



Migration and Education in Sweden:  
Integration of Migrants in the Swedish  
School Education and Higher Education  
Systems

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Erasmus+

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## INTRODUCTION

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The following report presents and discusses the current situation, challenges and opportunities, resulting from the increased numbers of newly arrived students in the Swedish education system. The primary focus is on developments since 2015, and on students in school education (compulsory and upper-secondary). To a lesser extent, the report touches upon students in higher education and the recognition and validation of skills and foreign qualifications of migrants.

The report draws on several previous Swedish and international studies, and on research conducted by the author and his colleagues (Bunar, 2010a, 2012, 2014a, 2014b, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2016d; Nilsson Folke and Bunar, 2016; Jahanmahan and Bunar, 2017)<sup>1</sup>, with further reference to various policy documents produced by the Swedish government and the *Swedish National Agency for Education* (Skolverket), other reports from governmental (e.g. National School Inspection) and non-governmental organisations (e.g. teacher unions).

### General Statistics, Educational System and Definitions

With its roughly 10 million inhabitants, Sweden is a relatively small country, renowned for its generous welfare system. The country has become similarly renowned for its liberal migration policy towards asylum-seekers and refugees. During 2015, Sweden received 163,000 refugees, mainly from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. Amongst them, approximately 70,000 were minors under the age of 18 years. Approximately 35,000 were unaccompanied children, primarily from Afghanistan<sup>2</sup>. Due to tighter border controls throughout Europe and stricter refugee admission policies in Sweden, the number plummeted to 30,000 refugees in 2016, of which 10,000 were children (Swedish Migration Agency).

Approximately 1.78 million inhabitants of Sweden were born abroad, and roughly 536,000 are second-generation immigrants whose both parents were born abroad (Statistics Sweden). This multiculturalism has affected everyday life in Sweden, from the labour and housing markets to its culture and educational system. Integration does not always run smoothly, and the country has faced a number of challenges including segregated housing, school segregation, and a widening social gap between ethnic Swedes and migrant minorities (Bunar, 2016a).

In the academic year 2016/17, there were around 1.34 million students enrolled in elementary (compulsory, 7-15 years of age) and upper-secondary schools (non-compulsory, 16-19 years of age). Approximately 275,000 students in elementary schools are eligible to attend mother tongue classes (one to two hours per week), which equates to 27 % of all registered students. In comparison, in the year 2000 about 12 % of all students in elementary schools were eligible for mother tongue classes (Skolverket, 2017a). The percentage is similar in upper-secondary schools (Swedish National Agency for Education). There are around 90,000 employed teachers in elementary schools and the students-teacher ratio is 12:1 (Swedish National Agency for Education). In upper-secondary education, there are approximately 36,000 teachers employed, which means that the student-teacher ratio is similar to that found in primary education (Swedish National Agency for Education). There are 44 universities and colleges in Sweden, with approximately 403,000 students enrolled in the academic year 2015/16 (Statistics Sweden, 2017). All higher education is tuition-free for Swedish and EU citizens, as well as for permanent residential visa

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<sup>1</sup> The report is particularly based on the content and analyses provided in an unpublished report by the author (Bunar, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Unaccompanied minors are defined (Prop.2005/06:46) as children under the age of 18 and at the time of arrival to Sweden separated from both parents or from another adult considered to be a legal guardian.

holders. Asylum-seekers, however, are not eligible to free university education nor to adult education until they are recognized as refugees.

Newly arrived students are defined as children who arrive to Sweden just before the ordinary start of compulsory education (age 7), or during elementary or upper-secondary schooling (up to age 18) (Prop.2014/15:45). Newly arrived students' rights and obligations are not just defined in relation to educational legislation (Skollagen, 2010:800), but also controlled by migration legislation (Utlänningslagen, 2005:716). Under these circumstances, subgroups among newly arrived students can be differentiated (Nilsson Folke and Bunar, 2016):

- *Undocumented migrant children* are, since 1 July 2013, entitled to education at all levels (preschool, elementary and upper-secondary) on the same conditions and terms as children with citizenship or legal residency status native-born students (SOU, 2010:5).
- *Asylum-seeking students* are entitled to education in regular schools. They must be offered a school placement (elementary or upper-secondary according to their age) within a month of their arrival to Sweden. However, it is not compulsory for asylum-seeking and undocumented children to attend elementary school.
- *Refugee students* (with granted permanent residence), and *children of labour migrants* from the EU or third countries with residence and working permits, have the same educational rights and obligations as Swedish citizens.

Responsibility for asylum-seeking and undocumented migrant students is shared between the national government, which covers the economic costs, and local governments, which provide social services and education (Andersson, Ascher, Björnberg and Eastmond, 2010; Nilsson Folke and Bunar, 2016). All children, irrespective of their migration status, have the right to medical and dental care. It is of paramount importance that the health care system which is attached to schools (school nurses and doctors) has enough time, resources, and therapeutic competences to deal with children who suffer from trauma (Eide and Hjern, 2013). Proper communication channels between teachers and nurses within schools, and between school health care and general health care within the municipality, should also be provided. This, however, does not always seem to be accomplished (Skolinspektionen, 2017a).

## MAIN RELEVANT POLICY INITIATIVES, REFORMS, MEASURES

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### Policy changes

Since 2010, a number of governmental committees have worked on drafting amendments to educational law, with the aim of clarifying the rights of newly arrived students in compulsory education. Traditionally, newly arrived students were placed in introductory or separate classes (in Swedish *förberedelseklass*) for a period usually extending to two or three years (Bunar, 2015a). In some municipalities, they were directly immersed in regular classes (Axelsson, 2015). These decisions were in many cases based on category-thinking (newly arrived) rather than on individual needs-thinking (Nilsson Folke and Bunar, 2016). Since no diagnostic tests of students' previous knowledge (in Swedish *kartläggning*) were conducted, and due to the sparse provision of tuition in their mother tongue (in Swedish *studiehandledning*), students were often inadequately prepared for the transition from introductory to regular classes.

By January 2016, a new set of proposals (Prop.2014/15:45) was adopted for compulsory education (grades 1 to 9):

- A student is considered as newly arrived for up to four years after their arrival to a Swedish school.
- Diagnostic tests on students' previous schooling, and the level of academic knowledge in literacy and numeracy, will be conducted within two months of the student's arrival to school. Subsequently, additional tests will be conducted in different school subjects (mathematics, history, geography, etc.).
- No more than two months after the student's reception, a principal will make a decision regarding his/her grade placement as well as placement in either introductory (separate) or regular class. The decision will be based on student's previous academic knowledge and on relevant social reasons (e.g. age and social network). Parents will be consulted, but the decision cannot be appealed to a higher judicial institution.
- The concept and organisational form of the introductory class is introduced in legislation, thereby legalizing a praxis that has existed for several decades.
- Students can be partly educated in introductory classes (although it is not mandatory) for a maximum period of two years. Thereafter, and if needed, a school must provide the student with special educational support while they attend the regular class. The government recommends that schools should, although are not required to, physically locate introductory classes within close proximity to the regular classes, in order to facilitate cooperation and transition and avoid segregation.
- During the introductory period, not exceeding one year, teaching hours may be reallocated from other subjects to Swedish language or Swedish as a second language (SSL) courses. Students will be granted, at minimum, an equal amount of teaching hours as all other students during the remaining time in school.

Although the new legislation certainly has many positive aspects, based on previous research (Bunar, 2015a; Rutter, 2006; Stewart, 2012; Dettlaff and Fong, 2016) there are three major challenges that have not been properly addressed: i) how to promote social inclusion of newly arrived students; ii) how to bridge the gap between schools and newly arrived parents; and iii) how to make sure the new policy reaches classrooms.

## Measures and reforms

The set of investment packages in education for refugee children could be summarized as “more money for improved Swedish language, and more information and knowledge for better inclusion”.

In January 2017 the government (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2017) announced a large and long-term investment in supporting the capacity of municipalities and free school owners<sup>3</sup> to provide newly arrived students with education of high quality. Although no detailed prescriptions of possible measures are

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<sup>3</sup>There is an extensive school choice policy in Sweden meaning that even private businesses, religious organisations, non-profit organisations, and other legal entities can run a school after the license has been granted by National School Inspectorate (Skolinspektionen). These schools are called *friskolor*, which could be translated as independent or free schools. Every student is assigned a universal voucher issued by local government covering all costs, including school material and school lunches. Schools are not allowed to collect any fees from parents. Admission to public schools is organised on the catchment area principle, while free schools base their admission policy primarily on waiting time since application was submitted. In other words: students are only granted a place in their nearest school and free choice is conditioned by availability of place in other schools (see Bunar and Ambrose, 2016).

given, it is obvious from the document that investment in language learning, study counsellors, teachers' didactical skills, and proper organisation, are considered to be the most relevant areas. The program stretches from 2017 to 2025, with a total budget of 2,138 million SEK. The National Agency for Education (SNAE) is responsible for allocating the resources.

Previously, the government has even allotted extra resources, partly available through SNAE, to support local school projects. Certain developmental funds are also available through the European Refugee Fund and Regional Authorities (in Swedish *Länsstyrelser*, see Bunar, 2016d). Towards the end of 2015, the SNAE allocated 200 million SEK to 46 municipalities in which at least 10 % of all the children in the municipality were newly arrived (Skolverket, 2016c). To author's knowledge, there has been no evaluation on how and with what results the money has been used.

Another example is the opportunity for municipalities to apply for funds from the SNAE to employ a local coordinator who will oversee the professional development of teachers in the field of schooling for the newly arrived. There is a project aiming at developing cooperation between the SNAE and 20 selected municipalities which have each received a substantial number of refugees since 2015. The idea is that the Agency—with its resources, networks, and knowledge—will provide teachers, principals, and local school administrators with additional support in order to improve the quality of education for newly arrived students. Every participating municipality is required to set up a local team consisting of the head of the local education authority, a school principal, the most skilled (or so-called first) teacher, a coordinator, and teachers in Swedish or SSL. The Agency provides a team of their own experts to support the local team in producing a description of the local situation, the challenges and strengths, possible measures, and instructional models. The two teams meet on a regular basis and there is an opportunity for municipalities to learn from each other.

Other resources from the government are directed towards more tangible goals. In 2013 the government launched and funded an initiative to deliver more classes in Swedish or Swedish as a second language for newly arrived students in elementary school<sup>4</sup> (Förordningen, 2013:69). The initiative required an additional 105 hours of teaching in Swedish or SSL per year. 70 municipalities, 18 free school owners and 4,300 students across the country participated in the program in autumn 2016 (Skolverket, 2017c). Despite two external evaluations (although neither were in the form of an effect study), the SNAE (ibid.) could not recommend whether the program should continue or not. Furthermore, after interviews with students, teachers and school leaders, the evaluations found two contradictory experiences: some stakeholders were positive and they referred to the fact that more time is needed for students to learn; others were negative, and referred to students having overly long days (ibid.).

The government also agreed to cover all additional costs that municipalities could have regarding education of undocumented migrant students (Skolinspektionen, 2015).

Over the last five years, a large number of conferences, seminars, and professional development courses for teachers, school counsellors, principals and school health personnel have been conducted (Skolverket, 2016c). It is extremely difficult to get a clear overview of all the activities put into place for teaching staff,

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<sup>4</sup> During autumn 2013 and spring 2014, the initiative was reserved for students in grades 6-9. Since autumn 2014 all grades in elementary school are eligible to participate.

not least because the municipalities are responsible for the professional development of teachers. The SNAE also provides a helpline for schools to call if they need guidance and advice on how to organise teaching for newly arrived students (ibid.). The Agency has also revised some of its documents about support and advice regarding organisation and pedagogical models for newly arrived students, and translated material about upper-secondary education and study counsellors into different languages (ibid.).

Another political initiative is an agreement between the government and *the Association of Independent Schools* to allow an admission quota of newly arrived students to free schools without queuing, equivalent of up to 5 % of all students at a school. However, the participation of free schools is voluntary (The Swedish Association of Independent Schools, 2016).

One of the largest opportunities for the education system is the ambition of newly arrived students to succeed in schools. These students show great enthusiasm for learning the language and hope for a bright future in Sweden. In a number of recently conducted research projects, Bunar and associates (Bunar, 2015a; Nilson Folke and Bunar, 2016; Jahanmahan and Bunar, 2017; see also Nilsson Folke and Axelsson, 2013; Skowronski, 2013; Svensson and Eastmond, 2013; Nilsson Folke, 2017) found that the perspective on education by interviewed newly arrived students in elementary schools and unaccompanied minors in upper-secondary schools was pervaded by a strong feeling of wanting to be “normal”, to be “just like everybody else”, and “to attend a real class, study all subjects and earn grades”. What was particularly striking in the interviews was that many reported a strong desire to belong, to be a part of the mainstream, to be included, and to have Swedish friends. The thing most detrimental to students’ self-esteem and ambition were low expectations from significant stakeholders such as teachers and study counsellors, and having a feeling that they were stuck in a separate system (introductory classes, Language Introduction Program) designed for the newly arrived. Therefore, they are in need of encouragement, and need to feel and see signs that they are progressing in the system and have the same chance for development as any other child.

## Validation and Fast-track – the role of higher education in the integration of newly-arrived

*The Swedish Council for Higher Education* (in Swedish *Universitets- och högskolerådet, UHR*) is one of the main authorities responsible for assessments of university degrees from other countries. Other authorities are responsible for some professions, e.g. the NSAE for teachers and *The National Board of Health and Welfare* (in Swedish *Socialstyrelsen*) for professions within the health care system. In addition, universities themselves assess whether an applicant to a particular course or program is eligible. On the UHR website ([www.uhr.se/bedomning](http://www.uhr.se/bedomning)), detailed information is provided on how to apply for validation and which documents must be submitted. Recently the council has received more resources in order to further increase efficiency and speed-up the assessment process. The number of applications for validation of foreign qualifications has increased in the last three years, as evident from Table 1.

**Table 1.** Applications to the UHR for validation of qualifications from other countries

Year	Upper-secondary	Post upper-secondary vocational	Academic	Total
2016	12 209	3 456	11 707	27 372
2015	10 320	2 719	9 835	22 874
2014	8 363	1 909	7 729	18 001

Source: Swedish Council for Higher Education (2017). *Rapport och statistik*. Retrieved on April 27, 2017 from <https://www.uhr.se/bedomning-av-utlandsk-utbildning/rapport-och-statistik/>.

The largest number of applications for all three categories in 2016 came from Syrian nationals. The second largest group for upper-secondary education were Iranian nationals and Iraqi nationals for post upper-secondary vocational and academic educations (ibid.). It takes on average between 5 and 8 months for the UHR to assess an application for post-upper-secondary vocational and academic education, and between 2 and 4 months for upper-secondary. During the last three years Sweden has received approximately 30,000 adult refugees with university diplomas from their home countries, which must be considered a good starting point for integration and a valuable contribution to the economy. And it seems that having a university diploma recognized facilitates entry into the labour market. In an evaluation of migrants with positively validated foreign qualifications between 2007 and 2011, the UHR (2014) contends that 9 % more migrants got a job after one year if they had their diploma validated, and 11 % more after three years.

However, in the same report, many interviewed applicants lamented that, despite recognized qualifications and life-long experience in a particular profession, it was still difficult to find a job. Language was an important obstacle, but discrimination was also mentioned (ibid.). Obviously, integration requires educational and informational investments, not only in newly arrived migrants, but also in many employers.

Of particular interest in this context are newly arrived teachers' alternative paths to resuming their profession in Sweden. Currently, there are two major initiatives at the national level. The first one has been in place since 2007 and is called "Further education of migrant teachers" (in Swedish *Utländska lärares vidareutbildning, ULV*), with Stockholm University as the national coordinator. Under this scheme, newly arrived migrants who worked as certified teachers in their home countries can apply to a specially tailored two-year university program which includes in-service practical training. The aim is to prepare them to work as teachers in the Swedish pedagogical and social context. Another admission requirement is advanced knowledge in Swedish language proven by a degree in the course Swedish 3 or Swedish as a second language 3 (corresponding to degree from a national upper-secondary program), or by taking proficiency Swedish language exam called *Tisus*.

In an interview with a representative of the Swedish Teacher Union<sup>5</sup> (in Swedish *Läraryrbundet*), the ULV is called "a great initiative", but there are three obvious problems. First, while it is currently a project, teacher unions have made it clear they would like to see it as a permanent activity. Second, it takes at least four to five years, from the day of immigration, for migrant teachers to enter the program. This can be partly attributed to insufficient language skills, and partly, which is particularly worrisome, to a lack of information about the existence of ULV. And finally, yet another challenge is to get all participants through

<sup>5</sup> Since information about the program is scarce and since the Swedish Teacher Union (*Läraryrbundet*) has been involved in preparing the program, I decided to interview Anna Tornberg from *Läraryrbundet*'s central office for more information.

the education program on time. Once again the Swedish language is perceived as a major obstacle. More support is obviously needed for ULV students in order to reduce the number of drop-outs. A new initiative is to start all new ULV courses with a mandatory semester solely focusing on scaffolding the participants' language skills.

Another initiative to promote the access of newly arrived foreign-trained teachers to jobs in the Swedish school system is the so-called *Fast-track program* (in Swedish *Snabbspår*). There are several similar initiatives targeting various highly educated migrant groups, with the latest one directed towards social scientists. The most visible target group was newly arrived teachers. According to Lärarförbundet (2016, p.11)<sup>6</sup>:

A Fast-track has been introduced on behalf of the government and in cooperation with the National Employment Agency [in Swedish *Arbetsförmedlingen*] and labour market partners. The ambition is to get a comprehensive system that meets newly arrived teachers. Validation, further education, in-service training and establishment will be reconnected in an efficient way. Fast-track will shorten the newly arrived teachers' path to becoming certified as a teacher and getting a job as a teacher.

*The Fast-track program* for teachers was introduced in 2016, partly as a response to the general shortage of teachers in Swedish schools and partly as an answer to the enormous need for mother tongue-teachers and bilingual teachers who could support newly arrived students in their native languages. But it would also help to shorten the time on the pathway to becoming certified teachers and serve as a labour market measure for bringing at least a portion of those refugees who arrived and were granted asylum during the last few years into permanent employment.

The Fast-track courses have a duration of 26 weeks, including in-service training in schools and preschools, and are organised at six universities. The language requirements that are required for admission to ULV have been dropped, and education is organised in parallel in both Arabic and Swedish, since the majority of students are Arabic-speaking Syrians and Iraqis. The idea behind this project is that after identifying a newly arrived migrant as someone with teacher education and experiences, he or she is directed as quickly as possible towards the path that eventually will lead back into the teaching profession. After completion of the course, an individual strategy about the next step (although in most cases the students must also complete ULV) will be provided in every case based on the course results, identified strengths and weaknesses, the validation of a university diploma from the home country issued by *the Swedish Council for Higher Education*, and the answer from *the Swedish National Agency for Education* on the request for a teacher certificate.

## MAIN POLICY CHALLENGES

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At the end of April 2017, *the National School Inspectorate* published a report (Skolinspektionen, 2017b) on how municipalities organise and govern the reception of newly arrived children in elementary schools, how they assess students' previous knowledge, and how information about a student is disseminated and

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<sup>6</sup> See also: Stockholms universitet (2017). <http://www.su.se/lararutbildningar/larare/snabbsparet-for-nyanlanda-larare>.

used in schools. Although the Inspectorate identifies several positive aspects in the audited schools' work and a general positive development, it also mentions a number of serious shortcomings that schools need to address. Some of the most important are (ibid. p.6):

- Even when schools, upon the initial reception, make use of diagnostic tests for assessing literacy and numeracy provided by the SNAE in order to decide which grade and class to place a newly arrived student, the structured assessment of the students' level of knowledge in various subject matters is still inadequate.
- Since a number of municipalities organise the initial reception and conduct the first diagnostic test at central level, there is a risk that the information will not reach all teachers when a child is transferred to a regular school; this is especially true when the information transfer is solely done in written form and without direct contact and dialogue between those who conducted the tests and the teachers.
- If a student moves to another municipality, there is a risk that the documentation about background, previous knowledge, progress and identified educational needs will not be transferred to the new corresponding authorities.
- Principals are not involved in the initial reception of newly arrived students at their schools and especially not when the reception is centrally organised at municipal level. A principal is nevertheless responsible for a student who "belongs" to a particular school, irrespective of how the initial reception is organised.
- Students' academic progress is not tracked in a satisfactory way.

Newly arrived student older than 15 years will end up in *Language Introduction Program* (LIP) at upper-secondary school level. 36,000 students (79 % male and 21 % female) attended the LIP in the autumn of 2016. The LIP is specially designed for newly arrived without previous knowledge in Swedish language, with the purpose of preparing them for a transition to other individual, vocational or university preparation programs (granting degree and for some eligibility to higher education). That, however, takes time: according to the SNAE (Skolverket, 2016b), only about 9 % of the students enrolled in the program in 2011 had successfully graduated from a national program five years on.

Asylum-seeking and undocumented children are eligible to enter the LIP until they turn 18, but when asylum is granted the age limit goes up to 20 (as for Swedish citizens). Thus, after they have turned 18, asylum-seeking children face legal obstacles in enrolling in upper-secondary education or getting transferred from the LIP to regular programs (Skolinspektionen, 2017a). Even worse, asylum-seeking and undocumented children must *leave* the program once they turn 18, although the legislation is not clear on this particular issue (Skolverket, 2017b). Beyond age 18, there are actually no legal educational options for asylum-seekers since adult education is closed for them. But, even if they do not have a *right* to further education through another program, there is no legislation that explicitly *forbids* municipalities and schools to allow them entrance. We simply do not know how many principals, school administrators, and study counsellors are aware of that possibility and make use of it.

The LIP is formally based on an individual approach. This means that a tailored individual action plan should be elaborated for each student. When a student has achieved good results, they can apply to be transferred to a national or another individual program. However, the National School Inspection pointed out in a recent report (Skolinspektionen, 2017a) that:

- not all principals and teachers are aware that plans have to be produced, followed, evaluated, and updated;
- students tend to be treated as one single collective;

- expectations remain low;
- tuition for mother tongue education is not always provided; and
- school health organisations remain undersized.

Other obstacles frequently identified in recent research for both elementary and upper-secondary education forms are: inadequate local implementations of well-intended governmental policies; lack of certain teacher categories and properly educated teachers able to work in multicultural environments and with a language development strategy; inadequate support structures (resources, holistic school approach, and collaboration); lack of space caused by the sudden arrival of large numbers of refugee students; uneven allocation of newly arrived among municipalities and schools, and; lack of scientifically grounded research results that can inform practice and decision-making; physical segregation and social exclusion (see Bunar, 2015a; Jahanmahan and Bunar, 2017; Nilsson Folke, 2017).

A particularly troublesome obstacle is the poor relation between schools and parents. After interviewing 26 newly arrived parents in his research project, Bunar (2015b) concluded that:

- Refugee parents' experience of school has to be considered and assessed within a broader framework of municipal reception and social status. Welcoming climate, respectful treatment and proper housing are the most important aspects. Granted asylum, language-learning opportunities of high quality and employment/meaningful internship are additional crucial aspects.
- Housing segregation is one of the major elements exerting negative impacts on newly arrived refugee students' educational opportunities.
- All parents had high educational aspirations, but their ability to support children was rather limited. Consequently, we need to find tools to support parents since it will function to support children's learning and development over time.
- Parents did not have any particular reflections on schools' organisational models (separate and regular classes) or pedagogy.
- They did not seek active involvement in schools' everyday practices. Rather, they sought information (a short weekly notice), respectful treatment and ongoing communication, which would make them feel included in their children's schooling.
- The majority of parents in the sample expressed criticism towards teachers' attitude, they felt belittled and even humiliated, and their competences as parents were repeatedly called into question.
- Teachers interviewed in the project confirmed difficulties in cooperating with parents, but the root cause, according to them, was cultural differences.

It could be concluded that currently the largest challenge in Swedish schools concerning inclusion of newly arrived refugee students is not a lack of policies, but rather policy implementation. This is especially important under the present circumstances: almost 100,000 children have applied for asylum in the last four years. One of the biggest challenges under those circumstances is to find mother tongue teachers, teachers in Swedish as a second language, and language support teachers. Presence and pedagogical quality of these professionals is a prerequisite for the learning and inclusion of newly arrived children in schools (Bunar, 2015a).

## ASSESSMENT OF RELEVANT POLICY INITIATIVES AND REFORMS

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The new legislation and other policy measures presented earlier in this report regarding newly arrived students are a step in the right direction, and are in accordance with previous international and Swedish research (McBrien, 2005; Szente, Hoot and Taylor, 2006; Rutter, 2006; Permisán and Fernández, 2007; Spicer, 2008; Pinson, Arnot and Candappa, 2010; Zembylas, 2011; Stewart, 2012; Wernesjö, 2014; Bunar, 2015a). These new regulations give schools the capacity to, in several ways, address organisational challenges, students' previous academic knowledge, and consider educational rights and pedagogical-instructional issues.

First, the fact that it is now mandatory for schools immediately upon reception of a student to conduct diagnostic tests in order to adequately assign an appropriate educational level, is important. Since the tests are based on scientifically grounded material, this information will be vital for an evidence-based decision on what kind of organisational form and pedagogical support are needed for that particular student. This is in line with recommendations presented in previous research (Nilsson and Axelsson, 2013; Bunar, 2015a) and in various documents and evaluations (Skolverket, 2008, 2014, 2017c; Skolinspektionen, 2009, 2014, 2015, 2017a, 2017b; Utbildningsdepartementet, 2015).

Secondly, as previously mentioned, the existence of the organisational form of introductory classes has been "legalized" and its time framework has been set to a maximum of two years. Another positive effect is the encouragement that the education of newly arrived should be conducted in schools where they belong ("as close as possible to regular classes") according to the attendance zone principle (children are enrolled in the geographically nearest school), or in schools they choose according to the school choice principle (Feinberg, 2000; Bunar, 2012; Malmö stad, 2014).

Thirdly, the new law is expected to reinforce the educational rights of newly arrived students by clarifying that they are in schools to learn and develop. *The National School Inspectorate* has pointed out in several reports (Skolinspektionen, 2009, 2014, 2017a) that the education for the newly arrived in many municipalities does not follow national educational time regulations. Moreover, it has to be quality time oriented towards active pedagogy and learning rather than simply time "spent" in class or at school. Newly arrived students have been disadvantaged in two ways. They could be provided with up to only 15 teaching hours per week, and a large part of that time had elements of play and leisure activities, not structured learning. The focus on pedagogical time will assure that newly arrived children are provided active pedagogy. The new legislation has underlined the crucial role students' mother tongue play for their cognitive and intellectual development, thus reiterating the students' right to tuition in their mother tongue and teaching in their mother tongue as well.

Fourth, in the new legislation and most visible in the SNAE's Guidelines for education of newly arrived students (Skolverket, 2016d), there is a clear dissemination of accountability and responsibility on the side of school principals and school owners. Every student's individual educational needs and learning are in focus and there are clear efforts to separate dealing with the newly arrived from dealing with students with special needs such as disability, behavioural problems and learning difficulties. Finally, there are clear efforts not to physically separate newly arrived from the social and pedagogical mainstream.

## IDENTIFICATION OF POSSIBLE FUTURE CHALLENGES

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One of the largest challenges that Swedish society has faced during the last decade is increasing residential segregation. There are no indications that this is going to change in the foreseeable future. From previous research we know that this segregation affects all aspects of community life, from the economy and social relations, to the reputation, status and self-confidence of the population (Bell, 2007; Noreisch, 2007; Bunar 2010b). Furthermore, there are worrisome signs about gangs and organised criminal networks gaining ground among first- and second-generation immigrant youth in socially deprived areas (Sarnecki, 2016; Brå, 2016). In order to mitigate the detrimental effects of segregation on vulnerable communities, a coalition for change, consisting of the national and local governments and representatives of the local population, organisations and businesses, is needed. Joint efforts by housing, social, labour-market and educational policies, combined with voices articulating local needs and properly implemented measures by local administrators, have the capacity to provide palpable alternatives. Another concrete measure to diminish housing segregation is to help newly arrived refugees settle down in areas other than, which they do almost exclusively, in neighbourhoods already ethnically and socio-economically segregated.

School segregation and an increasing achievement gap is another current and future challenge in acute need of addressing. School segregation emerges partly because of the attendance zone principle for allocation of students between schools. Thus, students from a particular neighbourhood are admitted to their nearest public school. As a consequence, the social and ethnic structures, and even status and reputation of the neighbourhood (Ambrose, 2017), are being replicated in local schools. School choice policy has in certain respects contributed to increased integration for individual students who were able to connect personal ambitions and well-informed parents to this structure of opportunity (Kallstenius, 2010). However, there is abundant evidence that, in reality, school choice has contributed to exacerbated school segregation since students with the highest degrees and from the most established families tend to opt out of immigrant-dominated schools (Reay, 2004; Kallstenius, 2010; Raveaud and van Zanten, 2007; Ravitch, 2010; Ambrose, 2017). Obviously, there is a need for a review of the current organisations and operations of the school choice system in order to properly address school segregation (OECD, 2015). Many newly arrived students are ending up in immigrant-dominated schools in socially deprived neighbourhoods in large cities or in one single school in smaller municipalities. Thus, they partly contribute to increased segregation, and partly they suffer most from its effects. In some municipalities such as Malmö and Stockholm, there is a policy of dispersing newly arrived among schools, even if it means "bussing" students. This policy should be seriously considered in order to alleviate school segregation effects.

In the last four years, about 48,000 unaccompanied minors have applied for asylum in Sweden. The majority are boys, 15 to 17 years old, from Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Syria, Eritrea and Morocco. Many of those unaccompanied children who arrived in earlier years managed to find their places in the labour market (Celikaksoy and Wadensjö, 2015), proving their resilience and ambition (Jahanmahan and Bunar, 2017). However, there are only very few unaccompanied minors who graduate from a national upper-secondary program (Skolverket, 2017b, Skolinspektionen, 2017a). There are also worrying signs that some unaccompanied young boys are being involved in petty crimes (Wagner, 2017). It is a challenge, but also an imperative, for social service providers (schools, social services, police, legal guardians, and school

counsellors) to ensure that the unaccompanied minors' social and educational needs are properly catered for. It is of the outmost importance to find alternative educational paths, especially for those who drop-out of *the Language Introduction Program*.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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- Remove all legal barriers that prevent or impede access to education for refugees, irrespective of their migration status. This is particularly important for unaccompanied asylum-seekers aged 18 and older.
- Provide appropriate diagnostic tests, based on scientifically produced and tested material, on students' previous school background, knowledge and experiences, as well as the adoption of an individual development strategy for each student. Such tests are implemented in Sweden, but according to the latest inspection report (Skolinspektionen, 2017a), the testing process lacks individualization, their results are not always communicated to all concerned teachers, and they are sparsely used at upper-secondary schools.
- Provide bilingual support (in Swedish and in student's mother tongue) of learning throughout the introductory period. This kind of support represents one of the strongest pedagogical instruments for learning (Axelsson, 2015).
- Make sure that long-term educational investment is made in mother tongue education.
- Provide more teachers with training and qualifications in Swedish as a second language. Furthermore, there is a pressing need to organise at least shorter courses for all teaching staff on the structure and pedagogical content of learning Swedish as a second language.
- Avoid educational segregation (for example, no separated classes for an extended period of time, nor schools only for newcomers).
- When applicable, ensure that there is a well-planned transfer from introductory to regular classes, and continuous bilingual and social scaffolding in regular classes, to promote optimal learning.
- Provide ongoing evaluation of students' learning and social inclusion progress.
- Provide awareness education for non-immigrant parents to disarm stigmatization and fears of integration measures influencing their children negatively.
- Provide information and offer close cooperation to newly arrived parents on all aspects of schooling.
- Provide sensitive inquiry into possible traumatic experiences of all asylum-seeking children and ensure that this can be professionally dealt with.
- Ensure that schools work together with local community and civic society in order to integrate both adults and children in local social networks.

- Refugee teachers need more support in Swedish. For many, English training is also needed. They also need to find an academic mentor who will guide them through their university education. This is particularly important for migrant teachers that attend the Fast-track.

## FINAL REMARKS

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Education for newly arrived students in Sweden has developed significantly during the last years in terms of its quality, organisation, allocated resources, content and supporting structures (Skolinspektionen, 2017c). At the same time, the country has received the largest number of refugees in its history in a single year: 163 000 in 2015.

If there were one word which could be used best to adequately summarize the policy reforms since then, it would probably be *clarity*. The main stakeholders in the school system have a much more profound and clear system to work with and follow. There is clarity on who is accountable for students' achievements, results and welfare. Today, all schools, teachers and principals should be/are required to be aware that the newly arrived must be considered and treated as individuals with specific challenges and strengths, that they cannot be automatically placed in various organisational forms without closer scrutiny on their background; and that support in their mother tongue and continuing development of their mother tongue is also a prerequisite for learning Swedish – to mention just some of the most important aspects.

The remaining problems to be addressed are, as mentioned above, the social exclusion of the newly arrived from the schools' daily life, the concentration of most newly arrived in only certain schools, the poor relations between teachers and parents, the need for employing and assisting language support teachers, the professional development of all teachers in the area of language development, and in teaching and working in increasingly diverse schools (see Bunar, 2015a).

However, there is one necessary precondition to fulfil so that newly arrived students get access to equal opportunities in education and fair chances from the beginning. They must be considered and treated as *our* children, students in *our* schools with particular educational needs, and thus *our* responsibility, and not as "temporary others", as refugees and asylum-seekers that perhaps soon will be forced to leave the country. Resilience and empowerment are crafted from enhancing positive traits and reassuring the existence of positive relations between the newly arrived and the receiving society (Jahanmahan and Bunar, 2017).

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