrible. I am now remembering that day and the crying and laughing and crying. I can't describe what I felt because it was a first step for me to move from my hometown, from my old things, old friends to a new life and new steps but it was very different [...] when we went to [the camp] I saw the forest and I was very, very afraid and stressed. The manager of the camp, he was a very kind man. He was Swedish, he took us to hospital and that day the Migration Agency put us in a hotel (Leah, Land, 2016).

Leah's first reaction when she sees the 'camp' she is supposed to stay in indefinitely is terror. This is not the camp in central Land, but one located in a neighbouring county in an isolated area deep in the forest. Her reaction is severe enough for them to move her to a hotel. After one night there, she and her children are sent back to the camp. They stay there for a while and things gradually get better. Eventually they are moved to Land, first to the camp there and after another few months, to an apartment.

Zina also spends a few months in that same camp. Isolated in the forest, as a lone girl amongst mainly men, she too has a very difficult time there:

I didn't imagine that's how life in the camp is or how the life outside is, like by yourself. It's so hard. Eh, they moved me to a camp in _____. I can say it's a disaster. I was the only girl there and they disturbed me a lot there, I felt disappointed and I didn't know my way. I told them, and to be honest, they helped me and they moved me to Land.

Zina returns to the topic later in the interview:

Mm, I cried a couple of times, eh, 'I want to move, I want to move'. Because they were talking too badly and they were talking to me because I, it was summer and I don't know what they think, because I don't wear hijab or I wear whatever I want, they talk to me 'See what she is wearing, see what she is wearing, she's not a good girl' (Zina, Land, 2016).

Zina is somewhat unusual in that her first six months in Sweden was as an EBO resident. She was staying with her aunt in a bigger city and she was quite content there. However, after a while she felt the need to live her *own* life so she contacted the Migration Agency and asked for help with accommodation. Even though things have improved for her after she moved to Land, she says she does not feel safe there. In fact, she felt a lot safer walking around in the big city than she does in Land.

While Leah and Zina found the transition from big cities to the countryside difficult, the isolation and the forest does not evoke fear in all participants. Adnan, who has himself chosen to move to Land after he got his residence permit, has the following to say:

I love nature. I love animals. So I think, I believe [a village outside Land] is paradise for me. Because the lake is just a stone's throw away from me. It's the same expression in Arabic, stone's throw. There are two or three lakes here. And a lot of trees, animals. I think it's paradise for me (Adnan, Land, 2016).

Although he is from a big city himself, he is at peace in the Swedish countryside. He does stress, however, that he is far from typical in this regard. Most Syrians, in his opinion, want to live in bigger cities.

While there are some similarities between the participants in Land and Stad, these should not be exaggerated. In Land, they often speak about the benefits of living in a small town in a rather abstract way: they could probably find the same benefits in a different, similarly sized, town with different inhabitants. Those that do not feel safe in Land would presumably find other rural, sparsely populated landscapes equally unsafe, especially if they were forced to live in isolation with people who they found threatening.

Although the size of Stad is sometimes brought up in conversation it is never the main point of the argument: instead it is the *people* that make Stad feel like a safe place. What they have found in Stad could *not* easily be found somewhere else. 'People' is often defined quite narrowly as people the respondents know, relatives in particular, but it can also mean 'people' as in one's own ethnic group. This latter definition is less common, but it is of central importance to Magdalena, whose views, it should be noted, are exceptions rather than the rule. What makes Stad feel safe to her is that it offers her the opportunity to live in peace with her people. Stad is unusual in the sense that the majority of immigration to the town comes from Christian minorities in the Middle East. Magdalena does not feel safe living amongst Muslims and says certain towns in Sweden are out of the question

for her. Stad is better than most other places but she wishes that there was a way for the municipality to completely ban Muslims from living there. Only then would she feel completely safe.

What most participants in Stad value, however, is family. Immediate family is important both in Land and Stad, but many of the participants in Stad also have a wide network of more distant relatives nearby. This gives them a sense of familiarity that provides comfort and a sense of safety:

It was very difficult, in the beginning, the first few months, was very, very difficult for us. It was ok here, we are in a safe place and we have many, many relatives here. They tried to console us, they tried to make us forget everything but it was not so easy (Marta, Stad, 2016).

The importance of family, both immediate and extended, is something we will return to later. For now, it is enough to note that to many participants in Stad, having family around was an essential part in making a new, strange place feel like a safe home.

The difference between the two locations is that the participants in Stad arrive to a 'ready-made' community. In Land, most of the participants have yet to make any meaningful new connections that can provide them with a similar sense of security. The local community is still at some distance from them. On a more positive note, none of the respondents find the local community threatening. Around the time that this study was conducted there were frequent media reports of not only protests when new accommodation centres opened but also more worrying stories of threat and violence towards asylum seekers. Stories of arson attacks directed at refugee accommodation were particularly common.⁸⁰ None of the participants in Land (or Stad for that matter) mention fear of these type of attacks. Nor do they describe being met with hostility.

7.2.2 Stability

Whereas safety was a prominent theme in the first round of interviews, stability was more central in the second. Since the first interviews focused on the transition from Syria to Sweden and the second focused on the transition from asylum seeker to resident, this shift is partly due to the structure of the interviews, but it is reasonable to suspect that stability is indeed something that comes with time.

⁸⁰ The Swedish Civil Contingency Agency released a report that questions whether these types of attacks were actually more common (MSB 2016). Expo, in turn, questions the accuracy of this report (Färnbo 2016).

7.2.2.1 Permission to stay granted (for now)

The question of *stability* is closely linked to what was discussed in Chapter 6 as the foundation of integration. Uncertainty and instability are defining features of being an asylum seeker: one is by definition still *seeking* protection and until one has a residence permit there are no guarantees of staying in the country where one has applied for asylum. Obtaining a residence permit is a substantial improvement in this regard. Recall, for example, how Kareem said he now stands on ‘firm ground’ or how Rania described it as if her life and the plans she makes for it now feel more ‘real’.

Kareem and Rania got permanent residence permits but not all were as fortunate: three of the interviewees got temporary permits. The law that made temporary permits the new standard came into effect on 20 July 2016, but it made an exception for families with children that arrived before 24 November 2015: those families still got permanent residence permits. Sara and Maria both arrived with parents and siblings under the age of 18, but since they are over 18, they are in the peculiar situation of not—legally speaking—belonging to their own family: their families got a permanent permit but they themselves got a temporary one. I had imagined that such a situation would be particularly hard to handle but it is possible that their families’ permanent permits actually made their temporary ones easier to bear: both women were quick to follow the bad news of their own temporary permit with the good news that their families got permanent permits. Whether they thought this increased their chances of staying long term, whether they were just happy for their families, or whether they were simply putting on a brave face, is difficult to tell.

The third temporary permit case is Asim who is unusual in that he got a three-year temporary permit rather than a 13-month permit. This is typically reserved for those that are refugees under the 1951 Convention but Asim says he got it because he is in full time employment.⁸¹ Because three years is now the best anyone can hope for, Asim was quite content with this:

That part is gone [worrying about being sent back]. Now I worry about my family. How to bring them here as soon as possible. It’s a different problem but I know that I am in good hands. Me personally, not my family yet. So I

⁸¹ In Sweden, if one does not qualify as refugee under the 1951 convention one may be deemed in need of subsidiary protection. Syrians are far more likely to get subsidiary protection than many other nationalities, less than 10% got refugee status in 2016, the average (excluding Syrians) was closer to 70% (Migrationsverket 2020a).

know that if I lose my job I will not starve to death. For three years at least nobody will kick me out from Sweden. Yeah, it's more stable (Asim, Stad, 2017).

What Asim and the two young women have in common is that they have something else that offers a sense of stability, either family or work. Perhaps this makes the temporary nature of their permits more manageable.

7.2.2.2 Settling in

The stability that a residence permit offers may require a long wait, around a year for most participants, but once the permit is obtained the change it makes is almost instantaneous: 'it's like suddenly going upstairs', as Marta puts it. Other forms of stability are more of a gradual process. It comes with increased experience and knowledge about a place: it is when a place starts to feel like home, when one starts to feel 'settled'. In the beginning, one might go through what Jacob calls the 'tourist phase':

The first few days everything was new to me. I walked a lot. I am very curious. Very curious. I walked a lot. Back and forth, back and forth. I wanted to know that I was in Sweden. [...] when you come to a new country, and it was really hard to come here, when you have left your family and everybody that you miss, it is really hard. But I knew that I was waiting for something that is good for me. A new life. A good life. But it was hard, not easy. But I am curious, and I wanted to know where I am. In Sweden. It's like a tourist, exactly. You can say it's like a tourist phase [...] I want to ask you, do you travel to other countries where something is new?

Yes, sometimes.

Sometimes. So your eyes look at things, a lot of things that are new. Some are very nice and you don't have much knowledge about them. The same thing happened to me. Everything was new. My eyes saw a lot of things that were new, that were really nice. But at the same time, my heart was hurting so much. So much. I missed my family, my dad, my mum, my siblings and my friends. And my feelings for my girlfriend. A lot of things (Jacob, Stad, 2017).

Jacob usually speaks like this, at length and with many repetitions to emphasise his points. It is important to him that I understand. In order to find the question that I asked I went back several pages in the transcript only to find that it was not a question at all but rather a statement: I simply explained that this interview would be about how his life had changed since the first interview. In order to answer that, Jacob felt that he had to go back

to the beginning. He uses examples that might be familiar to me—like being a tourist in a new country—and then he adds what is different about his situation: the heart ache of leaving everybody you love behind.

In the year that passed between the interviews, Jacob learnt a great deal about Sweden. His life is more stable now. Not only because he—with exceptionally good fortune—got a *permanent* residence permit only two days before the rules changed but also because he knows that he *wants* to stay. What helped Jacob come to that realisation was finding out more about Sweden. This was done mainly through conversations with others, especially his uncle.

Without social connections of some kind it would be difficult to find stability in a new life situation. The participants that have their immediate family with them are particularly fortunate in the sense that at least this part of their lives is stable: it is difficult, if not impossible, to feel settled somewhere if your spouse and children are in a different country. Two of the participants in this study are in this situation and it has a profound effect on their wellbeing. I will return to their stories in the chapter on social connections. For now, it is enough to note that social connections in general and family in particular are important.

Stability can also mean financial stability. In this regard residency is a step up from being an asylum seeker but it still has limitations: the introduction benefits that most of the participants rely on are still modest and there is a time limit to how long they can be claimed. Many mention worries of ending up on social welfare after the two years are up. Without a job, real stability would be difficult to achieve. As we will see in the chapter on employment, however, not all jobs offer stability.

The most crucial aspect to this study, however, is the impact housing has on stability. Temporary and uncertain living arrangements are typical of not only the participants in this study but of asylum seekers in general. This is an issue normally associated with EBO (e.g. Boverket 2015a) as moving between different relatives is common. The participants in this study followed this pattern to some degree. Out of the nine that were interviewed in Stad, six had moved at least once.

However, the life of an ABO resident is no more stable in this regard. All of those who lived in Land had numerous moves behind them (and probably ahead of them). A typical situation for a family would be a couple of days at an arrival centre and then a couple of weeks at a different arrival centre in a different town. After that they are moved to an accommodation centre in a different part of the country where they stay for a number of months

until they are finally offered an apartment. Once they had their residence permit, they had to be prepared to move again as they could not stay in the Migration Agency's apartments. Frequent moves can have a detrimental effect on integration for a number of reasons: not least because it is difficult to form stable relationships if one is constantly on the move.

On a related note, stability is not just about the individual's sense of stability, but it can also refer to the stability of a community. One could potentially call an accommodation centre a community but there are problems with this. One of the problems is its instability: people move out and new people move in quite frequently. This also poses a challenge to the wider community in Land: frequent moves decrease the sense of familiarity that might help enable an inclusion in the local community. A similar point can be made regarding Stad as many of the areas where asylum seekers live are characterised by unusually high turnover of residents: it is challenging to form stable communities when the residents continually change.

7.3 Facilitators? Concluding remarks

In summary, language was a highly valued 'facilitator' to integration and the classes run by volunteers were much appreciated by the participants despite some concerns about the quality of teaching offered by volunteers and, in Land in particular, the lack of progression these classes offered. By the time of the second interview, most had attended at least some SFI classes. This was generally seen as an improvement although many saw limitations to what they could learn in school. The language is best learnt through talking to Swedish people, they argued, something that had proven difficult in both Land and Stad. Cultural knowledge was also something that the interviewees considered best learnt through meeting Swedish people. Paradoxically, considering their view of Swedish people as quite reserved, they praised Swedish culture for its openness.

In the section on safety and stability, I looked at possible differences in terms of how the local communities perceive refugee reception. Whereas in Land, refugee reception was a sudden and potentially frightening change, in Stad the change has been more gradual. As the population of Stad changes, the town has become increasingly segregated. The extent to which a concern for safety plays a role in this is difficult to tell. When the interviewees speak of safety it is above all about being in a safe, peaceful, country. On a more local level, they seem to find safety in different ways: in Stad it is mainly through other people like their relatives; in Land it is through living in a small town. Finally, stability was discussed both as something that increased

substantially with a residence permit and something that continued to be difficult to obtain in some areas. One such area is housing: although housing instability is usually associated with EBO, it is also a common feature of ABO.

Ager and Strang (2008, p.181) write that ‘facilitators’ help remove barriers to integration. Whereas language—and cultural knowledge in the sense that it might aid communication—can be clearly conceptualised as ‘tools’ that facilitate integration and remove barriers, safety and stability are less straight-forward. Calling them ‘facilitators’ may be too narrow a definition. For one thing, they are an integral part of the foundation of integration: rights and citizenship are valued precisely because of the safety and stability they bring. One could even go as far as saying that stability *is* the foundation of integration: without a stable foundation, anything that goes on top will surely crumble. But it could also be conceived as an end-result of integration: it is plausible that on a subjective level true stability will only ever be possible when all the other integration domains are in place. This surely depends on individual preference, but a permanent job that suits one’s qualification, family and friends nearby and a stable housing situation, are typical ‘goals’ amongst the participants in this study that, when obtained, might provide a person with a sense of stability.⁸² As safety and stability are multifaceted concepts that interact with many other domains, I will return to them in later chapters. For now, it suffices to say that while there may be some uncertainty regarding their classification, there is no doubt that they are important.

⁸² It is worth noting that stability does not need to be desirable to all: some people may thrive on frequent moves or frequently changing jobs. It is when instability become the only option, a reality for many asylum seekers, that it becomes a problem.

8 Social connections

A complete lack of social connections would render the concept of social *integration* meaningless. Indeed, the very existence of a *society* would be called into question if there were no such connections. Since migration disrupts social connections, an integration process can in part be understood as a process of becoming ‘connected’. This process is the topic of the present chapter and a central question regarding the comparison between ABO and EBO is whether all social connections are of equal ‘integrative’ value.

Ager and Strang’s (2008) conceptualisation of social connections draws on Putnam’s theory of social capital and they use his terminology of *social bonds* (with family or co-ethnic communities) and *social bridges* (with other communities). They also add a third type: *social links* (with structures of the state). Using the term ‘capital’ draws attention to the fact that social connections are not just valuable in their own right but also as a resource that can, potentially, be converted into other forms of capital. Putnam’s take on social capital is highly optimistic. It is essentially what binds society together and it has a range of positive effects: increased social trust, lower crime rates, economic growth and so on (Putnam 1995, p. 66-67). Naturally, this is not the only way to conceptualise social capital and other theorists have taken a far less positive view of the concept (see section 4.3). To Bourdieu (1986), for example, social capital is mainly *exclusionary* and it plays a crucial role in the social reproduction of class.

Putnam’s and Bourdieu’s ways of approaching social capital do not have to be seen as mutually exclusive. I have tried to stay open to the possibility that social capital can have a positive inclusive effect on the community level *and* an exclusionary effect that run along class, or ethnic, lines. Although my account of social capital does not rely exclusively on Putnam, I have retained his categories of social bonds and social bridges. These categories, as well as the ‘social links’ added by Ager and Strang, have proved useful when analysing the integration of asylum seekers and it is these three types of social capital that will be discussed in the sections below.

8.1 Social bonds

Using Putnam’s terminology, social bonds are bonds between people who are like each other in some way. This includes both bonds with close family members and to more distant members of a co-ethnic community. This section will open with quite a narrow focus on family ties; this focus will then gradually widen to also include both accepted *and* rejected bonds with one’s

own ethnic and national group. The section on social bonds will conclude with a discussion on the role time and place play in how they are evaluated.

8.1.1 Importance of immediate family relations

A family can be defined in many other ways than the traditional nuclear family. Although the participants generally conform to this norm, one thing that is both open to interpretation and subject to change when migrating is where to draw the boundaries around who counts as *close* family. As we will see in section 8.1.2, members of the extended family may also fit into this category, but for now we will focus on the immediate (nuclear) family.

Most of the asylum seekers interviewed in both Land and Stad either came to Sweden with their families or they arrived separately but were reunited before the interview. As expected, the most important social connections for them are the social bonds with their immediate family, i.e. bonds within married couples and between parents and their children. The bond between parents and children is particularly central in the interviews and it is something that pervades nearly every ‘integration domain’ covered in this study: every choice the parents make is based on what they think will be best for their children. Although the parents do not describe it in such terms, family commitments can place restrictions on the choices one can make. A single person may, for example, have more freedom of choice when deciding where to live. On the other hand, family creates a sense of stability that is harder to achieve as a single person. Having family around also means protection from another downside to starting a new life in a new country: loneliness. Ali, who came to Sweden on his own, found this to be a struggle:

Travelling here was hard and I arrived here, and I felt lonely. I stayed one day in the station. I didn’t know anyone. I didn’t know what I should do. Then I met someone, he could speak the English language. I told him, he saw me and he asked me ‘you are tired?’ and I said ‘yes, because I don’t know what should I do’. I explained to him about my situation. He told me I should go to the Migration Agency [...] Eh, it’s hard, so hard to come to a country when you don’t know anyone in that country. So hard. But you know, that’s the war. The war is, eh, it’s unhuman. You should leave your country to go to another safe country like this [...] I expected [to feel lonely] but I have never felt it before, this feeling exactly. So when I tried this feeling it’s so, so hard. It’s not like reading on a website about being lonely (Ali, Land, 2016).

Ali does not have a wife and children of his own. He misses his parents and younger brother who are still in Syria, but it will be difficult for them to ever join him in Sweden, as an adult man he has no right to reunification

with his parents. Somehow, he needs to find the ‘cure’ to his loneliness in Sweden. To Asim and Adnan, the situation is very different: an essential part of their lives has been put on hold as their families are still in Syria. At the time of the first interview they are both waiting for reunification with their wives and children. Adnan describes his shock of finding out he might have to wait over a year for this. His wife was having a hard time on her own with two children and telling her the bad news was difficult. To Adnan, missing his family and worrying about them is something that overshadows other, more positive things, like obtaining a permanent residence:

When I came to Sweden I studied a lot and I felt empowered, but when I got the decision I started thinking about reunion with my family and the new laws in Sweden. About my boys [...] about the bureaucracy. The papers and problems. I had a headache that time. And for some reason, I stopped studying. I knew I could go to SFI but I didn’t [...] When your mind is clear, you can do that but when you have a lot of things on your mind you cannot study [...] That time I did not study. I just, eh, went fishing to try to relax [...] But it was difficult for a lot of reasons. I was thinking about getting a house, it is difficult in Sweden. I was thinking about my family: when are they coming? It’s long time. The most difficult thing for me in Sweden is waiting for my family (Adnan, Land, 2016).

Waiting for one’s family is not something that necessarily gets easier *or* harder with time. It’s not a linear process but rather a struggle to get on with everyday life that is interspersed with phases that are more critical or ‘crisis-like’. Adnan went through such a phase when he got his permit. Asim, who is still waiting at the time of the second interview, describes a difficult year in which he suffered badly from depression:

Maybe it is because I had this depression issue but I am, I have this homesick problem, I don’t feel at home here. I feel very lonely, I need my kids. I have friends, very good friends. In Stad. Again, maybe it is me and not them. I tried to isolate myself as much as I could. Because I passed this period of depression and I didn’t want them to be affected.

So when you are homesick, is it your family more than a specific place that you miss?

Yes, my family. Only my family [...] I want them to be here, I want to be involved in day to day issues. Why you didn’t do your homework? Why you didn’t clean after yourself? Why you didn’t arrange the bed? I want this small family stuff. The most difficult thing for me when I finish work, is how to pass these five or six hours until I fall asleep. I have nothing to do. I can

invent something to do but it is very hard. So hopefully this will change when they come (Asim, Stad, 2017).

His longing for his family did not get easier with time. In fact, the opposite was true. He speaks regularly with his family via Skype and says that what led to his depression was that he noticed his children were getting used to his absence. His depression meant that Asim had been unable to work at times, but his employer and his friends were supportive throughout this phase and he now believes he is over the worst of it. Until his family is in Sweden, however, he does not think that he will feel truly at home.

Adnan is more fortunate. He too was waiting for his family when I first met him. When I meet him again a year later, they have arrived. Adnan is like a changed man:

I sleep well, I eat well. As you can see (he has gained some weight). It is a big difference from last year. I can focus. On everything. My kids' future, our future in Sweden. I can *think* (Adnan, Land, 2017).

Although the arrival of his family is a great source of happiness to Adnan, the transition had not been entirely without difficulty. The hardest part was probably that his youngest child did not remember him when he arrived in Sweden. He wants his children to know and trust him again, and because of this, he is on parental leave at the time of the second interview.

These examples show that *not* having family around can disrupt an integration process by having a negative effect on a person's well-being. They also show that while the long-term effects on integration are bound to be good for most, family reunification can temporarily put other aspects of the integration process on hold.

In the chapter on language I wrote about how online resources was an important tool when learning Swedish. Even more important, however, is that they provide a link to family members in Syria and in other countries around the world. This is not without its difficulties. For one thing, as Asim's example shows, it is not easy to maintain a relationship through Skype. Another problem is that the technology does not always work, especially when calling a country at war:

I talk to my family absolutely. But it depends on the electricity. If it is coming or not and which time it is coming on. It's not like two hours, 10 to 12, no it's different every day. Because if you want to use the mobile there, if you want to use Wi-Fi, it is out of coverage when there is no electricity. Yes. Eh, and my family want to talk to me, 'what happened with you?' I tell them nothing. Nothing until now. 'Ok, we hope to get your decision soon', I hope

so. I don't want to talk with family because I don't have good news. They care about me, about my future. You know parents. They are very good people (Ali, Land, 2016).

This quote shows that even with modern technology it is not always easy to keep in touch with loved ones. Ali acknowledges these technical difficulties, but his main concern is that he is unable to ease his parents' worries about whether he will get to stay in Sweden or not. Although all the interviewees have some family and friends still in Syria that they worry about and try to stay in contact with, some are more fortunate than others: those that have their immediate family in Sweden are at least spared from trying to maintain their closest bonds at a distance.

An additional benefit of having a family is that it tends to make it easier to escape the *boredom* often associated with being an asylum seeker. When asked who she spends time with besides her family Rania says that family life takes up most of her day so there is little time left for socialising. In this respect, there is a marked difference not only between EBO and ABO but also between different types of ABO, i.e. between living in an accommodation centre and an apartment. For example, living in an ABO-apartment brings with it additional 'time-filling' activities such as cleaning, shopping and cooking for the family (in centres they are served three meals a day). In EBO, the situation is a little bit more complex and whether boredom is seen as a problem or not may depend on the person's relationship with their hosts and how involved they are in the day to day running of the household.

Another clear difference between different types of housing is the level of *privacy* they provide. Not all social connections are wanted and the constant presence of other people in the accommodation centres can be a burden. An ABO-apartment is clearly preferable to accommodation centres in this regard, at least when shared with family and not strangers. Again, regarding EBO, generalisations are difficult as the circumstances vary a great between participants. These, and other, differences will be discussed in more detail in section 9.4 on housing. For now, it is enough to say that family life can be either restricted or enabled by the place one finds oneself in.

8.1.2 Importance of extended family relations

What I refer to as 'closeness' within a family is primarily about feelings of attachment and emotional intimacy but it can also refer to how closely related two members of a family are. In that sense, closeness can lead to higher expectations: family members may help other family members because they are family, but the demands placed on a brother are usually higher than the

ones placed on a second cousin. Geographic closeness can enable closeness in other respects as well and a move might make previously weak bonds strong. When the circumstances of the move are traumatic, as they are for refugees fleeing a war, the norms regarding how close a family member must be for an offer of help to be extended is bound to change as well. Regarding the topic of who counts as close family, and the topic of extended families more generally, there are some noteworthy differences between the participants in Land and Stad that will be discussed below.

8.1.2.1 Land: why not EBO?

Although EBO is the housing form that first comes to mind when the topic of extended families is brought up, those that live in ABO are not necessarily without such connections. A few of the participants in Land did mention that they have relatives in Sweden which prompted the follow up question: why not EBO? The question is interesting—not least because those that *do* live in EBO tend to describe it as an obvious choice if it is available. It should be noted that the *actual* availability of EBO is not always made clear in the interviews with ABO residents. Hence the interviewees explanations as to why they are not in EBO could be based either on an actual choice or an adaptation to circumstances (i.e. that their relatives had not offered them a place to stay). Leah, for example, has cousins whom she stayed with briefly when she first arrived in Sweden. When asked if it had been an option to stay with them long-term she replied:

It's very hard for them. Because their apartment is not that big. For me and two children. That's the first reason. The next, I think, how can I explain, I can't feel that, I can't feel good myself if I am in, I am living in apartment that belongs to somebody, like my cousin, or my friend, for a long time. Because it is not two months, or three. People before, Syrian people, they stay maybe two or three months, three months at the most, then they get their permit and they leave. But now the permit takes one year, one and a half years, it is not easy to live with your cousins in the same apartment and they have kids, and you have kids. It's not good. For one year, more than one year. If it was one month or two months, yes. But if it is more than one year it is very hard (Leah, Land, 2016).

To Leah, the long wait for a permit is the main reason why EBO is not an option. She goes on to explain how Sweden is very different from Syria. In Syria, money determines everything, including the size of your house. In Sweden, she argues, there are certain minimum standards that apply to everybody. She feels that it would be harder for her cousins to take her in as

they are used to Swedish standards. She also describes their lifestyle as ‘Swedish’ meaning that they focus on work and spending time with their children, leaving little time for their extended family.

Rania also has cousins in Sweden, and she reasons in a similar way. She does not see staying with her cousins as an option because they all have families of their own and ‘their own lives to live’. It would be too crowded, and she does not want to put them through that—especially since there is no way of knowing how long the wait would be. In addition to this, Rania makes a point out of saying that they are only cousins; if they had been siblings, things might have been different.

It is difficult to pin-point exactly why some deem it acceptable, even self-evident, to stay with relatives for a year whilst others see it as unthinkable. Rania’s story would suggest that it has something to do with the closeness of the bonds but that doesn’t always hold true. In fact, Rania herself eventually found herself in EBO after a long time in ABO. They found a house in Land through an acquaintance where they could stay rent free until they had received their permit. Family bonds did prove useful in the end, but it was hardly a matter of close ties: the house belonged to a friend of her husband’s cousin. This was a different scenario as they were not living *with* this man, but it still shows that help does not have to depend on *close* ties.

Zina not only lived in EBO but is also the only interviewee who decided to move from EBO to ABO. This is how she describes her experience:

When I came, I lived with my aunt, she has her own house. I went to school [...] I was so happy. I had job also, at the weekend. I feel like that’s the life in Sweden, everywhere, that even if I go by myself, I will find this, and I can do whatever I want. I lived in [the city] maybe six months then I thought about going by myself, eh, living by myself, like a teenager I wanted my *own* life. I went to the Migration Agency and said ‘I want to go to another place’ (Zina, Land, 2016).

Unlike Rania and Leah, Zina does not express concern about how a lengthy stay might have a negative impact on her aunt’s life. Instead, her decision is based on a feeling that she cannot live *her own life* the way she wants to whilst living there. She does not explain in detail what she means by this, but she mentions that she finds her aunt’s husband quite controlling. After moving from her aunt, Zina regrets her decision. Living in a camp is much harder than she thought it would be (see section 7.2.1.2). A few months into her stay, a different aunt joins her in the camp for a while. Unlike Zina, who is a Syrian national but lived most her life in a different country, this aunt

lived in Syria. They did not know each other from before and are not close. As Zina puts it: ‘We don’t have this connection, this connection that I know her. I can’t tell her what’s in my heart’. Zina still thinks that having her aunt with her is an improvement on being alone, but her example shows that family bonds are no guarantee for feelings of closeness.

8.1.2.2 Stad: support in a time of need

In Stad, where EBO is far more prevalent there is a great deal of variety in the ‘closeness’ of the family bonds. Some had met their Syrian-Swedish relatives in Syria, either before the relatives left Syria or as visitors after they moved. A few had even visited Sweden, and their relatives, before. However, it is also common to move in with relatives that one has never met before. Jacob, for example, had only ‘met’ his uncle through Skype before he came to Sweden. Despite this, Jacob was welcomed with opened arms. To Jacob, his uncle and his uncle’s wife give him ‘the same feelings as [his] parents’ and they quickly became very important to him. As they have lived in Sweden for a long time—in Jacob’s words they are ‘almost Swedish’—they have plenty of useful knowledge to share regarding what life in Sweden is like. Although they are close to retirement age and not wealthy people, they also help out financially: ‘like parents’ they provide what Jacob needs in terms of food, clothing and other necessities. Whilst Jacob clearly appreciates all the practical and material help, what he values above all is the emotional support he gets from his uncle. This is quite a common theme in Stad: practical help is appreciated but almost always of secondary importance. As Kristina points out, this kind of help also needs to be temporary. Sooner or later they will have to find a way to survive on their own:

In the beginning you get a lot of help. If there is anything you need, they will help you. Someone might need to go with you to the Migration Agency or the Social Insurance Agency. You know in the beginning there is a lot of paperwork here in Sweden. So, what can I say? It’s good that there is someone there to help in the beginning but after a while you have to start relying on yourself (Kristina, Stad, 2016).

Whereas the practical help is mainly short term, the social benefits of living near relatives are potentially permanent. Some of these benefits might take time to develop but others are instantaneous. In sharp contrast to those in Land and in ABO more generally, many of the participants in Stad have a ‘ready-made’ social life when they arrive. Marta’s description of her first few days in Sweden illustrate this quite well:

My first days, they were like coming to paradise. The first day I arrived here. We were here at four o'clock and [later that day] we had an engagement party. So we arrived at four o'clock and after five or six hours we woke up and everything was ready, my relatives had everything, clothes and everything because the smugglers took everything. We had everything and we went to someone who did our, to a hairdresser, and my children had new clothes and we had a party and then many, many other parties in the same month, it was like getting out from a bad place after one and a half years and then in one month you go to parties, you have many, many parties. It was very good for my children, they were very, very happy (Marta, Stad, 2016).

Marta and her family spent a year and a half in Turkey before they, after several failed attempts, eventually made it to Sweden. Finally seeing her children happy after their difficult time in Turkey, in addition to the enjoyment of going to parties, made Stad feel like 'paradise' to Marta.

Parents, like Marta, interviewed in Stad are especially likely to emphasise the importance of relatives. Although living in their relatives' homes for a long time is a bit *too* near, they generally believe that it is good for their children to have extended family close by. The children that were present at a few of the interviews seem to agree: when I ask what they like most about Stad they usually answer that they 'have a lot of family there'.

Many of the parents in Stad acknowledge that there are some downsides to living there, segregation and a shortage of suitable housing being the two main examples, but they still believe that it is the best option for their children. Again, Marta will illustrate this point:

Many friends tried to convince us to go to other cities, in the north or here, near [Stad]. But I don't want to take my children to another place, it is enough for them the time we had in Turkey. It was very, very difficult for them. You know, when the parents are not in good humour, the children can understand it [...] So now, I don't want them to be sad anymore, I want them to be happy. I think they are happy with other people from Syria, they can have contact with them, and we have many relatives here. They are so relaxed. Very, very relaxed. I don't want to go to another place where I can't meet people who my children can be good with. You know it is difficult to start from the beginning. We had it many times, I don't want to have it anymore (Marta, Stad, 2016).

The reason why Marta's friends have tried to convince her to move elsewhere is because they have had a very hard time finding somewhere to live in Stad. But she is tired of moving and so are her children. What they need

now is stability and she believes that the best way to get that is to be near relatives and other Syrians: people they ‘can be good with’.

What it is like to live *with* relatives is something we will return to in a later chapter that addresses housing specifically. For now, it is enough to conclude that relatives can be a valuable resource. They can offer support in many different forms, give a sense of stability and a social context to belong to. This social context does not have to be limited to family: it often extends to the wider ‘ethnic’ group. As the next section will show, however, these connections are more likely to be spoken of with some ambivalence.

8.1.3 Ethnicity and nationality: Ties that bind?⁸³

Regarding social bonds in the wider sense of co-ethnic or co-national bonds, perhaps a third concept should be added to the heading above: religion. Although religious affiliation was not intended to be a focal point in this study, it is a topic that is hard to ignore when examining social bonds. This is especially the case since it may be one of the primary reasons why the participants’ views in Land and Stad so clearly differ on the topic of social bonds. The following sections will explore these differences and the complex pattern of belonging that emerge in the interviews. They will also attempt to show how these bonds might affect the choices that participants make regarding housing and how the presence of ‘co-ethnics’ can be both a pull and a push factor when it comes to deciding where to settle.

8.1.3.1 Stad: blurred boundaries between ethnicity and family

One possible explanation as to why the participants in Stad regard EBO as the natural choice is that they belong to a group with certain characteristics.⁸⁴ When I speak to Mikael, who works at Stad Municipality, about integration he tells me ‘you have to remember that these are people *without* a homeland’. What he is referring to is that many of the refugees that come to Stad identify as Syriac/Assyrian or as other Christian minorities from the Middle East. Because they have lived all their lives in countries dominated by a different culture than their own their ties are not, one could argue, to a particular *place* but rather to a particular group of *people*. At the Syriac

⁸³ Although nationality and ethnicity are sometimes used interchangeably, in this text I have tried to keep the two separated. Thus, ‘nationality’ refers only to Syrian citizenship whereas ‘ethnicity’ refers to other group characteristics/identities (see section 4.3 for more on the problem of categorising).

⁸⁴ See section 4.3.1 for more on Syriacs/Assyrians in Sweden.

Orthodox church that I visited, members of the congregation and clergy spoke of their *people* as a group that had suffered enormous hardship—both historically and in the current war. As a consequence of this hardship, they argued, very strong bonds formed in the group. The church itself, and associated cultural organisations, are obvious meeting places for this ‘group’ and they do a great deal to help new arrivals in Stad. Going by these stories at least, the concept of ‘taking care of one’s own’ expands beyond the family in Stad. In fact, the boundary between family and the ethnic/religious group is sometimes blurred in Stad: when I ask Magdalena if she has relatives in Stad she replies that her husband has two sisters. The interpreter then adds that Magdalena is bound to have some family there as well since ‘indirectly, they are all related to each other’ (i.e. as an ethnic group or a ‘people’).

Regarding the prevalence of EBO in Stad, a possible explanation is that the strong bonds within the group—and the idea that helping ‘one’s own’ is an essential part of the group culture—has meant that certain norms have been established that are hard to break. EBO could be an expression of these norms: it is potentially very difficult to deny even distant family members a place to stay when taking them in is the expected thing to do. The widespread use of EBO in Stad is also the logical consequence of the town’s ethnic composition: once an above average proportion of a certain group has been established in a certain place, it follows that the continuous inflow of new members of this group will also be higher than average. For EBO to even be an option, the newcomer must know someone already established.

Of course, in order for an individual to present EBO as the *only* choice, it has to be an option that is actually available to them. But presenting it this way also implies that the individual does not regard ABO as an option. Previous studies show that avoiding ABO can be the main reason for choosing EBO (Hadodo & Åkerlund 2004; Lennartsson 2007) and in retrospect, direct questions about ABO should have been included in the EBO interviews. However, the topic of ‘camps’ did come up in conversation in a few of the interviews. Maria, for example, speaks of a friend who lives in a camp in Sweden. It is not a close friend so they are not in regular contact, but she knows that this friend finds living in the camp very difficult. I ask if that makes her glad that she has a cousin to stay with and she replies:

Yes. I am so thankful to my cousin because he accepted that we live with him even though we took his childrens’ room. Yes, it was hard, but we had *no other choice* (Maria, Stad, 2016, my emphasis).

Even though we had just spoken about ABO, Maria does not recognise this as an actual *choice* she could have made. A few other interviewees make similar statements. Only in one interview does the interviewees offer an explanation as to why they see EBO as the ‘only’ option. Like many others, Magdalena and her family have moved between different relatives in Stad, keen not to outstay their welcome. This has been very stressful for them but despite this, she still believes it is the best option for her. She asks if I want to know why and when I say yes, she replies:

You know, there are camps we can go to. Refugee camps. But we, as Christians, have experienced this before in our homeland. We’ve been harassed and persecuted by Muslims. And it is still happening here, in the camps. That’s why we don’t want to stay in camps. Why we move around from relative to relative instead (Magdalena, Stad, 2016).

Magdalena’s interview, as mentioned, is the only time this argument was brought up. Also worth noting is that Emanuel, a long-standing member of the congregation, helped with translation during the interview. Magdalena spoke some Swedish and it is clear based on what she did say in Swedish that these views are her own, but the fact that Emanuel holds similar views might have steered the interview in a certain direction. After the interview, Emanuel tells me that the church has campaigned for ‘Christian only’ accommodation centres, ideally near Stad. This, he believes, would alleviate the housing crisis in Stad. In the end, the campaign was fruitless as it ran contrary to the ideal of equal treatment in Swedish regulation.

A 2017 report by Open Doors, an organisation that supports Christian victims of religious persecution, offer some support to Magdalena’s statement. Since their survey specifically targets Christians who have experienced religious persecution in Sweden, it is difficult to draw conclusions regarding the extent of the problem, but the results are worrying regarding its severity: over half of those surveyed had been the victim of violent assault. However, since Migration Agency statistics on either religion or ethnicity is scarce, it is difficult to assess whether that Christians are more likely to than Muslims to choose EBO, and if so, *why* that is the case.

8.1.3.2 Stad: diversity within the group

Although the Migration Agency group people only according to nationality, the interviews in Stad indicate that Syrian *nationality* may not be the most dominant form of group identity. As Magdalena’s example shows, the national ‘group’ includes people that she believes are in direct opposition to

her own group. Her husband Josef also points out that they were, in sense, refugees in Syria as well: their forefathers had fled to Syria from Turkey early in the previous century. Magdalena, and her husband, speak mainly of an opposition between Christians and Muslims but the group 'Christians' itself is far from homogenous. What has generally been called 'Christians from the Middle East' in this thesis is in fact made up of a number of ethnic/religious groups such as Assyrians, Syriacs, Arameans and Chaldeans.⁸⁵ There is both considerable overlap between these categories and occasional disagreement as to what is the 'right' term to use (see section 4.3.1). Even in the small sample used in this study there was considerable variation: several different Churches are represented, both Orthodox and Catholic. Some, like Jacob, prefer not to identify with a particular Church at all:

I was an atheist for a year and a half. And I tried to search for, to look for facts. And then, when I came back to Jesus, I didn't like calling myself a Catholic or Orthodox or Protestant. It doesn't matter. I decided to just be Christian. I don't like telling people what I am, when they ask I just say Christian. When they ask, 'but are you Orthodox or Catholic or something else?' I tell them again 'Christian'. But if you want to know, my father is a Roman Catholic and my mother a Syriac Catholic. But I am a Christian. Just that. I don't know why that is always the first question that people ask, 'what church do you go to?' I don't know why (Jacob, Stad, 2017).

Earlier in the interview Jacob described going to the Church of Sweden to pray and I, perhaps a little bit surprised, ask if this is the church he regularly attends. As the quote shows, the question of belonging to a particular church is one he received often in Stad and it is a matter of some frustration to him. He explains that he does not go to church regularly but when he feels the need to pray, he goes to whatever church is convenient.

The interviews in Stad show that the relationship between concepts such as identity, nationality, religion and ethnicity is incredibly complex. Social 'bonds' that extend beyond the family can belong in either of those categories; sometimes these categories overlap and sometimes they do not. Like family, these bonds can be defined broadly or narrowly: they can cut across national categories—bonding Assyrians that come from Syria and Iraq, for example—or be based on coming from the same small town in Syria.

⁸⁵ Although I am aware that this is a problematic simplification, I will continue to refer to the 'group' primarily as Christians as I consider it less problematic than accidentally using the wrong 'ethnic' term.

8.1.3.3 Land: ambivalent belonging

In Land, the situation is quite different. Whereas Jacob is something of an exception in Stad in his desire to distance himself from groups, in Land there is a more general tendency to de-emphasise the value of belonging to a group. Regarding nationality, few of the participants in Land express particularly strong bonds to the Syrian nation despite belonging to the Muslim majority in Syria.⁸⁶ However, nationality is central in at least one respect—it is as Syrian *nationals* that they can apply for asylum—and both Zina and Ali express disapproval of people that pretend to be Syrian in order to get a residence permit. Ali questions how these people reason and asks, ‘have they no feeling for their homeland?’, implying that Ali *does* have feelings for his homeland. At the opposite end we have Adnan who states that he does not miss Syria because he does not ‘tie his feelings to land’. The most common sentiment, however, when speaking of Syria—and this applies to Stad as well—is probably despondency. The participants come from a country that has been utterly destroyed. This is a source of great sadness but there is also a surprising amount of pragmatism in their stories. Many speak of how it will take a long time for Syria to be rebuilt again and that they have more hope of living a good life if they stay in Sweden for good.

In terms of nationality then, the views of participants in Land and Stad share some similarities. If we move on to instances where they define themselves as something *other* than Syrian, however, more distinct differences between the groups emerge. Whereas the participants in Stad tend to use a *narrower* definition than nationality, i.e. they are part of a Syrian Christian minority, the participants in Land often use a *wider* definition: not only do they speak of being Muslim in quite general terms, they often refer to themselves as ‘Arabs’ and their culture as ‘Arabic culture’.

The participants’ relationship to other Syrians, or ‘Arabs’, in Land is ambivalent at best. Adnan is especially critical of other Syrians and when I ask if cultural diversity was a problem in the camp he replies:

⁸⁶ By belonging to the majority, I mean belonging to *any* of the different Muslim denominations in Syria. Writing about Muslims as one group is, of course, as problematic as doing the same with the ‘group’ Christians (with the added implication that they may not belong to a ‘majority’ at all). However, since none of interviewees referred to themselves as belonging to a particular Muslim denomination, I had to assume that it was either unimportant to them or it was a topic they preferred not to talk about. In either case, the same principle as used when discussing Christians will apply here: i.e. that a category that is too wide is better than a narrow definition wrongly applied.

No, I think I had problems with the Syrian people. Because I hate when someone asks me things, I don't know, but it's a bad way of thinking. In American English it's called being nosy. I don't like it. For example, I have a lot of friends from Eritrea, Somalia, it's the truth, a lot of Syrian people are, eh, racist? Do you understand what I mean? For example, [...] when I sit down and make a relationship with black people, they don't like me, the Syrian people. And they made a lot of problems with me. But I have a strong personality so a lot of people, eh, I don't like a lot of what Syrian people are doing. I don't hate the Syrian people, it's my people. But they make a lot of mistakes. With their behaviour (Adnan, Land, 2016).

Adnan explains that the 'nosiness' of Syrian people makes them ask 'a lot of questions that are none of their business' and this often leads to arguments. One thing they argued about in the camp was religion:

One man said 'why don't you come and pray with us in the mosque?' I am free, I want to pray in my room. It's not your business. And I cannot remember exactly what he said, what I said. But I think that was a bad argument and about religion. Also in Ramadan, you know about the fast? Ramadan. I ate before all of them. Because I have a special understanding of religion [...] I ate maybe three hours before them. So they were speaking about this and I think I stopped the argument. I said 'I am free, I am not coming to you and telling you 'come and eat with me'. I am free, you can take care of yourself' (Adnan, Land, 2016).

For Adnan, living with other Syrians was mainly a source of conflict and annoyance but, perhaps for women in particular, it can also be a source of fear. Leah asked to be moved to an apartment because her teenage daughter was afraid in the camp where they initially stayed. As a Christian family they had suffered abuse in Syria and this made it difficult for her daughter to trust other Syrian people. Leah is quick to add, however, that her fears were never realised and that all the people they met in the camp were 'very kind and good'.⁸⁷ Zina, like Leah, also found living in an accommodation centre a frightening experience but she is less inclined to also bring up positives. Her quote below also shows that cultural differences do not always follow national, or religious, lines:

I feel afraid to meet new people because in [my previous camp] I saw a lot of bad people, so I feel afraid of anyone, to meet anyone, from my country. Yeah. Eh, I told you, I'm born and raised in a city, so I don't see, I'm not

⁸⁷ In other words, Leah's story should not be read as a confirmation of Magdalena's claim that Christians are being harassed in Swedish camps (section 8.1.3.1).

racist but in our countries it is not like Sweden and Europe, it is totally different between urban people and villagers, totally different cultures and behaviour and everything. Yeah, maybe they are better than me inside but eh, totally different behaviours. We cannot live with each other. So it was different for me to accept the people that I was with [...] I feel afraid and they stare at me, the boys. That's weird for me (Zina, Land, 2016).

The diversity *within* a national group can make social bonds less likely. Apart from the difference in religious affiliation discussed already, there are other aspects worth considering as well. Zina brings up one of them in the quote above: the cultural differences between urban and rural areas. The young men in the accommodation centre may be her main concern as she finds their behaviour frightening (see also section 7.2.1.2), but they are not her only concern. At the time of the first interview she is sharing a room with three older Syrian women, and the difficulties she has had with them show that not only the rural/urban divide but also disparity in age can make social 'bonding' difficult:

It is hard for me to go school, I cannot sleep. They sleep late, they always talk and I feel shy to tell like old people to stop talking or 'I have to sleep'. I'm just one girl in a room with all old women there. Yeah, I told the school but they cannot help me. I told [the manager of the camp] and he said 'we don't have room' [...] I don't live my life. I live the life that the people around me live. I feel like when I'm in a place with bad people, I cannot like, breathe, if I'm with the old people I cannot live *my* life, like a young person. Or always sleeping, don't know what to do. If I talk, they talk a different way that I talk, I feel like, very strange. I don't find my way, I want to, I have a dream, I want to make my dream, but there are a lot of problems in my way [...] It's hard to live with strange people and, eh, it's so hard. I don't know if you understand me (Zina, Land, 2016).

Zina's story shows how the lack of privacy in accommodation centres can have a negative effect on integration. The women she shares a room with are so dominant that there is no 'space' left in the room for her to think about what she wants. In a more literal sense, there is also no space for her to study as the only table in the room is taken up by the women's things. They also move and use her things without permission, adding to Zina's feelings that her privacy is being invaded. Because they are older, she is uncomfortable telling them how she feels. Although these things seem insignificant on their own, added up over time they could become unbearable.

Zina's example shows that 'strangeness' can be found within one's own ethnic or national group. Overall, there is a risk of overstating the importance of ethnic or other forms of similarity when it comes to living in an accommodation centre. The kind of forced intimacy one has to deal with when living in such a place would in all likelihood be difficult to endure regardless of the ethnic background of the other inhabitants.

8.1.3.4 Land: disassociation

Although the participants in Land are generally more neutral than the quotes above suggest, it is noteworthy that none express a desire to live around other Syrians. In fact, the opposite was more often the case. Sometimes, as seen in Zina's example in the previous section, in-group diversity can lead to disassociation from certain elements within the group, but there is also a tendency among the participants in Land to disassociate from the Syrian, or Arab, group as a whole. Somewhat contradictory, some describe Land as a good place to live because there are *few* Syrians there, other describe it as a bad place to live because there are *too many* Syrians there.

I suspect that this may be one of the instances when researching as an outsider is a real disadvantage. I could never fully understand the complexities of the situation the interviewees have left behind or what fleeing a war might do to a person's trust in other people. Hasan, for example, says he does not want to move to a big city because he 'escaped from Arabic people' and he does not want to move somewhere where there are too many of them. For him, ABO is a conscious choice rather than a last resort. His wife has relatives in a big city who asked them to come and stay with them, but they refused the offer. Hasan connects 'Arabic people' in big cities to social problems and by distancing himself from cities, he is also distancing himself from these problems. As he puts it: 'I want to follow the regulation in this country. I like this country very much. I don't want to go to a place where we have problems with other people. I want to live in a place with no Arabic people!'

At the same time, Hasan is eager to point out that only a few people cause problems, not *all* Arabic people. It is also important to note that both he and his children have made friends with other Syrian people in Land and he can see advantages to living in an area with at least *some* Arabic people: for one thing, he is very appreciative of the Arabic food shop that opened in Land shortly before the first interview. This means they no longer have to travel to neighbouring towns in order to get Halal food, something that had previously put a strain on their limited budget.

8.1.4 Time and place

In the first round of interviews—despite some mixed feelings towards the own national group—the most important social ties of participants in both locations were generally with other Syrians. This is by no means surprising as there are obvious benefits to making connections within one’s own group, not least because a shared culture and language makes communication easier. In Stad at least, being with other Syrians also felt like a comfort when new to the country. Another aspect to bear in mind is that the participants arrived at a time when many other Syrians also came to Sweden. The likelihood of meeting other Syrians was very high in both locations. It follows that the likelihood of having both positive and negative experiences with said group would also be high. One of the topics of interest at the second round of interview was to see whether the centrality of social bonds remained even though the participants’ circumstances had changed. Another, related, aspect explored further was what role ‘place’ played in this.

In Stad, all interviewees had lived there since their first day in Sweden and those interviewed again were all still living there at the time of the second interview. Although social bonds can remain strong even across great geographical distance, ‘place’ plays an important role in Stad as it enables the maintenance of these bonds. Time also plays an essential part as it is only with time that social bonds solidify. A few of the participants in Stad were initially quite open to the possibility of moving elsewhere but became reluctant to move once they had settled in. Theresa and her daughter Hanna illustrate this quite well. In the first interview I ask if it is a comfort to have other Syrians around in Stad and Hanna replies: ‘Yes, you could say that. It’s weird but they understand the difficulties we have been through and you feel like you are in this together’. Her mother elaborates:

The same difficulties, the same situation, the same hopes, the same everything (laughs). And we live, sometimes I see people here from Damascus, from the same street in Damascus that we lived on, I see them there and now I see them here (Theresa, Stad, 2016).

Although Theresa clearly appreciates this sense of continuity and it brings her comfort to know they are not alone in their struggles, she also sees problems with living in Stad:

In the beginning it is good for us because there is a lot of Arab people here. We have no need to speak Swedish here, we can go to the mall, anywhere, you find Arabic people and you can speak Arabic. But it is only good at first,

in the future it is not good. It won't help us learn good Swedish (Theresa, Stad, 2016).

In this interview Theresa saw Stad, and its high proportion of Arabic-speaking Syrians, as good 'for now' but she was open to moving in order to improve her chances of learning Swedish or finding a job. A year later, things have changed. Hanna explains that her younger siblings have started school there and it is important for them to stay. Theresa adds that she has made many Syrian friends in the year that has passed and that she now feels very much at home in Stad. She also shows great appreciation for Swedish society and Swedish laws so to her, Stad has the best of both worlds: 'It's like living in Syria but in a better *place*'. Kristina, who has lived in Stad nearly three years when I interview her, has also settled in well. When I ask her if she wants to stay in Stad for good she replies:

Yes, I think so. We can't live anywhere else. Sometimes, I think that we are like fish. If you take the fish out of the sea, it can't breathe, it would die. So we can't leave this place (laughs) (Kristina, Stad, 2016).

The idea that Stad is like a 'home away from home' is one that is shared by many in Stad. The proximity to family, and to one's 'people' in a wider sense, provides a sense of comfort and stability. This is especially the case for those with children (see quote from Marta, section 8.1.2.2).

To a couple of participants, the negatives of living in Stad outweigh the positives and they would prefer to move elsewhere. Jacob, for example, has become more critical in the year between the interviews. In the first interview when I ask if he wants to stay in Stad, he replies that he does not know anything about the rest of Sweden, he only knows Stad. Hence, it was difficult for him to say whether it would be better to live somewhere else. In the second interview, when I ask if he wants to stay or move elsewhere, he has formed more definite views on the matter:

Yes, I want to move. Straight away, I say move. Because I want to speak more Swedish than my mother tongue. I want to speak more. I want to learn the language. That is the first thing. I am curious, I want to learn about your culture. I want something new. Sometimes, I feel like I am not doing anything new. Because nearly everybody here is from my country. Nearly everybody that I meet regularly. I don't want it to be like that. I want something new (Jacob, Stad, 2017).

To Jacob, the 'home away from home' is not comforting but restraining. He is young, curious and he wants to experience something new.

Asim is also considering moving. He differs somewhat from the rest of the participants in Stad as he is not Christian. This may give him more of an outsider's perspective, although he does not bring this up as a reason for moving. His views on Stad do not change drastically between the two interviews but they do become more nuanced. The first time we meet, he speaks of Stad as a 'ghetto'. A year later, he has experienced other places in Sweden that he considers much worse in this regard. He has grown to like Stad a great deal and has made many friends there, both Syrian and Swedish, but for the sake of integration he would prefer to move:

Well, integration is to be part of society. That means, for me, that I don't live on welfare. I may have a period where I need state support but that is not my goal. And I don't live in a ghetto. Because if I want to live in Damascus, I should not come to Stockholm. In Stockholm, I should live through a Stockholm mentality. Not to lose personality and identity but also not contradict [the Stockholm mentality]. Well, I still believe integration in Stad needs a lot of work to be better but again, compared to other places it's not bad. More could be done. Diversity is good, diversity is very good, but sometimes in Stad and in other places, less in Stad, you feel that there is an anti-diversity attitude. From both foreigners and Swedish people. And that is what I hate about Stad, not the diversity, it's the opposite, it's the anti-diversity attitude, like people living apart, why are you apart? (Asim, Stad, 2017).

Asim is guided by what he thinks is best for the children but unlike those that want to *stay* in Stad because it provides comfort to their children, he wants to *move* somewhere where the 'anti-diversity' attitude is less strong.

That family, particularly children, always comes first is a frequently occurring theme in in Land as well. Regarding the question of whether it is better to stay or to move, participants in Land were as likely as those in Stad to refer to their children's well-being when explaining their decisions. However, because their circumstances were different, the end-result was also different: at the time of the second interview, half of the participants had moved away from Land. Those who live in ABO are faced with two choices after obtaining a residence permit, either they can wait for placement in a municipality or they can find their own housing. Both Adnan and Rania were still living in Land the second time I met them. They had come there on their own accord and although they did not know much about the place before they arrived, they had grown to love living there. In the first interview, Rania was already leaning towards staying. The main reason for this was that she did not want to uproot her children one more time:

as I told you, my children like being here, they have friends, and if you change and change, they will not have this, and it is very difficult for them to find new friends. But I think it is enough for them. They lost their friends in Syria, then up north, I don't want them to be not connected with someone. It is better to be connected (Rania, Land, 2016).

At the time of this interview it was something of a dilemma for Rania whether to stay for her children's sake or whether to move somewhere where she might have a better chance of finding a job that suited her qualifications. She opted for the former. When I meet her again a year later, things have worked out quite well for her workwise, although in an unexpected way (see section 9.1.5).

Of those that decided to wait for a placement, Khaled ended up in a medium sized town a few hours away from Land. His children found the move upsetting as they missed their cousins who were still living in Land, but Khaled believes that his main responsibility is to provide for his family and that he will have a better chance to do so in a larger town. The contrasting examples of Khaled and Rania show that putting one's children first can lead to different choices for different people.

Regarding social bonds outside the immediate family, many of the participants still express a certain reluctance to live amongst many other Syrians although their opinions may have softened a bit. Adnan, who had quite strong negative views on other Syrians, now says that the most important thing is to make friends with people with whom he has something in common with. Whether they are Syrian or Swedish is less important, although he still finds most Syrian people 'too nose-y'. Hasan, who was adamant he did not want to live in a big city ended up moving to one when he received a placement there. The move had made him re-evaluate his views on big cities. They are not as dangerous as he had envisioned, and he could see many benefits to living in one. Most importantly, the big city has not had a negative effect on his children like he had feared.

One final thing to consider regarding the impact on time and place on the participants in Land is that with *time*, the participants themselves will also have an impact on the *place*. Rania, for example, has become something of a pillar of the community in Land by the time of the second interview. She tells me about a cultural organisation that she has helped to start up. Her main aim with the organisation is to teach children Arabic in an organised way. They meet every Sunday and they have quickly gone from ten pupils to over forty. Rania values language skills highly and she believes that knowing Arabic well will also make it easier for her children to learn

Swedish and other languages. They have yet to be offered any Arabic classes in their regular school and when she found it difficult to motivate her own children to study Arabic at home, she simply started her own school.

The organisation is also a cultural and religious organisation connected to a mosque located in the basement of a residential building that was also founded in the year between the interviews. Two Arabic food shops have also been established in recent years. Rania's family, and other families like them, have not only established themselves in the short time they have been there, but they are on their way to establishing Syrians as a group in Land. One can imagine a future where new arrivals to Land are welcomed in much the same way as those in Stad, albeit in a much smaller scale. With an established community, with an organised cultural and religious life, it may be easier to see the benefits of social bonds. On the other hand, some may reject such a place as it could be exactly what they are trying to avoid. Only time will tell if the fledgling community will last long-term; it is still early days, and much depends on what other opportunities Land can offer, employment-wise in particular.

In summary, social bonds clearly matter a great deal for integration. The bonds within the immediate family are the least ambiguous in this regard. This is shown not only in the negative effect being separated from one's family has but also in the sense that children are clearly a very strong motivating factor for the various choices that people make for their future. Regarding the extended family, the results are more varied, both in terms of the kind of support offered by extended family and whether one chooses to seek out this support. Whether this variation is due to individual or cultural reason is impossible to say for certain, considering the limited scope of this study. Finally, when it comes to social bonds to the wider group, the most important point is that similarity should never be assumed. Studying Syrians nationals as a coherent group is often a mistake, not least because that group contains great variation in terms of both ethnic and religious identities. Even if one narrows it down to more specific ethnic or religious groups, a supposedly homogenous culture contains both modern and traditional elements, and the differences between men and women, young and old, rural and urban, can also create obstacles for social bonds. In fact, sometimes the differences within a supposedly similar group can be so great that relationship that are formed despite these differences are probably more accurately described as *social bridges*, which as it happens, is the topic of our next section.

8.2 Social bridges

Whereas social bonds are based on some kind of similarity between people, social bridges are connections between people that are *unlike* each other in some decisive way. This section will explore such connections in four separate but interlinked parts. The first subsection acknowledges that social bridges are not only connections with ‘ethnic’ Swedes but also with people of foreign background other than Syrian. The second moves on to *who* are perceived as Swedish and *how* they are perceived by the participants. The third discusses the role that place play in forming social bridges and finally, the last subsection will be a summative section that looks at *why* social bridges are valued by the participants.

8.2.1 Building bridges in a diverse society

For a number of decades, Sweden has been a country characterised by ethnic diversity. This diversity is apparent in both Land and Stad, albeit in different ways. In the case of Stad, the participants have a tendency to speak of the town as consisting of Syriacs/Assyrians on the one hand, and Swedes on the other. This might be down to the perception of the interviewees rather than the actual composition of the town itself. When I speak to Mikael at Stad municipality about diversity he has the following to say:

There is a large number of languages in the schools for example. I don't have all the numbers in my head, but a lot of different languages are spoken in Stad. You tend to think about Arabic or Syriac, and variations of that, because it is mainly Christians from Middle East that have made their way here. [A large part] of the population have roots in the Middle East. Eh, but we also have a large Finish group that came in the 1960s. Around that time, 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. But they don't set themselves apart in the same way really, and I actually don't think we should do that with this group either (Mikael, Stad municipality, 2016).

Mikael's answer reveals that diversity can be quite a complex topic in Stad. It is clearly diverse in the sense that it contains a multitude of different languages, and presumably different ethnicities, but one group stands out amongst the rest: Christians from the Middle East. This is partly a question of sheer numbers: They make up a substantial part of the population. But Mikael's ambiguous comment about the town's Finish minority hints at something else. They too, make up a sizeable part of the population but *they* do not ‘*set themselves apart*’ in the same way. He follows this by saying

that ‘*we* shouldn’t do that with this group either’, making it uncertain who is doing the ‘setting apart’: ‘we’ or ‘them’?

It is clear, however, that there is a difference to how he perceives the two minorities. Whereas the Finish are integrated into the Swedish mainstream, the Christians from the Middle East are not. One possible explanation for this is that they are a more recent addition than the Finnish, another is that they are a ‘visible’ minority.⁸⁸ Visibility in this case is not limited to physical appearance but can also be extended to the ways in which the group has had a visible impact on the town itself. Mikael recommended that I explore the estates where some of the more affluent people of Middle Eastern background have settled. The houses there, he said, are built according to a very different aesthetics than what is considered the norm in Sweden. I followed his advice and what I found was indeed a fascinating mix of the more traditional Swedish wooden houses and stone-clad, quite palatial, houses that are more reminiscent of the Mediterranean or—in my architecturally untrained eyes—an American version of the Mediterranean.

That a difference between groups is deemed noteworthy does not necessarily mean that this difference is seen as a problem but, quite often, it is. The large, unusual-looking villas on the outskirts of Stad, for example, are not universally appreciated. According to the comment section in the local newspaper, some people believe that these houses belong by the Mediterranean, not in Sweden. Others find the *mix* in building styles incongruous and do not think that the buildings fit together as a cohesive whole. It is tempting to see the houses as metaphors and interesting parallels can be drawn to social integration in a wider sense. For now, however, we will return to the topic at hand: how a sizeable minority group in Stad has affected the perception of diversity.

Although Stad is clearly diverse, the perceived dominance of one group seem to lead to one of two things for other minority groups: they are either absorbed into the Swedish mainstream (like the Finish) or seen as odd exceptions. My walk through Stad with Maria, provided an example of the latter. She told me that every time she sees someone from a different country, China for example, she wonders what they are doing there. There was no judgement implied, she simply could not comprehend why anybody *not* from Syria (or neighbouring countries) would choose to live in Stad.

⁸⁸ I am using the term ‘visible minority’ for want of a better one. It is a term mainly used in Canada and it has been criticised for ‘homogenising experiences of different ethnic groups’ (UN 2012, p.9).

If ‘multi’ is taken to mean ‘more than two’, the interviewees in Stad do not seem to think of it as a *multi*-cultural place. Even the diversity that clearly exists within the own group (see section 8.1.3.2) is curiously downplayed. Jacob is one of the few that mentions other groups as important. He too sees Syrians and other Arabic speaking people as dominant in Stad, but unlike many of the other participants he sees this as mainly problematic:

It is difficult to learn Swedish because nearly all of Stad speaks my mother tongue. So it’s not good. Not good. What I can say is, me and my friends, most people here, maybe not friends but people that I meet, they don’t like that it is this way. A place for just refugees. They want to be together.

They want it to be more mixed?

More mixed. They like it mixed. To learn the language, to develop and learn something new. And also so that you, you as a Swede or Swedish-born, so that you can see who I am and so that I can see who you are. We need each other, we need to mix. My friends, nearly all of them, are not Swedish born but the language that we speak when we are together is Swedish (Jacob, Stad, 2017).

Jacob is eager to make more connections with Swedish people, but this has proven difficult in Stad. Almost as a substitute for this he has made friends from other countries, like Peru and Portugal, whom he can learn something new from *and* speak Swedish with. Although he has Syrian friends as well, he is actively trying to avoid spending all his time with Syrian people.

As in Stad, the participants in Land are also inclined to focus on ‘Syrians’ and ‘Swedes’ as the two main groups of interests. But there is a greater tendency to see more *multi*-cultural aspects as well. The rather obvious explanation for this is that participants in Land are more likely to be exposed to other nationalities than those in Stad. Living in an accommodation centre makes it particularly hard to avoid such contact. Not that avoiding contact is necessarily desirable. On the contrary, it can be one of the main advantages to living in such a place:

In the camp we came to know different people, we could compare between people, between the Syrian people and Afghan people, how the Afghan people live, how the Iraq people live, how the Syrian people live. You can make a comparison. This is the best part of the camp (Hasan, Land, 2016).

But the diversity in the camp *can* be a problem:

You see many, many people from another country, from another tradition, another character and you will eat together in the kitchen and you will see

the same faces in the same camp, always, always. You must keep yourself very strong to be, to not put yourself in many, many problems. It's very hard (Leah, Land, 2016).

Hasan and Leah show that the accommodation centre can be both a place of tension and a place for meaningful encounters between people of different backgrounds. Outside of the confines of the accommodation centre, the perception of other minorities varies as well. Many participants describe a reluctance to live with many other Arabic people, but some are more concerned about *other* minority groups. Rania, for example, had visited a larger city where she had seen a bloodstained syringe in a public toilet. She linked drug use in the city to the fact that there were many African people there. To Rania, Land is a safer option for her and her family because there are less immigrants there.

Leah's relationship with other groups is more complex. On the one hand she says that the diversity in the camps means that one has to work very hard to stay out of trouble. On the other hand, she has found other places where she has managed to find very meaningful commonalities in spite of differences. The church, in particular, is such a place:

I feel more at peace with myself when I go to pray. Because it is hard, when you haven't got permission to stay, and you have many troubles in your mind and you can't find something to do here. I think this is the problem for me. When I go to church and I am sitting with them and when I hear the problems from all the wars and praying with them, I come home more peaceful and more relaxed [...] [I have] many friends, Syrian, Arabic, they're all my friends. Because we lived together, and we love each other, and we respect each other. I haven't got any problems with them and they like me, and they love me, and I love them. And Eritrean people, I respect them, they got many, many hard and bad times in their country, and Afghani people, and Swedish people. I haven't got a problem with friendship. I like all (Leah, Land, 2016).

Praying together and hearing people from different countries talk about the hardship they have endured is comforting to Leah. She is quite unusual in the sense that all social connections seem of equal value to her; what most people ask for above all was more contact with *Swedish* people. Perhaps this is because social connections play a different role in her life. Since her initial asylum claim was denied, her everyday life is not centred around integrating in a new home country but around coping with possibility of not being allowed to stay. What she is looking for above all is emotional support in a difficult situation. To many of the others, contact with Swedish people

can also be understood as *social capital*: a useful resource that could potentially be converted into other resources. I will return to this in section 8.2.4.

To conclude this section, it should be noted that the tendencies described here are quite weak. The interviewees in Land *are* more likely than those in Stad to speak of connections with people that are neither of Syrian nor Swedish background but whether they actually think of Sweden as distinctly ‘multicultural’ is far from certain. A final thing to note is that time did not seem to have a discernible impact on how the interviewees viewed the matter. In other words, ‘Syrians’ and ‘Swedes’ were the two main groups of interest in both locations and remained so in the second round of interviews.

8.2.2 Who are the Swedes?

That the participants express a particular interest in connections with Swedish people is hardly an unexpected finding. It seems like a rather ‘natural’ focus to have when new to the country. But this also relates to a different question that could be more problematic: *who* do they consider Swedish? This question will be tackled in the first subsection below. The second subsection revolves around *what* is considered Swedish, how the participants view Swedish people, and how they believe that Swedish people view them.

8.2.2.1 Becoming a Swede

If a person is new to a country, as all the participants are, the move is unlikely to have had much of an effect on their identity. When you move to a new country later in life, it can also feel like it is too late in life to change. Asim talk about this and many other aspects relating to Swedish identity:

Citizenship for me is about responsibility, and participation. So I want to become Swedish, I want to contribute, I want to pay back my dues. I have nothing except being thankful to Sweden. And to the people. So, how Swedish I will be I don’t know. I am old. I am 48 years. I am very flexible and I think I will integrate well but how Swedish I will be, I don’t know. I don’t think I will be socially Swedish. I will never act socially as Swedish. I think I am warmer. I am warmer than Swedish people. But I know that my kids, they will integrate faster and that’s my goal. They will be more Swedish than I am maybe. What is beautiful about Sweden is you don’t have to be 100% Swedish [...] I don’t know what is Swedish. If Swedish is loving Sweden, I am already Swedish. If Swedish is loving the system, the social system, I am already Swedish, if Swedish means speaking the language then I need more time. If Swedish means I don’t care about my daughter’s relationships with boys, then I will never be Swedish. If Swedish means that if you are my friend and I am cold to your suffering than I will never be Swedish. You know, I

don't know what is Swedish. So in some aspects I am already Swedish and in other aspects I will never be Swedish. But that is part of this multicultural society I think which makes it beautiful (Asim, Stad, 2017).

The above quote is lengthy, but it brings up many interesting aspects, some of which are unique to Asim and others which are more generally held views. Some things are familiar from previous chapters. For example, Asim's views on citizenship and his wish to 'pay his dues' and contribute is a common theme throughout the interviews (see Chapter 6). That the participants often emphasise the importance of learning Swedish has also been discussed before (section 7.1) although it is quite rare that it is brought up as an important part of one's identity.

Age as a factor when it comes to integration is something that a few of the older respondents bring up. Even more frequent is the idea that the important thing is that their *children* integrate well. Asim wants his children to adapt to Swedish society but there are some limitations: he alludes to a cultural difference in the way Swedish people view sexuality by saying that he will never stop caring about his daughter's relationship with boys. Although he is the only one to use this example, many of the parents worry about bad influences on their children (criminality and drugs in particular).

One final theme that can be picked out from Asim's quote, that appear in several other interviews as well, is his contrasting views on the Swedish *system* and the Swedish *mentality*. An expressed love for Sweden as a country and its particular social system is common in the interviews, as is the idea that this love makes one feel (at least partially) Swedish. Asim's views on Swedish mentality are more ambiguous. He describes himself as 'warm' and Swedish people as 'cold' and he is not alone in doing so. Using 'warm' and 'cold' to describe people and ways of acting is quite common. Although 'cold' sounds quite harsh, it should be noted that it is typically taken to mean 'shy' and 'reserved'. Most participants still find Swedish people quite friendly.

Asim stands out from the rest of the participants as he is the only one that described Sweden as a *multicultural* society. The 'beauty' of this, he says, is that one does not have to be '100% Swedish'. Other participants in Stad often refer to relatives who have lived in Sweden most or all of their lives as 'almost Swedish'. Looking at it from Asim's perspective, describing long-term residents in Sweden as 'almost Swedish' could be seen as a positive sign of 'multiculturalism' at work; a sign of freedom of choice, rather than a sign that 'Swedishness' is too narrowly defined. Although one could argue that this is the case, there are also stories that contradict this view

somewhat. In my interview with Adnan, the unequal status of the ‘almost Swedish’ and the ‘ethnic Swedes’ becomes obvious. When I ask what integration means to him, he replies that he wants to speak of what he sees as an integration problem:

There is, I have noticed, a person that work for the integration section at the municipality. He is Arabic [...] I have noticed the same problem in [other places] How can I have integration in Swedish society with these people? Do you know what I mean? I need Swedish people, Swedish people who are specialised [...] Syrian people have many different types. Good, bad and in between. But specialised people can deal with them all. Because they understand how people think. They have studied, they are experts, they have experience [...] If he has a cultural background, or a religious background, he should not work with integration. That is the first. The second is that he has never studied and has no experience with the science of integration. How to deal with different people (Adnan, Land, 2017).

Part of the problem, as Adnan sees it, is that conflicts in the Middle East might affect how the integration officer deals with people from different backgrounds. This lack of trust may be understandable, but it is still interesting he assumes that ‘Swedish people’ can easily take a neutral position, one without ‘cultural’ or ‘religious’ background. Only Swedish people, or Swedish experts to be precise, can teach him about integration.

The unequal status that is implied in Adnan’s quote is apparent in other interviews as well, especially in Land. The question of identity is not a recurrent theme per se, but how one is perceived by others when one is not ‘100% Swedish’ is: many interviewees do feel that they are treated differently because of their background. In other words, being ‘almost Swedish’ could be a sign that one is not fully accepted as a member in Swedish society.

8.2.2.2 Swedes: willing helpers but reluctant friends

In Stad, the difficulty in meeting Swedes is often described as one of the main disadvantages of living there. However, this difficulty is typically ascribed to the location itself and the segregation it entails, *not* to any inherent quality in Swedish people who they tend to describe as ‘kind’ and ‘friendly’.

In Land, the participants do not have a community of established Syrians to fall back on and they are therefore more dependent on relationships with Swedish people for their integration. Perhaps because of this, they are more likely to look for reasons why their attempts to make contact with Swedes do not always work out, and this section will revolve mostly around their stories. Like the participants in Stad, they too frequently use adjectives like

‘kind’ and ‘friendly’ to describe Swedes, but they also sense a certain reluctance to get too close. Rania describes a birthday party she arranged for her daughter the following way:

Yes, it was a lot of fun. When the mothers and the fathers first arrived, they looked a little bit uncertain because they are not used to their kids having friends that are not Swedish. Yes, I hear that a lot. They have friends like that in school but not for going to each other’s homes if they are not Swedish. I don’t know why because we want to be a part of this society. We want to integrate. So it was good when they came and visited me and my husband. For two or three hours we played games and did a lot of things (Rania, Land, 2016).

After some initial suspicion Rania’s birthday party turned out successful in the end but she wonders why the Swedish parents seem reluctant for their children to play with non-Swedish children. Others have found it even more difficult than Rania to make a connection. Ali, for example, describes a typical day as an asylum seeker in Land like this:

I go to the library and to ICA [supermarket] to shop something. I stay in the library for three hours in the day. I don’t meet anyone who’s from Sweden. Anyone that will talk to us. I don’t know exactly if that’s about the person or all the people. I think it depends on the person, some people are closed, so closed, I think. I don’t know if he, or she, is scared of us. When you get to know someone and you are talking to him and he can see your good opinions or good habits, he will like you or she will like you. And live with you (Ali, Land, 2016).

Ali, who is in Sweden on his own and suffers a lot from loneliness, has quite mixed feelings about Swedish people. On the one hand, he finds them very kind, ‘they always smile at you even if they don’t know you’, but he also finds them very difficult to get to know. Many people seem ‘closed’ to him and he thinks this may be because they are afraid. Ali argues that if people would just take the chance to get to know him, they would realise that he is nothing to fear.

Khaled too, says it is hard to meet Swedish people. He does not think it is fear exactly that is stopping people, but rather that it is not in the Swedish culture, in our ‘tradition’ as he puts it, to make friends easily. Hasan has also had difficulties making friends with Swedes and he wonders if media’s portrayal of Muslims could have something to do with it:

There is a distance between us, we don’t like this, with Swedish people. Maybe some people got bad ideas from the media about Arabic people. From

the advertisement, from the TV. No, it's the wrong idea about Islam. Islamic people or Arabic people. Wrong idea. We are not like this. Not like you see on the TV. We are nice people, we like working, we like learning, we like the people here, we like the rules.

Hasan returns to the question later in the interview, keen to emphasise that they are just as modern as any other people:

We are like any people all over the world. We are engineers, we are lawyers. Like any people all over the world. Not someone with a camel coming from the desert, no. We have buildings, we have everything like any other people (Hasan, Land, 2016).

Although many of the participants in Land have struggled to find Swedish friends, they generally do not attribute this difficulty to racism on the part of the Swedish, but rather to the fact that Swedish people are reserved. Adnan argues that it is precisely *because* they do not realise that Swedish people are reserved that many Syrian people get it wrong:

Syrian people say that relationships with Swedish people are difficult or hard. I think that they are wrong. Swedish people, it is not that they don't like to make relationships, but they are careful. And I like this way of making relationships.

Slowly?

Exactly, slowly. For example, if you meet a Syrian man he might say 'give me your phone number'. It's normal in Syria. But then I met Swedish people and they think it's a strange if you ask about the phone number. It's something special. I understand this point. I watched a lot of videos about Sweden and Swedish people in Arabic, I read some books. I went and searched for books in the library, how Swedish people think, how Swedish people, their way of their life. I tried to understand all this before I make relationships with people (Adnan, Land, 2016).

What Adnan describes is one of few concrete examples of the importance of cultural knowledge (see section 7.1.3.2). In order to make friends with Swedish people, he argues, you need to understand their way of life. His example also suggests that it takes time to build social bridges. If that is the case, one year may not be enough as the improvement between the two interviews is modest. In the second interview with Ali, he talks about integration and about 'being part of a community' and I ask him what it means to him to be part of a community:

Eh, to be part of society, to be part of the community. Then, I don't know. I think it has to, that the Swedish people have to feel that I am not an immigrant, I am part of the Swedish community. Somehow. Maybe it is because I have had some contact with you, I don't know, but it feels normal to talk to you, to laugh together, have a coffee or tea, a fika. But with other Swedes, I don't know how to do it (Ali, Land, 2017).

To Ali, it is important not to be seen as different to anybody else in the Swedish community. He thinks that mastering the Swedish language plays a big part in this:

If I had a Swedish person that I was really friends with, if I was with him every day, I could get the pronunciation right. But I don't. So it's difficult. Swedish people, I told you before, are afraid of people with black hair (Ali, Land, 2017).

What Ali describes is a catch 22 situation where he feels he will not be fully accepted in the Swedish community unless he speaks perfect Swedish, at the same time he will never learn perfect Swedish unless he is accepted into the Swedish community (or at least finds a close Swedish friend).

In my first interview with Zina, she too spoke of her difficulties making friends with Swedish people. In the second interview, I ask if her opinions on this matter have remained the same and she answers:

Yes, they are very kind. But they are only kind, they don't want to be more, like friends or something. They want to help, they want to talk to you. If you need something, if they can help you. They don't want to be friends or close friends or... That is what I feel here (Zina, Land, 2017).

Zina is perhaps a little bit more disheartened than some of the other participants, but the sentiment is far from uncommon: most do describe Swedes as very *helpful* and very *kind* but that it is difficult to move beyond that. Ali's statement that Swedes are 'afraid of people with black hair' indicates that he has experienced some xenophobia from Swedish people but neither he nor any of the other participants describe encountering outright hostility. This last point applies to those that live in Stad as well.

Part of the problem, I suspect, is that being an asylum seeker, or a new resident, creates a certain dynamic in the interaction with Swedes where one party, the asylum seeker, is seen as in need of help and the other party, the Swede, takes on the role of helper. A certain level of independence may be required in order to meet as equals, and potential friends. Rania has started working in a preschool when I interview her the second time. She believes that this has helped her socially. Not only has she made friends in work but

she feels that people in general look at her in a more positive light because she has a job: it is a sign that she wants to contribute to society and ‘not sit at home, not study or work and live on social welfare’.

These last two sections have explored two topics relating to how the respondents define and perceive ‘Swedishness’. The first of two dominant themes identified is that Swedishness is rarely described in multicultural terms but is closely tied to Swedish ethnicity. The second is that the participants in both locations generally have a positive view of Swedes but, for different reasons, they struggle to make connections with them. The following sections below will focus more closely on the importance of place. These sections will also show that, despite the stated difficulties, not all participants have been unsuccessful in forming social bridges.

8.2.3 Where are the Swedes?

When the different forms of housing for asylum seekers are discussed, the possibility of building social bridges is typically brought up as a crucial difference between ABO and EBO. Although not all EBO residents live in segregated areas, enough of them do for it to be considered a pattern and a potential problem. Hence, one argument in the debate is that if asylum seekers were to live in ABO instead, which is typically in rural areas that are less segregated, the likelihood of forming social bridges would be higher. But the comparison between ABO and EBO does not end there. One government report on integration, for example, states that if more asylum seekers and refugees went to ‘smaller municipalities where the *closeness and the warmth* between people is greater the learning of Swedish and integration will be quicker’ (SOU 2003: 75 p. 49, my translation and emphasis). Not only are rural places less segregated, this report suggests, but the *mentality* of people there is different and, supposedly, more conducive to integration.

8.2.3.1 Land: networks closed to new members

It is far from certain that the participants in Land would agree with the views stated above. Segregation *does* exist in rural areas, albeit in a different form. Living in an accommodation centre the asylum seekers are clearly separated from the rest of the population and it is highly doubtful that this somehow enables contact. Living in ABO apartments might be an improvement but sometimes these apartments are in such isolated areas that there are very few people there to make contact with. Although the participants in Land are perhaps more fortunate than most since both the accommoda-

tion centre and the majority of the ABO apartments are quite centrally located, the evidence that the participants find the local particularly welcoming is inconclusive at best.

When Zina speaks about the major differences between people from the countryside and people from cities in countries like Syria, she makes a point out of saying that Syria is not like Sweden in this regard (see quote section 8.1.3.3). In a different part of the interview, however, she makes it clear that she *does* see a difference between rural and urban people in Sweden, and that she finds people in bigger cities more welcoming. She lived in a big city before coming to Land and she describes the difference as follows:

When I was in [the city], I knew everything. Because you meet a lot of people. Even when you are just walking around [...] Swedish people came and talked to me ‘Where are you from?’ Yeah, they are so kind. When they see someone needs help, they help. And from every simple thing they said, you know how they think. If you concentrate on everything, how they move, how they behave, simple things, you will know how they think. Yeah, how they respect the rules, how they, even if no one sees them they follow the rule. They’re not like ‘ok, no one sees me’, no they respect the rule. And that’s what I like in Sweden. They respect every person, the rules, the society even. They don’t, they are not racist, they don’t have, eh, difference between like rich people and poor people. They don’t look at them like bad people. They are so kind. [...] but if you walk around [in Land] you will see maybe two persons, three, four. Also, in small places, it is hard to find friends. Like Swedish people, they grew up here, and they have like their own friends. They go to school and come back home and then, yeah, it’s hard to meet new people. If I see maybe four people sitting there, I cannot go and say ‘hi, I want to be your friend’. But when I was in [the city], *they* came to *me*, they talked to me (Zina, Land, 2016).

To anybody that has been to the city in question, Zina’s impressions of it may seem somewhat romanticised. Perhaps it is, but there is no doubt that her experiences with people there were more positive than in Land. Apart from her impression that people are friendlier and more open in the big city, the sheer *number* of people was also a positive. Just by observing people in the city she says she learnt a lot about what Swedish people are like.

Zina is still living in Land at the time of the second interview, but she has recently found out she has been offered a placement in a town not far from the city where she previously lived. I ask her if things have got any easier in Land in the year that has passed, and she replies:

No, and that is why I am afraid to move. I hope that it is better, you know here in Land, it is not a big place so you will find that all the neighbours and all the students, they all know each other. So they have their own groups like. Their own friends. So they don't like to deal with new people. Maybe they are afraid, there has been a lot of problems in the last two years (Zina, Land, 2017).

Zina is hoping that the larger town she is moving to will be better than Land but there are no guarantees and she is worried about her future. One downside to living in an uneventful small town is that any problem that does occur tend to get a disproportionate amount of attention. Zina says 'a lot' has happened in the nearly two years she has lived there but she mainly speaks about one specific incident that made the local news. A fight broke out in her school and police were called. When the police arrived, some of the youths started throwing rocks at them. Zina emphasises that it was not just Syrians involved both many different nationalities, including Swedish. But she is worried that Swedish people will see it as a 'refugee problem':

What I am sad about is that some of the Swedish people think that because of what happened in the school, because of those people, everybody that comes to Sweden is like that.

In an attempt to comfort her, I say that not all Swedish people see it that way and she continues:

I know. But then it makes me feel uncomfortable to deal with new people. It makes me... sometimes I don't know how they think. Maybe they will think that I am, if I am nice to them, they will think that I want something from them. That makes me a little afraid to deal with people here (Zina, Land, 2017).

This feeling of being afraid to make contact because she is worried that Swedish people have preconceived notions about her is not something that Zina experienced before when she lived in a bigger city. The time she has spent in Land has had a negative impact on not just her views of Swedish people but also her own self-confidence.

In the year that passed between the two interviews, some of the participants in Land moved elsewhere. Hasan and his family moved from Land to a big city. He sees advantages and disadvantages with both places but, like Zina, he finds it slightly easier to make contact with people in the big city. Hasan thinks this might be because they are more used to people from different backgrounds. For other 'movers', the move meant re-evaluating their time in Land. Kareem, for example, is in the process of moving back to Land

after some time in a larger city. Khaled, who was quite pessimistic about his chances of making friends in Land when I first met him, has discovered that social bridges are not easier in a larger town. People seem even more scared of immigrants, he says. Unlike Kareem, Khaled does not want to move back to Land. He has less spare time now, and because he wants to focus on finishing his studies as quickly as possible, he does not think that having few friends is necessarily a bad thing.

Rania is one of those who decided to stay in Land. She likes it there, partly because it is a small place, but to her the size of the town impacts on social interactions in negative ways as well. Rania is from a big city in Syria and in the first interview, she made the surprising statement that the smaller a place is, the more like Syria it is. What she meant was that people in smaller towns are more 'connected' as families. Adults are, for example, still in close contact with, and typically live nearby, their parents. Rania can see this 'connectedness' in Land, but says it was even clearer in a smaller place in northern Sweden where she previously lived. Although she likes this way of life, she is not entirely sure how she fits into it. Like Zina, she has also noticed that people in Land belong to firmly established groups that are hard for a newcomer to join:

I spoke to my colleague [and her family] about this a little bit [...] they said that they came to Land two years ago. They were living in [another small town] and when they moved here, they noticed that these families spend most of their time together and those families spend their time together. And these ones and those ones. And I noticed that too. Because during the week no one had time and at the weekend everybody spent time with people that they know for many years. Yeah. That's the way it is. Sometimes I hear that some people are afraid to make new contacts and spend time with new people (Rania, Land, 2017).

Rania's friend from work is Swedish but she has similar problems fitting in. This shows that the unwillingness to connect with someone new does not have to be based on some form of ethnic or cultural prejudice. Although it is unlikely that Land is completely spared from such prejudice, it is not a dominant theme in the interviews. It should also be noted that some participants do not see a difference at all, and they do not find the people of Land more *or* less welcoming than in other places.

8.2.3.2 Stad: Lack of contact as a result of segregation

As I mentioned in previous sections, the participants in Stad generally acknowledge that it is difficult to meet Swedish people, but they are less

likely than those in Land to explore reasons why. Segregation is seen as the main obstacle to contact and those that would consider moving elsewhere typically give one of the following reasons: either that it would be easier to find housing elsewhere *or* that they would like to live somewhere less segregated. The concentration of people of similar background to themselves gives the Stad a 'home away from home' feel that some appreciate, and others mainly see as a problem.

It is important, however, that the issue of segregation is not exaggerated: Stad is *not* a completely divided city consisting of separate parts that never connect. Some parts are mixed. The town centre for example, where many asylum seekers spend their days looking for something to do with their time, is more mixed than it sometimes appears in the participants' stories.⁸⁹ Many participants describe walking around Stad, hearing Arabic or Syriac wherever they go. This may be true, but one *also* hears a great deal of Swedish. Some residential areas are also mixed and not all the participants live in segregated areas dominated by other Syrians. Maria, for example, describes her area as 'mostly Swedish' and her Swedish neighbours as very 'sweet' and helpful. I ask her in what way, and she replies:

My neighbour, she is an old woman. And she is always saying 'welcome, welcome!' and one time she gave us a cake. She made a cake and gave it to us. She is so cute. My God (laughs). People here are so sweet. They make us forget all those bad things about Syria (Maria, Stad, 2016).

Although Maria's relationship with her neighbour can hardly be described as a close friendship it *is* friendly and it shows that connections like these do exist in Stad. Asim has also established contact with his elderly neighbour. He initially lived with a friend in an area that he describes as consisting of '90 % foreigners' but his next-door neighbour, an 83-year old woman, was Swedish. He calls her 'mormor' (Swedish for grandmother) and they quickly went from being neighbours to being friends. Her grandchildren were sceptical of him at first, but after only a few months he was 'part of the family'. They celebrated Christmas together and he knows 'all the intimate secrets' in the family: 'If [the granddaughter] has had a fight with her boyfriend, I know why'. Asim ends up moving in with 'mormor'

⁸⁹ That many see going into the town centre as an important part of their everyday life is seen not least in the fact that they see a bus card as a necessity even though it takes up nearly half of their monthly allowance. This contradicts the common portrayal of EBO residents as being completely isolated in their ethnically segregated suburbs.

shortly after the first interview. Sadly, her health deteriorates after that and when I meet him again, she has passed away. He is still living in her house, but he is moving to a different house soon. When he was looking for a place to stay, one requirement was that he wanted to live with Swedish people. What he found was a room in a house owned by a Swedish couple that votes for Sweden Democrats (SD).⁹⁰ Their first question when he arrived to view the place was: ‘Are you a Muslim?’ He answered that he is from a Muslim background but that he is ‘atheist in his convictions’. This seemed to please them, and he was offered the room—an offer that he accepted. Asim likes the couple and even though he does not agree with all their views he does not think they are bad people. He thinks it is important not to avoid contact with people because they have opinions that he does not agree with:

I know that from mormor’s family, they are only misinformed [...] her granddaughter, she is one of my best friends. And she is outspoken with her racist remarks, she is not afraid to say something outrageous and really racist, but I have noticed that every time when she is talking about Arabs or Muslims in general, she is using these racist terms, but when she is talking about a particular Muslim or particular Arab, she is very positive. I told her ‘you see this is a problem when you talk about us in general, but when you know somebody, you like him! And you accept him. And he even becomes your friend, and *I am your family*’. So maybe it is that you don’t know, that you are misinformed. So that was a big lesson to me, when I know someone who is a supporter of SD, I don’t take this defensive position immediately. I try to know the person. And my criteria is always one criteria, I don’t care if he is really a racist or not, I ask myself, is he capable of committing a hate crime? If I come to the conclusion ‘no, he is not’, then he is not a lost cause for me. I can fight for him, I can fight for his friendship, I can fight for his understanding, I can fight for changing of his views about us (Asim, Stad, 2017).

Although open racism or hostility is not a reoccurring theme in either Land or Stad, Asim’s quote shows that it does exist. This is hardly surprising, but his way of dealing with it might be. He is willing to ‘fight for [the] friendship’ of misinformed individuals and attempt to change their racist views. Not everybody would have the ability, nor the desire, to do so.

In terms of change over time, there is a general tendency in Stad for social *bonds* to strengthen and although social bridges are still valued, they seem to fade into the background somewhat for some participants. Part of the reason for this is that the participants are far busier at the second interview

⁹⁰ See section 2.3 for more on the rise of this extreme-right party.

than the first. Work and studies take up most of their time. At the same time, this has led to more opportunities to meet Swedish people for some. Hanna, for example, has finished SFI and has moved on to Komvux where she is completing a few courses needed to be eligible to apply to a university in Sweden.⁹¹ Unlike classes for asylum seekers and SFI, Komvux is not specifically targeted at new arrivals to Sweden and some of her classmates are now Swedish. Improved language skills can also facilitate social bridged but finding someone to speak Swedish to in Stad is still a problem. When Sara's Swedish improved, she started using an app that has put her in contact with a number of people in different parts of Sweden.⁹² Unfortunately, none of them live in Stad, but she has visited a couple of people that live in nearby towns.

In terms of finding opportunities to meet, many of the interviewees in both places hold out hope that when they find work, they will also find Swedish friends. Based on the experience of those that have managed to find employment, there is at least some cause for optimism. Kristina has found work in a preschool and she believes that this has helped her interaction with Swedish people:

Yes, [making contact with Swedish people] is hard. Not because they are Swedish and we are Syrian but because we cannot talk to them. Language is preventing us from spending time with them. But then, when I started spending time with people in work, they were really nice, and I really like being with them. And it means that I get an understanding of how they live, how they think (Kristina, Stad, 2016).

The quotes from Maria and Asim show that that neighbourhood segregation in Stad is not so extreme as to make social bridges impossible. But apart from these cases, there is little to suggest that neighbourhood would be the best place to meet, regardless of the level of segregation: a Swedish neighbour is by no means a 'guaranteed' social bridge. In fact, few of the interviewees in either Land or Stad mention neighbours as people that they have meaningful contact with. If the neighbourhood is not the best place to meet Swedes, and many participants have yet to find a job, this raises the question: where do people meet?

⁹¹ Komvux is a form of secondary education for adults who, for various reasons, have not completed their primary or secondary education.

⁹² The app is called 'let's talk' and it aims to bring new and established people together. It was released in 2016 as part of a marketing campaign for Swedish throat pastille Läkerolet (the brand's slogan is 'makes people talk').

8.2.3.3 Building bridges through organisations

The answer to the question above is often that they meet through different types of organisations, especially those that offer activities to asylum seekers. Many of the participants in Land meet Swedish people mainly when attending classes in the church or in one of the other associations. Although these meetings are much appreciated, there is an unevenness to these relationships. Hasan calls one of the volunteer teachers his only Swedish friend, then he jokingly adds: ‘50 people have her as their only friend!’. Two of the women, Leah and Rania, have formed friendships with volunteers from the church that go beyond a teacher-pupil relationship: they meet up outside class as friends. When I ask if the difference in age (most of the volunteers are retired women) is an issue Leah answers:

[In Sweden] I feel that older women, I can’t feel the age difference between us. Because they are very friendly, they never make us feel that we are younger than them and they know more than us. Women in Syria, when they are old, they always think that they know more than you. You never know anything, they know. But here, they are very friendly, I don’t feel that they are older women, they are my friends (Leah, Land, 2016).

That many of the volunteers that are involved in services directed at asylum seekers are retired is not something that is specific to Land, although the average age here *is* significantly higher than the national average. The interviewees rarely express that this is a problem. Leah, who is quoted above, is not alone in thinking that a friend is a friend regardless of their age. Curiously, other interested parties *do* see it as a problem. Land municipality is taking part in an integration project that is meant to bring Swedish people and newly arrived refugees together. When I attend an asylum network meeting in Land, the project is discussed as they have noticed a problem. The idea is to match people of similar ages and interests with each other. However, all the Swedish people that have signed up are of retirement age whereas most of the refugees are in their thirties. Judging by the participants stories, it is far from certain that they would find the age gap an issue. Ali can see a different problem, however. He is acquainted with the woman who runs the project and he explains that he has told her the project will never work. When I ask him why he says ‘because it is not mutual’; the refugee gets to learn Swedish but what does the Swedish person get?

In the end, seven times as many refugees than Swedes signed up for the project.⁹³ Perhaps Ali was right, but it is far from certain that this imbalance is due to Swedish people deciding against it because there is ‘nothing in it for them’. It could also be precisely because the whole premise of the project was mutual friendship that the Swedes were reluctant to join. As Zina pointed out earlier (section 8.2.2.2), Swedish people seem more comfortable when they are helping, less so when they are asked to be friends.

Whether reciprocity would help Swedish people sign up for projects or not is something I can only speculate about, but from the participants’ perspective it is undoubtedly important. It can be difficult to always be the receiver of help and many long for the chance to give something back. Kareem is one of the few that has had some success in this regard:

We were in ABF [an adult education association] and a woman came to us and said ‘who wants to play boules with an old woman and an old man?’ I said ‘ok, I can go’. I went with my brother and another friend. And every Wednesday, they said to us ‘come and play with us’. It’s very nice for us. First of all, you can speak. The old people like us because we are different. We are speaking with them, they have a new friend and they feel very useful because they are teaching us the language, they give us coffee and cake [...] The Swedish government has helped us so we must help the old women and the old men in Sweden (Kareem, Land, 2016).

Kareem sees these meetings as mutually beneficial: The older couple helps him with the language and in return, he offers them friendship and something meaningful to do with their time. In a sense, much of the interaction between asylum seekers and volunteers could be described that way. The volunteers I have spoken to certainly find their work meaningful, but it is quite unusual that a participant describe it in such terms.

Kareem has also found other ways of building social bridges through the help of an organisation. His children’s football club to be precise:

It is very nice. I like it very much. I like it, first of all, for my children. So, if they go to play football, they will have a good body. That’s the first thing. The second thing, they won’t look for other things, they are looking just for sport. The third thing, they have many friends. If you play football, for every person you make contact with another person. The fourth thing and the last

⁹³ Land was not the only municipality where the interest from established Swedes was weak. A municipal officer in a different town conducted an informal survey of all municipalities involved in the project. 41 out of 138 responded and nearly all of them had similar problems (Söreskog 2017).

one: I go with them, I fill my time, I see other people and I make contact with them, I speak with them. Eh, make friends with them. That's very useful for us (Kareem, Land, 2016),

Although the football practice is mainly for his children, it also has positive side effects for him and his wife. Because he has managed to make friends through the football club, Kareem has a very positive view of the kind of community one can find in a small town:

Ok, it's small but it's very nice. We have everything we need here in Land. Every person here is very kind [...] until now no one said to me 'I don't like you' [...] when I go with my children to the [football] practice all the women, all the men say 'Hi, how are you?' They like me, they like my wife, my children. They help us if we need help. Many times I don't find a car to go back home and they've said to me 'Ok, ok, I can bring you home, come here'. They helped me many times. That's, eh, in a big town no one will stop you and say come here I will bring you home (Kareem, Land, 2016).

If active participation in organisations is the key to connecting with Swedish people in Land—as Kareem's case would suggest—the situation in Stad is more complex. Many of the services that are directed towards asylum seekers, language classes for example, are run by people who are themselves of foreign background. Although connections formed in these organisations are important social bridges in their own right, the participants do make a distinction between 'ethnic' Swedes and those with an immigrant background and this distinction will be explored further in the next section. To conclude this section, it should be noted that organisations *can* be a way to connect with Swedes in Stad as well. Hanna, for example, met Swedish friends through the church where she helps out with Swedish classes (see section 7.1.1). Jacob attends Swedish classes at the Red Cross and through that organisation he was offered to take part in a dance project. He accepted the offer and made friends with a Swedish dancer through this project.

8.2.4 The value of social bridges

I opened this chapter on social connections by asking whether all connections are of equal integrative value. The first part of the chapter dealt with 'social bonds' based on some form of similarity that implies shared norms and beliefs. I write 'implies' because groups of supposedly like-minded people often display a wide range of differing 'norms and beliefs' and any such categorisation is always a simplification. However, it is at least plausible

that such differences are less pronounced *within*, for example, Syrians as a group or Swedes as a group than *between* the groups.

In diverse societies, it is usually not social bonds but social bridges that are held up as central. Assimilationists may argue that bridges need to be more like bonds because society can only be held together by shared norms. It generally follows that it is the newcomer that should adapt and become more like the established, but *mutual* adaptation is also possible (see section 3.2). Alternatively, if social bonds are based on what Durkheim (1893/2013) calls mechanical solidarity, social bridges can be seen as a form of what he calls organic solidarity: a type of solidarity based less on shared norms and more on the interdependence caused by the division of labour. This view leaves more room for cultural difference, but it does make labour market integration all the more important: a solidarity based on interdependence is bound to be less effective if some groups are seen as more ‘dependent’ than others.

To Blau (1977), social integration is based on neither shared norms nor interdependence. Instead he sees interaction as key to integration: If there is no interaction between groups they cannot be said to belong to the same structure. Despite talk of ‘parallel societies’, it is doubtful whether separation between different groups in Sweden is so complete that we are dealing with different social structures. That being said, if Allport’s (1954) contact hypothesis is correct and contact is crucial to prevent prejudice and hostility between groups, it could still be a problem if contact is too limited.⁹⁴

The above gives some indication of how the integrative value of social bridges is usually discussed. In the remainder of this section, we will take a closer look at what value *the participants* place on social bridges. The first thing that should be noted is that if one expects to find more consensus on this level than on the theoretical macro level, one will be disappointed. There is one topic though, where the participants in both Land and Stad are in agreement and that is language: they all agree that the Swedish language is best learnt by speaking to Swedish people. Stad is particularly interesting in this regard. Here, the participants are in frequent contact with people of immigrant background who are long established in Sweden. These contacts

⁹⁴ The group threat theory, drawing on work by Blumer (1958) and Blalock (1967) suggests the opposite: contact can increase prejudice if the size of the outgroup is seen as a threat. Putnam (2007) suggests that neither is true and argues that people in diverse societies ‘hunker down’ leading to a decline in overall social capital and trust (see Chapter 4 for a discussion on Putnam).

can be a great resource in many ways but the one thing they cannot do, according to the interviewees, is to teach ‘proper’ Swedish. Asim, for example, sees the foreign background of many volunteer teachers as a problem as they try to teach Swedish by explaining grammar and rules in Arabic, a method that he does not find very effective. The problem that Asim brings up is, of course, connected to the wider problem of segregation. This affects not only the participants, but also their children, who often attend immigrant-dense schools. This causes a dilemma for some of the parents. Kristina, for example, is happy in Stad but she admits that it has certain disadvantages. One is that her children’s Swedish suffer:

I think that if they were in a different town, in a different municipality, they would speak better Swedish. But they have learnt this pronunciation, this language that people in Stad speak, it is not like Swedish people speak. I can tell that when Swedish people speak fast, I don’t understand. But here they speak so everybody understands. It’s not the same dialect, not the same tone or the same melody or whatever it is called. Eh, it’s not the same dialect. But they learnt quickly. They are good students and they study a lot. They will be ok (Kristina, Stad, 2016).

The way that Kristina describes the Swedish spoken in Stad hints at something that is never fully articulated in the interviews. What is referred to ‘good’ and ‘proper’ Swedish is not necessarily a more grammatically *correct* version of Swedish, but one that *sounds* different and is given a higher status in society because it is the Swedish spoken by the majority population.⁹⁵

Marta has had a similar experience to Kristina with her older children but with her youngest son she tried to improve his Swedish by sending him to a different school:

Ah, he’s great. He is speaking Swedish like a Swedish person. After six months all my relatives said ‘oh my God! He is speaking so well’. And his accent, because his school is so, you know there aren’t so many immigrants there [...] I asked my relatives: ok, the school in _____, who are the students there? They mentioned many, many names. I noticed that they are all, they are not, they are not from Sweden. So I said no, I am not going to send my son there. I sent him to another school, it was far but I sent him there. And it was a very good decision. He quickly developed his language, so fast. He can speak so well. And with a very, very good accent (Marta, Stad, 2016).

⁹⁵ In Pripp’s (2001, p. 92) study on Syrians/Assyrians in Sweden, participants who had work in other European countries found that Swedish people were far less accepting of strong accents or other language ‘imperfections’.

Marta is happy with her decision to send her son to a different school and it seems to have had the desired effect. She did consider moving elsewhere, partly because it would make it easier for her children to learn ‘good’ Swedish, but she decided against it. To her, the advantages of living in Stad outweigh the disadvantages.

Apart from the question of language, the participants in Stad are less inclined to view social bridges as a resource. They do however, find them important in other ways. Magdalena, for example, argues that it is a problem that ‘Swedes and immigrants’ do not know each other’s cultures (see section 7.1.3.2), but she stops short of explaining *why* this is a problem.

That many struggle to articulate why social bridges are important should not be interpreted as a choice to live in a parallel society, however. There is little evidence that this is the case as social interactions with Swedes are clearly wanted. Social bridges may not be seen as resource as such but there is a curiosity and willingness to learn about Swedish culture.

In Land, the participants are generally more reliant on Swedish people and this affects how they speak about social bridges. They rely on Swedish people to provide information that many of the participants in Stad can obtain through their social bonds.⁹⁶ Swedish contacts can be useful when trying to find accommodation or employment but there are also some more unexpected ways in which social bridges can be seen as a resource. Rania, for example, likes living in Land but she misses some of the things a larger city could offer, especially activities for her children. Using contacts already made she decided to take matters into her own hands, and she started a drawing class for the children in Land. ABF offered the use of their premises, a woman she knew from the church agreed to act as the teacher and the church agreed to pay for materials. This is not just an example of Rania using her Swedish contacts as a resource. It also shows that asylum seekers are not simply passive receivers of help, they actively work to improve their situation with the often-limited means available to them. In addition, Rania’s insistence that the class should be for *all* children, not just refugee children, shows that integration initiatives do not have to come from ‘above’.

That her children get to spend time with Swedish children is important to Rania and when they first arrived in Land, such contacts were hard to establish. Her eldest daughter was initially placed in a class for newcomers,

⁹⁶ On a few occasions, I have myself been used a resource in this way: I have been asked to provide advice on everything from job applications to what to do if one has been scammed on ‘Blocket’ (an website used for buying and selling used goods).

something that she objected to. After a meeting at the school, it was agreed that her daughter's Swedish was sufficient for her to start in a 'normal' class instead. For Rania, this was important both for her daughter's language development and her integration in a wider sense. It was important to her children too but perhaps for different reasons. When the eldest daughter started school, the younger children were jealous: they too wanted to start school so that they could make Swedish friends. The children's keen interest in 'Swedishness', a common theme throughout, is harder to interpret than the adults'. Is it simply because it is new and exciting, or are they sensing that there is an important status difference in place?

Whereas parents are guided, and sometimes constrained, by the best interest of their child, non-parents are faced with other challenges. One of them is loneliness. When that is the case, it becomes clear that social bridges can be valued in their own right and not as a capital that can be converted to a different resource. Social bridges can also be crucial to feeling part of a community. When I ask Rania what integration means to her, she replies: 'It means that, if someone says my name, others will know who that is'. She adds that maybe she has already achieved this in Land, indicating that if one can get past the initial difficulty of building social bridges, this type of acknowledgement may be easier to achieve in a small community like Land.

As seen in Stad, community formation does not have to rely on social bridges. Nor are they necessarily preferable to bonds when the problem is loneliness. Getting to know local people could, however, help one feel less 'lost' when in a new, strange place. Adnan, for example, has a keen interest in understanding his new surroundings. He lived in a different town not far from Land when he was an asylum seeker and whilst there, he made friends with several Swedish women at a 'language café'. On a few occasions, they invited him home for dinner. He describes three of these dinners, at each one he felt that he broke a different social norm. At the first one, he forgot to take his baseball cap off. The second and third one he describes as follows:

When she finished cooking I sat at the table and waited and waited and waited. Oh it's finished, why is the food not coming to me? After some minutes she told me: 'you must go and take your food by yourself'. Sorry, because in Syria if you have a guest you must give him all things, food and all things. And, another problem was when I went to [a different friend's] house and she put the dinner on the table and she put a fork with it. I thought this fork was for me and I started eating with the fork. She went and got a

different one. She said ‘no problem’ but I was embarrassed (Adnan, Land, 2016).

Adnan’s innocent mistakes seem like minor problems that I am certain most Swedish people would forgive. To him they matter though, and social bridges are important as they help him understand the social norms of the society he now lives in. The other participants in Land do not talk as much about adapting to norms but social bridges are generally valued as a means to understanding the society that they now live in.

To conclude this section, the first thing to note is that the participants do not necessarily subscribe to a certain type of social integration when they speak about social bridges: norms, interdependence and interaction all play a role in their stories. The second thing to note is that ‘time and place’ (which got its own subsection in ‘social bonds’) naturally matter when it comes to social bridges as well. Regarding time, it is not important in the sense that the participants’ views change a great deal between the interviews; they generally do not. Instead, it is important to remember how very new to the country the participants are: even at the second interview few have been in Sweden more than a couple of years. Part of making sense of something new is trying to fit it into categories and it is perhaps not surprising that ‘Swedishness’ is defined quite narrowly as Swedish ethnicity. Time could also be an explanation as to why so few have managed to make meaningful connections with Swedish people: some obstacles to contact, language barriers for example, should decrease with time. Other obstacles, such as the Swedish unwillingness to get close that the participants in Land describe and the segregation that exist in Stad, might be harder to combat. Finally, time (and place) also matters because the needs of someone new to a country differs substantially from someone that has been there a long time. In Land, it is clear how social bridges are valued as a means to fill many of these needs. In Stad, social bridges only have one such function that clearly separates it from social bonds: as a means to learn the language.

8.3 Social links

When the goal is seen as equal participation in society, one common approach to measuring integration is to compare those born outside and inside of Sweden in terms of outcomes on some chosen indicator. In Ager and Strang’s (2008, p. 181) core domains of integration *social links* refer to the kind of contacts one has with ‘structures of the state’. Hence a comparison of the type described above could be phrased: do Swedes and immigrants

have equal access to the structures of the state? Are they treated the same way or are there reasons to suspect discrimination? Since the situation of asylum seekers is markedly different from that of new residents in this respect, both regarding the type of agencies involved and the level of contact, the two groups will be discussed in separate sections below.

8.3.1 Asylum seekers: Left to fend for themselves?

Asylum seekers are a special case as, legally speaking, they are *not* equal to other residents and citizens. They do not have equal rights and many of the services that are part of the ‘structures of the state’ are not open to them. What then, should serve as their reference point or control group? *Who* should they be equal to? Since this study is not based on a comparison of that kind this may seem beside the point, but the special status of asylum seekers bears repeating. That the few services available to them are provided by the Migration Agency, an Agency that few Swedish people would have much contact with, not only makes a comparison more futile, it also adds to their ‘separateness’ in Swedish society. How they experience their contact with the Migration Agency could still be seen as a question of integration: it is the first contact they have with a government institution and if this contact does not work well, it may have a negative impact on their future life in Sweden. This contact will be the topic of the first section below. The following two sections will deal with various ways in which the municipalities and volunteer organisations can help to compensate for some of the shortcomings in the reception system.

8.3.1.1 The Migration Agency

The Migration Agency is responsible not only for granting asylum but also for the reception of asylum seekers, including financial support and housing whilst they await a decision. Despite this, the participants’ contact with the agency is quite sporadic. Seeking asylum is typically a drawn-out process consisting of a few pivotal moments and a great deal of waiting between these moments. The first step, applying for asylum, is usually done on arrival. After that, the asylum seeker waits for an asylum investigation appointment. Most of the participants in this study waited at least six months for an interview appointment but the waiting time varies greatly depending on the complexity of the case and the sheer number of applicants in the system at the time the application is made. Once the interview has been conducted, the asylum seeker waits for a decision. This, too, can take several months.

Whilst waiting, there is usually little contact with the Migration Agency unless additional information is needed in their case. The slowness of the process and the lack of contact is a point of frustration for many participants. If there is no contact, it is difficult to know if there has been any progress in one's case or not.

Although the wait is a matter of frustration, the actual encounters with Migration Agency staff are described in predominantly positive terms. When asked what her appointments at the Migration Agency were like, Kristina replies:

It worked really well and they were really kind to us. They had respect, they treated us with respect. Everybody was happy and everything turned out well (Kristina, Stad, 2016).

Kristina has been a resident for over a year when I interview her which might explain her short and unreservedly positive answer; more negative aspects may have faded into the background. The feeling of being treated with respect, however, is one that she shares with several of the interviewees. Marta was also a resident at the time of the interview, albeit a more recent one. Her account of her first meeting with the Migration Agency is a bit more personal:

[On our second day in Sweden] we asked for asylum, to stay here in Sweden. And they were very, very kind. When I told my story, the staff there cried. She cried because it was our first day here and we looked like we came from somewhere strange. It was difficult to tell the story at the beginning because they were my first days here when I told her, when I told the story. In the beginning it was so difficult. But they were very kind, they heard everything and promised to give us a quick answer, but we understood that there were so many Syrians, great numbers which came here and wanted to be in Sweden (Marta, Stad, 2016).

Marta's description of the Migration Agency employee's emotional response to her story creates an interesting contrast to the, perhaps more familiar stories of the Agency as a rather cold bureaucracy (e.g. Norström 2004). The participants in this study mostly occupy a middle ground on this matter and respectful politeness seems to be their overall impression of the Agency. Adnan is somewhat more critical. He explains that his problem with Swedish bureaucrats is the 'cold' way in which they deal with people. He explains that he does not mean cold as in 'cold-hearted' but rather that they work in a slow and deliberate way that he is not used to. The Syrian

system may be less rigorous and fair, but it is also more spontaneous, and decisions are typically much quicker.

While the participants are usually content with the reception they get at the Migration Agency, they are not always content with the Agency's decisions. When Zina's aunt moved out of their shared apartment, Zina had to move to an accommodation centre. She was told there needed to be at least two people living in the apartment and when she found out later that a single person had moved in after her, she felt cheated. Khaled felt similarly misinformed. He made an application for extra expenses when he had to accompany his pregnant wife to a hospital appointment. When the cost of the train tickets was deducted from his allowance he was upset as he was never told that the money was a loan rather than an additional payment. The type of problems that Zina and Khaled bring up, could be due to language-based misunderstandings. An interpreter is always present at the asylum interviews but for more 'everyday' issues, this may not be the case. Larger accommodation centres, such as the one in Land, get weekly visits from Migration Agency staff. None of the interviewees in Land describe the lack of interpreters at these visits as a problem but a meeting I attended at the centre indicates that others do. The meeting, or a civic information class to be more precise, was arranged by one of the adult education associations and one of the questions raised was why the Migration Agency send staff that cannot communicate with the majority of the people there.

Most of the complaints directed at the Migration Agency are of the type described above, i.e. issues concerning their everyday life in Sweden. In one case, however, the legal certainty of the asylum process itself is questioned: Magdalena believes that the Migration Agency were deliberately slow with her adult son's case. The establishment programme is only an option for one year after registering as a resident. As Magdalena's son arrived in Sweden with a work permit, he was a registered resident from day one. His asylum application was approved one year and one day after him registering and because of this one extra day, he lost his right to attend the establishment programme.

8.3.1.2 Linking at the municipal level

The Migration Agency has no permanent office in neither Land nor Stad and going to the nearest physical office would require extensive travel for asylum seekers in both places. As the Migration Agency is the main provider

of services to asylum seekers, this clearly means access to service is restricted. In Land, weekly visits are arranged but since there are no translators present, communication is still a problem.

These limitations have created a need for other actors to provide a necessary link between the asylum seekers and the Migration Agency. Sometimes the municipal staff themselves take a certain responsibility. On this point, Land and Stad differ somewhat. When I spoke to Anna (who works for Land municipality) and Mikael (who works for Stad municipality) I got two quite different answers to two similar questions:

Even though it is the Migration Agency's responsibility, do asylum seekers sometimes turn to you with questions?

Yes, yes, that happens. I have a, two days a week, I have a drop-in reception downstairs where people can come in if they need help with anything. It could be filling in a form or that they have received a letter that they don't understand. It could be just a general question. And a lot of asylum seekers show up for this. Mostly it is just a matter of referring them to the right place, 'oh, you should go to the Migration Agency with this' or 'you have received a letter from the school that your children are starting there now, that's where you should go', and so on (Anna, Land municipality, 2016).

Does the municipality end up taking more responsibly than intended?

Yes, or, the municipality, no not really. But the municipality here in Stad refer to the agencies that are responsible, if you are an asylum seeker it is the Migration Agency, if you are seeking employment and have your residence permit it is the Employment Service. The municipality has been very careful not to take on a bigger share of the responsibility than we need because it could easily become very big (Mikael, Stad municipality, 2016).

Although the end result may not be that different—quite often it *is* just a matter of referring to the right agency—Anna's answer shows a willingness to engage with asylum seekers that is absent from Mikael's answer. One possible explanation for this is the difference in size of the two places, another is that ABO and EBO are two profoundly different forms of reception. Mikael acknowledges that there are problems with ABO as well but, as he puts it, 'at least it is an organised form of reception': the asylum seekers have a contact person and someone is ultimately responsible for the well-being of those in ABO. In EBO, Mikael argues, the Migration Agency have minimal involvement in the asylum seekers' everyday life. One could argue that this gives the municipality all the more reason to step in and take some of the responsibility that the Migration Agency is shirking. At the same time,

refusing to do so could potentially force a much-needed change.⁹⁷ Although Mikael is not wrong in saying that the Migration Agency has a very limited presence in Stad, the difference between EBO and ABO in this regard may not be that great after all. In conversation with Anna in Land it transpires that the level of interaction they have with the Agency has decreased in recent years. When she started her job in 2013, she got weekly updates from her contact person. Three years later, she would not even know who to call: ‘it keeps changing, you get a name and you call that person only to find out they have left or moved somewhere else’.

8.3.1.3 Volunteering to link

It is difficult to judge whether the different approaches in the two municipalities actually affects the participants’ everyday life in a significant way. The participants in Land *are* more likely to speak of the Municipal Office and the staff there, a few even mention Anna by name in the interview. So, in some ways the smallness, if not the ‘closeknittedness’, of the town is apparent. When it comes to asking for help, however, the Municipal Offices does not seem to be of central importance. When I ask the participants who they ask for help or information about something, the most common answer is that they try to work things out themselves before they ask for help. Phones are particularly valuable tools; both as means of obtaining information and for translating Swedish documents. As mentioned before, the individuals interviewed in this study have resources that many asylum seekers lack (such as English language skills). Because they can find the information they are looking for with relative ease, they have a level of independence that is not afforded to all asylum seekers.⁹⁸ For those who find obtaining the right information more of a challenge, the church that runs the language café and the other associations in Land play an important role. Many asylum seekers come to the café with questions and letters in Swedish that they cannot understand. The volunteers do what they can to help. For those that live in accommodation centres, the staff at the centre also serve as valuable links.

⁹⁷ Stad is one of the municipalities that are actively campaigning for a change in the EBO law, see section 9.4.2.

⁹⁸ In fact, a few of the interviewees actually describe taking on the role of a ‘link’ between the Migration Agency and other asylum seekers themselves: Kareem helped with translating from English to Arabic when Agency staff came to his ‘camp’ and Adnan says he helped many people in his ‘camp’ with interpreting the meaning of Migration Agency letters.

In Stad, the situation is quite different as the family that the asylum seeker lives with can provide helpful support of this kind. The wider network of Syrians that exist in Stad is also useful at times when more expert knowledge is needed. The Syriac Orthodox church that I visited in Stad does all the things that the church in Land does: translating documents and making phone calls on behalf of asylum seekers and other newcomers. But their help also extends beyond this: it is a large congregation and they have made full use of the expert knowledge that exists *within* the church. Church members that work as lawyers or as Public Employment officers hold regular sessions where they give advice to asylum seekers. Although the church is clearly a great resource to asylum seekers there are limits to what it can do to help. During my visit, I had the opportunity to speak to George, an active member of the church. He explained that Migration Agency has little to offer on two of the most pressing matters to asylum seekers: housing and money. Unfortunately, the church cannot do much to make up for the Agency's shortcomings. Problems with housing and money are often intertwined as black-market rental contracts are expensive and George makes it clear that the church cannot offer any kind of financial assistance. They do, however, try find small ways in which they can still be of help to families that are struggling financially. One example is the Christmas party they arranged the previous year where church members donated presents to those who were unable to buy their own (asylum seekers in particular). The church also has a room where they store food; church members can either donate or take from this storage depending on their needs.

There is one last aspect to consider regarding the 'linking' role of volunteer organisations. It concerns the fraught relationship that many asylum seekers may have with state authorities, a topic that was brought up by Samer at the Worker's Educational Association (ABF) in Stad. Samer is very optimistic about ABF's role in the reception of asylum seekers. Not only in terms of their language classes but also as an important link between new arrivals and society. Many of the people that come to Stad come from countries where the state and state employees work *against* people, he argues. They are used to state officials causing problems and they are used to bribes and corruption. Because of this, they have a difficult time trusting government authorities. ABF, on the hand, they can trust because it is an independent organisation. ABF can get them used to the idea that the Swedish state is there *for* the people, not against them. Adnan shares similar views on the topic:

The problem for the refugees, I understand what happens, but a lot of people don't understand. They think the Employment Service, the housing company, the Migration Agency, the Tax Agency, all this mean Swedish government. Because we lived, we were in a dictator country. All things were by the president's hand. So they, they grew up in this society and they think, they need, they need time to change their mind. But I think with some people it is impossible to change their mind (Adnan, Land, 2016).

Although this is an interesting point of view that may well be shared by asylum seekers more generally, it is not one that is frequently expressed in this study. In fact, the interviewees typically display a great degree of trust in Swedish authorities (see section 6.2). One last, telling example of this is when Hasan speaks about the merits of the book *About Sweden*.⁹⁹ He does not believe the internet provides trustworthy information about Sweden, but he trusts this book: 'because it comes from the government', he believes that what it says is true.

8.3.2 New residents: A fine line between support and control?

Emir works for an educational association in Land and in our conversation, he shares some of his thoughts on what he sees as central problems in the integration process. Above all, he is critical of the removal of so called 'etableringslotsar (immigrant resettlement assistance).¹⁰⁰ This service was meant to give new arrivals support in their everyday life and help them find work. Since then, Public Employment Service is solely responsible for helping new arrivals get a foothold in the Swedish labour market. Working with the individual they come up with an introduction plan that spans two years. This typically involves SFI, civic information, work placements and, if relevant, validation of foreign qualifications (Arbetsförmedlingen 2019a). According to Emir, the Public Employment Service is unable to give the kind of everyday support that many people need since they only meet with them every three months. He argues that the fact that many refugee residents attend his meetings, which are directed at asylum seekers, shows that their needs are not met. It should be noted that Emir has a vested interest in the

⁹⁹ For more on this book, see section 7.3.1. It is not 'from the government' per se but it is published by a branch of local government (Gothenburg; Västra Götaland County Administrative Board).

¹⁰⁰ The service proved inefficient as it rarely resulted in employment, but there were also more serious allegations of criminal activity directed at some of the companies offering this service and it was cancelled in 2015 (Arbetsförmedlingen 2015).

issue as the association he works for used to provide ‘resettlement assistance’ until the service was cancelled, but his argument does show that the dividing line between asylum seekers and new residents is often blurred. Asylum seekers might long for the support they will get after they get their permit, but at the same time there are residents who find that support lacking and come back to the services offered to asylum seekers.

Although the general consensus is that things improve greatly with a residence permit, Emir is not alone in his assertions that there are also areas that do not quite live up to expectations. Once an asylum seeker obtains their residence permit, the Migration Agency is replaced by a number of other government services. The most central one is the Public Employment Service where each new resident who qualifies for an ‘introduction plan’ is assigned to an employment officer.¹⁰¹ Based on the person’s interests and previous experiences, the employment officer and the newcomer will agree on a plan that will, hopefully, make them employable as quickly as possible. In terms of accessibility, the Public Employment Service is an improvement on the Migration Agency but some of the interviewees still found the slowness of the organisation frustrating, especially if they had pressing matters at hand. Adnan, for example, had a potential offer of a work placement that he wanted to discuss with his employment officer. He contacted the Employment Service and his officer got back to him two weeks later. When they finally called the woman who he had discussed the offer with, she had changed her mind.

As we will see in this section, access is not the only issue of concern when it comes to the Public Employment Service. Generally speaking, however, the participants speak of their appointed officer in neutral or even positive terms. When I ask Sara if she is content with her officer she replies:

Yes! She is really nice. She has helped me and the first time I met her she was really happy because she went to get an interpreter but I told her straight away, I don’t need an interpreter, I want to speak Swedish. She was so happy. (Sara, Stad, 2017).

¹⁰¹ Most people over 20 but under 65 that have ‘recently been granted a residence permit as a refugee, person with subsidiary protection status or family member’ are entitled to an introduction plan (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2020). Some changes were introduced in January 2018, one of those changes was the removal of ‘a right to an introduction plan’ (or ‘establishment plan’). The refugee is now assigned to an ‘establishment programme’ instead (prop. 2016/17:175). As all the interviews in this study were conducted before the change, the interviewees are part of the old system.

Sara is pleased with the help she has received from her officer, but it is also clear that she likes her on a personal level. That the relationship with an employment officer is more of a personal relationship than the formal one with a Migration Agency officer is noticeable in several interviews. Sometimes, as an example given by Kareem shows, the personal and the professional can be difficult to combine. Kareem was offered housing and an introduction plan in a bigger city. After a few months there he decided that he would prefer to move back to Land. When he told his officer this, the officer's professional advice was to 'stick with the programme'. Later that evening, after working hours, Kareem received a phone call from his officer. He wanted to tell him 'as a friend' that he thought he was doing the right thing by moving back to Land.

A personal connection of this kind is by no means guaranteed and although a congenial employment officer is certainly not a hindrance to integration, it is not a necessity providing that the officer fulfils the expected duties of their role in other ways. Mostly importantly, they need to offer help and guidance that is seen as relevant to the newcomer. Regarding this point, the results are mixed. The general impression is that as long as everything is going 'according to plan', the participants usually do not question the content or quality of the service. A possible explanation for this could be that the 'introduction plans' are less individualised than some sources (e.g. the Public Employment Service website) make them out to be: the vast majority of newcomers start their introduction period by going to SFI. Some of the participants do not have a very clear idea about what the next step should be but others do. Hanna, for example, wants to continue the medical studies that she started in Syria. Proficiency in Swedish is a requirement to study medicine at a Swedish university, as are a few other subjects, and Hanna is working her way through these required courses in a very determined way. She has clear goal and as long as the path to this goal is also clear, she has little need for guidance.

When things *do not* go according to plan, it is usually due to one of two things. The first scenario is when the 'usual' path is closed. Ali was told by his employment officer that there were no places currently available in SFI so he went to the school himself and asked. When there, he was told he could take the test to find out which level he was at and he started SFI soon after. As Ali says: 'so there *was* a place for me but he [the employment officer] wanted me to do some other activity'. The second scenario is when the officer is not in tune with the newcomer's ambitions. Ali has experienced this too:

I used to think before that the Public Employment Service was there to help us. This organisation, I don't know how it works, the Employment Service. All the suggestions that they have are things like cook, or car mechanic or, what's it called, eh, cleaner. You could say basic jobs. I don't know how they think but maybe it is just my case officer. Maybe different officers have different ways of working (Ali, Land, 2017).

To Ali, his employment officer has been of little help in finding either educational or work opportunities. The fact that he himself had to arrange a place at SFI naturally damaged his trust in the officer's ability to help. But his dissatisfaction does not end there. He has a law degree from Syria that is of limited use in Sweden. He would like to find a job or an educational opportunity where his previous experience is not entirely wasted but his officer only suggests unqualified jobs or jobs of no relevance to him.

Some of Ali's concerns revolve around the relevance of the guidance on offer and he is not alone in this. Although none of the participants question the relevance of studying Swedish, the introduction plan often contains other components that some find less fulfilling. Theresa goes to SFI but she also attends a different course. One of the aims of the course is learning how to apply for a job but Theresa feels that she is learning little of value. The main problem, however, is not the pointlessness of the course but the fact that it takes time and energy away from other things:

Eh, I think the course, all courses, take a lot of time from us and I don't have much time to study in the afternoon. I get very tired and I cannot study in the evening (Theresa, Stad, 2017).

Her daughter Hanna fills in:

So she goes to school [SFI] for four hours in the morning and then the other course for four hours. So she doesn't have much time left for studying, she wants to make more of an effort with the language and improve her Swedish. But when she comes home, she just can't manage to study. She has to help my brother with something or do some housework or something like that (Hanna, Stad, 2017).

It is interesting that instead of *giving* Theresa valuable skills, the course is *taking* something valuable away from her: time. Somewhat ironically, a course designed to help her integrate is making it difficult for her to focus on what she believes is most important: learning the Swedish language.

Theresa is not the only one in the study that finds lack of time a problem; many of the parents have similar complaints. In order to receive full benefits, they need to take part in full-time activities (i.e. eight hours a day). In

the case of Theresa, the time is filled with activities that she finds meaningless and she believes it would be better spent studying on her own. Full time activities also mean she has less time with her children. This is something that is brought up by some as a difficult transition from their time as asylum seekers when all they had was time.

It could be argued that this is the reality for most people that work fulltime. At the same time, the circumstances of someone new to the country are different in a number of ways. Kareem, for example, explains that it is not just the actual activities that eat into his time. His SFI class and his civic information class are in different parts of the city which means that he spends up to three hours on public transport each day, on top of the eight hours he spends in class. In the early stages in a new country, there is also a great deal of administration that needs to be dealt with. There are countless forms to fill in and appointments to go to at a number of different agencies. Kareem explains that he needs to visit the Social Service each month in order to obtain his housing allowance. To each of these visits, he says that he needs to bring at least ten different documents. These meetings, and the paperwork involved, cause him a lot of stress. All this combined leaves little time, not only for studying and family life, but also for making plans for the future, finding a job and more long-term housing.

Activities that are perceived as meaningless, and a Swedish bureaucracy that can be difficult to navigate for a newcomer, are not the only challenges described by the participants. It is also important to remember where they come *from*. Kristina's husband Younan explains:

One thing that I have been wondering a lot about is this eight-hour system you have in Sweden. Most people that come from countries of war are psychologically damaged, they don't feel so good inside. Eh, to put them in this eight-hour system, going to schools, to courses for eight hours. I can't get my head around that because other European countries don't have the same number of hours. I mean, people that work get time off, but we don't, not to the same extent.¹⁰² That means that people that are already exhausted get even more exhausted, it has a negative effect on them mentally (Younan, Stad, 2016).

¹⁰² There appears to be some local variation on this point. SFI schools are often closed for a couple of weeks each summer. In some cases, it is deemed acceptable to take those two weeks off without losing one's allowance, but the employment officer can also suggest alternative activities for the individual to attend.

Younan makes an interesting observation: people that work typically have five weeks holiday every year but in the introduction programme you are expected to be in attendance eight hours a day, all year around. This is not necessarily a negative for all new arrivals. For someone like Ali, who is in Sweden on his own and is glad to have something to ‘fill his days’, time off is not a priority. Also, while few escape a war completely unharmed, there is bound to be a great deal of variation in terms of previous experiences: not all war wounds are equally deep. Despite such variations, it is noteworthy how little consideration is given to previous experiences in a *refugee* reception programme.

The eight-hour system, in combination with the ‘form-filling’ required by the Swedish welfare bureaucracy, also has another effect on some of the participants: it gives them the impression that they are not trusted:

The people that work with helping us, they don’t think that we want to learn the language, they think we just want to live here, and that Sweden should give us houses and everything. That’s why they fill all our time. But then we have no time to learn (Gabriel, Stad, 2016).

Gabriel has been in Sweden for three years and he is having a difficult time learning the language. When I interview him, his thirteen-year-old daughter sometimes helps out as a translator. To Gabriel, it is important that I understand that it is not for lack of wanting or trying that his Swedish is limited, it simply takes time for an older man to learn a new language. He believes that refugees’ days are filled because they are not trusted to make good use of their time if left to their own devices. In Gabriel’s case, the lack of trust and the need to control is implied in the way the system is organised. In other cases, such as Zina’s, it is more directly noticeable in the way that her employment officer interacts with her:

I hear from my friends [...] that when they talk to their employment officer, or anyone else, they are so strict with them, because they all think that refugees always lie. Even if they have problems. Because a lot of them do that. Like what I said to you about my last appointment, I said I want to move to [a big city], not because everybody wants to move there [...] but because I know I will have more help there. I have friends, I have relatives, I have cousins that are born here in Sweden. So I know they will help me. But they don’t take it like that, ok, I feel that they think that I am just lying to move. And not only for this subject or this thing. For everything there is, there are many Swedish people that think that refugees would lie to get anything (Zina, Land, 2017).

Zina believes that employment officers are strict with refugees because they have a preconceived notion that they all lie. Understandably, she finds it unfair that because some refugees do lie, all are treated as untrustworthy.

Most newcomers are reliant on the welfare state in various ways. In order to ensure that only those entitled to services can avail of them, most welfare services have various control functions built in. This applies to the public employment service too. Their focus is on making the newcomer ‘employable,’ but a significant part of their work involves controlling that participants maintain the required level of activity to qualify for benefits (See Larsson 2015). This does not have to be a problem if the activity is valued by both parties, as appears to be the case with SFI in this study at least. When there is disagreement, however, the control function seems to trump whether the individual believes that the activity in question makes them more employable. It is understandable that such a control function could be interpreted as a lack of trust since, essentially, that is precisely what it is.

This section on ‘social links’ have focused mainly of the Public Employment Service as it is a central service to new residents, but some themes are applicable to the welfare state in a wider sense as well. The problems brought up here are shared by several, but not all the participants. Some are, as already mentioned, happy with their officers and the service they provide, and others are probably best described as neutral. Finally, we have Rania who is difficult to fit into a category as she did not get the help she expected but is still reluctant to be critical. She emphasises personal responsibility, having a positive attitude and making the most of what is on offer. Although the outcomes of interactions with the Employment Service are not determined by the behaviour of the employment officer alone, it is perhaps easier to stress the need for personal responsibility when things work out well in the end (as they did for Rania). When someone in need of guidance finds the service they receive lacking, it is not necessarily a matter of them having a negative attitude and ‘asking the wrong questions’, as Rania suggests. Also, as we have seen from previous examples, it is not always easy to forge one’s own path and the system is actually structured in a way that leaves little room for personal responsibility.

To summarise this section on social links, the participants’ contact with the Migration Agency appears to have worked relatively well. It is uncertain, however, whether they can be seen as representative in this regard. Other sources do report some access problems such as a general lack of local presence and a more specific lack of interpreters when the Agency visited the accommodation centre. Of course, the fact that all but one received a

residence permit in the end is also likely to affect their perception of the agency. A slight shift in attitudes can be observed when the participants have become residents. A lack of trust is a central to this shift. Not in the sense that newcomers from oppressive regimes find it difficult to trust government officials, as Adnan and Samer suggested, but rather in the sense that some of the participants feel that they themselves are not trusted by government officials. Since a lack of trust is implied in the control functions of the Public Employment Service and other welfare services, this experience is in all likelihood not unique to newcomers. Hence it is difficult to judge whether the belief that refugees are not trusted *because* they are refugees is, in fact, due to discrimination. At the very least, the fact that some experience it this way suggests that there is room for improvement regarding how the employment officers interact with newcomers.

8.4 Social connections: concluding remarks

In Ager and Strang's framework, social connections, combined with the facilitators discussed in the previous chapter, serve as mediators between the foundational aspects (rights and citizenship) of integration and integration outcomes (employment, housing, health and education). Regarding social links, this study indicates that this mediating 'function' is not working perfectly. For example, there are some doubts whether the Public Employment Service actually helps newcomers find employment. On this point, the study's limited ability to assess the outcomes of the introduction programme needs to be taken into consideration: only a handful of the participants have completed their programme at the time of the interviews.

The same can be said for social connections in the wider sense. The participants are still at the very beginning of their integration process, and the value of these connections cannot be easily linked to outcomes in different domains. Even when such links can be found, the limited scope of the study naturally affects the generalisability of the findings. What the study *can* say something about is how and why the participants value social connections. In this regard, some noteworthy differences were found between the participants in Land and Stad as they tended to emphasise social bridges and social bonds respectively. These differences influence some of the choices they make and this in turn could lead to different integration outcomes. In the coming chapter, we will look at some early indications of how this might work in practice.

9 Means and markers

What I referred to as integration outcomes in the previous chapter, Ager and Strang (2008) call ‘means and markers’. The domains covered here (employment, housing, education and health) are probably the most commonly measured indicators, or *markers*, of integration. They can with relative ease be converted into quantitative variables and help answer questions such as: what is the labour participation rate of immigrants compared to those born in Sweden? What proportion of immigrants own their housing? Are early school leavers more likely to be of immigrant background? If ‘immigrants’ and ‘Swedes’ differ in any significant way in any of these measures, the conclusion is that there is an integration problem.

What is more unusual about this approach is that these domains are also seen as *means to* integration. In that sense, it helps to not think of this integration framework in the pyramid shape that it is presented (see section 3.3.1). An integration process does not have to follow a particular order. For example, social connections could lead to employment, but it could also work the other way around: a job might lead to new social connections. These social connections, coupled with the sense a purpose that a job can provide, might contribute to a feeling of belonging to a certain society. These ‘markers’ also serve as ‘means’ in the sense that equal participation in these domains—at least in theory—leads to a socially cohesive society.

This chapter will discuss the four domains identified by Ager and Strang as ‘means and markers’ from the individual perspective of the asylum seeker/refugee. It will look at how both their legal status and the location (and housing) they are in affect their access to these domains. In doing so, it will touch upon their role as both ‘means’ and ‘markers’ but it will also look at the more subjective meaning of these domains.

9.1 Employment

Employment is probably the most commonly used indicator of integration. Its appeal is obvious: unlike a fuzzy subjective concept such as ‘sense of belonging’, it is seemingly easy to measure in an *objective* way. Although the enormous weight that is placed on employment is itself highly normative, it somehow appears more neutral and less burdened by normative connotations than cultural integration.

In a comparative perspective, Sweden stands out as a country with a particularly large employment gap between native and foreign-born individuals (OECD 2016). Although such comparisons can be misleading, figures that

show that immigrants are far less likely to be in employment are often taken as an indication that integration has somehow failed. While there is little agreement as to *whose* failure it is and what should be done about it, it is safe to say that the employment gap is generally seen as a problem. Another ‘fact’ commonly agreed upon is that it takes far too long for new arrivals to find gainful employment (see section 4.4.1).

Because employment is seen as such a central component to integration, the most compelling argument against a particular housing form would probably be to show that it is less likely to lead to employment. While it is not within the scope of this study to draw such conclusions—nor is the purpose to do so—section 9.1.3 offers some tentative comments on employment outcomes. The main contribution, however, lies in what can be gleaned from *how* the participants talk about employment; both in terms of what employment means to them and in terms of the obstacles that they face in this area. After an initial look at the specific circumstances that asylum seekers are in, we move on to new residents. One central point in this section is that obstacles after a residence permit often take the form of difficult dilemmas. As always, location (and housing) serve as a constant backdrop and as grounds for comparison.

9.1.1 Asylum seekers: at the bottom rung of the ladder?

Anyone looking to disprove the argument that unemployment is due to laziness and an overly generous welfare state, need only look at the example of asylum seekers for support: the allowance they receive place them far below the poverty line yet very few manage to find employment. Admittedly, passivity is often forced upon asylum seekers since many do not have a legal right to work, but this alone does explain the low employment levels. Permission to work is granted on the condition that the person provides valid identity documents or in other ways cooperate in clarifying their identity (Migrationsverket 2020d). Between 2012 and 2015, over 340 000 asylum claims were lodged (Migrationsverket 2020a). Out of those, around a third had permission to work (AT-UND), but only 2000 did (RiR 2016:32).

As a side-effect of not asking questions of a sensitive legal nature, I lack information about the participants’ legal right to work.¹⁰³ The few occasions when the topic is brought up by the participants themselves indicate

¹⁰³ In retrospect, this was overly cautious since no AT-UND does *not* mean that the person is refusing to clarify their identity. It is more likely to be due to administrative delays, at the peak of the ‘crisis’ AT-UND case were deprioritised (Fallenius 2016).

that there is some uncertainty regarding how exactly AT-UND work. Jacob is under the impression that asylum seekers are only allowed to do unpaid work placements and Hanna says she only found out recently that they may be allowed to work. The fact that few others even bring up the topic could indicate that the right to work, and how one qualifies for that right, is not communicated clearly to asylum seekers. It is also possible that they are aware of this right but that there are too many other obstacles to employment for it to have any practical significance. One such obstacle could be that employers are reluctant to employ asylum seekers. Maria tells me that she has tried to find a job but that everybody she has asked tells her she needs a residence permit to work. This could be a genuine misunderstanding, but she thinks they prefer to employ new residents for other reasons: they, unlike asylum seekers, qualify for state subsidies which makes them cheaper to employ.¹⁰⁴

Judging by the statistics quoted earlier, it is rare that asylum seekers are in employment, and the participants in this study are no exception. Only one, Asim, found full-time employment as an asylum seeker and he himself acknowledges that he is very unusual in this regard. For most participants, paid work comes at the end of an ‘integration process’ that start with a residence permit and SFI (sometimes combined with other forms of education and training). Few participants describe even looking for paid work. A few have looked for work placement and these too are hard to find. As Anna at Land municipality explains, asylum seekers are not a prioritised group:

I feel like I want to prioritise those that are going through their introduction or perhaps just after their introduction. Because I know that they are here, that they *live* here, so I kind feel like I have to prioritise them. There is a limit, of course, to how many work placements you can come up with. I mean it is not just newly arrived refugees that need them, it is also kids in secondary school. All target groups really. And generally speaking, few asylum seekers have a work placement because it requires, that it says on your LMA-card that you have AT-UND (Anna, Land municipality, 2016).¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ A Nystartsjobb (new start job) for example, is an initiative that can pay for over half the cost of employing a new refugee resident (Arbetsförmedlingen 2019b)

¹⁰⁵ An LMA card shows that a person is an asylum seeker. AT-UND is only required for an asylum seeker to work, not for work placements as Anna implies (Migrationsverket 2014b). This misunderstanding is widespread and when I asked for a clarification on this issue, the County Administrative Board was unable to give one.

That asylum seekers are not a prioritised group is also made apparent by a recent decision to remove work placements for asylum seekers from the Migration Agency's responsibilities. Since January 2017, no government agency is involved in arranging work placement for asylum seekers and they are no longer covered by the insurance that Migration Agency used to provide. The reasoning behind this decision was twofold: firstly, the Migration Agency's resources should go mainly to shortening waiting times and secondly, work placements should go primarily to new residents (Regeringen 2017a). An asylum seeker is still free to find their own work placement, but employers may be less inclined to take them on without the support (and, not least, insurance) previously provided by the Migration Agency. This policy change had no real impact on the participants of this study; by the time it came into effect most had already received their residence permit. The level of help offered by the Migration Agency before the change is also difficult to assess as it is not something that the interviewees bring up.

In Land, only a couple of the participants have had any success finding work placements as asylum seekers. The local church runs a small charity shop that is open once a week. In this shop, they also offer work placements to asylum seekers. The arrangement is mutually beneficial: the asylum seeker is given something to do and the charity shop gains valuable translation help. Naturally, the asylum seeker in question needs to speak both English (or sufficient Swedish) and Arabic so they can communicate with both the staff and the customers (many of whom are Arabic-speaking asylum seekers). Leah fits this profile and she helps out in the shop every week. So does Rania, but for her the work placement is a part of her introduction plan as a new resident. Rania also tried to find a work placement when she was an asylum seeker, but she encountered some obstacles. She previously lived in an accommodation centre in northern Sweden. While there she had a work placement in a pre-school. When she moved to Land, one of the first things she did was to enquire about the possibility of getting a similar position:

I asked at the municipal office, and they said that if you want to work with children you must have a police background check. So we sent a request to the police and they said they couldn't do anything without a personal identity number. But up north, they didn't ask for this letter. They just said they needed a teacher that can speak Swedish and Arabic and English. Back then I only knew a little bit of Swedish but I knew English. So when I went to the crèche the children helped me speak better Swedish because I couldn't speak English with the children, I had to speak Swedish [...] I didn't want to move

from there because they said they needed me, and they wanted me to stay. In the crèche. But I thought it would be better in Land (Rania, Land, 2016).

In the end Rania is happy she made the choice to move to Land but at first she was reluctant to move away from a work placement that she really enjoyed. The quote from Rania shows that whether asylum seekers are offered work placements or not could depend on the location they are in. Since Land receives many new residents as well as many asylum seekers, it is perhaps understandable that the former is prioritised. It should also be noted, that the municipal officer in Land is right about record checks: they do apply to *everybody* that wants to do paid or unpaid work in schools or crèches, including asylum seekers (Skolverket 2020).

Despite some rather persistent attempts by some to find a work placement, no other asylum seeker in Land had managed to do so. The frustration of having nothing to do is palpable in the interviews. Zina, for example, has this to say about her mother:

She can't even find somewhere to go and work for free, a work placement. Yeah, she wants to do that because she feels tired doing nothing. You feel like useless when you don't have something to do. We're not used to sit around and only talk and eat (Zina, Land, 2016).

Whilst Zina's account of her mother's predicament is quite typical, Kareem has a slightly more unusual take on things. To him it is not a *personal* problem that he is not able to find a work placement. As he puts it, he has worked non-stop for twenty years, it is 'ok to take one year off, like a rest'. However, he struggles to understand why the Swedish government does not make better use of asylum seekers:

Why do you lose one year from us? One year you pay for me, but you don't take anything. And not just me, there are many people like me. Everyone coming to Sweden must wait one year until he takes his residence permit and begin his life. So one year for every person, you pay for him but don't take anything from him. Why? You can use us (Kareem, Land, 2016).

Kareem argues that working for free would not only be a good way for the asylum seekers to keep busy and learn the language, it would also be an excellent opportunity for them to give something back to Swedish society.

Land is a small municipality and it is understandable that both paid and unpaid work opportunities are limited. Whether Stad does any better in this regard is difficult to judge based on this interview data alone. As we have already seen, obstacles to paid employment are apparent to asylum seekers

in both Land and Stad. Regarding unpaid work placements, however, only those in Land bring it up as a problem. The fact that four out of nine interviewees in Stad were already residents in the first round of interviews probably contributed to this difference, hence it is difficult to tell whether work placements for asylum seekers is actually less of a problem in Stad. Three of those with residence permits also received their permits unusually quickly, which could explain why they had less of a need to ‘fill their time’. To those that *did* have such a need, a work placement could be a meaningful way to fulfil it, as Jacob’s example shows:

I talked to [the mechanic] and I said I wanted a work placement. It is a new thing, I only started a week ago [...] I work four, sometimes five hours. But I want more, even though it is without money. Just experience. I want more because there is a person there who is a very good car mechanic, if I watch him I will learn. So I would like to get eight hours. Not just four or five. And also, if I am at home I have nothing to do so this is better (Jacob, Stad, 2016).

To Jacob, his work placement with a local mechanic is ‘something to do’, but it is also a chance to learn something new. He may not have any plans to ever work as a mechanic but, as he himself puts it, he is a very curious individual. When I speak to Jacob a year later, he tells me that he stayed in this position for two months. After two months, he got his residence permit and he moved on to SFI. In retrospect, the main benefit of the work placement was that he felt a little bit better about his situation by simply having somewhere to go during the day. I ask him if it also helped with his Swedish and he says that it was not ideal for this purpose as they did not speak much Swedish there. Sara, who also got a work placement shortly before her residence permit, had more luck in this regard. She found a position in a café on the outskirts of Stad where ‘everybody was Swedish’. She says she learnt a lot of Swedish in the one month that she worked there.

The biggest success story in Stad, however, is the aforementioned Asim. He managed to not only find a work placement shortly after arriving in Sweden, he also managed to turn this work placement into a paid fulltime position in the space of three months. Asim is a programmer and his case, living in Stad is certainly advantageous to living in Land. From Stad, he is able to commute to a larger city where the work opportunities for programmers are plentiful. In addition, not all skills are as transferable from one context to another as commuter programming. A law degree from Syria is, for example, of limited use in Sweden. Another thing to consider is that any kind of occupation that requires extensive communication between people,

teaching for example, will always require a high level of Swedish. For these reasons alone, finding employment directly relevant to one's degree after only a few months in Sweden, like Asim did, is probably always going to be the exception rather than a rule. For most, the journey to work will most likely be much longer and its 'official' starting point is typically a residence permit. What this journey might look like is the topic of the next section.

9.1.2 Residence: New opportunities and new challenges.

A couple of the participants in Stad did not have time to meet me for a follow up interview after they received their residence permit. Maria was one of them. She did, however, send me an update via email. One of the questions I asked her was what the biggest difference was between being an asylum seeker and a resident. She replied:

The biggest difference was getting a personal identity number! When I got that I could register at the school and the Employment Service, I could open a bank account, I could work and have my wages paid into the account (Maria, Stad, 2017).

A personal identity number is a central component of a 'normal' life in Sweden. It consists of a person's date of birth plus four control digits and it is either given at birth or to new residents who are staying in Sweden for at least one year. Many of the things that participants describe as out of reach for asylum seekers (bank accounts, broadband subscriptions, police background checks etc.) are due to them not having the last four digits of this number. In theory, since there are usually no *legal* impediments in place, much of this should be available to asylum seekers but in practise, it is close to impossible to find a way around administrative routines that rely heavily on everybody in the system having a personal identity number.

While a residence permit opens doors partly because this administrative obstacle has been removed, there are other aspects that are more directly tied to the person's changed legal status.¹⁰⁶ Of particular relevance to this chapter is, of course, the right to work. Unlike asylum seekers' right to work—which is limited and seems poorly understood by both the participants and potential employers—there is no ambiguity regarding a resident's right to work. The removal of this obstacle does not necessarily ensure a smooth path to employment, however. The next three sections will discuss

¹⁰⁶ Residence is tied to a number of 'citizenship-like' rights (to healthcare, education and adequate income etc.). These are discussed in relevant chapters and will not be explored further here.

some of the challenges that the participants face after their residence permit. It will start with some (cautious) remarks on how the different outcomes in the two locations could be interpreted. It then moves on to the more qualitative aspects of what employment means to the participants and how they view their opportunities to achieve what they are hoping to achieve.

9.1.3 Different locations – Different trajectories?

Although—as I have stated repeatedly throughout this thesis—the study’s findings should not be taken as conclusive evidence that one housing form is better than the other in terms of integration outcomes, there are some noteworthy differences in the area of employment that should be mentioned. In Land, only one of the eight interviewees had found employment when I met them for follow up interviews a year later. In Stad, the situation was almost the reverse. This is something of a qualified statement as a few of the interviews in Stad were with married couples where only one spouse had a job but the comparison is still relevant: in Land, Rania and her husband were working but in the other three couples interviewed, neither was employed.¹⁰⁷

Length of stay naturally affects the likelihood of being in employment and there is some variation in that regard, but there are also factors that could potentially be tied to either location or housing form.¹⁰⁸ Regarding housing form, there is a marked difference in what happens *after* a residence permit. In order to take part in the establishment programme one needs to be registered at an address in the population register. Those that live in EBO can usually register at the address they are currently living at, for those in ABO this is not an option as an ABO address cannot be registered in the population register. This means that the individual is faced with two options: they can either find their own housing or they can wait to be offered housing in a municipality. The arguments for and against these two options will be discussed in more detail in the section on housing; for now, it is enough to say that in either case, the wait is usually far from over after the ABO residents get their permit. That those in EBO get a head start on their

¹⁰⁷ Although each interview had a ‘main’ interview subject, a spouse was often present. If a married person’s spouse was not present, I still asked about their employment status. For a family unit, there is a significant difference between one and two unemployed parents.

¹⁰⁸ Three of the families in Stad that have at least one employed parent arrived in 2013 or 2014, most of the other participants arrived in 2015.

integration process because they do not have to wait for housing could help explain some of the difference seen between the two locations. Other aspects are more dependent on the location than the housing form. One such aspect was brought up in relation to Asim's success story: living near a big city brings with it a wider range of work opportunities. Several of the participants describe Stad as a town where it is hard to find employment and around half of those in employment work in a bigger nearby city rather than Stad itself. Although they generally would prefer to work in Stad as the commute takes longer than they would perhaps like, they acknowledge that Stad's location is advantageous in this regard.

In Land, opportunities for work are limited and even though it is possible to commute from Land to several medium sized towns, the larger cities are out of reach. If one is looking for a job suited for particular qualifications, one may need to move elsewhere.

The reason why the Public Employment Service was put in charge of housing new residents was that employment opportunities should be a central consideration when placing an individual in a municipality.¹⁰⁹ In theory, a person should go to a municipality that may have use for their particular skill set. In reality, housing was in such short supply that finding accommodation at all was a challenge and such considerations generally came a distant second. The participants that chose to wait for a housing placement did so partly because they found it difficult to find housing themselves, but there are also some signs that they had some faith in the system actually working the way it should. Khaled seems particularly convinced of this:

I think that the Migration Agency or the municipality, because I have a lot of experience and many certificates with me, I think the municipality wanted such a person with these qualifications. Eh, I don't know what the municipality has planned for us but I think it is really good [...] Why would I want to stay in Land when Land does not ask me? They did not offer me to stay with them. But [this municipality] is really good for me because they wanted me to come here (Khaled, Land, 2017).

A less optimistic interpretation of the circumstances surrounding Khaled's move is that the municipality was simply fulfilling their obligation to take in a certain number of refugees. He may not, in other words, be as carefully chosen as he thinks (see section 2.2.3).

¹⁰⁹ As of January 2017, the Migration Agency has taken over the responsibility for housing new refugee residents (Länsstyrelsen 2016).

Only time will tell if Khaled made the right decision to move and it bears repeating that living in ABO may cause a certain delay to the process. Three of the participants from Land accepted offers to move to larger municipalities where the employment opportunities are better. However, they had to wait at least six months before moving and once there, they had to start from scratch in many ways. In Stad, the participants had chance to familiarise themselves with their new hometown during their time as asylum seekers and they have built up social networks that may prove useful when looking for work.¹¹⁰ For some, this was a good reason to stay put in Land as well. Kareem, who moved to a larger city but then decided to move back to Land, would certainly agree with this assessment. At first, he was excited to move to the city where he thought it would be easier to find work. After a few months there, he came to the conclusion that this was not the case:

All the companies there, they only look at your CV. My CV has nothing, what can I work with? You have to start in a small town and fill your CV. After that, you can go to [a bigger city]. In the [city] you can make a lot of money working but first you need to fill your CV. You need maybe ten years to fill it. Do you know what I mean? (Kareem, Land, 2017).

What Kareem means is that it will be easier for him to find employment in Land where an employer might take him on based on a personal connection rather than what is on his CV. That way he can ‘fill his CV’ and gain valuable references that can be of use if he does decide to move back to the city in the future. Whether this is a good strategy or not depends on the connections one has established in the smaller town. Many of the participants in Land struggle to make meaningful connections (see section 8.2), but Kareem appears to have done better than most in this regard and he already has a potential job offer for when he is finished with SFI.

Two final aspects regarding the different employment outcomes should be mentioned. The first is related to the previous point on social connections and it concerns language. A potential benefit of living in a place like Stad, where there are many other Arabic-speaking people, is that a good level of Swedish may not be a requirement for employment. There are a few examples of this in the study. Sara’s father is one:

¹¹⁰ A couple of participants mention that got their job through contacts, another couple described contacting the employer directly and the rest are unknown.

He started going to SFI, then he got a job so he's working now and he doesn't go to SFI. He's working with an Iraqi, a man from Iraq, so he writes in Swedish and everything is in Swedish, absolutely. They work with advertising and design, and everything on the computer is in Swedish but he cannot speak Swedish (Sara, Stad, 2017).

Sara's father understands enough written Swedish to get by, but he does not speak the language and he does not need to in order to do his job. In other cases, speaking Arabic is equally important: Gabriel's wife, for example, works as a personal assistant to an Arabic-speaking person with special needs. Although the possibility of finding work that does not require much Swedish opens up opportunities in some ways, it also has some potential drawbacks. Younan, who has yet to find employment, acknowledges that it is both a curse and a blessing. On the one hand, he believes that his chances of finding employment are greater in Stad than elsewhere precisely because he may not need Swedish; on the other hand, he thinks that it will be difficult to ever learn 'proper' Swedish in Stad which in turn severely limits the type of jobs he could apply for. Since many other people in Stad in the same situation as Younan, one can also assume that the competition for unqualified work of this kind is quite stiff.

The final aspect to consider, is that the number of people in employment says very little about the *quality* of that employment. The need to find employment is often more urgent for those in EBO than those that come from ABO, something that potentially leaves them vulnerable to exploitation. A former ABO resident that take an offer of housing is guaranteed to have somewhere to live for at least two years. An EBO resident gets no such guarantees. Instead they need to find their own housing and since waiting lists for legitimate contracts are very long, they often have to rely on black market solution. Without a legitimate contract, they cannot get rental allowance, hence the need to accept any type of employment even if the working conditions are bad. Josef, for example, works twelve-hour shifts in a food packaging factory. It is physically hard work that involves a lot of heavy lifting, and the long shifts leave little time and energy for learning Swedish or in other ways improving his employability. He sees no other choice as it is the only way he can pay his (inflated) black market rent.

What these last two aspects, language and material necessity, have shown is that a short-term gain in the area of employment could sometimes be a long-term loss in terms of integration. In section 9.1.5 we will explore this question further by looking at how necessity sometimes comes into conflict with the aspirations that the participants have. Before we get to that, we

will look at how the value of employment can be expressed in terms of integration.

9.1.4 The integrative value of employment

Suggesting that some of the participants in Stad experience the need for employment as particularly urgent, as I did in the previous section, by no means imply that others find employment less important. In fact, if there is one thing that all the participants have in common it is that they all see employment as a central part of their future life in Sweden. Seeing employment as almost synonymous with integration is not just common in official rhetoric, it is a view that is shared by the participants and when I ask what integration means to them, employment features heavily in their answers. Theresa is an interesting exception:

If you contribute to society and do what you can, that is a good way to integrate. To get into and kind of become part of society. Even if you cannot work outside of your home. To take care of your children and your family is also work that is good for society. To make sure your children are raised in a good way (Theresa, Stad, 2017).

Theresa is alone in bringing up this kind of unpaid labour as important way to contribute to society. She is speaking from her own experience of struggling to make time for both the introduction programme and family life (see also section 8.3.2). It is perhaps no coincidence that it is a woman that brings this up as this type of work is predominantly done by women, but it should be noted that a few of the fathers in the study also mention that they find this balance difficult. One aspect from Theresa's quote that can be applied more generally to the participants' view of integration is that it is about *contributing* to society. This connects to what was discussed in chapter six as their perceived need to 'pay back a debt'. There is a great sense of gratitude to Sweden as a country for helping them in their time of need and many express a very strong need to give something back. The perhaps most obvious way to do so is through employment and paying taxes. Jacob explains why it is so important to him to pay taxes:

The taxes are high here. In my country we have taxes too but here they are very high. But I agree with this, if you want my opinion. Nearly all my friends say 'they are too high!', But I say 'look!', you have trains every 15 minutes, buses that show up on time, there is free childcare, free schools. Many things, if you don't work there is social welfare, there are many things. If you are a pensioner, and your children, your son or daughter, can't take care of you,

there is a house where you can stay and they will help you when you are old [...] so that is why the taxes are high. It will all come back to you, I say to my friends, it will all come back to you (Jacob, Stad, 2017).

After a few months in Sweden, Jacob came to appreciate many of the things that he found different about the country. He soon realised that many of those things were built on taxes. To him, paying taxes is not just an unfortunate side effect of having a job but it is a way to contribute to a model of society that he values highly.

Apart from making a contribution to society, employment is also seen as important to integration as it provides a meeting place for people of different backgrounds. In Stad, where the participants often live in segregated areas, such meeting places are otherwise rare. Kristina says it can be difficult to meet Swedish people, but she has managed to do so through work (see also section 8.2.3). Her nephew, who has lived in Stad all his life, attends the interview and he wants to give his take on things:

I would like express my own point of view, it is that what it all comes down to is that you have to enter the labour market somehow, it is only there where you can mix, where different nationalities mix. The thing with Stad, and places like [suburb in Stad] is that it is made up almost entirely by Syrians, Assyrians and Syriacs. The same kind of nationalities. You don't get in [to society] the same way [...] this is a big problem for integration. You have to get in somehow. Like [Kristina] for example, she entered the labour market and she came in contact with Swedish people. Otherwise it is practically impossible (Kristina's nephew, Stad, 2016).

Kristina's nephew does not make it clear why he thinks that such meetings are so important but to Kristina they were valuable because they helped her understand Swedish people and 'how they live'. Another commonly brought up benefit of mixing more with Swedish people is that it helps to develop language skills. As we have seen, some of the participants in Stad mainly speak Arabic at work and they lose out on developing potentially valuable language skills. Not learning the language is not a problem only at Arabic-speaking places of work, however. When Asim tells me that he is now working for the company where he previously had a work placement, I ask about their previous condition for employing him, that he could speak Swedish:

That was when they offered me the work placement, the intern position, they told me we will teach you business culture in Sweden and we will help you with the language but it will be difficult to hire you now because you don't speak Swedish and it is very important when we deal with clients. Yeah, that

was a disappointment because it didn't, nobody cares about Swedish, we have all the documentation in English, and when we have meetings I beg them to speak Swedish but they insist, I am the only foreigner but they insist on speaking English, and the whole process is managed with English language, so this is, this was a very big disappointment (Asim, Stad, 2017).

Asim is content with his job. In other words, he does not need to practise the language in order to move on to better employment. To him learning the Swedish language is simply an important part of living in Sweden. This is a point that is easily forgotten about when too much focus is placed on employment. It gives the impression that everything else simply serves as a means to find employment. This is also relevant to other domains, especially social connections. If too much focus is placed on the instrumental value of such connections (i.e. that social contact can lead to employment) one might forget that social connections can have a value in their own right. Adnan, for example, does not have many friends in Land but he is optimistic that once he start working he will make more friends. Friends are like chains he says, if he gets to know one person in work, that person can create a 'link' to other new friends. Adnan, and many others with him, speak of social connections as 'friends' not as social capital that can be converted into other resources. To him, it is employment that works as a means to an end (friendship). Treating employment as both a *means to*, and a *marker of*, integration can in other words make a great deal of sense. Also important is that while the participants reflect on their role in wider society by speaking of how they can *contribute*, employment is also about achieving a certain quality of life. Employment statistics say little about what a 'good life' is as it is highly dependent on the subjective experience of the individual. The final section on employment will give some indication of what employment means to the participants on a more personal level.

9.1.5 New beginnings: status loss and reinvention.

Starting a new life in a new country can be a daunting task. Much has been said about the poor outlook for unskilled refugees in a Swedish labour market that mainly require highly skilled labour (see section 4.4.2), but coming to Sweden with qualifications, like most of the participants in this study, can be equally challenging: what does one do, for example, if one's qualifications prove useless in this new context? If one cannot find work doing what one is trained to do, does one settle for something less?

As the example of Asim shows, some individuals' qualifications are fairly easy to transfer from one context to another. For many others, it is a much

longer process. Many occupations require a certain level of Swedish and how long it takes to reach this level, indeed whether one is able to reach it at all, naturally varies depending on the individual's ability to learn a new language. Learning a new language is not something that gets easier with age and this is definitely something that the older participants struggle with more. Another obstacle that one needs to get past is that evaluation of one's degree, a process that is not always straight forward. Once that is done, one may also need to supplement the degree with additional university studies in Sweden for at least a year or two. Of course, to even be eligible to attend Swedish university one first needs to pass the required Swedish courses.

Taking all this into consideration, the process from the first day in Sweden to actually working in one's chosen profession could span many years. For some of the participants, this is not a viable option. Josef, who works long shift in a factory in order to pay his rent, is a qualified pharmacist but he has little hope of ever working in that field in Sweden. Age is also a factor. Josef is in his late fifties and he would be close to retirement age by the time he finished his studies if he went down that route. Regarding age, there is also an interesting gender aspect. Many of the couples interviewed have a significant age difference. Although it goes against the general tendency that refugee men are more likely to be employed (see section 4.4.1), in some cases it could make it easier for the wife than the husband to both learn the language and enter the workforce. Gabriel's wife is ten years younger than him and she is working while he is not. Kristina and her husband are in a similar situation. Kristina studied economics at university in Syria, but she spent most of her adult life there as a housewife. She now works in a pre-school and although she has little use for her degree there, she enjoys her work.¹¹¹

The need to find a job quickly may differ in urgency but it is clearly felt by most participants. Those in EBO cannot stay with relatives forever; those that come from ABO may only be guaranteed housing for two years. The introduction allowance is also paid out for two years only, and many fear having to rely on social welfare after that. Because of their perceived need to contribute, becoming a financial burden to the state is seen as shameful.

¹¹¹ Changing from one main provider to another can affect power dynamics in a family. Darvishpour (2002) interviewed Iranian divorcees in Sweden and found that when such a change occurred after migration, it was often a contributing factor to divorce. Unfortunately, this was not a topic explored in depth in these interviews.

More importantly, however, it is difficult to live a ‘good life’ on social welfare: with very few exceptions, employment pays better than unemployment. The economic hardship that many newcomers find themselves in has meant a difficult transition for many of the participants, most of whom come from a relatively affluent middle-class background. They had a good life in Syria before the war, but they lost everything and now they have to start from scratch. When I ask Marta what the most difficult thing for her has been in the year and a half since she arrived, she answers:

Maybe it is only for me, but it is, as you say ‘to start from scratch’. To begin from zero. It was very, very difficult. But here, the society helped us so much. Because if you don’t work you can get money. The introduction programme helped us so much. It is very, very difficult if you are new in a place and you have no money, it’s a catastrophe. But if someone helps you financially, ok, you can begin and have, it was difficult but when I began to have an income, I know that for these two years I will have money. So this gave me more hope. Maybe my situation is different from other people. Maybe other people came and they haven’t lost as much as me, so they will not say the same. There is much difference between me and other people, I know.

Marta is very grateful for the help she has got in getting back on her feet, but she still has a long way to go. Essentially, she has started on less than zero as she still has large debts to pay back to friends and family:

I want to have a good life. Ok, we lost a lot. Mm, after five years, maybe we will have paid back so much of the debt that we can speak like other people ‘When are you going to have your holidays? What are you going to do?’ But now it is very difficult. These debts are like a train behind you. I hope to, I hope to pay back all and have a future and a house, but the most important thing is to have my children around me (Marta, Stad, 2016).

A good life to Marta is in a sense a ‘normal’ life, to ‘speak like other people do’ about where they are going for their holidays. But the status loss she has experienced is not only a matter of material living conditions. It also concerns her professional identity as a teacher. She worked for 18 years as a teacher in Syria and she would like to continue this work in Sweden but when she evaluated her qualifications, she encountered a problem. Since it is not a requirement in Syria, she never studied pedagogics but without it she is not eligible to work as a teacher in Sweden. She is also not eligible to apply for the ‘fast track’ supplementary education programmes that several

Swedish universities run. She has managed to find work in a school regardless, but as a teaching assistant rather than as a teacher, and she finds this transition frustrating.

Marta is hopeful that she will someday work as a teacher again. Others are trying to make alternative plans. Ali, for example, is trying to find a way to make some use for his law degree as he is doubtful he will ever be able to work as a lawyer in Sweden (see also section 8.3.2). For Khaled, it is not a matter of eligibility but rather a matter of whether his particular skill set is in demand in Sweden. He worked in banking in Syria and he was disappointed to discover that what was considered quite an accomplished, high status job there, was just a 'normal' job in Sweden. To make matters worse, there seemed to be very little need for banking staff as it is an area that has been digitalised rapidly. 'If you walk into a Swedish bank', Khaled says, 'you only see one person working there'. To get a more advanced position in the banking Khaled would have to study at university in Sweden. This would mean taking a student loan, something he is reluctant to do. Instead he is looking at shorter vocational training offered, and paid for, by the Public Employment Service. Khaled is pragmatic about this potential change in careers, the most important thing for him is to find a course that has a decent chance of leading to employment. Several of the other parents are equally pragmatic. To them, the most important thing is that their children have a chance at a good life. Their main role is to provide for them until they are old enough to do so themselves and things like professional status often come second.

A few are even quite excited about the chance to do something different. Adnan has a degree in IT that was not of much use to him as a shop owner in Syria and it is now out of date. When I meet him the first time, he has many ideas of what he would like to do in Sweden. On the one hand, he's interested in farming work because he loves animals; on the other hand, he would love to become a translator so that he could translate all the 'wonderful books' he has found in Sweden to Arabic. At the time of the second interview he has narrowed it down to working with Computer Numerical Control (CNC) in some capacity. He finds the technology, which involves automated control of machining tools, interesting and the job prospects look good. He is faced with a dilemma though as he, like many others, has a debt that would like to pay back as quickly as possible. What he is torn between is looking for a shorter CNC operator course that could lead to employment fairly quickly or a longer, more advanced CNC technician course that would be more interesting, and pay better, in the long run.

Rania is also faced with a dilemma but of a different kind. She had a good job in IT before she had to leave Syria and when I first meet her, she speaks of her doubt that she will ever find anything similar in, or near, Land. At the same time, she and her family are happy in Land and would rather not move again. Instead of moving to suit her career, she is considering changing her career in order *not* to move:

Actually, now I think about working as a teacher, in a school or with adults. I used to be an assistant teacher in the university in Damascus. For four years, so I like this sort of work. And sometimes I think, what about my university degree? In IT? Shall I forget it? I sent it for validation in Stockholm, but for now I think I like this sort of work. Like teaching. I don't know if I can find something about computers or teaching IT, in the school or I don't know where, but what I find myself in now is teaching [...] I like doing a lot of things with computers and my career is a very good career, but I don't know if I will continue with it or not. For now, I think it is better for me and my personality to be active in something (Rania, Land, 2016).

A year later, things have developed in an interesting way. Rania has started working in a pre-school and as it turns out, it was not for want of better offers. Rania got a work placement at an IT company within commuting distance from Land. She believed her chances of securing employment there were good but, in the end, she decided against staying there. Here, she explains why:

I went to this company because I wanted to see what it was like to work in IT again. I didn't want to make a decision that I would regret later. I wouldn't do that. But then I started there, and it was fun in the beginning, but after a few weeks it was just the same job I had already done for eleven years. So, ok, I used to do it but it wasn't fun for real. It was just 'yes, I can do it' and I thought it was good to get to know all the right terminology and things like that. And it was also hard getting there. It was those two things, not just one. So I contacted the pre-school and after an hour they replied and said 'come for an interview on Monday' (Rania, Land, 2017).

At first glance it may look like Rania simply picked family life over her career: commuting to a different town would mean a lot less time with her family. On closer inspection, it is clear that she also picked a job that she found more fulfilling than the one she had initially trained to do. She was even fortunate enough to try out both her options; she does not have to live with regret or worry that she made the wrong decision. What Rania's ex-

ample shows is that the relationship between quantitative measures of integration and the subjective experience of individuals is not always straightforward. On a structural level, the fact that immigrants are more likely to be overqualified for the job they do is an integration problem (SCB 2016b). By such measures, Rania would be an integration ‘failure’. If one looks at her own perceived quality of life, however, she is clearly a success. Of course, things do not always work out as well as they did for Rania. Many refugees struggle to find employment, *any* employment, even after many years in Sweden. For others, finding employment often involves compromises that they may experience as a personal failure.

In this section on employment, we have seen how residence permits open up doors to opportunities unavailable to asylum seekers; how living in EBO in a location like Stad could have initial benefits that potentially turn into long-term disadvantages, and that starting anew can mean frustrating status loss or a chance at reinvention. The next section, on education, is in many ways closely connected to employment and some familiar themes may reappear. To avoid too much repetition, the focus will shift slightly, and more attention will be paid to the younger generation: i.e. those that come to Sweden as children and young adults.

9.2 Education

Although education may have an intrinsic value apart from its instrumental value as a means to secure employment, it is the latter that is usually the focus in studies on integration. Crucially, the gap in employment rates between native and foreign-born residents that was discussed in the previous section, is accompanied by a similar gap in educational achievements. It can therefore be assumed that at least part of the ‘employment gap’ can be explained by the ‘educational gap’. Hence, ensuring equal access to education is seen as an important integration measure.

The participants in this study are not quite representative in this regard as most have at least some form of third level education. As the previous section showed, however, having qualifications does not necessarily mean that one is easily able to secure a qualified job. This topic will be explored further in this section. We will then move on to those who did not come to Sweden with a degree but are hoping to pursue one in Sweden. Finally, we will look at the challenges that children face in the realm of education, as well as some of the challenges the municipalities that receive them face.

9.2.1 Adults finding their way

For the vast majority of new arrivals in Sweden, learning at least some Swedish is a necessity both for employment and further studies. Hence, the most fundamental form of education for this group of people is Swedish language education. Since this topic has been covered elsewhere (see Chapter 7), it will not be given further attention here. The uncertain value of a foreign degree has also been discussed already but a few additional points should be made. To begin with, one of the reasons why some participants do not see working in their previous field as an option is that the process of evaluating and supplementing their degree is simply too long. It would be beneficial if this process could start earlier, i.e. when the person is still an asylum seeker. Access to Swedish education at an early stage could be improved and the process for validating one's degree as an asylum seeker could be made easier.

Ali was eager to get this process started as an asylum seeker, so he contacted the Public Employment Service who said they were unable to help him as he did not have a permit to stay. With the help of a volunteer teacher, he eventually got his application submitted. Even with his previous degree validated though, he faces an uphill struggle. It will require several years of university level studies to turn his previous degree into something that is useful in a Swedish context. The process could be made longer still as he has encountered another obstacle to studying at the university. He believed that one could do this as part of the establishment programme, but he later discovered this is not the case. To Ali, it is incomprehensible that one gets paid to take a course on how to be a cleaner, a course suggested by his employment officer, but not to study at the university. Although he is aware that student loans are available, and that it is considered 'normal' in Sweden to borrow money in order to study, he does not want to do that.¹¹² Apart

¹¹² CSN (Centrala studiestödsnämnden - National Board of Student Finance) offers low interest student loans as well as a small grant to all students with an income under a certain level. It is, as Ali points out, indeed a popular option in Sweden and as many as 70 % of student avail of this offer (CSN 2018a). CSN did a small study on why students of foreign background are less likely to take student loans and they found both cultural and religious reasons behind their decisions. According to the Quran, it is 'haram' (forbidden) to take loans with interest and some Muslim students state this as the reason why they do not get a student loan (CSN 2018b). This could be a contributing factor to why some participants in this study are reluctant to take loans, but it should be noted that this is not something that they themselves bring up.

from what appears to be a strong aversion to borrowing money general, he is worried about what would happen if he was unable to pay it back. Because of this, Ali had to change his plans somewhat. He is now hoping to find employment as quickly as possible and work for a few years in order to support himself when he does get a chance to go to university. As he puts it, his goal has not changed but the road to that goal has changed.

Going from evaluating one's degree to actually working in one's chosen profession can take a long time. For some, it takes too long and it is a process that they never complete. Even if that is the case, simply having a degree may still be beneficial. If an employer cannot find the ideal candidate for a job, the wrong education is sometimes seen as better than no education. When Land municipality was faced with a shortage of language teachers and other forms of language support in their schools—after receiving a large number of school age children of different backgrounds in a short space of time—they looked at what skills were available in the local refugee population. Since they had little hope of filling the positions with qualified teachers, anybody with an academic degree was a potential candidate for a job in their schools.

University studies are not the only form of education available to adults and Adnan was particularly impressed with the range of opportunities on offer, and the fact that everything from adult learning associations and SFI to vocational training and universities is open to people of all ages. In Sweden, at least in theory, it is never too late to reinvent yourself. In Syria, it is very different, he explains:

In Syria, when the student is 18 years old, he must decide his life. It is not fair; it is the future of our country we are destroying. This happens in Syria. So we have a failed society. That's what I think. So we have failed doctors, failed teachers, failed engineers, a lot of failure. Have you heard about doctors that forget something in the body [when they operate]? We have this in Syria (Adnan, Land, 2016).

Having to make a definite decision on your future so early in life leads many young people down the wrong path and in the end, this leads to a 'failed society' according to Adnan. There is also an interesting gender aspect to his experience of coming from a 'failed society':

Because, after this experience and the war, I don't trust in the life 100 %. When I was in Syria, I had shops and I was very good with money in Syria, but in one moment everything woosh! [everything was gone]. I don't trust in the life 100 % so I want my wife to be better. I want my wife to be stronger,

I want my wife to be able to take care of herself. That's what I want. This I think is very good in Sweden. She can do that in Sweden very easy. Easier than Syria or Turkey or another country (Adnan, Land, 2016).

The war had made Adnan come to the realisation that it was not good for his wife, who he was still to be reunited with at the time of this interview, to be so dependent on him. He has high hopes that she will gain a sense of independence through education once she gets to Sweden. Adnan's enthusiasm for the Swedish education system does not end there. In fact, his faith in the Swedish system is so strong that his defence of it once led to an argument in his camp:

One guy said 'This teacher is stupid'. So I was angry. I said 'Why do you say he is stupid? He is coming to teach you and your friends, without money, I think you are stupid'. He didn't understand the teaching methods. Do you understand? About the teaching methods [...] you can find teachers in Syria, a lot of teachers but no one studied *how* to teach. Because it is different. Understand? In Syria, maybe if you study mathematics or English in high school you can work as a teacher. I think this is a big mistake. Because it is not enough if you study English or mathematics, you must study *how* you to teach (Adnan, Land, 2016).

Adnan's comment is interesting considering the predicament that Marta find herself in (see 9.1.2.3). She is having a difficult time validating her degree precisely because she has not studied teaching. In the next section we will get back to how her experience give her a slightly different take on the Swedish education system. For now, it is enough to say that Adnan, and many others with him, see Sweden as a country that values education very highly. This, in turn, is something they value about Sweden. For many of the parents, however, it is primarily their children's education that they have in mind when they speak of such matters. When I ask Kareem if he sees himself living in Sweden long-term, he replies:

Absolutely. Because, to tell you the truth, if I am back in my country and I want my son to study in Sweden, I would not be able to afford to pay for all my children to study in Sweden. Do you know what I mean? If I'm in Syria, and I want my children to study in Sweden, what would it cost? It would cost a lot. If I want three children to study in Sweden, I would need maybe a million dollars (Kareem, Land, 2017).

To Kareem, the most important reason for staying in Sweden is that he can ensure that *all* his children will receive a good education. His children are still too young to attend university but some of the young adults interviewed

started university studies in Syria that were interrupted by the war. Hanna and Maria studied medicine and dentistry, respectively. They had only just started their university studies when they had to leave so the thought of starting from the beginning again is not that daunting. Indeed, they are mainly grateful that they get the chance to do so. As Maria puts it:

The best thing about being here is that I can continue my studying. Sweden is opening the door for all the refugees to continue their studies. To go to the university. I want to continue my studying as a dentist. I want to study dentistry, I want to help people to have a beautiful smile! (laughs) (Maria, Stad, 2016).

Whereas Hanna and Maria were in their first year at university, Jacob was in his third year. For him, the thought of starting from the beginning again is harder. Another thing that separates him from the other young adults is that his parents are still in Syria. This makes the need to find a way to support himself more urgent. His initial idea was to find a shorter course that would make him employable quickly, perhaps childcare as he likes the idea of working with children. Then he could work and study at the university at the same time. He is no longer interested in studying commuter engineering as he did in Syria, instead he wants to do something he is passionate about. He loves sport and children so he thinks that working as a PE teacher would be ideal. Shortly before I interview him the second time, Jacob is offered a part time job working in a kitchen. He is optimistic that this means he can go straight to university when he finishes his Swedish studies.

Finally there are those that did not get a chance to start university before they came to Sweden. Zina is a Syrian citizen but she spent most of her life in a different Arab country. Living in this country became unsustainable as they lived under constant threat of deportation. They were also discriminated against as Syrian nationals. One aspect of this was that Zina was unable to attend university there because she is Syrian. Unlike someone like Maria, who is simply continuing on the path that she was on in Syria, Zina has no such point to go back to. Although determined to go to university she is uncertain of what she wants to study. Her dream as a young girl was to become a journalist but after only a few years in Sweden, she has given up on that dream: she believes that her Swedish will never be perfect enough to achieve this goal. When trying to 'find her way', Zina sees limitations not just in herself but with the place she is in. That studying at university potentially means moving elsewhere is something that participants in both Land and Stad are aware of (and willing to do). But for Zina it is more than

that. It is almost as if the smallness of Land in itself prevents her from finding her way:

Eh, it's quiet. But it is not for teenagers. It is not for people that want to work or who wants to find their future. Especially the people that come new to Sweden. Maybe the Swedish people know how to, they know their way, but for people that are new to a small place [...] it is hard to think, to even imagine things like where we will start, what we will do. You don't have the basic things to start, or to think about what you want, in a small place. If you don't know the language, you don't know how to behave with Swedish people, or the different rules from one country to another. So, it's hard to begin (Zina, Land, 2016).

In a small place, Zina argues, it is difficult to learn the language and 'how to behave with Swedish people'. Apart from this, however, she also thinks that it is hard to even *imagine* what she wants her future life to be like in a place like Land. Even for teenagers or young adults who have found their dreams, Land may not be the ideal place to follow them. At least not if those dreams involve going to university. For younger children, however, there are potential benefits to living in a small town like Land. Some of these benefits relate to education and they will be discussed in the next section.

9.2.2 Children leading the way

Unlike adult asylum seekers, who have very limited access to education, asylum seeking children have the same right to education as all other children in Sweden if they are under 18 years of age when they arrive. This, combined with children's (usually) superior ability to learn a new language, means that refugee children often get a head start on their parents; something that could put the child in situations that they are, in other ways, ill-equipped to handle. One example of this is my interview with Gabriel. His Swedish was quite limited which meant that his 13-year-old daughter had to translate large parts of the interview. Although her language skills were impressive, it is difficult for any 13-year-old to accurately convey the meaning of a situation that they do not fully understand. As long as we were speaking about basic 'facts' this translating solution worked, but when her father expressed more complex thoughts and arguments, I often suspected that something was lost in translation.

That children often have to take on the role of translators and language teachers is bound to have an effect on family dynamics. It can be hard for the children who, as seen in the example of Gabriel's daughter, are forced to take on a role that is too demanding for their level of experience. It can

also be hard for the parents who lose some of their authority when they become dependent on their children. Such difficulties were not commonly brought up in the interviews, however. Instead, the parents focused on the positives of their child receiving an education. One of the many tragedies of the war in Syria is that countless children have not been able to attend school for a number of years. Because of this, simply being able to send their kids to school is a huge improvement for many Syrian parents. Apart from the more general benefits of an education there are others that are more specific to refugee children: schools can be an important venue for socialisation in a new context and having something to do (and having somewhere to go) during the day is valuable to a child living under difficult conditions.

Even though the Syrian refugee children quickly surpass their parents in terms of language abilities, they are usually behind their peers in Sweden. Speaking Swedish as a second language is an obvious disadvantage but so is the fact that many have missed several years of schooling and are ‘catching up’ in other areas than language. Marta’s children spent nearly two years in a Turkish refugee camp with no education. When they finally got to start school in Sweden, the transition from being ahead of their peers to being behind them was a difficult one:

In Syria we had private school for children who are very clever. And this begins from grade six, seven. Two of my children were in this school. Because they were special. When we came here, it wasn’t the same. You know, the language, it was difficult. And two years, one and a half year without school. It was difficult. They forgot so much [...] you know, physics and chemistry, when they began studying that here, my son found it difficult in the beginning: ‘these two years, the children here know more than me’, ‘these two years, I am very stressed with physics or chemistry, two years I don’t know anything about’. So it was a very great challenge to get high grades here. But this year I think it is ok. He said that he is having high marks this year. I am waiting. Today he is getting his results! (Marta, Stad, 2016).

Marta, being a teacher herself, clearly values education and she takes pride in her children doing well in school. Valuing education is something that she has in common with all the other parents in the study. Unlike many others, however, she is not sure that the Swedish way of doing things is necessarily the best. She describes her first teaching experience in Sweden as something of a shock. The school was in one of Stad’s ‘disadvantaged areas’. Marta worked as a teaching assistant, the main teacher was Swedish, and the majority of the teenage pupils were Arabic speaking. What shocked Marta was how little respect the pupils had for their teacher. They talked

throughout the class and were even rude to the teacher, both to her face and by talking about her in Arabic (which she did not understand). This experience, Marta explained, was very different to her experience of teaching in Syria where the pupils were respectful and stayed quiet until asked to speak. Other participants are more likely to state a preference for the less authoritarian approach of Swedish teachers. Leah is one of those parents and she says that in Sweden, the teachers listen to the children. In Syria, they are far too strict, they often hit children and she believes this ‘destroys their future’. This should in no way be read as a comment on Marta’s teaching methods as there is a vast difference between demanding respect and inducing fear, but it does show that there are different opinions on how well the Swedish education system is functioning.

Location potentially explains some of the difference between Leah’s and Marta’s views as they have experienced the Swedish education system in very different contexts. Crucially, a side-effect of residential segregation is that schools also tend to be segregated and school segregation in Stad is quite extreme. Mikael at Stad municipality explains that the municipality is working hard to try to break this segregation by spreading pupils out to different schools in order to achieve a mix in languages. They also try to limit the negative effects of segregation by involving existing pupils in the integration of new arrivals through a mentor system where older pupils help the new ones, and they have two teachers in each class which also gives the children extra support. The efforts that the municipality, and the individual schools, have put in, have had results and eligibility to secondary school have improved significantly over the last few years. They are now above the national average.¹¹³ However, school segregation is still very much an issue. Despite an overall improvement in the results (even the worst schools are doing significantly better) there is still a striking difference between different schools: in some, less than 50% are eligible for secondary school, in others the figures are closer to 100%. What sets the top schools apart is that they have few pupils of foreign background in general and few new arrivals in particular. The statistics for new arrivals, defined as those that come to Swe-

¹¹³ Eligibility to secondary school can be measured in different ways. The figures used here are approximate values for how many pupils finish elementary school with sufficient grades to be eligible for *all* secondary education. If one looks at eligibility for a vocational programme, the figures are higher.

den four years or less before finishing elementary school, is especially disheartening. Nationally, less than 30% finish with sufficient grades to go to secondary school (Skolverket 2018b).

Marta's description of her children's struggles when starting school in Sweden shows the considerable challenge that new arrivals face. In light of this, the statistics above may not be entirely unexpected. The fact that her children quickly improved their results is also important to note: they, like most of the children in this study, have parents with a high level of education and are more likely to succeed than new arrivals on average. Despite this advantage they are still faced with the possible disadvantage of attending schools where the majority of other pupils are of the same background as themselves. This makes learning the Swedish language more difficult, something that several participants in Stad acknowledge (see section 8.2.4).

In Land, the circumstances are very different. Unlike Stad, where school segregation and its associated problems is something that developed gradually over a number of years, Land has made quite a drastic transition in a short period of time. The Migration Agency may be the primary agency responsible to the reception of asylum seekers, but the municipalities have one important responsibility: ensuring that asylum seeking children have access to education. This can be quite a challenge in a small municipality: there is less room to manoeuvre as even a small number of new pupils make up a substantial proportion of the total number. Anna at Land municipality acknowledges that this is challenging at times:

I mean, there's a new home [for unaccompanied minors] opening up on Monday with ten places, ten kids that all need to go to school /.../ of course that makes it difficult for the school. They have to make room for ten new pupils quickly. If they are all different ages it could be one or two in each class, if you know what I mean. They are between 13 and 18 according to the information we got, so it may not be that bad, but what if we get ten 14-year olds? They all have to go in the same class, that could be tough. And that's just it, you don't know. And you can't prepare for what you don't know (Anna, Land municipality, 2016).

There is no denying that receiving asylum and refugees had been a significant transition for the schools in Land. On a positive note, new pupils meant less talk of school closures. On a less positive note, they now struggled to find room for all the new pupils. There is some tentative talk of building a new school but since it is impossible to predict how many new arrivals Land will receive in coming years, and how many of those already there that will stay long-term, such a build would be risky. Despite such challenges, Anna

says they have handled the task reasonably well and most children are offered a place in a school within the recommended one month. Another achievement is that there are 15 languages spoken in the schools in Land and they have managed to find supporting staff for all of them. As mentioned previously, using the competence already in Land played a large part in this success. To Anna this is a clear ‘win-win’ situation offering employment to the adult refugees and language support to the children.

The participants in Land are positive towards the education on offer but a few of them question the value of the introduction class specifically for asylum seeking children. One of Khaled’s is in such a class, the other goes to a class with Swedish children. He says he can notice a clear difference in how quickly they have picked up the Swedish language. Other parents also express a preference for their children going to a class with Swedish children (see Rania’s story in section 8.2.4). Anna at Land municipality has a more positive view:

I think the organisation works quite well. They start out in an introduction class. After that they are moved to a preparation class and when they are in a preparation class, they are registered in a normal Swedish class, but they only take part in the classes they can handle, like PE and arts for example. The rest of the subjects they take separately, but it’s all about being included in a class (Anna, Land municipality, 2016).

Anna speaks from a different perspective and is perhaps more inclined to see the big picture rather than the situation of the individual child. Moving children to a standard class too soon could be detrimental to their learning and it could take up too much of the teacher’s time, which could have a negative effect on the children already in the class.

Despite the concern that some parents in Land have regarding the introduction class, once their children are in a standard class the majority of their fellow pupils are Swedish, which should improve their chances of learning Swedish. However, it is difficult to judge whether this automatically leads to better education outcomes overall. When one looks at school results, it is less obvious that Land is the better alternative. Unlike Stad, where the pupils are now doing better than the national average, the pupils in Land fall far below it. Even if one excludes new arrivals, who can have a disproportionate effect on the results in a small municipality, Stad still does better than Land on average. If peers are an important factor in learning, there is

in other words little to support that the peers on Land are better suited for this task than those in Stad.¹¹⁴

To conclude, if education is used as a marker of integration, the hoped-for result is presumably equality in terms of participation or achievement. As this chapter has hopefully shown, it is doubtful whether this is a realistic goal for many of the refugees that come to Sweden. Particularly those that come later in life, but even school-age children face an uphill struggle: their starting point is so clearly different from someone who is born in the country. That does not, of course, mean that the status quo should be accepted uncritically. More could be done to ensure equality of access to education, something that exists in theory for all residents but not necessarily in practise. Perhaps equity is a more appropriate word than equality in this regard. Since their circumstances are so different, new arrivals face many additional obstacles that can prevent their access to education. Identifying and tackling these obstacles should be a priority if equality is seen as an important part of integration.

9.3 Health

As with education, asylum seeking children have the same right to free health and dental care as all other children in Sweden. For adults, the right is restricted to emergency health and dental care that cannot wait and a fee of 50 SEK applies to most visits (Migrationsverket 2020d).¹¹⁵ That an asylum seeker's legal status restricts the right to health care is but one of the way in which access can be limited. Language barriers and remotely located accommodation centres; as well as more general problems in the health care system, such as long waiting times, can also be restrictive. This section will discuss some of these limitations as well as other aspects that can affect the general well-being of asylum seekers.

¹¹⁴ The 'peer effect', it should be mention, has been disputed, see section 4.4.2. The results vary a great deal between different schools in Stad but at the very least one could conclude that a pupil currently in a 'bad' school in Stad would be much better off transferring to a 'good' school in Stad rather than transferring to Land. Not all rural schools underperform in this way, in fact many do better than average despite limited resources (Åberg-Bengtsson 2009).

¹¹⁵ Although 50 SEK for a doctor's visit may seem affordable, on a daily allowance between 19 and 71 SEK per day, it is a substantial amount. A residence permit not only removes the restriction to 'health care that cannot wait', it also means an improved economic situation that by itself might improve access to health services.

Regarding the limited *right* to health care, it does not appear to be a central concern to the participants. In fact, I can only find one instance where a change in residence status was also seen as an improvement in terms of health care: Rania's husband had a problem with his elbow but as an asylum seeker he was not entitled to physiotherapy. Once he had his permit, his condition was finally treated. There is a somewhat obvious explanation as to why access to health care is not of great concern to the participants: they are all relatively healthy people. One needs to bear in mind that the people that agree to take part in a study of this kind are unlikely to be those that suffer the most from ill health. Another aspect that should be considered, is that the fact that most participants speak English might also make health care more accessible. Emir, who works with asylum seekers in Land and in other nearby places, has a completely different understanding of things. He has visited several different accommodation centres and, in his opinion, access to health care is one of the main concerns in most of them. Making appointments can be difficult with no Swedish and the association often has to help with this. Many accommodation centres are also located in remote areas, far from the nearest health care service. In some of these areas, public transport is virtually non-existent which naturally limits access to health care even more. The asylum seekers in Land are fortunate in the sense that the accommodation centre is centrally located, and the local health care centre is only a short walk away.

This does not guarantee access, however. When I attend a civic information class at the centre, run by the same association that Emir works for, the teacher received several questions relating to healthcare. One problem is that, even though the health care centre is nearby, one cannot simply go there and make an appointment. Appointments have to be made using an automated phone service that is only available in Swedish. In a face to face meeting one might get by with body language and Google translate. On the phone, it is more difficult. If one manages to press the right buttons at the right time, one is given a time slot when a nurse will call and assess the need for an appointment. It is at this stage one can ask for an interpreter to be present at the appointment. How to get to that stage is more of a challenge and the advice given is to 'ask a Swedish speaker for help'. In Land that would typically be the manager at the centre or someone like Emir.

The long distance to health care services and the lack of public transport are bound to be more common problems in ABO than EBO since EBO is typically located in larger towns and cities. Unsurprisingly, none of these issues are brought up in the interviews in Stad. Neither are language barriers

considered a problem. Those that live in EBO do not have to rely on the kindness of strangers to the same extent as they usually have someone in their household that can contact the health care services for them.

That access to services such as health care is more restricted in rural than in urban locations is not a fact that is unique to asylum seekers; it applies to all who live in such areas, regardless of legal status.¹¹⁶ The same can be said for the one thing that participants in Land and Stad both bring up as problematic: the long waiting times for health care. Zina' mother, for example, had surgery before she came to Sweden. She is supposed to go to monthly check ups but four months into her stay in Sweden, she has still not been able to get an appointment. Sometimes, the healthcare practitioners' view of what is considered urgent is not shared by the participants:

I wanted to go to the hospital, ok, I get a date after one month and two weeks, it's a long time. I wanted to fix my teeth, you know the pain if you have pain in teeth. Ok, I can come on the tenth of next month. That means after three weeks. I have pain in my teeth, and they want me to come after three weeks! (Kareem, Land, 2016).

In Stad, Younan has a similar complaint:

It is a well-known problem here in Stad, the emergency room, and it is not only newcomers that complain about it. It is really difficult if you are urgently ill, and you have to wait eight hours to see someone at the hospital. It is really bad that the hospital doesn't have enough staff. They really should do better (Younan, Stad. 2016).

Younan is highly critical of how health care is run in Stad and he uses the fact that it is a 'well-known problem' to 'not only newcomers' to add weight to his statements: he can expect better because everybody else in Stad does. Theresa also struggles with the waiting times but to her, it is more a matter of getting used to a new system than about a flaw in that system:

You have good healthcare; they listen to you and you get good care. But it takes a very long time to go to the doctor. We are not used to this system. We have no system in Syria. No medical system. You are free to go to this doctor, or this hospital, or this. You are free, your choice of hospital, your choice of doctor, anything. Yeah, here we all go to the health care centre

¹¹⁶ It could be argued that it does not apply *equally* to all. For one thing, a car is usually the only means of transport available and asylum seekers are much less likely to have a car (or even know someone with a car) than a more long-term resident.

[vårdcentral] and then they send you to the doctor or to the hospital. We have no choice (Theresa, Stad, 2016).

In the Swedish system, the local health care centre is indeed the first port of call. On paper at least, one is free to pick which health care centre to go to so strictly speaking, it is not true that 'we have *no* choice'. That being said, the options may well be more limited than in many other countries, including Syria.¹¹⁷

As we have seen there are some issues regarding access, but perhaps even more important is the question of whether the particular circumstances that asylum seekers find themselves in have an adverse effect on their well-being. According to Emir, access to health care is a central problem precisely because many asylum seekers are in poor health. The trauma of fleeing from a war, coupled with the uncertainty of whether one will get to stay in Sweden are obvious contributing factors to this. But apart from such psychological factors, Emir's impression is that the asylum seekers he meets are also physically more prone to illness. He believes this is because they usually come from a much warmer climate, and it simply takes a while to 'acclimatise' to the harsh Swedish weather. Another possible explanation is that a psychologically stressful situation can lead to physical ailments as well.

It is also likely that the living conditions asylum seekers find themselves in might have a detrimental effect. Emir says that one of the most common complaints in the accommodation centres is the lack of nutritious food. This view is shared by nearly all the interviewees who had experienced living in a centre, albeit to a varying degree. Whilst some simply acknowledged that it would be impossible to please everybody, others, like Adnan, feel very strongly about this issue:

More often than not, the food was disgusting. Maybe it was just me because I looked around and other people were eating. Maybe it is because I am a germophobe, I have a special way of eating. I don't know, I don't know. But a lot of people were eating, eating. For me, when I tasted it, I could not eat. I lost 16 kilos in the camp. Sometimes I didn't eat for a full day [...] sometimes I bought a can of fish, tuna, from ICA [supermarket] (Adnan, Land, 2016).

¹¹⁷ Naturally, the freedom of choice that Theresa describes applies to Syria before the war. Another word of caution is that this freedom may in part be reserved to the urban middle class to which she belonged.

Adnan describes himself as a germophobe, something that not only make eating difficult but also sharing a room and toilet facilities with other people a challenge. Since an asylum seeker living in an accommodation centre receives only 24 SEK per day, the possibilities of buying a nutritious meal if one does not like the food served in the centre are severely limited. In Adnan's case this ended in substantial weight loss. While Adnan, by his own admission, is a rather extreme case his example still shows that the inability of centres to cater for individual tastes can have quite an impact on their health. The case of Zina's mother, who is recovering from surgery, shows that not only the taste of the food but also the set mealtimes can cause problems:

Her heart stopped four times in the operation. And she has to take care because maybe it will be problem again /.../ Sometimes, she is in pain. She has to eat maybe eight times in a day but little, little, little. Yeah, and it's hard in the camp to do that. Because we have set times in the camp for food. Two times a day, lunch and dinner. Yeah, it's hard to do that (Zina, Land, 2016).

Apart from the lack of good food, the lack of exercise is also brought up by a few of the participants in Land as a problem for their health. When asked if there is something that she misses in Land, Leah responds:

Yes. For example, aerobics. Something like aerobics, because I have migraine problem and I have blood pressure problem, I must always walk, walk, walk but I think in Land it is very hard to walk. You are always going, going, going and coming back the same way. And on the snow also, it is very hard to walk. We need something, an activity for our bodies. Yes. We would feel healthier (Leah, Land, 2016).

In all likelihood, there is 'something like aerobics' available in Land, but the cost would be prohibitive. Rania speaks very highly of an initiative in the small town in northern Sweden where she previously lived. Two of the teachers from the local school had started exercise classes for women. It was affordable, 100 SEK per month for twice weekly classes, and inclusive: both refugee women and Swedish women attended. Rania misses having a similar class in Land and although affordable aerobics classes may not be classed as a necessity, her example shows that such an initiative can have both health benefits and help strengthen social bridges in a community. It also shows that the availability of such a service, because it relies on volunteers, varies with the location.

One final example from Land comes from Khaled. He found that living in the accommodation centre made his child's rheumatism more difficult to

cope with. The school is located at some distance from the centre, which made walking to school difficult for his child, but the distance was not considered enough to qualify for free transport. After three months, Khaled and his family got an apartment outside of Land. This brought an unexpected benefit: They were now located far enough from the school for his children to be entitled to free transport. It is quite possible that Khaled's child should have been entitled to free transport even at the shorter distance because of his medical condition. However, knowing one's rights and how to claim them is not an easy thing to do in a new country.

Compared to those in Land, the participants in Stad gave few examples of either the location or their accommodation having a negative effect on their health. This should not be interpreted as them necessarily having fewer health-related issues, it simply means that it is harder to make a direct link between their form of accommodation and their health. Some more indirect links has been discussed already, for example how living with relatives can act as a 'buffer' in an emotionally strained time (see section 8.1.2). The next section on housing, will show how it can also *add* stress to their lives.

The topic of health is incredibly complex. Hence the brief treatment of both the participants in Stad and the whole dimension of what happens *after* a residence permit could be seen as not doing the topic justice. What I have tried to do in this section is to discuss health aspects that could be discussed in isolation from other integration dimensions: tangible aspects such as access to health care, food and exercise. In the material available to me those aspects happened to be particularly discernible in the accommodation centres in Land. This section on health should, in other words, not be seen as an exhaustive discussion of the topic. Instead, I would argue that health is a theme that permeates the entire study and it plays a role in each chapter of this thesis. Some aspects are tied to the legal status of the individual rather than location or housing: the stress of an economically strained situation and the uncertainty of not knowing whether one will be allowed to stay, for example. These issues are bound to improve with a change in residence status. Other things are harder to change. Most importantly, it is doubtful whether the trauma of war will ever truly go away.

9.4 Housing

Housing is the last of the ten integration domains suggested by Ager and Strang and as this study takes a comparison between different forms of housing as a point of departure, it is a domain that is of central importance.

The housing form could have an immediate effect on the integration prospects of asylum seekers, but it could also affect what choices are available to them post residence. Both aspects will be covered in this section. In order to highlight the need to look at housing in a wider context, a comparative section of the two *locations* (section 9.4.3) is also included.

9.4.1 The several different forms of ABO

The type of housing referred to as ABO throughout this text actually contains a variety of different housing forms. Even in this relatively small study the interviewees have experienced quite a range of different types of housing of varying standard. It should be made clear from the outset that this study was conducted at a time that was in many ways exceptional. Most of the interviewees in this study arrived in 2015, the year when the number of asylum seekers that came to Sweden reached record-breaking levels. At the end 2015, over 180 000 asylum seekers were registered with the Migration Agency, more than double that of the previous year (Migrationsverket 2020a). This gives some idea of the challenge that faced the Agency. The Agency's preferred type of housing is apartments where the asylum seekers can live more independently, and they have a number of apartments that they rent on a more long-term basis. When these apartments do not cover the need for housing, it is supplemented by so called temporary accommodation centres. This type of housing is typically located in a former hotel or a hostel. Unlike the apartments which are run by the Migration Agency directly, the temporary centres are run by subcontractors (Migrationsverket 2020c). When this study was conducted, temporary housing was the exception rather than the norm, but this still was not enough to meet housing need. One way of dealing with this was by fitting more people into existing housing. The usual standard of 5 m² per person was lowered to 3 m² per person and the maximum of four people per room was raised to six. Although the Public Health Agency does not have any clear guidelines regarding over-crowding, it states that this many people in a small space could lead to various health problems (Folkhälsomyndigheten 2019a). When increasing the capacity in existing housing was not enough, the Migration Agency was also forced to open emergency accommodation in different locations around the country. These typically consisted of a camp beds lined up in a sports hall. Although this was only meant to be an emergency measure, some ended up staying in this type of accommodation for several months. At the time of the interviews, both measures were being used in

Land municipality. Emergency housing had opened in a sports hall in a village outside of central Land with room for 50 people and the Migration Agency also fit more people into existing housing. The number of people registered as living in ABO in Land municipality increased by nearly 100 between 2014 and 2015, even though the number of rooms did not increase.

None of the people I interviewed stayed in the emergency centre and it is difficult to judge what effect the increased occupancy might have had on them. Only a few of the participants stayed in the accommodation centre in Land, the rest were in centres in other parts of the country and moved to Land when Migration Agency apartments became available there. Families are prioritised for apartments as staying in centres is seen as particularly unsuitable for children. A few months in a centre followed by a move to an apartment was therefore quite typical. Rania and Adnan were exceptions as they had moved to Land on their own. Adnan moved after he got his residence permit and Rania before. Through contacts she had managed to find a house there where her family could stay rent-free until they got their permit. Zina too was quite unusual as she started out in EBO but later contacted the Migration Agency and asked for help with accommodation. At the time of the first interview she lived in the accommodation centre in Land.

9.4.1.1 Accommodation centres: ‘Like a prison, but a *free* prison’

All participants have, in one way or another, experienced both living in a camp and in an apartment. With one exception, they all prefer the apartments. The exception is Ali who came on his own and who, unlike the families, did not ask to be moved. To him, living in the camp was in many ways preferable: he had made friends there, he had free Wi-Fi and daily Swedish classes. His particular camp also had a gym and every second week they could travel for free to a larger town nearby. Despite this, he acknowledges that living in the camp was far from ideal:

There is a routine in the camp. I don’t want to use this word, but it’s like this, it’s like jail. Because every day it is the same thing, the same idea, waking up, breakfast, and lunch and studying some Swedish. And you feel without community. Ok, I’m coming to Sweden, I should make a relation with people. Why I should stay in a camp? (Ali, Land, 2016).

Leah also compares the camp to prison:

We don’t have any activities, or something to do outside the camp, we feel like we are in a prison. Prison, but free prison (laughs). It was very hard at

times. The children were always fighting with each other; they didn't have anything to do. Always the same, the same (Leah, Land, 2016).

The feeling of routine and boredom, of every day being the same and having nothing to do, creates a feeling of being in a 'free' prison. They may be allowed to leave but as there is nowhere to go there is little reason to do so. Also reminiscent of a prison is the lacking sense of independence in the camp: living there gives little control of one's own lives. This is an issue even for those that were comparatively happy in their camp, like Kareem:

Ok, in the camp, the food was very nice, they gave you everything you need [...] That's what I saw in my camp. But I didn't see any other camp. I've been told, in other camps, the food was not good. They said to me, the heating is not good, they said to me we don't have hot water. But in my camp, this is what I see. Everyone was very kind with me [...] But, in the camp we stayed five people in the same room [...] That's why it is better to have an apartment, for you and your family. Now we have our own room and the children have their own room. I have a balcony, I can eat in the morning, I can eat in the night, I can eat whenever I want to. That's the difference between the camp and the apartment (Kareem, Land, 2016).

Compared to many other camps, the standards in Kareem's camp were quite high. Kareem describes their room as fairly large and they even had a dining table with five chairs and a small refrigerator inside their room.¹¹⁸ Kareem and his family also had their own private bathroom, something that many others missed. Although Kareem acknowledges that he was probably better off than most, even the best of camps cannot offer the sense freedom than an own apartment brings. The food may have been good in the camp and the staff were quite flexible if he needed something outside of the set mealtimes, but living in an apartment means he can eat whenever he wants without asking anybody for permission.

What made Kareem's camp better than many others were essentially three basic things: good food, a private bathroom and sufficient space. All three are reoccurring themes. Food is commonly brought up as a major problem in camps. For parents, part of the challenge was trying to get the children to eat. The food may have been tolerable to them but not to their children:

¹¹⁸ When I visited the 'camp' in Land, many of the windows had plastic bags with food hanging outside them. In wintertime this may be a passable method of keeping food items fresh but in summertime a refrigerator would surely be missed by many.

The food was very bad. We did not get any healthy food and that is not very good. We always, my children were always eating cheese and toast, cheese and toast /.../ One of my friends, I met her in Sweden, I met her in the camp and now she's my friend. She stayed in the camp ten months. Yes. And she has two kids and they are little. And they never ate the food. Always cheese and toast. I don't think it is very healthy eat the same food for ten months (Leah, Land, 2016).

It can be difficult to get a child to eat at the best of times but the general impression that the participants give of the food in the camps is that it is lacking in both quality and variety (see also section 9.3).

The lack of private toilets was also seen as particularly problematic for parents with small children who might wake up in the middle of the night and need to go to the toilet. Not having a private shower was described by a few participants as being problematic for Muslim women as it was difficult to protect one's modesty when showers are shared with others. The cleanliness of the shared facilities was also seen as a problem by many. They made sure to keep their own room clean but areas that were shared with others were more difficult. Adnan, who described himself as a germaphobe, found this very difficult. As did Leah who was concerned about the spread of diseases when people from different countries shared the same facilities.

Although bad food and unhygienic, shared showers were things that many of the participants brought up, it should also be noted that several of them were also quick to point out that these were minor problems that paled in comparison to the one major one: the long, passive wait for a decision. Ali feels strongly about this and he has this to say about the food in the camp:

You will find in any camp, people who don't accept the situation there [...] You will always find some people who don't like [the food] but it's not important. Because, I will give you an example, in your home when your mum made you some food, maybe sometimes you didn't like it and you didn't eat it. It's the same thing way. But in the camp, it is not only Syrian, it is from Eritrea, from Afghanistan, they have to deal with all people. I understand that it is not important, but I can only speak for myself. It is not important to me. The food is food, it's potatoes, rice and meat. The food is food (Ali, Land, 2016).

While complaints about things like food might be provoking to some, like Ali who see it as unimportant, one has to consider the overall situation that asylum seekers find themselves in. When a life is reduced to little more than meeting basics needs, and those needs are not fully met, complaints are quite

understandable. It is also understandable that many see the possibility to cook one's own food as one of the main advantages of living in an apartment. In a sense food is not *just* food: it means the freedom to decide for oneself when and what to eat. It also gives a sense of purpose missing from the life in the camp: shopping for food, cooking and cleaning are time-consuming activities that both make the wait more bearable and bring some sense of normality back to life.

More detrimental than both shared bathrooms and substandard food, however, is the lack of space often experienced in accommodation centres. The idea of *space* can take on different meanings in this context. In its most literal sense, most would describe their rooms in the camp as small; but it could also mean not having one's *own* space and being forced to share it with others. For most participants, both aspects were a problem in the camps and moving to an apartment typically meant more space in a literal sense as most had several rooms instead of one. It also provided a sense of privacy both from those *outside* the family and those *within* the family. Regarding the latter, an apartment usually meant that the parents and children no longer had to share a room. Regarding the former, sharing a space with strangers—sometimes strangers that one actively dislikes—can put a lot of strain on a person who is already in a difficult situation and sometimes strategies for avoiding other people are deemed necessary. The result of this is often that the actual space available to a person is reduced further. Khaled, for example, kept his children in their small room most of the time as he did not like them playing with some of the other children in the camp. This led to a lot of arguments and frustration. Zina's difficulties sharing a room with several older women (see section 8.1.3), is worth bringing up again as it so clearly had a negative effect on her integration process. Zina feels deeply uncomfortable sharing a room with these women. Her discomfort means that she often finds herself in the room that her mother and two brothers share even though it is too small for all of them. Trying to find peace in the communal areas is usually not an option:

If I feel bored, there is a TV down in the camp. But they always turn it off because there are no Arabic channels. But I can understand if I see English or Swedish. I sometimes try to watch TV when I'm very bored. I come down and see how the guys stare at me and start to talk. I feel afraid and sad and go again. Nothing to do at all. You cannot do anything. Study, make activities, have a good time, friends, go out, nothing at all (Zina, Land, 2016).

Some of the men in the camp and their behaviour towards Zina further limits the space available to her. She is uncomfortable in her room and she is scared outside of it. She is also bored as there is very little to do in the camp. She says the younger children are also bored. Some of the residents brought up the lack of activities with the manager and he eventually brought in a table football game for them to play with:

But the kids don't play, we don't play, only the men (laughs). So there is nothing for us or for kids I think. Only men. And yeah, we cannot play, they are always there (Zina, Land, 2016).

Zina's example shows that there is a power structure in place in the accommodation centre: factors such as age and gender can determine how a space is used and who gets to use it. As a young woman, Zina has little power over space.

9.4.1.2 ABO apartments: some semblance of normality

The accommodation centres described in the previous section share some traits with Goffman's (1961/1991) total institutions and they have been analysed as such in previous studies (see, for example, Valenta & Berg 2010). One thing that characterises a total institution is that it is cut off from the wider community. Accommodation centres may not have high walls and locked doors like a prison but they are cut off in other ways: firstly, no one that is not an asylum seeker lives in them and secondly, they are often located in isolated areas with very few neighbours. This does not necessarily apply exclusively to the accommodation centres. It is not uncommon that the Migration Agency rent entire apartment buildings (hence the residents are all asylum seekers) and it is also not uncommon that these apartments are in isolated areas. Land municipality is aware that this could be a problem and they have tried to counteract it as far as possible. Anna thinks that part of the reason why it has worked relatively well is because they have had some control over the process from day one:

We started noticing around 2012 that new arrivals started moving here, there were some empty apartments available and people started moving in /.../ of their own accord so to speak. They signed their own contracts. It was only a few people but still. And then I guess the municipality was courted a bit as well. We already had one home for unaccompanied minors that opened in 2011, an agreement like that. So I think they realised that if people start to move here of their own accord, there is no one really here to help them and support them. That's when they signed this agreement with the Migration

Agency. That way they received money to cover an employee that would work specifically with this group and that's what I do (Anna, Land municipality, 2016).

The agreement made with the Migration Agency means the municipality have some control over the reception system and a say in how it is organised. One thing they have tried to ensure is that the apartments that the Migration Agency rent from them are spread throughout the estate in question rather than being concentrated in a few buildings. This was done both as an integration and a security measure: concentrating all asylum seekers into one building could leave it vulnerable to a potential attack. In order for new and old residents to get along without problems, the municipality also requested that the Migration Agency would pay for a person who would be employed part-time as a 'mediator' between the new arrivals and the other residents. By explaining the housing rules, how the laundry room works, for example, or that they are not allowed to smoke on the balcony and throw their cigarette butts on the ground below, this mediator has helped to prevent conflict in the building.

This level of control only applies to the apartments they have let to the Migration Agency, they have no say in how the accommodation centre is run and they were not given much notice when it opened. Since it had opened though, communications between the municipality and the manager at the centre had worked well and Anna's impression is that it is a well-run centre. One of the few advantages of the centre compared to the apartments is that the manager that can help the residents with everyday practicalities. He also makes it easier for the municipality as they can always refer back to him when someone turns to the municipality with questions. Despite this, Anna says that most asylum seekers would prefer to live in apartments.

The participants generally confirm the view that apartments are much preferable, but they are not entirely without problems of their own. Land municipality may have put a great deal of effort into dispersing asylum seekers evenly in the centrally located apartments. Not all apartments are centrally located, however, and some of the participants found themselves living in a remote village on the outskirts of Land. In this area, the question of dispersal was somewhat beside the point as there are very few neighbours to be 'dispersed' among. Another issue in this area is that public transport is very limited. At weekends and during public holidays there is no bus service. Khaled, who lived there for over a year tells me that Christmas was difficult as they did not have a bus service for ten days. Walking to Land takes about an hour: a challenging walk in the middle of winter with small

children. Khaled also found living in such an isolated area a challenge because he is used to living in a big city. Khaled's children, who presumably are also used to city living, found the countryside outside Land so strange that they even questioned whether it was real:

The people here, no one ever leaves their home. We never see anyone out in the street walking. Our children asked us 'are you sure that this house is not a game? We never see anyone in the house, nobody walking around, are you sure that it is not a game? That we don't live here?' (Khaled, Land, 2016).

Apart from the isolated setting of some of the apartments, there are also issues that relate more directly to housing standards. In Land, most of the interviews were conducted in the participant's apartment and the apartments I saw for myself were rundown and had not been renovated for many decades. Unsurprisingly, none of the participants brought up 'updated décor' as a top priority but there were related issues with water damage and mold that could be a more serious problem. Khaled also had a problem with the heating in his apartment. The radiators in the living room did not work so he bought a small portable radiator. This led to complaints from the Migration Agency that their electricity bill was too high.

One thing that was brought up as a major advantage of apartment living in the previous section, the possibility of cooking one's own food, also brings with it certain challenges. The daily allowance increases as one moves from a centre to an apartment, but the amounts are still very modest. Many struggle to make this money cover the cost of food, Leah included:

When we get the money, the first thing we do is to go to [a larger town]. We do all our shopping there, important things that we need always. Like rice, here in ICA it is very expensive. We go and buy from Arabic shops, like vegetables, in ICA they are very expensive, so we buy from Arabic shops, or Netto or Lidl. A little bit cheaper than ICA. Little. We are doing all our shopping in [the larger town] and it lasts us maybe three weeks. And the last week? (laughs). It's very, very hard. But the children they need much more from life, from me, they need for example internet, they need Wi-Fi, but I can't get it. My son, he always needs data for his mobile, but I can't always buy him (Leah, Land, 2016).

Leah takes the train to a larger town once a month and buys in bulk as the prices are lower in some of the shops there. Transporting a month's supply of groceries is not an easy feat for a single mother with no car and even after this ordeal, she is still struggling to make ends meet. The money needs to

cover many other things apart from food.¹¹⁹ The interview with Leah was conducted early on in the study and it shows how much happened in Land during this period of time: a few months later ICA was no longer the only shop and there was not one, but two Arabic food shops in Land. In a few of the later interviews this is mentioned a big improvement as they no longer had to go to a larger town to get their groceries.

One final aspect that should be mentioned is that while apartments generally offer more space and privacy than accommodation centres do, there are limitations here as well. Families usually get their own apartment but single people must share with others. Privacy, in other words, is not guaranteed in apartments either. Although there are no examples of it in this study, one can imagine that if a conflict arises in an apartment, the people involved may be even more vulnerable than in the more controlled environment of the accommodation centre. Privacy *within* the family is not guaranteed either: Leah shares a one-bedroom flat with her two children. She had asked repeatedly for an apartment as her daughter did not feel safe in the camp, she wanted something as quickly as possible and was very happy when she got her one-room apartment. Rania first ABO apartment was also crowded as she did not want to risk being separated from her mother and brothers. Since her brothers were not young children they were not prioritised for an apartment so all the Migration Agency could offer was a two-room apartment that they all shared: Rania and her family in the living room, her mother and brothers in the only bedroom. The Migration Agency guidelines (SIS 2011) state that there should be no more than two people per room (including living room) in an apartment and apart from the two cases mentioned, this matches the standard described by the participants.

Although ABO apartments are by no means perfect, it is still clear from the interviews that they are by far the better ABO option. Zina, who had a difficult time in the camp, finally got to move to an apartment with her mother and brothers a few months after my first interview with her. When I ask her what is better about living in an apartment, she replies:

Everything! Like you feel like you are home, you feel like you have a place of your own. In the camp you feel like you live with all the other people there. If you want to open your door, if you want to sleep, you can't, because you hear all the people outside. If you want to put on music, they knock on

¹¹⁹ One thing Leah brings up is her children's need for Wi-Fi, on this point living in a centre could be beneficial as most centres do provide free Wi-Fi.

the door and say we don't like music. There are weird people. Yeah, you cannot feel comfortable in the camp (Zina, Land, 2017).

For Zina, and many others with her, moving to an apartment meant finally feeling comfortable and finally finding something resembling a home.

9.4.2 EBO: Stuck outside society?

Mikael at Stad municipality is aware that problems exist with ABO too, but as he puts it 'at least it is an organised form of reception'. The standards may be low in many centres but at least there are standards. In EBO no such standards exist, and both the municipality and the Migration Agency are in the dark regarding how people in EBO actually live. There are clear signs, however, that many EBO residents live in substandard conditions. The problems that Mikael associates with EBO are to a large extent the same as those discussed in various official reports.¹²⁰ Some problems are directly related to housing; others are more context-dependent:

The whole idea [with EBO] is that the new arrivals should integrate themselves. The theory is that you find work quicker and get integrated into Swedish society if you live with people that are already here, that already live in Sweden, but the challenge is that many of those that already live in Sweden are not established in Swedish society. Therein lies the difficulty [...] in this municipality you might end up in [a socially disadvantaged area] where a lot of people are unemployed and, to a great extent, not established in Swedish society. And then it is tough from the start [...] It's difficult if you end up directly in a social and economic deprivation. Then EBO does not become the help it is intended to be (Mikael, Stad municipality, 2016).

According to Mikael, the intentions behind EBO are good but, at least in Stad, it has not worked out as intended. Apart from the problem of unsuitable housing, many also end up in areas that he believes are not conducive to integration: areas where many of the residents are unemployed and 'not established in Swedish society'. He does not think it is primarily a question about language, that part seems to work quite well in Stad. Instead he sees it as a question of not being able to 'get a foot in the door into established society', leading to many people living 'outside' of society. The lack of good housing, and the lack of basic security this brings, is part of the problem. But in the end, Mikael brings it back to a question of employment. Living

¹²⁰ E.g. Boverket (2015a), SOU 2018:22. See Chapter 2 and 4 for a discussion.

in areas with high unemployment, he suggests, can lead to a sense of hopelessness that may become an obstacle in a newcomer's integration process.

This sense of hopelessness is not apparent in the interviews I conducted with refugees in Stad. There are certainly challenges on the path to employment but, as we could see in section 9.1.2.1, many have actually secured some form of employment already. Although this does not disprove Mikael's 'hopelessness' theory, it does show that living in a disadvantaged area (as many of the interviewees do) does not preclude the possibility of labour market integration. In most cases, the host families that the participants stayed with were 'established' in the sense that they had lived in Sweden for a number of years, they spoke Swedish and were in employment.¹²¹ It is possible that this, in addition to the participants' relatively high educational qualifications, helped contribute to their success.

What Mikael refers to as 'established society' is also open to interpretation. He says you can 'live outside of it' but it is uncertain what this would entail. If being established is synonymous with participating in the labour market, it is certainly possible to live a life outside of the labour market. But does that mean that those individuals somehow live outside of *society*? And where does that leave those that live outside of it for reason other than unemployment? The old, the sick and the disabled, for example?

Mikael says that a person who is pessimistic about their chances of being part of 'established society' may become very 'tied to what they do have' and what they have is a co-ethnic network of people, many of whom are in the same situation. However, a co-ethnic network does not have to be a poor substitute for an 'established' life, it could also be a great comfort *and* an alternative way of feeling more established in a new, unfamiliar place. It is worth remembering that the Syrian community is well-established in Stad and that it is not limited to specific neighbourhoods. There are other meeting places as well, not least the various churches in Stad. George, who works for one of the churches in Stad, says that one of the important functions of the church is that it gives the older generation, that does not work, somewhere to go during the day. Pointing this out is not an attempt to diminish the problems that do exist with EBO, it is simply an attempt to give a more balanced view. As Mikael himself says when I ask if he has any examples of

¹²¹ Questions about the host were more relevant if the person had stayed with them on a relatively long-term basis. A few of the families had moved around a great deal. In those cases, the moving became a more central concern than the characteristics of each individual host (hence, such questions were not asked).

EBO working out well: 'I'm sure there are some, but I don't really have any. What I look at is what *doesn't* work with it'.

Although some of the participants in this study could serve as the positive examples that Mikael is missing, they too are affected by some the problems associated with EBO. Regarding the issue of over-crowding, it varies a great deal between the participants. Much depends on the size of the household of both the hosts and the 'guests'. Asim, who came to Sweden on his own, initially stayed with a married couple who were long-term friends of his, but he later moved to his elderly Swedish neighbour. In both places he lived comfortably in his own private room. All other participants came to Sweden with at least some members of their families. For some, EBO still works relatively well as their host is either a single person or a couple. The worst-case scenario is when two families, that both have several children, are combined in one household. Gabriel and his family spent the first four or five months living with his brother. Gabriel and his brother have five children each bringing the total in the household to 14 people. Staying with his brother was only a short-term solution and since then they have moved five times and after over three years in Stad, they have yet to find permanent accommodation. They move between different temporary apartments, all unauthorised sublets which give them no rights as tenants. At the time of the interview they have one month left in their current apartment, then they must move again. Although none of the other participants describe a housing situation quite as unstable as Gabriel, most have found it difficult to find a more long-term solution. We will return to this in section 9.4.4 as it is a topic that comes into sharper focus post residence permit.

Gabriel's initial living situation with his brother may also be the worst case of over-crowding but there are other examples as well. Marta and her family stayed with her husband's sister for nearly a year when they first arrived in Sweden. With Marta's three children and the sister in law's five, the living conditions were very cramped. They initially lived in a modest terraced house and all eight children had to sleep in the same room, two in each bed. Things improved after a few months when the host family moved to a larger house; Marta and her family then had their own room. Marta describes this time with a mix of gratitude and guilt:

We were with our relatives, we lived in their house and they were very generous with us [...] But it is not so easy when it is not your house. You cannot, they were very, very kind, but you know you must not use this, one must abuse this kindness. So, I tried to take up very little space in order not to show that I am a stranger there. But it was difficult for me [...] Ah, it was

very difficult. And I insist on saying that they were very kind, but I know it is not good to have so many children in one house. Eh, her children are smart and she is a teacher, she is used to have special time with them. You know when you are in your house you can do what you want. Like teaching them in special ways, have your rules. But when you have another family living with you, maybe things change. I know this, I was so, I felt so sad, or so stressed because I don't want this to be because of me and my family. She did not try to show me that something changed in her family but I know. It was the same thing which I felt when I was in Syria when I got guests at home, everything changes. Eating times and everything (Marta, Stad, 2016).

Marta is full of gratitude for the kindness that her husband's sister has shown them. Not only did she give them somewhere to live but she helped with many other things as well. For one thing, her teaching experience had been helpful. Since they arrived in summer the schools were closed for the first two months. During this time, her sister-in-law managed to teach Marta's children some basic Swedish. Despite this kindness, or perhaps *because* if it, Marta found it very difficult to live in their house for such a long time. She tried to take up as little space as possible, but she knew that their presence still had a negative impact on the other family's everyday life: it was not just a matter of space but a matter of upsetting their normal routine.

Maria's living situation is also difficult at times. They are staying with her cousin and his family and the crowded living conditions cause a lot of tension:

[One of] the most difficult things is [...] that we cannot find a house. Cause we are living in our, with my cousin. And his family. And you know there is always arguments, we are nine people in the house, there are always arguments, there are always fights between each other [...]

What kind of arguments would you have?

I don't know. About family. And, it's so tiring when my parents don't have jobs and they are staying all day in the house. And, stress, stress, stress. The waiting is killing us. We suffered a lot in Syria. We saw a lot of disgusting things. The bombings and when we lost everything. We lost everything in Syria. We came here with nothing at all. So, it is difficult because of that (Maria, Stad, 2016).

Like many other refugees, Maria came to Sweden with traumatic experiences of war behind her. Coupled with the anxiety of waiting for a decision on her asylum application, this made the living situation even more difficult.

Overcrowding is not the only reason why living in someone else's home for long period of time is not ideal and even the interviewees that are less troubled by overcrowding acknowledge it can be very stressful. As Hanna says: 'You don't feel that comfortable to do what you want to do, you feel like a burden'.¹²² Feeling like a burden is a common theme throughout the EBO interviews. Sometimes, the interviewees also express a need to minimise this burden. I ask Maria if they are planning on staying with her cousin for a while and she replies:

Yes, I will stay. I have nowhere else to go. We have to stay with them. But we, my parents said to him "we will buy the food, we will not stay with you for free". If you will not accept money from us, we will buy the food. Meat, vegetables. Etcetera. So, we are buying the food and we are living with him (Maria, Stad, 2016).

Maria and her family try to compensate as best they can by buying food in lieu of paying rent. Another common way to try and minimise the burden on the hosts is to make sure one does not outstay one's welcome. As Kristina puts it: 'It's good that there is someone there to help in the beginning but after a while you have to start relying on yourself'.

The interview material clearly supports the claims that EBO often means substandard living conditions. Overcrowding is a definite problem, as is the disruption that it causes to the host family's everyday life. It is likely that the stress and tension this causes may have a negative effect on the person's general well-being which in turn might affect their integration prospects. The lack of space could also have a negative effect on children's school work as it may be hard to find a peaceful place to do homework (this applies to children of both host and guest families). What is less clear, however, is to what extent the immediate context (i.e. the neighbourhood) of the housing plays a role. Many of the interviewees live in areas that are commonly described as disadvantaged, but none bring up the area they live in as a matter of concern (see also section 7.2.1.2). The problems they have with EBO are very much located within the walls of their (temporary) home. Also important to note is that while there are definite problems with EBO, the participants clearly see benefits as well and many receive a great deal of

¹²² One aspect of not being able to 'do what you want to do' is that one may not be able to come and go as one pleases. I experienced this first-hand when Maria asked me after our interview finished if I would like to see where she lives. I accepted this offer and she made a phone call to see if anybody was home. No one was home, and she did not have her own key, so we went for a walk around Stad instead.

support from their hosts (see also section 8.1.2). Unexpectedly, they would all prefer their own home but failing that, EBO is seen as the best alternative available to them.

Regarding the limited role that the neighbourhood seems to play it is at least plausible that the people most likely to influence behaviour and attitudes of the newcomers are the hosts that they live with. Since the hosts generally appears to be ‘well-established’, both in terms of employment and in other respects, they might act as a buffer against the potentially negative influence of the neighbourhood. It is possible that the participants are not representative in this regard, but at the very least it shows that one can find ‘good’ role-models in ‘bad’ areas.

Stad municipality was campaigning for the introduction of what they called ‘*dignified* own housing’ long before the EBO law eventually changed. One part of their proposal was that EBO should be preapproved by some appropriate authority before the tenant moves in. The idea was that the housing should meet certain minimum standards: a legitimate contract and a maximum number of people per household, for example. The other part of their proposal involved removing EBO as an option in certain disadvantaged areas, implying that these areas are not ‘dignified’ to live in. In my interview with Mikael, he acknowledged that this part of the proposal could be controversial, and he argued it should mainly be seen as a way to ‘start a discussion’. At the peak of the ‘crisis’, when the interview was conducted, the suggestion to prohibit EBO in large areas of the town seemed less realistic than it had done a few years earlier when they launched the proposal. A few years later, things took another turn and in January 2020, their ‘controversial’ suggestion to limit EBO in disadvantaged areas became reality (see section 2.3.3).

Although the will to break segregation in Stad is understandable, doing so by essentially forcing new arrivals to move elsewhere may have undesirable consequences. For one thing, as this study shows, EBO can work relatively well even though it is in a disadvantaged area. Granted, something may have a positive effect on the individual but may still be negative for the neighbourhood, the city and even the country as a whole. On that note, it is worth considering what declaring certain areas ‘undignified’ places to live does to the reputation of said areas and the people that live there. Also worth asking is whether further stigmatisation of these areas is really an effective strategy for breaking segregation.

9.4.3 Two locations compared

To Mikael, the main advantages of ABO is that it brings a sense of order and a higher level of control over the housing situation of asylum seekers. It is precisely this, however, that can make institutionalised living of this kind seem ‘prisonlike’ to many of the people that have to live through it. The camps in particular place significant restrictions on a person’s freedom and sense of privacy. Because it is a relatively controlled environment, it can leave the individuals in it feeling that they have little control over their own lives. At the same time, there are cases where *more* control might have been desired. Zina, for example, did not feel safe in her camp and received little help from staff when a group of young men were harassing her.

There are issues with both freedom and privacy in EBO as well. Living in someone else’s home for a long period of time is difficult. Not only is one’s freedom constrained as a guest, but there is often a sense of guilt for constraining the freedom of the hosts who may not be able to live as they usually do in their own home. There is one major advantage with EBO, however: at least the participants are staying with people that they feel comfortable and safe with. This may also make the problem with overcrowding more bearable: if one must share a limited space with a number of other people, one probably prefers to do so with family rather than strangers.¹²³

Comparing EBO with the ‘worst’ form of ABO may not seem entirely fair as many of the drawbacks mentioned do not apply ABO apartments. However, when housing is as scarce as it was when this study was conducted, most asylum seekers will have to spend at least some time in accommodation centres: none of the participants in ABO were placed directly in an apartment although most were fortunate enough to be move to one eventually. Also important is that when one looks at more contextual aspects of ABO, the potential drawbacks are not limited to the ‘camps’.

ABO in Land is in some ways typical of ABO nationwide. What determines the location of ABO is above all the availability of (relatively) affordable housing. As a consequence, it tends to be located in areas where there is less demand for housing which are also areas that in various ways are less desirable places to live. Although there are exceptions, ABO municipalities are often found in rural locations with a similar set of problems: the labour market is weak (Andersson 2016; Mellander & Wixe 2017), educational opportunities are scarce, young people leave to try their luck elsewhere and

¹²³ Overcrowding is a problem in both types of housing but the more extreme cases in this study can be found in EBO.

left behind is a dwindling and aging population. A decreasing population, and tax base, leads to financial struggles and cutbacks in the services available to those who stay. This rather gloomy description does not apply to *all* of rural Sweden, but it is a fairly accurate description of Land. Land has suffered badly from deindustrialisation in recent decades. The local labour market was strong until the 1970s, but it relied heavily on one locally based company. When that company started downsizing, the population rapidly declined: it is now down to less than two-thirds of what it was in the glory days half a century ago. Apart from a diminishing tax base, the municipality was also left with a large number of empty apartments. These were owned by the municipality's own housing company and in the end, the upkeep became too costly and over 1000 apartments were levelled to the ground.

The last few years, however, have seen a few tentative signs that things might be improving in Land. For the first time in many years, there is actually a waiting list for an apartment in Land. There are even plans for building new housing although the municipality is understandably wary of ending up in the same situation again and the plans so far have been quite modest. Related to this positive trend in population and housing are other recent developments. Anna at Land municipality describes it as follows:

Land is the small town that has actually gained a little bit of optimism for the future in recent years. A lot of positive things has happened here, I don't know, a lot of the positives are about newly established companies, even if they are small companies they will still be of benefit to ordinary people. This happened around the same time as refugees started coming to Land. So I think that we have this optimism on the one hand and then, when the new arrivals came it wasn't like 'oh no, here comes the new arrivals' but it was something that was kind of positive (Anna, Land municipality, 2016).

Even if it is not necessarily the case that all of Land, or even most of Land, sees the reception of asylum seekers and refugees as 'something positive', it is at least fair to say that the timing could have been worse.¹²⁴ Also worth remembering is that while Anna's quote could easily be dismissed as a 'politician's' answer, far from all small town politicians describe the reception of refugees in positive terms. Media reports are more likely to focus on negative aspects, especially the unequal distribution of asylum seekers around the country that has meant a few smaller municipalities has had to take a

¹²⁴ As a side-note, this sense of optimism seems to have passed on the refugees themselves to some extent. Several of the interviewees describe how Land may be small now, but it is getting bigger and better every day.

much larger share of the ‘burden’ (e.g. Nilsson 2015; Söhrman 2019). In Land, the official stance is that refugee reception is an opportunity, not a burden. For the first time in decades, the population is on the rise and this is mainly due to these new arrivals. The population increase is essential if Land is to continue flourishing. Vital services, both public (schools, for example) and private (shops), can remain open and new companies and potential employers are more likely to take a chance on Land.

The municipality’s positive attitude towards refugee reception is only one of the aspects that set Land apart somewhat from many other ABO municipalities. The location, while not perhaps ideal, is within commuting distance to several larger towns where the labour market is stronger. Commuting to a university is also possible. There are certainly areas with a high ABO reception that fare far worse in these regards. Commuting distances may not be a central concern to asylum seekers but it does affect how they view the possibility of staying in Land long-term. A more immediate benefit of ABO in Land is that the accommodation centre, and the majority of the apartments, are centrally located in Land. This means that things like public transport, healthcare and other services are easily accessible. The benefits of living in a central location is made very clear when one looks at those who are not so fortunate: a few of the participants in Land stay in apartments on the outskirts of Land and living in such an area without access to a car can be a very isolating experience.

Despite the relative advantages of Land outlined above, and despite several participants expressing appreciation for the perceived safety of the place, moving from a large Syrian city to a small Swedish town remains a challenging experience and many of the participants struggle with the very smallness of the place. That there is very little to do and few places to go in Land is brought up as an issue by some. Another common observation is that the streets in Land are always quiet and empty, especially in the evening time. This is not only a major transition from the life that they are used to, but many also see it as a reason why it is so hard to meet Swedish people in Land: there is simply no one around to meet. Granted, ‘the street’ is probably not the best place to meet in any town, regardless of size, and those that have had more success in this regard are those that are involved in organisations of various kind (8.2.3.3).

That it can be hard for asylum seekers to meet established Swedish people is at least partly due to the specific situation they find themselves in. Many of the arenas where friendships are usually formed are out of bounds to asylum seekers: many make friends in the workplace but few asylum seekers

work, the educational opportunities available to them are targeted specifically at asylum seekers and many organised activities come at a cost that may be prohibitive to someone with a very limited income. Other aspects are more context dependent. In Land, social isolation and closed networks are seen as specifically rural problems. In Stad, and in similar urban locations, residential segregation is perhaps the most central issue. That the Syrian diaspora is so well represented in Stad is seen by the participants as one of the town's majors draws *and* one of its biggest problems. Syrians, and other immigrant groups, are not spread evenly throughout Stad and the ethnic segregation is quite extreme in some suburbs. This leads to the removal of yet another potential 'meeting place': the neighbourhood.

While the negative effect of residential segregation should not be underestimated, the relationship between segregation and integration is far from straightforward. Firstly, when it comes to forming social ties with Swedish people, there is a chance that the importance of the neighbourhood is *overestimated*. Studies show that neighbourhoods are characterised by weak rather than strong ties and they are generally less important than other arenas such as workplaces. Tellingly, the ideal neighbour according to the average Swede is someone that is quiet and does not make unnecessary contact (Henning & Leiberg 1996; Ljungqvist 2017). Secondly, the importance of ethnicity should not be exaggerated. As Mikael at Stad municipality puts it, segregation in Stad is primarily a *socio-economic* problem. Because ethnicity and socio-economic status correlate, however, the two categories are often difficult to untangle.¹²⁵ Finally, it is also worth considering the effect that EBO has not just on isolated neighbourhoods but also on the city of Stad itself. While the Assyrian/Syriac presence is more apparent in certain areas of Stad, it is also characteristic of Stad as a whole. Younan brings this up as something of a mixed blessing:

There is a lot of pressure on Stad, because of this refugee... thing in recent years. A lot of things are not the same here, if you go to a different place in Sweden it's nothing like Stad in terms of people, the way everybody is in the same place. This thing with integration. At the same time, I'm happy to be here. I have so many relatives here. That is the reason why I came here in the first place. But even though I like it we can't have it this way, that everybody is in the same place. *Stad ends up outside somehow*. It's not like other places

¹²⁵ Immigrants born outside the EU are far more likely to be at risk of poverty: over a third have an income below 60% of the median income compared to 15% of the population as a whole (SCB 2016c).

[...] Because there is so much pressure, they can't really keep up. They were not prepared for so many people. And they may not have the resources either, the municipality, or the state (Younan, Stad, 2016, my emphasis).

Interestingly, Younan does not only place himself (or his neighbourhood) as outside some kind of Swedish 'normality' but the whole city of Stad. Although he personally likes living in Stad because there are many others like him there, he sees it as a problem on an aggregate level. At municipal office in Stad, many would probably agree with Younan's assessment that the pressure has been too high in Stad in recent years. Because they have received a high number of refugees for a number of years, a substantial part of the overall population is relatively new to the country. Despite the fact that Stad actually has a strong labour market, many new arrivals end up relying on social welfare for an extended period of time. Mikael explains that part of the problem is that there is a mismatch between the jobs available and the inhabitant in Stad. Local businesses mainly required highly skilled workers and many new arrivals lack the relevant qualifications. That many also struggle to make use of the qualifications that they *do* have (see section 9.1.2.3) makes the competition for the limited number of unqualified jobs even tougher.

It should be noted that although unemployment levels for immigrants are higher in Stad than would be expected considering the strong labour market, they are by no means extreme in a national context and they are lower than many other places, Land included. However, because Stad has received a large number of refugees in recent years, even an around average proportion of welfare dependents is a considerable cost and as a result it is one of the poorer municipalities in both the region and the country. Although there is equalisation system in place that is supposed to even out differences between rich and poor municipalities, it is not enough to compensate for the added cost of high EBO reception. But the fact that Stad municipality is struggling financially cannot be explained by EBO alone. It is also indicative of another, related issue: so called 'white flight' or 'white avoidance' (see section 4.4.4). Stad is characterised not only by a strong labour market but also by a higher number of commuters *to* than *from* the municipality. This is somewhat unusual for a municipality within commuting distance of a larger city. While there may be many reasons why people that work in Stad choose to live elsewhere, it is at least plausible that white flight or white avoidance is something that affects not just isolated areas in Stad but the city as a whole. Regardless of the reasons, it is a problem for the municipality as the people that work there pay their taxes elsewhere.

This section has touched upon some of the ways in which both asylum seekers and municipal staff reflect upon the more context-dependent aspects of ABO and EBO generally, and the location of Land and Stad specially. Many of these aspects are not only of relevance during the participants' time as asylum seekers but it also affects their plans for the future: especially the decision whether to stay or leave. The following two sections will discuss both practical limitations to the choices available to the participants and how they view the possible advantages and disadvantages of these options.

9.4.4 After ABO

Ager and Strang place housing in the 'means and markers' section of their integration model. Regarding the different types of housing available to asylum seekers the analysis was mainly limited to housing as a *means* to integration and there was little to suggest that accommodation centres are particularly conducive to integration. In fact, the living conditions were often described as having a negative effect on both physical and mental well-being which in turn could impact the overall integration process. Those that lived in ABO apartments fared markedly better in this respect. Other aspects were shared by both accommodation centres and apartments, particularly the various advantages and disadvantages of living in a rural setting.

In order to see housing as a *marker* of integration, however, it is necessary to take a more long-term perspective as one of the defining features of asylum seekers' housing is that it is temporary. One way to measure housing 'success' is by measuring the rate of home-ownership but for relative newcomers, such as the participants in this study, the manner in which they obtain their first rental contract may be a more relevant marker of successful integration: a legitimate contract with a housing company is preferable to subletting as it provides a sense of security that should be beneficial to integration. When asylum seekers in ABO obtain a residence permit, they are faced with two options: They can either wait for a placement in a municipality somewhere in Sweden or they can try to find housing on their own. The former option is more likely to lead to a legitimate contract but as this section will show, it is still far from the obvious choice to make.

As with everything else in the asylum system, there is an element of luck involved: an asylum seeker that decides to wait for a placement may be offered housing within a few months but there are also cases where people have waited over a year. Another reason why waiting for a placement is risky is that a placement could be anywhere in the country. A placement could be an opportunity to live in a desirable area where they would struggle

to secure a legitimate (and affordable) contract on their own, but it could also mean moving somewhere *less* desirable. A new law was introduced in March 2016 (SFS 2016:38) that, at least in theory, means that all municipalities are now obliged to receive a certain number of refugees (see section 2.2.3). The law change had multiple purposes. One was to shorten the waiting time for refugees who were left in ABO for many months after receiving their permit. Another was to spread new arrivals more evenly throughout the country as the previous system, where a municipality could simply refuse to take in any refugees, meant that some municipalities had taken in large numbers and others none. A third was to open up the opportunity for at least some of the new arrivals to live in areas where the labour market is stronger. The previous system, not unlike the ABO system, had concentrated new arrivals in areas with available housing rather than areas where the ‘integration prospects’ were good (Regeringen 2016).

Despite this law change, there are no guarantees that one will be offered housing within reasonable time (even less so that it will be in an ‘attractive’ location) and many still try to find their own housing. For those that are determined to stay where they lived as asylum seekers, and those who want to move to a particular city, assigned housing is not an option.

That asylum seekers develop an attachment to Land and would like to stay after they get their residence permit is perhaps more common than one might expect. I attended a meeting with the ‘asylum network’ (see section 5.2) in Land and on this occasion, a woman who works for the Public Employment Service was also present. At the time of the meeting, this was the agency responsible for offering housing to new residents unable to find their own housing.¹²⁶ It is typically a slow process as the places available do not meet demands, but the employment officer said that the new law had helped. They had recently got a few offers of housing in the Stockholm region, something that never happened before the change. Unfortunately, this was not necessarily what people were looking for. Two families had said no to housing in Stockholm. Instead, they had found their own housing in small towns near Land. Although the woman from the Employments Services was pleased to see that people were happy in Land, it was frustrating when people declined offers. Once someone declines, the offer goes elsewhere, they cannot simply offer it to someone else in Land also looking for accommodation. For her, it was a matter of reminding people that ‘Sweden is more

¹²⁶ The meeting took place in spring 2016. In January 2017, the Migration Agency took over this responsibility.

than just Land'. For the asylum seekers, saying no to an offer could be a risky move. One only gets one offer, declining that means having to leave the Migration Agency housing and finding accommodation on one's own.

Anna at Land municipality also says it is very common that asylum seekers want to stay in Land. I ask if they are able to help with this in any way and she replies that there have been some improvements in this area. She has let the Public Employment Service know that when an apartment becomes available, they prefer to take someone already established in the community. At the same time, the idea is that work should come first and ideally there should be a decent chance of employment for those that settle there. If the municipality has a need for someone with particular qualifications, a teacher for example, they may ask the Employment Services if they have someone that fits that profile. Choosing between those who are rooted in the community and those who have the best chance of finding employment can be a difficult dilemma. Kareem was one of those that wanted to stay in Land and he worried that waiting for a placement would mean being sent elsewhere:

My problem now, if I stay here another six months and after six months they tell me 'you must go to [a big city]'. If I go to [a big city] now, I begin from zero. I won't have friends, my children won't have friends. They have to start a new school, a new football team. Everything would be very new. So you are beginning from zero. I am here one year, I've made many contacts, my children have friends, they have their team, their dreams, they have many things here. If we go to [a big city], everything will begin from zero. So I am looking to find something in Land. [...] I have many friends here in Land, maybe someone can help me find a house here (Kareem, Land, 2016).

In the end Kareem decides to wait for a placement after all and, almost as if he could predict the future, six months after his permit he is offered a place in the big city he was talking about above. His journey does not end there, however. Initially he is quite excited about the opportunity to live in the city, but this excitement soon fades. Kareem is disappointed to find that he was not sent there because they have a need for his particular skills and finding a job there does not appear any easier (see section 9.1.2.1). Instead, it appears that he is just there to fill a required quota. He also realises that it is just a temporary solution. The apartment he lives in costs over 15 000 SEK in rent and he needs to go to the social welfare every month and fill in a lot of paperwork in order to pay for it. He is worried what will happen when the two-year introduction period is over. Will they still pay his rent? He will not be able to afford living there otherwise. An even bigger concern

is that the contract they have is only temporary and there is a definite risk that they will be without housing after two years regardless of their ability to pay the rent. In the end, life in the city is too stressful for Kareem and he decides to move back to Land.

Kareem's housing in the city may have been temporary and expensive but it was of good standard and it was large enough for him and his family. Others were less fortunate in this regard. Hasan and his family were moved to a small apartment in a converted retirement home. Apart from a bathroom and a small kitchen, their apartment only has one room that is used as both living room and bedroom for him, his wife and their two youngest children. Hasan has built a temporary wall creating a bedroom for him and his wife. It is barely bigger than the bed itself but at least it offers some sense of privacy. Apart from the extremely crowded conditions, Hasan sees another problem with living where they do: since the whole building has been converted to accommodate refugees, all the other residents there are in the same situation as themselves. They are still somehow set apart from the rest of society, just as they were when living in the accommodation centre. Hasan and his family would like to move as quickly as possible but finding accommodation is not easy. They like living in a bigger city and Hasan believes that his chances of finding work there are better, but they would consider moving back to Land if they can find better housing there. Housing and employment are in other words two 'markers' of integration that are difficult to combine in a satisfactory way. It is a challenge for the authorities tasked with finding suitable placements and it is a challenge for the new residents who try to tackle the Swedish housing market on their own.

Ali is one of those who decided that waiting for a placement is not a viable option. Waiting means more time wasted as he cannot start SFI until he leaves the Migration Agency housing and registers at an address. He is also determined to move to a bigger city, partly because work and educational opportunities might be better there and partly because he prefers city living and hopes it will improve his social life. Eager to find somewhere as quickly as possible, he is worried this might be hard to achieve:

I heard from a friend who got a permanent residency that the Public Employment Service only gives flats to families. Now there is a big shortage of flats here in Sweden. It is very busy. So I don't know how I can deal with this situation [...] because I don't know anyone who can help me here. I hope, in the future, that someone can help me. Because it is difficult to go to someone and say 'ok, I want to rent your flat'. If someone has a flat and you want to rent it, and it's without a company, eh, it's difficult. He doesn't know you,

why would he rent his flat to you? He can't do that. I think he will do that to someone who knows him. But not foreign people like me (Ali, Land, 2016).

Ali is aware that families are prioritised for placements and that this means that he, as single man, might have to wait a very long time. He has also heard that to get an apartment with a housing company in one of the bigger cities one must wait several years. The only option left seems to be to rent from a private individual, something that he thinks might be hard without the right contacts, especially as a 'foreign person'. After he receives his residence permit, Ali manages to find a temporary room through an acquaintance. It is only for a few months, and it is in a segregated suburb where he would prefer not to live, but it means he can start his introduction plan and get his introduction benefit. A few months later, a former Swedish teacher of his helps him find a temporary sublet in a more central part of the city.

Not having any contacts at all makes finding housing incredibly difficult. In most towns and cities where the housing demand is greater than housing supply, housing companies either require years of queuing before one has a chance of an apartment or they forgo the queuing system and pick the tenants they deem most likely to pay the rent (i.e. someone with a steady job, not a new arrival living on introduction benefits).¹²⁷

Zina saw assigned housing as her only option and for her, it turned into a very long wait because her case worker accidentally took her off the waiting list for housing. When I interview her the second time, she has just found out that she has received a placement after waiting over a year. She is excited that she will finally be able to start her introduction, but she is also nervous about moving on her own to a place she has never been, far away from her mother and brothers. Because she is over 18, they are treated as two separate cases. The rest of her family has not been offered a placement yet, but it could be anywhere in the country.

Finding accommodation in a larger town or city may be particularly challenging but even in smaller places where housing is more readily available there are obstacles to overcome. While living in a camp a few hours away from Land, Adnan discovers a fondness for the Swedish countryside. He has an old acquaintance from Syria that lives in a village outside of Land and through him he manages to find an empty apartment. When he decides to move there, he is faced with a catch 22 situation that he describes as follows:

¹²⁷ Many asylum seekers also lose valuable queuing time since housing companies often require a Swedish personal identity number to join the queue.

So I found an empty apartment and I went to [the housing company] and asked about it, she said you must have an introduction plan. And that was a big problem. You know why I think this is a problem, the job centre don't give you an introduction plan without an apartment contract. And the company, the rental company don't give you rental contract without an introduction plan. So, I think it is evil circle. You understand what I mean? It's an evil circle (Adnan, Land, 2016).

Adnan manages to solve the problem by registering at a friend's address temporarily. That way he gets an introduction plan and an income that allows him to sign a contract with the housing company. He tells me that he is lucky he has this friend, what most people do is buy a false address where they can register temporarily.

Black market solutions like subletting and false addresses are, in other words, not problems that exist solely for former EBO residents. As Adnan's example shows, even in an area where there is available housing the precarious situation that new residents find themselves in makes it difficult to get a contract without breaking some rule. If one can get past these obstacles, however, one is generally more likely to get a legitimate contract in a smaller town. Choosing to wait for a placement could potentially also lead to housing stability in the form of secure contract but it is far from guaranteed. It all depends on the municipality that they are moved to. Municipalities are obliged to receive a certain number and to ensure they have housing for their two-year introduction period. What happens after that is up to the municipality. Less than half of the municipalities offer permanent housing for all new arrivals and, unsurprisingly, these municipalities tend to be located in more rural locations where there is less pressure on the housing market (Boverket 2019).

All things considered, it could be argued that former ABO residents that either stay in a rural part of the country or are placed in one have better chances of successful housing integration, at least if success is measured in the security of the housing contract. The question is, how does this relate to other aspects of integration? And to what extent does the first rental contract determine more long-term prospects? SCB (2016a) has looked at the moving patterns of refugees and they show that very few of those that are placed in rural areas and smaller towns still live there five years later. As these are typically places that have struggled with declining population for a long time, it is difficult to see why new arrivals would stay in a place that the native population has been leaving for years. If a place cannot offer what people need or want, whether it is job opportunities, services or something

else, they will eventually leave. Only time will tell if the participants who have decided to stay in Land will follow the same path. That they feel safe and comfortable in Land is a good start, but what they look for above all is a good future for their families and employment is seen as a crucial part of this. Ultimately, if they cannot find employment in Land, they too are likely to move elsewhere.

9.4.5 After EBO

As with all things that happen in the shadow economy, it is next to impossible to know how widespread the problem of unlawful subletting is among new residents. A few things are known, however.¹²⁸ Subletting tends to be more common in larger cities where the housing shortage is more prominent. As former EBO residents are more likely to live in larger cities it is fair to assume that they are also more likely to be subletting. Former EBO residents are also at a disadvantage as they really have no other option but to find their own housing. The law (SFS 2016: 38) regulating housing for refugees, states that it is *primarily* for ABO residents but in reality, it is *only* for ABO residents. The reason for this is fairly obvious: ABO is an expensive housing form, especially the temporary kind, whereas EBO is of no direct cost to the state. Obvious though it may be, it is curious how little is made of this fact in the ongoing debate surrounding EBO. What it essentially means is that when asylum seekers choose EBO, they also opt out of any help with housing after they receive their residence permit. For some, it is then that the real problems with EBO begin. As discussed in section 9.4.2, it is common to feel a need to not ‘outstay one’s welcome’. As asylum seekers, few have the financial ability to pay for their own housing but with the added income that a residence permit brings, the pressure to move increases. Even if they can continue living with the same relative, registering at their address could be problematic if the people they are living with receive housing allowance or other benefits that could be affected by additional tenants. Partly because of this, the practice of registering at a false address is believed to be widespread (Boverket 2015a).

Mikael describes a situation where many former EBO residents end up essentially homeless but there is little the municipality can do to help. The social services have some emergency accommodation, but it is reserved for

¹²⁸ Boverket’s (2015a) report suggests a few possible indicators of black-market activities (subletting, false addresses etc). Their conclusion is that such activities are more common in larger cities.

women and children at risk of abuse. That schools report of families that move around between different short-term addresses so frequently that they lose track of where they live indicates that there are children in Stad that live in very precarious circumstances. Gabriel's family is one of those families. After moving five times already, they need to move again within a month. At the time of the interview, they have no idea where they are moving. Gabriel sent his cousin to the social services to ask for help and the response they got was that the social services could not help him with housing but if he could not provide adequate living conditions for his children they might have to take his children from him. This added to Gabriel's already quite strained relationship with Swedish state authorities (see also section 8.3.2). I ask if he has considered moving elsewhere and he replies that he has tried but it is the same everywhere, he has relatives in other cities in Sweden and they have the same problem. Moving to a rural location in the north where there is more housing available is not an option:

[Finding housing] is easier there but not finding a job. Everybody that is born in the north move to Stockholm to work. And it would be very hard for my children. They have their cousins here. That's why we didn't go and live in a camp. We want to stay here because the children have their school here, their friends. We don't want to move somewhere where they have nothing (Gabriel, Stad, 2016).

Stability is one of Ager and Strang's integration domains and as Gabriel's example shows, it is not always possible to achieve stability in all aspects of life: Gabriel may give up his housing stability by staying in Stad, but at least his children have the stability of having their extended family nearby and of going to the same school with the same friends.

That children, especially younger children, become rooted in a place much quicker than the adults is something that can be seen in both Land and Stad. Because of this, the children's well-being becomes one of the main reasons for staying in both locations—even when the participants can see other disadvantages to staying. In Stad, the lack of housing is one such disadvantage and nearly all the participants describe their housing situation as problematic. None of the other participants have struggled quite as much as Gabriel, however. Three are still living with the same relatives after residence and seem reasonably content doing so. For one of those, Maria, the situation has improved as her parents and younger siblings have moved to a different apartment: she now has her own room in her cousin's place. Kristina, who has been in Stad longer than most of the others, has actually

secured a housing contract and the remainder are in some kind of sublets. Even though subletting does sometimes work on a more long-term basis, it does have definite downsides. Firstly, it is an insecure housing arrangement where one lives under constant threat of eviction. Secondly, rent is typically higher than with a legitimate contract, and it is not uncommon that people pay large sums of money for the contract itself (Boverket 2015a).¹²⁹ Thirdly, unless they are approved by the landlord or housing company, which they rarely are, the tenant cannot claim housing benefit to cover the rent and lastly, the tenants may also be unable to register at the address and need to find a separate address at which they can register.

Although many want to stay in Stad despite the difficulties in finding housing, not all are determined to stay no matter what. The important question is whether they have something to move *to*: the younger participants are willing, even eager, to move elsewhere to study and some of the older participants, like Theresa, would like to stay in Stad for her children's sake but would be willing to move if she got a good job and good housing elsewhere. Quite understandably, moving somewhere unknown for housing alone is seen as too risky a move. Besides, as Gabriel mentioned, Stad is far from the only place in Sweden with a housing shortage. In some sense they may even be better off staying than trying their luck elsewhere: at least in Stad they have contacts that can help them find housing. Gabriel's assessment of northern Sweden is at least partly correct, although there are some northern parts where there is currently a very high demand for labour. It is also understandable if the northernmost part of the country are off limits to Gabriel and the others: moving a couple of hours away from their social networks might be acceptable but not moving twenty hours away.

Unlike ABO, where there is a clear transition between being an asylum seeker and a resident with regards to housing, EBO is more of a continuum. The housing problems that exist for asylum seekers usually persist long after they get a residence permit. Based on the interview material, as well as the other sources that have informed this study, the problem with EBO can be narrowed down to two main (partly connected) components: one is the issue of segregation and the other is housing shortage. The solution to these problems very much depends on perspective. Segregation is a complex issue that will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Regarding the question of housing shortage, the answer appears simple: build more houses. To

¹²⁹ A few of the participants describe paying extra in rent because of black market contracts but none of them mention buying contracts.

Emma, who works for the Church of Sweden as an integration coordinator, the more specific answer is that more housing should be built that meets the needs of people that actually live in Stad. This is not just a question about housing new arrivals, but it is about the lack of affordable rental accommodation more generally. It is an issue that affects many other groups including students and elderly people and Emma argues that it would be preferable if the question was discussed in more general terms, rather than with a narrow focus on asylum seekers and new residents.

The ‘integration network’ that Emma has been part of setting up consists of a wide range of organisations and the opinions vary somewhat regarding what should be done about the problems with EBO. One alternative idea is that an accommodation centre should open in Stad to cater for those that want to live there but struggle to find appropriate housing through EBO (see section 8.1.3). Such a solution would perhaps solve the immediate problem of housing asylum seekers, but it does little to address the general housing shortage. From the municipality’s point of view, there are two issues that need to be addressed. On the one hand, there is quite a severe shortage of affordable rental accommodation for low income households. On the other hand, they want to attract those that work in Stad but live and pay taxes elsewhere, especially high-income earners. The little that is currently being built in Stad is mainly targeted towards this latter group. Newly built housing consist mainly of apartment for purchase that are too expensive for many in need of housing. Meanwhile, in the parts of town where low-income earners are concentrated, the population has increased by thousands in recent decades, even though no new housing has been built.

The current housing shortage is not just an issue that affects Stad and, as Emma points out, it is not just an issue that affects asylum seekers and new refugee residents. It does, however, offer a potential explanation to why new arrivals struggle to integrate into the labour market even though the opportunities to do so are there:

We live in a region where there are a lot of opportunities for work. But if people do not have secure housing it is hard to look for a job. It becomes a vicious circle when you are forced to move around, many people move a lot because of this. They never get a stable ground to stand on. It affects their chances of finding a job, of learning the language. A lot of things are affected. What I would say, and many others in the network would as well, is that more housing needs to be built. So that people can afford to live here (Emma, Stad, 2016).

Emma, and many others with her, sees secure housing as an important means to integration. The municipality may agree with this assessment, but they are more inclined to promote limiting the possibility of choosing EBO in Stad as the solution. The question is whether that would just be a matter of postponing the inevitable. It may be possible to force asylum seekers to live in ABO, but what happens after these individuals receive their residence permit? Should the rights of residents to choose their own housing also be curtailed? If not, chances are that many of those that would have chosen EBO in Stad would still move there, only slightly later. Also, the recent law change does not involve banning EBO altogether, it simply cuts the daily allowance for those that chose to live in the 'wrong' areas. Previous attempt to limit EBO through financial penalties has proved unsuccessful (see section 2.2.3), and many will in all likelihood still move to the same areas, but they would live there under even worse economic conditions.

9.5 Means and markers: concluding remarks

In this chapter on 'means and markers', four separate domains were covered: employment, education, health and housing. While it was clear that all domains were understood as both means and markers, employment stood out as the most important marker to the participants. With regards to education and health, the 'means' aspects were perhaps more apparent. Finally, housing was clearly seen as both a means to, and a marker of, integration. In this chapter, I have described how the participants experience living in the two different forms of housing. I have also given some indication of how the initial housing choice may impact on choices made and options available after residence. I started the housing section by stating that it is a domain of central importance to this study and when the results of this study are summarised in the next and final chapter, it should become clear that housing is indeed a central domain that relates to all the other domains in Ager and Strang's integration framework. In order to avoid unnecessary repetition, I will conclude this chapter here and refer to the final chapter for the overall conclusions.

10 Discussion and conclusion

The title of this thesis takes the form of a question: Seeking asylum – Finding a home? It is a question with both a literal and a metaphorical meaning: it relates to both the material task of finding a house to live in and the subjective feeling of integration, of belonging to a society and feeling ‘at home’ in a place. The overall conclusion of this study is that these two aspects of ‘finding home’ are not always easy to combine. How I arrived at this conclusion will be the subject of this concluding chapter.

The starting point of this thesis was the idea that asylum seeker’s housing, the EBO option in particular, poses an ‘integration problem’. In 2019, this view had gathered enough support to lead to a policy change and since January 2020, the option to choose EBO has been limited. In the discussions leading up to this decision, two things were conspicuously absent. The first was a thorough examination of the integration prospects of the ABO alternative and the second was the perspective of the asylum seekers themselves.

The aim of this thesis has been to counteract the above shortcomings by exploring the topic of integration from the point of view of asylum seekers living in the two different forms of housing. In addition to this comparative element with regards to housing, the thesis has also had a broader aim of contributing to our sociological understanding of integration by viewing it from the position of individuals who are in many ways kept ‘outside’ of society—regardless of the type of housing they are in. The following questions has served as guidelines throughout the project: *How do asylum seekers make sense of their integration process? What obstacles and opportunities do they experience in this process? What role does the type of housing, and its context, play in this process?*

In the remainder of this chapter, I will give answers to these questions. The first section below will discuss the limits that the particular legal status of asylum seekers place on their integration. The structure of the section is based on Ager and Strang’s (2008) core domains of integration, the main analytical framework used in both the empirical chapters and in the literature review in Chapter 4. As such it will also serve as a summary of the results derived using this framework. The section will focus primarily on question one and two above, but it will touch upon how the different domains relate to housing. This is followed by section 10.2 where some limitations of the framework used are discussed. Section 10.3 will show how drawing on Durkheimian ideas on integration can help give a fuller picture of both how asylum seekers make sense of their integration and the role that

housing forms may play in this ‘sense making’. This section will also contrast the results of this study with how the connection between housing and integration is typically portrayed in policy. The chapter, and the thesis, ends with section 10.4 where two central limitations are discussed. The first relates to what conclusions can and *cannot* be drawn regarding the integration of asylum seekers based on the results of this study. The second relates to the possibilities and limitations of the concept of integration when attempting to understand the position of asylum seekers in Swedish society.

One limitation that relates to both of the above should be stated from the outset in order to avoid misunderstanding. The aim of this thesis has *not* been to provide an answer to the question of which housing form is better for integration. It is not designed for that purpose, nor is that necessarily the most relevant question to ask. In the latter sections of the chapter, the comparison between the two housing forms is used to critique recent policy decisions relating to both housing and other areas of refugee integration. The reader should bear in mind that the target of this critique is the *underlying assumptions* about integration that motivated these policy changes. In other words, the thesis questions how the problem of asylum seekers’ housing is defined, not the existence of a problem.

10.1 Integration in a state of limbo

Before we look at how the asylum seekers interviewed experienced integration, it is worth restating that this thesis views integration as a mutual process that implies some form of membership, and that the end goal of this process is equal participation in, and belonging to, a given society.

In order to make ‘participation in society’ more concrete, Ager and Strang’s core domains of integration were used as an analytical framework. A major benefit of the framework is that it illuminates the extent to which asylum seekers’ specific status excludes them from participation: access to each of the ten domains is curtailed to some degree. Although all domains are important, the ‘foundation’ domain is given particular attention below as it sets the boundaries of what is possible in terms of integration.

Ager and Strang defines the *foundation* of integration as ‘rights and citizenship’ and in this regard, asylum seekers are clearly at a disadvantage: they lack many of the rights associated with not only citizenship but also permanent residence. The current Swedish policy goals regarding integration are ‘equal rights, duties and opportunities’ (prop. 2019/20:1) and since asylum seekers are denied equality, they are in a sense denied integration. As Chapter 2 of this thesis shows, this is not simply an unfortunate side-

effect of lacking resources, asylum seekers are in some respects *deliberately* kept from full participation as a way of limiting the attractiveness of seeking asylum in the first place.

The asylum-seeking status can be defined as a precarious citizenship or an 'in between' status (see section 4.1). It is a kind of conditional membership where the person has the temporary right to stay in the country but without the rights afforded to other residents. That these rights matter to the participants can be inferred by the fact that most viewed the 'starting point' of their integration process as the day when they would receive their residence permit. While they found the wait for this day difficult, they rarely reflected on the limited rights they have as asylum seekers and they never expressed any expectation of *equal* rights with Swedish citizen. Instead, they often spoke with gratitude of Sweden as a country that values *human* rights, and many expressed a sense of frustration that they were not able to contribute to Swedish society as a way of 'paying back'.

Regarding citizenship, the participants' views were mainly pragmatic: they generally saw applying for citizenship as an obvious future step simply because a Swedish passport is better than a Syrian one, allowing for more freedom of movement. Important here is the difference between what Brubaker (1992) calls formal and substantive citizenship. Whereas formal citizenship is a general membership status, substantive citizenship refers to the specific rights associated with citizenship. Formal citizenship does not guarantee substantive citizenship: because of racial discrimination and other forms of exclusion these rights are not always exercised equally (Lister 2003). The link between citizenship and equal rights can also be questioned on the grounds that many social rights are associated with permanent residence rather than citizenship. However, because we live in a world of extreme global inequality, citizenship in a prosperous and peaceful country is still highly valued (Brubaker 1989). Since substantive citizenship cannot be guaranteed, it is perhaps not surprising that when the participants were asked to reflect on the possibility of obtaining Swedish citizenship, their main reference group was not native Swedes but rather other Syrian nationals without that possibility. It is also likely that questions about the more symbolic nature of citizenship were a bit premature and few participants appeared to have given it much thought.

That the asylum seekers in this study did not feel entitled to equal rights does not mean that the lack of rights was not problematic. For one thing, it was clear that despite their reluctance to complain, their limited social rights made it extremely difficult to make ends meet. This obviously affected their

ability to participate in society. Tellingly, the relief that the participants described after receiving a resident permit can in part be attributed to the social rights that this change in status brought with it: increased benefits brought them closer to living what some referred to as a 'normal life'. Equally important in this respect is the improved access to rights that may provide a meaningful existence, particularly the right to education.

The *facilitator* section is made up of two distinct domains: 'language and cultural knowledge' and 'safety and stability'. The latter was strongly linked to the foundation: the right to seek asylum was what brought them to a country where they feel safe, but it was only with a residence permit that they could start to feel some stability in this new country. Language was seen as key component to integration and participants in both locations spoke of obstacles to learning the language. The scarcity and quality of Swedish classes available to asylum seekers was particularly problematic in Land, whereas the difficulty in finding Swedish people to speak to was common in both locations. Cultural knowledge was generally also valued but it was not always clear *why* it is important and *what* it should consist of.

The *Social connections* section contains both clear differences and some similarities between the two locations. In terms of 'social bonds', the most apparent similarity was the importance placed on the immediate family: doing 'what is best for the family' was an important motivating factor, both in coming to Sweden and in the choices made once here. The importance of family for a person's well-being was particularly obvious in the cases where families had been separated. As social bonds in the wider sense of 'co-ethnic' bonds, as well as social bridges with Swedish people, are central to both how the asylum seekers made sense of their integration process and as motivating factors to recent policy changes, they will be given a fuller examination in section 10.3.

Regarding the 'social links' domain, the most interesting difference is not found in a comparison between the two locations but rather in the change that occurred after a residence permit: there were some signs of a more critical perspective emerging over time in this domain. The time as asylum seekers was characterised by limited access to services and hence also limited contact with public officials. Although access improved after a residence permit, the increased contact with the 'structures of the state' was not always positive and to some participants, social links were characterised by an excessive need for control and a lack of trust. Some also felt that not enough consideration was paid to their particular circumstances as refugees

suffering from trauma, and the eight hours of daily activities required for full benefits was seen as too demanding by these participants.

In the *means and markers* section, access to 'education' was seen by many of the participants as one of the great opportunities of living in Sweden. This was especially the case for the participants with children, some of whom had missed years of schooling. This meant that the children were faced with the challenge of catching up with their peers, but they were in many ways ahead of their parents whose access to formal education was denied. The long wait to access education was frustrating for many and once they had access, they were faced with additional challenges: the slow and complicated processes of validating and supplementing their qualifications made it difficult for some to work in their previous profession.

The loss of continuity and taken-for granted routines that forced migration entails can have a profound effect on what Giddens (1987) calls a person's 'ontological security'. It follows that 'health', especially with regards to psychological well-being, is a domain strongly affected by the situation that the asylum seekers were in. Both pre- and postflight aspects played a part in this: traumatic memories, the uncertainty of waiting for a decision, poor living conditions, economic strain and the lack of meaningful activities all had a negative effect on their well-being. In terms of access to healthcare, asylum seekers rights are limited to 'care that cannot be deferred' (see section 4.4.3). The participants did not bring up access to healthcare as a specific problem for them as asylum seekers, but a few did mention the more general problems of long waiting times in the healthcare sector.

Two 'means and markers' of integration remain: employment and housing. Employment is not only the most commonly used indicator of integration, it also played a crucial part in how the asylum seekers made sense of their own integration process. We will return to this question in section 10.3. Regarding 'housing', it was clear that much of what limits the asylum seekers' integration is not due to their specific housing situation but rather their status as asylum seekers. There are, however, some clear differences between the two housing forms and something that becomes clear when one tries to summarise the importance of housing is that it relates to all other domains in Ager and Strang's integration framework. Firstly, it relates to the 'foundation' as a question of equal rights: should asylum seekers have the same right to choose where to live as everybody else? Secondly, housing plays a vital part in the 'security and stability' domain: without a secure base from which to operate, everything else becomes difficult. There are also

clear links to ‘language and cultural knowledge’ as the location of the housing might determine the opportunities for language learning and cultural exchange. Thirdly, and this relates to the previous point, the location may also determine what kind of social connections the asylum seeker can make: whether they are mainly bridges or bonds. Both can be beneficial to integration albeit in different ways. Finally, housing also connects to the other domains in ‘means and markers’. Substandard housing could have direct effect on health—overcrowding could lead to both psychological stress and physical ailments—but the location of the housing can also limit the access to health care. Regarding education and employment, opportunities differ considerably depending on the location.

10.2 Some limitations of the framework

Bennich-Björkman et al. (2016) warn that if one tries to fit integration into ‘neat compartments’, one risks losing sight of the individual experience of integration and the ‘existential challenges embedded in refugee-ship’ as it is usually based on presumptions about immigrants as a category (p. 18-19). A large part of the challenge of integration, they argue, is to restore a sense that one’s individuality is recognised. Ager and Strang’s core domains could potentially be questioned on these grounds: since ‘existential challenges’ do not fit neatly into a domain, there is a risk that they remain unseen. At the same time, the framework does not by necessity exclude such aspects: if it is used as a framework for a qualitative exploration of how asylum seekers experience and make sense of the different domains, it is open to different interpretations and the struggle to restore individuality is actually apparent in several different domains.

Social links, for example, did not work well when refugees were treated as a category. Some participants argued that all refugees are distrusted because of the mistakes made by a few; others felt their needs were not met by ‘one-size-fits-all’ integration measures. Most of the participants had a high level of *education* but their qualifications were not always recognised. This status loss, as well as the choice between settling for less qualified *employment* or going through the arduous process of supplementing their qualifications, was difficult to several participants. The problem of restoring individuality also relates to *housing* and the quest for a ‘normal life’. Both ABO and EBO implies a loss of autonomy and privacy that can make a normal life impossible. Finally, restoring a sense of individuality also relates to the *foundation* and the identity questions a change in citizenship might raise.

A possible limitation then, is that while the theme of ‘restoring a sense of individuality’ is clearly present in the interview material, the framework does not make it immediately apparent which may obscure its importance. To the framework’s credit, it covers a variety of aspects that, I would argue, are highly relevant to the integration process of asylum seekers. The domains are also quite broad which allows for some degree of flexibility, even if it means fitting more into the various domains than Ager and Strang may have intended. While the domains themselves are useful and relevant, the way that the different domains are grouped, named and ordered could be questioned. Above all, the pyramid shape and the way it suggests that one ‘level’ leads to next is confusing rather than helpful as it suggests a far more ‘orderly’ integration process than what I have found is normally the case.

A final limitation of the framework, which is also the main reason why this thesis cannot end here, is that the domains do not fully capture how the asylum seekers make sense of their own *belonging* to society. While the domains clearly illuminate the limited extent to which asylum seekers can *participate* in a society, belonging requires a different level of abstraction. Understanding belonging is not only important with regards to asylum seekers’ individual integration processes, it also relates to more abstract ideas of what creates an integrated society. This will be the main topic of the coming section in which the experiences of the participants are juxtaposed with how the issue is viewed from a policy perspective.

10.3 Community and society

Although the integration goal of ‘equal rights, duties and opportunities’ was included in the latest budget proposal, at the time of writing the government does not have a clear integration policy. The idea behind not treating integration as a separate policy area is that it should be a question for *all* of society, and hence all policy areas, rather than measures targeted specially at immigrants (prop. 2019/20:1). The actual effect of this approach appears to be the opposite. The two areas where integration is most frequently discussed are residential segregation and the labour market integration of new refugee residents, and the suggested measures are primarily aimed at immigrants.

Levitas (2005) writes about the concept of social exclusion, but her arguments are highly relevant to how the concept of integration is currently used in Swedish politics. As previously described, she distinguishes between three different social exclusion discourses (see section 3.3.2), and what I propose in this section is that both segregation and refugees’ labour market

participation are typically spoken of in a manner consistent with what Levitas calls the ‘moral underclass discourse’ (MUD) and the ‘social integration discourse’ (SID). According to Levitas (2005, p.178), both these discourses are ‘fundamentally Durkheimian’ (see section 3.3.2). What I will argue is that the participants in this study also described their integration process in terms that are, if not fundamentally then at least partially, Durkheimian. At the same time, they challenged several commonly held assumptions about how integration works.

10.3.1 Community

[in EBO] new arrivals only meet co-ethnics or other immigrants. They do not have any contact with Swedes, and they do not learn about everyday life in Swedish society. They do not learn Swedish and are consigned to unemployment and welfare dependence ... [In ABO] new arrivals are distributed in smaller municipalities where the closeness and warmth between people is greater and the learning of Swedish, and the integration, is quicker” (SOU 2003:75, p.49, my translation).

The above quote may be over a decade old, but the ideas remain current and more recent examples can be found. When the conclusions from SOU 2018:22 was presented in a news article, the report’s lead investigator stated ‘if one chooses EBO, the contact with society can be non-existent for a very long time’ (Olauzon 2018).¹³⁰ This raises the questions: what is society? And what does it mean to have no contact with it?

‘What is society?’ is a fundamental question often left unanswered, but in migration and integration studies it is often assumed to mean the nation-state. Wimmer & Glick-Schiller (2002) warn against this type of methodological nationalism. Part of their argument is that the nation-state is not always the most appropriate unit of analysis and that more attention needs to be paid to transnational communities. This is a valid point and there are traces of transnationalism in the participants’ stories. Take, for example, the pragmatism they showed with regards to citizenship and the possibility of obtaining a Swedish passport. This is not only an expression of global

¹³⁰ SOU 2018:22 is the report where the restrictions on EBO were first proposed. The quote is only one example of the wider phenomenon of referring to immigrant-dense, economically disadvantaged areas as being ‘outside’ of society (in Swedish: utanförskapsområden), see Dahlstedt (2018) for a discussion on the concept.

inequality – some passports are worth more than others – but it is also a reflection of the fact that the war in Syria has forced them into a diasporic existence. Many of the interviewees have family members in other countries and a Swedish passport would enable maintenance of these social bonds. At the same time, the mobility and fluidity of their existence should not be exaggerated: nearly all expressed a desire to settle in Sweden permanently and in that sense, the geographically bounded territory of the nation-state is still of importance. The level of analysis with the most potential for belonging, however, is the local community. That belonging is closely tied to place in a more local sense was apparent in both Stad and Land, even though the circumstances clearly differed.

In Stad, many of the participants described arriving to a ready-made community or a ‘home away from home’. They usually had extensive family networks in the area and through these, and the many religious and cultural organisations present, they quickly gained access to a wider network of Syrians. This wider network in general, and the family networks in particular, were greatly appreciated by the participants. They provided a sense of continuity for children that had been uprooted from their home in a traumatic way, they offered an active social life and emotional support in a difficult time. It was also not uncommon that they provided economic support and the wider social networks could be utilised to find housing or employment. In addition, they were a valued source of information about Swedish society. All the participants in the study lived with relatives or friends who had been in Sweden for a long period of time and they often acted as guides to their new home country. They helped with practical matters, by translating documents in Swedish for example, but the help could be more profound than that: the knowledge they gained from their relatives sometimes helped to build an appreciation for more general aspects of Swedish society.

EBO was not without its difficulties, however. Overcrowded living conditions were a problem for some participants and feeling like a burden to the host family was also quite common. Although the host families are generally well-established in Sweden, the participants clearly separated them from ‘ethnic Swedes’ and many wished it was easier to establish such ‘social bridges’. The most common concern was the difficulty of finding housing in Stad and the frequent moves associated with EBO were apparent in this study as well. Despite these shortcomings, most participants still believed the advantages of living in Stad outweighed the disadvantages.

The strong social bonds of the ethnic community described by the participants in Stad can be understood in terms of Durkheim's (1893/2013) mechanical solidarity or as bonds based on similarity. This similarity was expressed in different ways: some felt a sense of solidarity with a people with whom they shared a common ancestry, others described a solidarity based on sharing similar experiences of forced migration. Shared norms and values were implied, for example by the central importance of the Church and family, but rarely made explicit. Instead, the close bonds in and of themselves were central to most, especially when they were based on family or kinship. The importance placed on family could be interpreted as an expression of traditional norms within the Syriac/Assyrian community (see Deniz 1999; Mack 2017) but what Bennich-Björkman et al. (2016) calls the need to 'restore a sense of individuality' is also relevant: relatives are surely more likely to see the *person* behind the refugee category than people at large.

When EBO residents' contact with society is described as 'non-existent', it implies that the kind of community found in Stad somehow exists *outside* of Swedish society. If that is the case, what kind of contact is missing that disqualifies this community from becoming a part of society? One possibility is that EBO limits contact with formal structures of the state. For the interviewees in this study, this did not appear to be the case. A second possibility is that EBO limits the possibility to form social bridges and this *was* seen a problem. Social bridges were desirable both as a means to learn the Swedish language and as a way of increasing understanding between groups. From a policy perspective, however, when EBO is presented as being 'outside' of society it is usually not this kind of mutual understanding that is emphasised but rather a one-sided lack of normative adaptation more in line with Levitas (2005) MUD discourse. A common idea is that a 'culture of dependency' has developed in disadvantaged areas and asylum seekers that start their lives in such places risk permanent exclusion. Some take it even further, such as the municipal officer who stated in a report that asylum seekers that stay in disadvantaged areas 'do not get integrated into Swedish society. Instead, they are integrated into criminal gangs and social structures based on violence' (Boverket 2015b, p.23). The MUD discourse assumes the existence of an orderly and normatively coherent society, on the one hand, and a normatively deviant underclass, on the other. In this example, gangs and violence are firmly placed outside of *Swedish* society and in that sense the MUD discourse in Swedish policy also takes on ethnic or racial undertones.

The interview material in this study gives reason to question the idea that EBO in socially disadvantaged areas by necessity leads to social exclusion, but it is not a finding that can be easily generalised. Apart from the general limitations of a qualitative study of this kind, a few more specific limitations should be addressed. Integration is often contrasted with problems of social order and a curious absence in the interview material is that there is little mention of the social problems typically associated with the suburbs of Stad (gang related crime, for example). Although highly speculative, it is possible that the interviewees' middle-class status meant that they were less directly affected by such problems even though many lived in disadvantaged areas. The Syriac/Assyrian enclave in Stad is also quite unusual. Most immigrant-dense areas in Sweden are ethnically diverse rather than dominated by a particular group and settlement in these areas is usually more likely to be caused by limited choice than a desire to live with co-ethnics (see section 4.4.4). In the study at hand, however, many participants in Stad did express a desire to live near relatives. Their choices were still limited, however, as they clearly did not want to live *with* their relatives.

Moving on to community in ABO, several reports have suggested that social integration in the form of social bridges with Swedish people is easier to achieve in this housing form (e.g. Boverket 2015; SOU 2003:75; SOU 2018:22). This is usually based on the assumption that geographic proximity to 'Swedes' automatically leads to better social integration. The experiences that the participants in Land described show that this is not necessarily the case, but how they viewed social connections did differ from the participants in Stad. Most importantly, those in Land were more likely to distance themselves from their own group and they often stated a preference for living with mainly Swedish people. Since most co-ethnics were fellow asylum seekers rather than an established community like the one in Stad, such a preference may be understandable: contacts with Swedes could potentially lead to opportunities for a more 'normal life'. Making meaningful connections with Swedes proved difficult, however, and unlike the participants in Stad, who saw the lack of contact as an unfortunate side-effect of segregation, the ABO participants were more likely to see it as a result of Swedish people's unwillingness to connect.

Sometimes the housing itself also made social bridges difficult in ABO. This was particularly true of accommodation centres, which were described as prisonlike places that followed a monotonous routine and that offered little contact with the community outside. All the ABO participants had spent at least some time in such a centre, and none described this experience

as positive. Moving to an ABO apartment, as most eventually did, was a great improvement as it offered a chance of more independent living. In terms of social connections, however, the improvement was minor. Some of these apartments were not placed in the centre of the small town but in rural areas on the outskirts of the town. Here, the participants lived in social isolation as they had few neighbours and public transport was limited.

Although the results are varied, the support for the thesis that ABO enables easier contact with Swedes is weak at best. A possible objection here is that the religious affiliation of the participants may have affected how they viewed social connections; hence the results are not comparable. There is some merit to this objection. Previous studies on the Syriac/Assyrian community in Sweden describe a group with a strong sense of mechanical solidarity brought on by their shared history of living as a religious minority under difficult conditions. As they have come to see safety in numbers, they show a preference for living together in Sweden as well (Deniz 1999; Mack 2017). While this type of reasoning was present in some of the interviews in Stad, it was absent in Land.¹³¹ Another possibility is that an awareness of islamophobia caused the Muslim participants to deemphasise social bonds in order to disassociate themselves from a stigmatised group, but the interview material gives no clear indication that this was the case. The participants in ABO *were* more likely to reflect on how they were perceived by the Swedish majority but they rarely made it a question of religion.

What is clear is that the social bonds available to the EBO and ABO participants differed. The large, well-established community in Stad was not available to the ABO participants and it would be difficult to claim that they would have done better had they chosen EBO. However, since the desired end-result of the latest policy change is that more choose ABO over EBO, a more interesting question may be whether the EBO residents would have done better in ABO. Would they as Christians have found it easier to be included in the community in Land? There are a few reasons to doubt that would be the case. The first is that it is unlikely that religion would shield them from other forms of prejudice and othering. The second is that when the housing itself prohibits contact, the religion of the person inside it is of scant importance. The third is that the participants in Land did not primarily attribute the local population's unwillingness to connect to xenophobia. While it is possible, even likely, that their 'otherness' played a part in their

¹³¹ Syrian Muslims that choose ABO could, of course, differ from Syrian Muslims that choose EBO in this regard.

exclusion it would be unfair to reinforce stereotypes about rural people as especially racist when there is little to indicate that this is the case. Instead, the participants were more likely to emphasise the strong social bonds that already exist in Land. Their impression was that the local population tended to socialise in firmly established groups that were not particularly open to new members. Land is a more homogenous place than many larger towns and cities. Perhaps, as one participant suggested, they are also ‘less used to strangers’. Until a few decades ago, most people either worked for or knew someone that worked for the same factory. The factory gradually downsized and Land has been a place that people move from, not to, for quite some time. The ‘warmth and closeness’ of small-town people suggested in SOU 2003:75 may in other words be present in Land but because it is a community based on similarity and long-established bonds, it is not necessarily a warmth that is easily extended to newcomers.

There are couple of exceptions to this and a few participants did manage to make Swedish friends in the small town. Parents seemed to find it easier than non-parents as they met other parents through their children. Taking an active part in organisations, such as the local church and football team, also helped. Those who had formed social bridges had a far more positive view of the community in Land. As parents, they especially appreciated the social control function of a small community where ‘everybody knows everybody’: if their children misbehaved, someone was bound to tell them.

It is possible then to see both the Syriac/Assyrian community in Stad and the local community in Land as examples of mechanical solidarity. Not in its most extreme form where the ‘collective conscience’ takes over completely and the ‘individuality is nil’ (Durkheim 1893/2013, p.91), but in a more moderate form that allows for greater variation within the community. What is noteworthy is that the community found in Stad is often seen as a problem whereas the community in Land is not.

The participants in Stad show that a community based on ethnic and kinship ties in no way precludes the possibility of feeling a sense of belonging to Swedish society in a wider sense: as one participant put it, Stad feels like home because it is ‘like Syria but in a better place’. At the same time, many expressed a wish for Stad to be more mixed. Swedes in larger cities may be more ‘used to strangers’ but they generally choose not to live with them: for every immigrant-dense area in Stad, there is an equally Swedish-dense area. Mechanical solidarity might hold the group together, but it may not be very helpful when connecting different groups. That is not to say that

forming a community through social bridges is impossible. Durkheim's contemporary Tönnies distinguishes between three forms of 'gemeinschaft' based on kinship, neighbourhood and friendship respectively (1887/2003, p.44), suggesting that 'common ground' can be found in very literal sense by living in the same 'neighbourhood'. A few of the participants in Land confirm that this can be the case. They have found a sense of belonging that is 'bridging' as it does not rely heavily on similarity but rather on a type of familiarity brought on by simply sharing the same, geographically confined, space.

Social connections can be viewed as a resource that can be converted into other resources: a social network may, for example, be used to find work and housing. It can also provide information and useful skills, such as a learning a new language. Viewed this way, social connections are more valuable if they are diverse and widespread (Granovetter 1973) and the skills learnt can be easily transferred from one context to another. What this leaves out, however, is that social connections are also valued in their own right and in this sense, they are often intimately tied to a certain place: they create a sense of belonging and make a place feel like 'home'. As such, they make up an important part of integration independent of their role as a 'resource'.

This leads us to the question of whether this form of belonging can translate into social cohesion on the societal, or national, level. Whereas the communities described in this section are 'real' in the sense that they are made up of people that are in close contact with each other, the national 'community' is, in the words of Benedict Anderson (1983/2006), by necessity 'imagined'. In the face of growing diversity, this 'community' is confronted with two options: either it can reimagine the nation in order to incorporate difference, or it can demand that newcomers adapt to already established norms and values. Although the latter option has been promoted regularly as of late, there is little consensus as to what exactly constitute Swedish norms and values. There is one supposedly Swedish value, however, that has proved particularly influential on policy and that is the value placed on work. This, as it happens, is also a central topic of the next section below.

10.3.2 Society

Whereas the social cohesion of a small-scale community can be informal and based on personal connection, in society it is largely formal and impersonal. Part of the problem when trying to define the norms and values that presumably lead to national cohesion is that they either risk becoming too

general and abstract or too narrow to incorporate difference. If, for example, democracy, freedom and equality are held up as particular Swedish values, it offers little meaningful guidance as to what separates *Swedish* society from other societies that subscribe to the same values. Why would they create bonds to a specific nation? If, on the other hand, the nation is defined more narrowly, it becomes a question of who has the right to define what it is. Should the majority rule? In the World Values Survey, Sweden stands out as a particularly secular country (Puranen 2019). One could argue that this makes secularism a ‘Swedish’ value but excluding the sizeable religious minority from belonging to the nation is problematic, not least because it would contradict other values that are also seen as important, such as freedom of religion.

When the lack of normative adaptation is brought up as an integration problem, it is assumed that asylum seekers and new refugee residents *as a group* are either not aware of or do not subscribe to certain values that are seen as important in Sweden. What this study shows is that it is far from certain that this is the case, at least when the focus is on abstract general principles. When the participants talked about why they came to Sweden, their perception of Sweden as a democracy that respects the freedom of the individual, and offers equal rights to all, was a central part of their reasoning. In other words, these values can be significant pull factors to individuals from more oppressive regimes.

To claim certain norms and values as Swedish can also result in a tendency to portray all who are defined (by themselves or others) as ‘non-Swedish’ as normatively deviant. This tendency is seen most clearly in the debate surrounding segregation: disadvantaged areas are portrayed as ‘parallel societies’ where anything from the suppression of women’s rights, religious extremism, a lack of respect for Swedish authorities and general lawlessness can be ascribed to the lack of ‘Swedish’ values (e.g. Boverket 2015b). That such questions receive limited attention in this thesis is purely because they are not commonly brought up by the participants themselves, but it is interesting to note that the participants in ABO are more likely to describe suburbs as dangerous places than the EBO participants that actually live in them. While this in no way disproves that problems exist, it does show that describing whole areas of a city as ‘parallel societies’ is problematic.

Although segregation has received renewed attention in recent years, the labour market has remained the number one area of concern when it comes to integration. Under the heading ‘integration and diversity’ on the Social Democrats’ website (Socialdemokraterna 2019b), the party describes their

goal as ‘a Sweden where everyone works and contributes’. The SID discourse is evident here and, like Durkheim, they have a great deal of faith in the integrative power of work. At other times, the MUD discourse is more apparent and labour market participation is discussed in highly normative terms. When the previous (2014-2019) Minister of Employment suggested that Swedish norms and values should be prioritised in the introduction given to new refugee residents, the duty to work was brought up as a particularly *Swedish* value. This duty had to be made clear to new arrivals, she argued, partly through information and partly through other ‘incentives,’ i.e. by cutting their benefits if they do not take part in recommended integration activities (Regeringen 2017b). This type of reasoning can be questioned on two grounds: Firstly, do newcomers need to be educated and incentivised to feel a duty to work? And secondly, does work automatically lead to integration?

Puranen’s (2019) study on recent immigrants to Sweden and their subjective integration shows that 87% agreed with the statement that it is one’s duty to society to work. In a qualitative part of the same study, finding work is frequently brought up as the main problem of living in Sweden. When I asked the participants in this study what integration meant to them, work was the number one answer. It was seen as important for a number of reasons. In the most basic sense, a higher income would mean a better living standard, but work could also provide a more meaningful way to spend one’s time and it could be an important part of restoring a sense of identity. Work was also seen as an important venue for making new friends and for some it was one of the few opportunities to form ‘social bridges’ with people they rarely had a chance to meet otherwise. One of the most commonly brought up benefits of work, however, was that it provided a chance to *contribute* to Swedish society. Contributing was a way of *becoming* a part of Swedish society and in that sense, it differed somewhat from the ‘duty to work’ that is expected of full members or citizens. The conditionality of the participants’ membership was keenly felt, and working was seen as a way of ‘paying back’ and showing their gratitude to Sweden for taking them in when they needed help. Paying taxes was also a way to show appreciation of a social system that they had come to value, and although a generous welfare system was part of what was valued, most saw living on benefits as shameful.

Despite this almost complete consensus regarding the importance of paid work, most interviewees were faced with considerable difficulties when try-

ing to find employment. As asylum seekers, there was a great deal of confusion as to whether they were allowed to work or even do unpaid work practise. It was also clear that they were not a prioritised group. New residents were prioritised for work placements and subsidised forms of employment made it more advantageous to employ refugees after a residence permit. Not knowing Swedish was another considerable obstacle and the limited access to language classes for asylum seekers was a source of frustration, as was the slow validation process once they had their residence permit.

While the participants were clearly faced with obstacles when trying to enter the labour market, lacking motivation was certainly not one of them. The idea that they would need to be educated and incentivised in order to feel an obligation to work seems misguided to say the least. Regarding the second question posed above, whether work leads to integration, the concept of organic solidarity does initially seem appealing and Lisa Herzog (2018) makes a convincing argument for its continued relevance. Because it is based on difference rather than similarity, she argues, it is particularly well-suited for today's ethnically diverse societies. She also finds that Durkheim's theory provides strong arguments for social justice: organic solidarity cannot work under conditions of unjust inequality and what Durkheim has in mind is a perfect meritocracy where everybody is free to develop their individual talents, regardless of their background. Levitas (2005) is less optimistic. Although Durkheim was actually more radical than most contemporary politicians—for one thing he proposed the abolition of inherited wealth—he failed to see the inherent conflict of interests in capitalist society. As Levitas (2005) puts it, equal opportunities still mean participation in a system 'driven by profit, based on exploitation and fundamentally divided by class' (p.187-188). The SID discourse, which Levitas ties to organic solidarity, can be criticised on a number of points: one, it defines social inclusion too narrowly as labour market participation; two, it ignores the question of why people outside the labour market are consigned to poverty; three, it does not address inequalities between workers; and four, it ignores the question of unpaid work and its gendered distribution (p. 26-27).

Levitas's critique of the SID discourse is part of her overall critique of the capitalist system, and while all the points above are relevant to the situation of asylum seekers and new refugee residents, a few more specific points can be added. The first relates to the emphasis on equal rights over equal outcomes and it is a problem that the otherwise positive Herzog (2018, p.119) acknowledges. Durkheim believed that because people 'naturally' differ in their talents, some material inequality was to be expected. He does not,

however, specify what level of inequality is acceptable and he does not make it clear how one should separate ‘natural’ from ‘social’ differences. The two are especially hard to untangle when individuals start from vastly different circumstances as is the case when one compares a native-born Swede to a refugee from Syria. Even with targeted integration measures, it is doubtful whether equity can ever be fully achieved. To some newcomers, there is simply too much catching up to do, but the effectiveness of the integration measures in place can also be questioned. There are examples in this study of activities that are experienced as both meaningless and ill-suited to the ‘talents’ of the individuals in question.

If material inequality is the main problem of unemployment, ensuring an adequate standard of living for those outside the labour market could be a good place to start. And if integration measures aimed at increasing labour market participation prove ineffective, improving those measure seems appropriate. Policymakers’ favoured approach, however, is to ‘encourage’ labour market participation through reducing benefits or enable it by providing ‘simple jobs’ with a lower wage (see section 4.4.2). As it stands, refugees are overrepresented in unqualified, low-paid jobs regardless of their education, suggesting that equal opportunities are not in place in Sweden (see section 4.4.2). Durkheim (1893/2013) himself would have seen this as an ‘abnormal’ form of division of labour, unlikely to lead to social cohesion.

Even more troubling, is the implications this discourse can have on immigrants’ rights to belong to Swedish society. Although immigrants’ contribution to Swedish society is sometimes used as an argument *for* immigration, the focus in recent years has been on the cost of immigration. To be more precise, refugees’ slow labour market integration has contributed to the perception that refugee immigration needs to be limited. This type of reasoning has resulted in increased efforts to keep new asylum seekers out and it has made the stay of those already residing in Sweden more uncertain. For refugees, the right to permanent residence is now conditional and dependent on them being economically self-sufficient. That work is no longer just a marker of integration but a requirement for belonging to society in a very literal sense, is particularly problematic since refugees’ grounds for entry are not economic but humanitarian.

While the focus on refugee residents’ need to earn their right to belong is relatively recent, asylum seekers’ limited claim to membership status is long-established and rarely questioned. The conspicuous absence of the RED discourse is seen most clearly in the fact that their daily allowance has not been increased since 1994. The relative lack of opposition that the latest change

in the EBO law met, indicates that their position has weakened further. Asylum seekers are, in a sense, ‘easy targets’ for integration measure of this kind *because* they are not seen as full members of society. That does mean that measures targeting them are particularly effective. When the change to the EBO system was first proposed, the Swedish minister of Justice and Migration at the time of writing, took to twitter and announced: ‘Own housing for asylum seekers (EBO) is the single most important factor behind increased segregation and overcrowding in the past 25 years. Now we can finally reform the system!’ (Johansson 2019). The announcement ignores several important points: firstly, segregation is also driven by so called ‘white flight’ or ‘white avoidance’. Secondly, structural inequalities leave asylum seekers and new residents from both ABO and EBO excluded from large sections of the housing market. Thirdly, over-crowding is a reality in ABO as well. Finally, it underestimates the pull of cities, and it overestimates the effectiveness of dispersal policies (see section 4.4.4).

There may, in other words, be reason to doubt that the new EBO law is an effective way of ‘breaking segregation’. In addition, improvements to the ABO system are noticeably absent and previous studies (see section 4.4.4) show that many choose EBO primarily because they do not want to live in ABO. This was also a reason given in this study, but it was also evident that the sense of community in Stad was a strong pull factor. The pull of community, combined with a desire to avoid ABO, means that many may still choose EBO despite a cut in benefits. Hence, they will continue to live in disadvantaged areas but under even more precarious circumstances. The EBO restrictions could still have some effect as some participants were initially quite indifferent to the location, it was only with time that they became reluctant to move, and it is possible that they could be ‘diverted’ elsewhere through ABO. That the initial location one is in does impact where one wants to settle can also be seen in Land where at least a few of the participants felt similarly rooted. That they were people who would not have considered living in a small town had they not been placed in one shows that dispersal can have a modest positive effect on the population development of such places. If this is something that is valued, more could be done to ensure that those that want to stay, get to stay and the transition from ABO housing to ‘standard’ housing could be smoother.

Although it is hard to see the contraction in rights that the new EBO law entails as beneficial to asylum seekers, some may still argue that it is in their best interest as it will lead to better integration outcomes. This too can be questioned based on the results of this study. The role that housing, and the

context of the housing, plays in the integration process of the asylum seekers is in some respects a question of how ‘community’ and ‘society’ relates to each other. Once the uncertainty of waiting for a residence permit was behind the participants, their integration processes were mainly centred around finding some form of *stability* in the housing, employment and social connections domains. What they found was that stability in one of the domains would often have to be sacrificed to achieve stability in another.

In Stad, the stability that a community based on social bonds provided was often prioritised over housing stability but in terms of employment, they clearly outperformed those in Land. This is noteworthy as the connection between community and society in EBO is often expressed in a combination of the MUD and SID discourse: when living in areas where unemployment and welfare dependence is high, asylum seekers are assumed to adapt to norms and values that decrease the likelihood of gainful employment. Although there are studies that show that unemployment is indeed ‘contagious’ (see section 4.4.1), it is hard to prove that this is due to a difference in values. If there is a ‘culture of dependency’ in Stad, it had little effect on the participants in this study. Although one should be careful not to make too much of the difference in employment outcome, a few things clearly worked in favour of those in Stad. They had access to both larger networks and a stronger and more diverse labour market than those in Land. They also avoided the delay to the integration process that many in ABO experienced after a residence permit: while the EBO residents could register at an address and start their introduction programme shortly after receiving a permit, the ABO residents (especially if they decided to wait for a housing offer) were left waiting for up to a year before they could do the same. On a less positive note for the EBO residents, since they received no help with housing after residence, they often had to rely on expensive black-market solutions. Because of this, the need to find a job, *any job*, could be quite urgent. In some cases, this meant sacrificing long-term integration goals, such as learning the language, for the more immediate housing needs.

Whereas the participants in Stad often moved between different houses, they still maintained the stability of living in the same *place*. In Land, the typical process involved staying for a number of months in an accommodation centre, then being moved to an ABO apartment in a different location and then finally, moving to yet another location after residence. While the participants in Land accepted that moving could be a necessary part of improving their situation, the parents were worried about how this constant uprooting might affect their children. Unsurprisingly, the hope for better

work opportunities was one of the main reasons why the participants wanted to move from Land. Unlike those in EBO, they had a choice: they could wait for assigned housing or they could try to find their own. Those who were intent on moving to a larger city either found their own housing or waited in the hope that their assigned housing would offer better prospects. The first option meant facing the same housing shortage that the participants in EBO faced, but without their social contacts; the second was something of a gamble—one could end up somewhere worse. Staying in Land also implied challenges. Land received both asylum seeker and new refugee residents, but the two reception systems are not connected. Hence, stayers had to find their own housing—a difficult task even in a small town.

In the end, the participants in Land were more likely than those in Stad to find housing stability in the form of a legitimate rental agreement but in some cases, this stability was only temporary. Since 2016, all municipalities are obliged to receive a certain number of refugees, but many municipalities only offer accommodation on a temporary basis and after the two-year establishment programme ends, the refugees are on their own again (Boverket 2019). Unlike earlier dispersal strategies, the current system increases access to stronger labour markets but unless housing can be guaranteed on a long-term basis, the value of this access is limited.

10.4 Concluding remarks

The search for stability described in the previous section is an essential part of the process of ‘finding home’ and if one looks at the whole process, from the first day in Sweden to the situation after residence, it is doubtful whether ABO provides more stability than EBO. Naturally, EBO does not guarantee access to a stable community and in earlier parts of this chapter, I have suggested a few reasons why the ‘typicality’ of the EBO participants interviewed could be questioned. The ABO participants’ *lack* of stability, however, cannot be as easily explained by the interviewees’ characteristics. Instead, flaws inherent in the ABO system made it exceedingly difficult to put down roots for a number of years after arriving in Sweden. Although it should be noted that the number of asylum seekers was exceptionally high at the time of the interviews, and some of the problems in ABO—such as overcrowded accommodation centres and long waiting times for housing after residence—are less pronounced when the number of people in the system is lower.

Despite such reservations, it is reasonable to conclude that ABO is not *by necessity* the better integration option. Every single story told in this study

is a story about compromises. If there is such a thing as a perfect place to start an integration process, it would in all likelihood not be accessible to the vast majority of asylum seekers. Both ABO and EBO typically entail low housing standards and locations that, in different ways, are seen as undesirable to many. In the absence of a reform that actually provides better options, both before and after residence, perhaps asylum seekers should be trusted to choose the option that is ‘least bad’ for them.

Regarding the concept of integration, I would argue that when seen from the perspective of individual asylum seekers, it can be useful: what the participants in this study described was essentially the process of a ‘part’ struggling to become part of a greater ‘whole’. This process can partly be understood in terms of community (mechanical solidarity) and society (organic solidarity). That community, interpreted loosely as solidarity based on perceived similarity, could both help and hinder integration was especially clear in Stad: segregation may have made the valuable social bonds stronger, but it also made social bridges, which could be beneficial in other ways, difficult. In terms of society, it was clear that the duty to make themselves ‘usefully fulfil a determinate function’ (Durkheim 1893/2013, p.43) was keenly felt in both locations. Although there could be a social desirability bias at play here, their desire to not feel like a burden seems highly understandable and I have no reason to doubt that it was genuine.

When the focus shifts from the integration process of the individual to the social cohesion of society at large, a few inherent problems with community reveal themselves. The first is that it overestimates the similarity within groups and the difference between groups. This may not be a problem on the group level—if the group members believe that the similarities outweigh the differences, some form of solidarity may still be generated—but it does bring us to a second problem: how is inter-group solidarity generated? Can a multitude of communities co-exist in a spirit of cooperation?

According to Allport’s (1954) contact hypothesis, contact between groups is necessary to counteract the prejudice that might form a barrier to such cooperation. It follows that since segregation limits contact, it may also fuel prejudice. That contact with established member of a society can be an important resource also make the concentration of newcomers into certain areas problematic. While these are valid reasons to view segregation as a problem, they are often accompanied by a crude division of the population into ‘Swedes’, on the one hand and ‘immigrants’, on the other. Whereas all forms of community in the latter ‘group’ tends to be treated with suspicion, in the former it is generally treated as unproblematic; even though a ‘taking

care of our own' mentality amongst Swedes is clearly more damaging than a similar attitude amongst immigrants, as Swedes are more likely to be in positions where they have the power to exclude others from equal participation.

Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas (2016) define integration as the 'process of becoming an accepted part of society' and this includes the acceptance of both individuals and groups. In the case of Syrians/Assyrians in Stad, despite their presence in the city for over half a century, it is doubtful whether they are accepted as an established part of society and their value as a resource to newcomers is usually neglected. Instead, dispersal is the favoured approach. Although this is partly justified as a way to 'spread the burden' of refugee reception more evenly, it is also clear that social integration is assumed to work better if individual newcomers are absorbed into a 'Swedish' community. This, in combination with a renewed focus on 'Swedish' norms and values, makes it difficult to see current Swedish integration policy as different from assimilation in any meaningful way. In terms of the integration goals of 'equal rights, duties and opportunities for all regardless of ethnic and cultural background' (prop. 2019/20:1), it is clearly preferred that 'ethnicity and culture' stay firmly in the background.

Regarding organic society, one of the main problems is that work alone does not guarantee full participation in society. Another problem is that it ignores contributions other than paid work. Other issues were discussed in the previous section and more could be added to the list. It is also worth noting that Durkheim himself seemed to lose faith in the idea that organic solidarity based on interdependence was enough to bind society together (Pope & Johnson 1983; Lockwood 1992). Despite these shortcomings, work is more central than ever in integration policy discourse and for refugees new to the country, belonging has become something that should be earned through work. This can have potentially devastating consequences. In the worst-case scenario, a failure to find a job could lead to deportation. But there are also calls to restrict access to the welfare system for new refugees: welfare should be *earned* through paid work (section 4.1). This is based on a conception of welfare that takes little account of need and views unemployment as a problem that can be solved through the right incentives.

In conclusion, the concept of integration can help us understand how individual asylum seekers deal with the obstacles and opportunities they face in different ways. When the same concept is used in policy discourse, the complexity is lost and the 'solutions' presented risk being counterpro-

ductive. Arguing for the need to increase the incentives to work ignores important inequalities in the labour market, and placing the blame for segregation squarely on the shoulders on those whose housing choices are the most limited, i.e. asylum seekers, is unlikely to do much to combat the ‘us and them’ mentality that policymakers claim they want to get away from.

If limited labour market participation and asylum seekers’ housing were defined as problems of inequality instead of integration, the solutions proposed would in all likelihood differ. In the current political climate, however, it is difficult to be optimistic that such a change in perspective will take place. The time when this study was conducted was in many ways exceptional, and although the aftermath of what came to be known as the ‘refugee crisis’ has been characterised by restrictions, in the midst of it, one can find some reason to hope. The burst of volunteer activity across the country around this time helped make life a little bit more bearable to many asylum seekers, and it shows that a different, more compassionate, Sweden is possible. Although this may be a different form of solidarity than what is required for newcomers to ‘participate and belong’ on equal terms, it is still worth remembering when the future looks bleak.

The ‘refugee crisis’ also brought with it a considerable change to Swedish demographics and Syrians are now the largest foreign-born group in Sweden. At the time of writing this, in spring 2020, the war in Syria still rages on, and many of the refugees now in Sweden see their future in their adopted home country. I have no doubt that given time and the right conditions, they will make a great contribution to Swedish society. On that note, I will leave you with a few words from Asim. As this thesis could not have happened without the Syrian refugees who trusted me to tell their stories, it seems only right that one of them will have the final word:

I love this country and I want to live and die here. I want my kids to be a part of this society. And I think, in general, the refugees that came in 2015 will eventually have a positive effect on Swedish society. With all the problems that they brought, all issues that they opened, whether it is cultural or economic or political, eventually the overall effect will be positive. For them and also for Swedish society. That is my deep belief. That doesn’t mean that there will not be a lot of difficulties, there will be a lot of difficulties, in assimilation, in culture, in economy, but eventually it will be positive and I want to be part of that (Asim, Stad, 2017).

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Appendix 1

Table 1. Interviewees Land.

	Round 1 (2016)	Round 2 (2017)
Ali Man, 20s. 3 rd level degree.	Asylum seeker. No family in Sweden.	Permanent resident. Moved to a medium-sized town on his own. SAS.
Khaled Man, 30s. 3 rd level degree. (Alma)*	Asylum seeker. Lives with his wife and children.	Permanent resident. Assigned housing in a medium-sized town. SFI (Khaled) and maternity leave (Alma).
Leah Woman, 30s. No 3 rd level education.	Her first asylum claim was denied and she is appealing the decision at the time of the interview. Lives with her children.	No interview was conducted. Second asylum claim denied.
Adnan Man, 30s. 3 rd level degree.	Received his residence permit a year before the interview. Waiting for family reunification. Moved to Land on his own.	Lives in the same house in Land where his family has recently joined him. Started SAS but took a break for paternity leave.
Zina Woman, 20s. No 3 rd level education.	Received her residence permit shortly before the interview. Her mother and siblings joined her a few months before the interview.	Still in Land but had recently been offered housing in a larger town. Since she has no registered address, she has not started the introduction programme.
Rania Woman, 30s. 3 rd level degree.	Received her residence permit shortly before the interview. Lives with her husband and children.	Both Rania and her husband are in employment. Moved to a larger house in Land.
Kareem Man, 40s. 3 rd level degree. (Hadia)*	Asylum seeker. Lives with his wife and children.	Permanent resident. Moved to large city after housing offer but was in the process of moving back to Land. SFI (Kareem and Hadia).
Hasan Man, 50s. 3 rd level degree. (Houda)*	Asylum seeker. Lives with his wife and children.	Permanent resident. Assigned housing in a large city. SFI (Hasan and Houda).

Table 2. Interviewees Stad.

	Round 1 (2016)	Round 2 (2017)
Asim Man, 40s. 3 rd level degree.	Asylum seeker. Waiting for family reunification. Lives with friends.	3-year temporary residence. Still waiting for family. Working full time. Renting a room.
Sara Woman, 20s. No third level education.	Asylum seeker. Sara and her family are living with relatives.	13 months temporary permit. SAS. Sara's father works.
Theresa Woman, 40s. 3 rd level degree. Hanna Woman, 20s 3 rd level not completed.	Asylum seekers. Theresa and her family (including her daughter, Hanna) lives with relatives.	Permanent residents. Still lives with the same relatives. SFI (Theresa), and SAS (Hanna).
Jacob Man, 20s. 3 rd level not completed.	Asylum seeker. Jacob and his brothers are living with relatives.	Permanent resident. Moved to a different house with his siblings. SAS and part-time work.
Marta Woman, 40s. 3 rd level degree.	Received her residence permit before the interview. Lives in a small apartment (sublet) with her family (before that, with relatives). SAS and part-time work.	Email update. Both she and her husband are working and they have moved to a better apartment.
Maria Woman, 20s. 3 rd level not completed.	Asylum seeker. Maria and her family are living with relatives.	Email update. 13 months temporary permit. Still lives with relatives but parents have moved to another apartment. SAS and part-time work.

Kristina Woman, 40s. 3 rd level de- gree. (Younan)*	Received residence permit a year before the interview. Kristina is working but not Younan. Lived with relatives at first, recently got their own apartment.	No follow up
Gabriel Man, 50s. Uncertain ed- ucational sta- tus, ran his own com- pany in Syria.	Received residence permit a couple of years earlier. Moves frequently between relatives and sublets with his wife and children. Gabriel's wife works, he goes to SFI.	No follow up
Magdalena Woman, 40s. 3 rd level de- gree. (Josef)*	Received residence permit shortly before the interview. SFI (Magdalenda) and work (Josef). Moved between different rela- tives.	No follow up

**These spouses were present at the interview occasion but took a less active part.*

Table 3. Other key informants*

Emma	Work for Church of Sweden in Stad.
Samer	Works for ABF Stad.
Emir	Studieförbundet Land
Anna	Integration co-ordinator, Land municipality
Mikael	Communications officer, Stad municipality
Emanuel	Active member of Syriac Orthodox Church in Stad, helped with translation.
George	Active member of Syriac Orthodox Church in Stad, helped find interviewees.

**Only those quoted directly are listed here.*

Appendix 2

Interview guide, round 1.

Age / education / previous occupation

When did you arrive in Sweden?

Did you arrive on your own or with family?

- Describe what happened from the time you arrived in Sweden until the day you arrived in Land/Stad? Are there any particular encounters, events or experiences that stand out?
 - Reception/treatment
 - Information
 - First impression of Sweden vs. expectations

- What has your life been like since you came to Land/Stad? (What people, events or experiences have been important to you?)
 - Describe town
 - Describe accommodation
 - Describe a typical day. What do you do and with whom?
 - Resources (daily allowance and other resources)
 - Social bridges (with Swedes or other nationalities) and bonds (with other Syrian people). Frequency, quality and importance of these contacts.
 - Social links. For example with Migration Agency, health and other services.
 - Organised activity. For example language training and work practise. Also, involvement in sports, cultural or religious organisations
 - Events that were particularly frustrating/rewarding

- Where do you see yourself in five years' time? Describe the ideal situation. Where would you like to live? What would you like to do?
 - Has the past __ months brought you closer to this goal?
 - What might stop you from achieving it?
 - What would make Sweden feel like home to you?

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