



A Time of Encounters

The Work with Asylum Seekers and New Arrivals in
the Parishes of the Church of Sweden 2015-2016

KRISTINA HELLQVIST AND ANDREAS SANDBERG

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KRISTINA HELLQVIST AND ANDREAS SANDBERG

Svenska kyrkan

POSTADRESS: 751 70 Uppsala

BESÖKSADRESS: Syslomansgatan 4

TELEFON: 018-16 95 00

FAX: 018-16 96 40

WEBB: www.svenskakyrkan.se

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Preface

This book describes work that is natural and should be familiar to every Christian parish: reaching out with a helping hand to a fellow human being, showing hospitality to a stranger. Our Christian faith teaches us to help people in need, irrespective of their religion or colour of skin. So this is nothing new, either for the Church of Sweden or for other churches.

Nevertheless, there are still reasons to study and learn from the recent work in the Church of Sweden parishes. In 2015, more than 160,000 persons sought protection in Sweden, which was an extraordinary and demanding situation. The churches are and have been far from the only ones to help. Many people have devoted their time and energy to give new arrivals a good start in Sweden. And this has certainly created commitment and movement! The report points to new contacts and an increased interaction between sports associations, municipalities and the Church, which in its turn has positive effects in both small and big communities. We are also seeing good examples of local inter-religious cooperation in the refugee work, for example between the Church of Sweden and Muslim congregations.

Since 2015, we have entered the public space in a new way, together with other parts of civil society. The Swedish society has long been so well-functioning that large sections of civil society have not been needed to uphold basic societal functions. So it might have seemed that the Church's work mainly related to the private sphere, as well as the leisure and entertainment sector. In the autumn of 2015 it became evident that what churches and other parts of civil society are and do also impacts the very fabric of society. The future may reveal what the long-term consequences of this experience are. In some situations, civil society may need to step in where the state and municipalities are unable to fulfil their mission. But that is not its real task. Civil society should be about partnering rather than gap-filling. Hence, it would be good for Sweden if the experiences from 2015 were to lead to a better planned and implemented partnership between the state and civil society!

The report shows that the parishes of the Church of Sweden have become meeting places in many ways: social activities and games, language cafés, church services, distribution of donated clothes, help with government contacts and counselling, to name a few. The fact that over 80 per cent of the parishes of the Church of Sweden are engaged in refugee work and that every other parish started

some kind of new work in 2015 are figures that speak for themselves. As I have often heard in conversations with politicians and government officials: 'We would never have managed without the extraordinary work of the churches and the other sectors of civil society'. That should not be forgotten!

Interestingly, the conclusions of the report also point in another direction. It is not only that parishes make an effort to help the new arrivals. The new arrivals also contribute to church life. The Church's worshipping community is one of the far too few places where a new arrival can contribute from day one. It is obvious from several accounts that the work and encounters and relationships it resulted in have affected the parishes profoundly. As a vicar in the study expressed it:

Theologically, many parishioners and co-workers have found the meaning of life: to love one's neighbour by helping the vulnerable. The identity and mission of the parish in society has become clearer.

The work is neither simple nor friction-free, but that is no reason to give up. In the long term, no one can preserve their dignity as a human being while the dignity of their neighbours is trampled upon. Whoever wants to follow Jesus can do no other than to show humanity: 'I was a stranger and you welcomed me' (Matthew 25:35).

The author Harry Martinson understood that friction and challenges can also create warmth. In 1963 he wrote:

The Swedish 'national soul' has a huge land mass to care for. There is not enough inner warmth for everyone, the warmth can't bear being spread too thin. Or else there will only be an evenly spread ground frost. Sweden ought to have twenty million inhabitants in order to get some spiritual warmth. Other parts of the world are teeming with crowds approaching astronomical numbers ... In this country it's quite the opposite. We move around with a country so big that we are unable to warm it up as we should or ought to, with our breath.

I believe that it has become a little warmer both in Sweden and, not least, in parishes from the hospitality offered and received. In gratitude to and for all who have been and continue to be part of this work.

+ Antje Jackelén

Antje Jackelén

Archbishop of the Church of Sweden

Chapter 1

Introduction

In 2015, more than one million refugees reached Europe's shores after a life-threatening journey across the Mediterranean Sea. Thousands never made it, but perished during the crossing. One million was just a fraction of the more than 65 million refugees all over the world, most of whom were now in the neighbouring countries of the conflict sites. At the same time, the number of asylum seekers coming to Europe is almost twice the number of the previous year. About half came from Syria, but many also came from other conflict-torn countries, such as Afghanistan and Iraq.¹ The media was filled with images of persons sleeping on cold floors in railway stations, exhausted after wandering along motorways and travelling in crowded refugee boats. One of the more than 3,600 refugees who died in the Mediterranean that year was the little boy named Alan Kurdi, whose dead body was washed ashore on a Turkish beach in the morning of 2 September 2015. The image of his lifeless body gave the distress and suffering of refugees a face, which touched the hearts of many people around the world.²

About the same time, the fate of the refugees became a more palpable part of the everyday lives of many Swedes and parishes. In October and November, almost 10,000 new asylum seekers reached Sweden's border every week. In total, there were more than 162,000 asylum seekers in Sweden in 2015, and around 70,000 of these were under 18 years of age. Hostels, campsites and gymnasiums around the country were converted to evacuation or asylum homes. Since the Swedish Migration Agency was unable, in some cases, to find accommodation for them, churches offered beds on church benches and floors. Many volunteers engaged in different organisations and networks in order to meet the urgent needs. The parishes of the Church of Sweden expanded their existing activities or mobilised for new efforts within a few days.³

The purpose of the study is to investigate the extent of the work of the Church of Sweden at parish level in what concerns asylum seekers and new arrivals, as well as how the activities were organised and what

1 UNHCR 2016, p. 7

2 By photographer Nilüfer Demir, Dogan News Agency 2015-12-29, <http://time.com/4162306/alan-kurdi-syria-drowned-boy-refugee-crisis/>

3 See, for example, the Swedish Migration Agency, 'Submitted applications for asylum' and 'Persons residing in the Swedish Migration Agency's reception system' 01 May 2016, Sveriges Radio 07 October 2015. Aftonbladet, 24 November 2015, Dagen 25 September 2015, SvT Hollmer 2016

experiences have resulted from the work. The focus of the report is on the major asylum reception in 2015 and 2016, while, at the same time, the work is given a longer-term perspective. The Church of Sweden is an Evangelical Lutheran Church and Sweden's largest member organisation, with 6.1 million members. The primary unit of the Church of Sweden is the parish. Parishes are self-governing but form part of a diocese and the faith community of the Church of Sweden.

This study focuses on the work of the parishes of the Church of Sweden and only briefly mentions the work that takes place in the Church of Sweden at diocese and national level. Nor does the study deal with the extensive humanitarian aid that the Church of Sweden, in collaboration with the ACT Alliance, provides to people in refugee situations around the world.

The study is based on a survey and case studies. A survey was carried out in October 2016 in order to obtain an overall picture of the activities, scope and organisation of the work of the Church of Sweden parishes with asylum seekers and new arrivals. Of the total 688 units, 65 per cent responded.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the variation in the work and the different circumstances of the parishes, case studies were conducted in five parishes. These parishes were selected because the municipalities where they are located have received large numbers of people, while also representing different types of municipalities in different parts of the country. In each parish, we interviewed employees as well as the parishioners' elected representatives and persons involved in voluntary work. A total of 35 semi-structured interviews were conducted. For a more detailed description of the method of investigation, see Annexes 1-3



The border between Serbia and Hungary. September 2015.
Photo: Daniel Fekete/HIA/ACT Alliance/Ikon.

IMMIGRATION TO SWEDEN AND REFUGEE RECEPTION

In relation to the total population of the world, every 113th person in the world is now a refugee,⁴ and it is estimated that nearly 34,000 persons a day are forced to leave their homes. Two thirds of these are on the run in their homelands. Those who flee across the border often stay in refugee camps in neighbouring countries and only a fraction reach Europe and the West.⁵

In 2015, more than 1.3 million applied for asylum in the EU. Even if this number was equal only to just over one per cent of all asylum seekers, it was still more than double the number of the previous year.⁶ Germany, Hungary and Sweden were the EU countries that received most asylum seekers in 2015, which means that Sweden was the country with the highest reception of refugees per-capita.⁷ The number of unaccompanied children was particularly large, and over 35,000 of the 88,000 who reached the EU sought asylum in Sweden. From an overall perspective too, persons seeking asylum were young. Four out of five asylum seekers in Sweden were younger than 35 in 2015, with the vast majority ranging between 18 and 34 years of age.

However, not all asylum applicants are granted a residence permit. Of the asylum seekers who reached the EU, just over 333,000 persons were granted asylum in the EU countries in 2015. Almost half of these were given asylum in Germany. After Germany, Sweden granted asylum to the highest number of persons. In relation to the population, this means that, of all the countries in the EU, Sweden approved most asylum applications, with more than 350 per 100,000 inhabitants.⁸

Migration is nothing new, although its intensity was never as high as in 2015. In the 1800s and early 1900s, Sweden was a country that many people left because of poor economic prospects or experienced religious and political oppression. From the 1920s Sweden became a country of immigration. At the end of the First World War, Sweden introduced, in common with many other European countries, passport and visa requirements, as well as requirements for work and residence permits. The Second World War brought streams of refugees from Germany, the Nordic neighbouring countries and the Baltic states. The high economic growth of the 1950s and 1960s increased the need for a labour force

4 UNHCR <https://sverigeforunhcr.se/blogg/653-miljoner-pa-flykt-i-varlden-fler-an-nagonsin-tidigare>

5 Eurostat Main statistical findings Asylum applicants, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum_statistics_2016-05-07

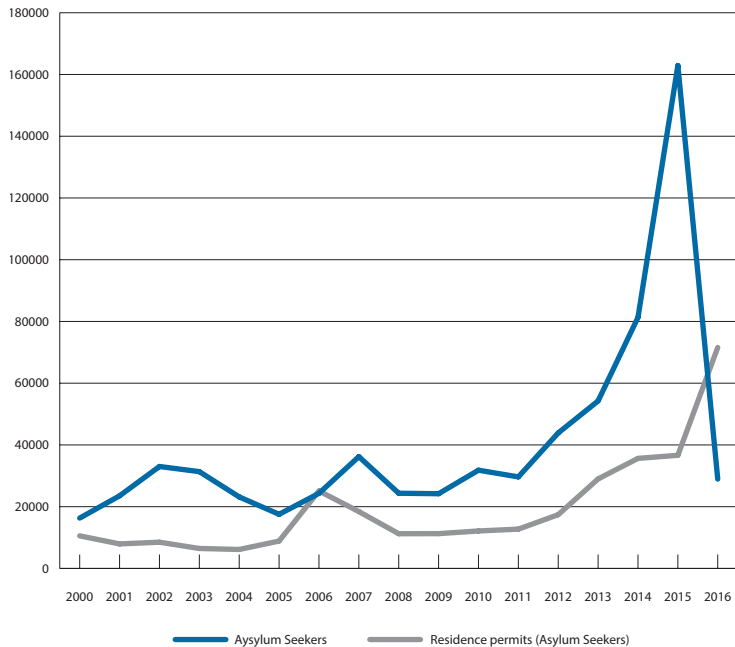
6 Fores, <http://www.migrationsinfo.se/migration/eu/asylsokande-i-eu/>, 2016-10-31

7 Eurostat, 'Number of (non-EU) asylum seekers in the EU and EFTA Member States, 2015 and 2016 (thousands of first time applicants)', [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Number_of_\(non-EU\)_asylum_seekers_in_the_EU_and_EFTA_Member_States_2015_and_2016_\(thousands_of_first_time_applicants\)_YB17.png](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Number_of_(non-EU)_asylum_seekers_in_the_EU_and_EFTA_Member_States_2015_and_2016_(thousands_of_first_time_applicants)_YB17.png)

8 Swedish Migration Agency, Asylum Seekers in the EU <https://www.migrationsinfo.se/migration/eu/asylsokande-i-eu/>

and brought about the liberalisation of labour immigration. Regulated immigration was only introduced in the 1960s, with the result that it has since been dominated by asylum seekers. Refugees have been coming in waves in response to crises around the world. The military coups during the 1970s resulted in refugees from Greece and Latin America. During the 1980s, asylum seekers came from Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey and Eritrea. The war in the Balkans in the early 1990s caused many people to flee their country. In the period from 1990 to 1993, Sweden received more than 100,000 asylum seekers from former Yugoslavia. Since 2000, Sweden's borders have again been opened to more types of migrants. Labour immigration was allowed and EU citizens have been granted free movement through EU membership, the Schengen Agreement and the Amsterdam Treaty. This has meant that, for much of the 2000s, asylum seekers and the migrating close relatives of asylum seekers accounted for about half of those who were granted residence permit in Sweden.⁹ In recent years, however, the number of asylum seekers has increased significantly. (See Figure 1.1)

FIGURE 1.1. NUMBER OF ASYLUM SEEKERS AND RESIDENCE PERMITS GRANTED



Source: The Swedish Migration Agency, Statistics, Residence permits granted 2000–2016.

⁹ Harrison 2016, Delmi Knowledge Overview 2016:1, All Time Migration! The importance of immigration for Sweden's development and prosperity, pp. 42–46

In the autumn of 2015, several European countries started to set stricter entry requirements for asylum seekers. The so-called eastern Balkan route was gradually closed. Temporary border controls were introduced at the borders of several countries, including within the Schengen area, and also at the Swedish border.¹⁰ On 24 November 2015, the Swedish Government announced it had amended its asylum legislation for the purpose of limiting the number of asylum seekers coming to Sweden.

In March 2016, an agreement was signed between the EU and Turkey with a view to reducing the number of asylum seekers in Europe. As a result, fewer people seeking protection are entering Europe, and new routes have been established, which has led to even greater numbers of people dying in an attempt to cross the Mediterranean.¹¹ At camps that have been set up, so-called hot spots, and along the escape routes to and through Europe, NGOs and faith communities meet people on the run and try to alleviate their urgent need for water, food, clothing and shelter, while working, at the same time, to ensure their human rights are upheld.¹²

The Swedish Government's new legislation to temporarily restrict the possibility of being granted a residence permit in Sweden (hereinafter referred to as the 'temporary asylum law')¹³ was announced in November 2015 and was adopted by the Parliament on 21 June 2016. The new law means that temporary residence permits will be the main rule, the right to family reunification will be limited, and the possibility for children to be granted a residence permit on the grounds of particularly compassionate circumstances and for adults to be granted a residence permit on the grounds of exceptionally compassionate circumstances will be reduced. Through an amendment to the Act on the Reception of Asylum Seekers, the right to housing and social security benefits has also been withdrawn for adults without children who have been refused but do not return voluntarily.

The new border policy in the EU and Sweden, in combination with the 'temporary asylum law', has meant that fewer asylum seekers are coming to Sweden – only about 29,000 persons arrived in 2016. In Sweden, the efforts of civil society have changed increasingly from solving an emergency situation with a large number of asylum seekers to dealing

¹⁰ An example of this is that Sweden introduced border controls between Sweden and Denmark on 12 November 2015, and a new carrier's liability with ID control on 4 January 2016. Border controls and fencing were also erected at other border sections within Europe. The so-called eastern Balkan route was closed on 6 March 2016. On 18 March 2016, the EU agreed with Turkey to reduce the number of asylum seekers travelling from Turkey and further into the EU

¹¹ UNHCR 23 December 2016

¹² ACT Alliance 2016 and Jackson and Passarelli 2016

¹³ By the 'temporary asylum law' we mean the Law (2016:752) temporarily Restricting the Possibility of Being Granted a Residence Permit in Sweden. For the sake of simplicity, we use the term 'temporary asylum law', although the law also concerns issues other than asylum rights

with issues of integration, family reunification and a growing group of persons refused asylum who remain in the country, in hiding and without documents. In January 2016, the Minister for Home Affairs estimated that only around 45 per cent of the more than 162,000 asylum seekers who came to Sweden in 2015 will be granted a residence permit.¹⁴

In 2017, the number of asylum seekers varied between 300 and 450 per week, excluding relocations from Italy and Greece. Of these, approximately 60-70 per cent are individuals who are not registered as having been asylum seekers in the past. The Swedish Migration Agency's prognosis for 2017 is that between 20,000 and 32,000 asylum seekers¹⁵ are affected by many different factors, including the global political situation, whether or not the EU-Turkey agreement is maintained, as well as how the possibility of being granted asylum and the right to family reunification in Sweden is being developed.¹⁶

With the introduction of a new refugee policy within the EU and Sweden, fewer asylum seekers came to Sweden in 2016, just over 30,000. The prognosis of the Swedish Migration Agency is that there will be between 30,700 and 50,700 asylum seekers in 2017.¹⁷ The prognosis for the coming year is uncertain and depends on the global political situation and on whether the EU-Turkey agreement is maintained. But it also depends on the possibility of being granted asylum and the right to family reunification in Sweden. With continued war and conflict, there are still many in need of protection. The challenge for the future is to create a sustainable reception of refugees and a successful integration in their new home country.

Only half of more than 160,000 asylum seekers who came to Sweden in 2015 are expected to be granted a residence permit. This means that between 60,000 and 80,000 asylum applications will be rejected. Many of the asylum seekers who are refused are expected to choose to stay as undocumented. The Swedish Government introduced temporary residence permits in June 2016, and the right to housing and social security benefits is withdrawn when a decision to refuse a residence permit has been issued. This means that, for its livelihood, this group now relies only on humanitarian organisations and faith communities, or the informal economy. Without legal rights, this group is particularly vulnerable and risks being exploited.¹⁸

¹⁴ Piteå Newspaper 27 January 2016

¹⁵ The Swedish Migration Agency 2017, Activity and Expenditure Forecast 26 July 2017, p. 37

¹⁶ Swedish Migration Agency 25 October 2016

¹⁷ Swedish Migration Agency, <http://www.migrationsverket.se/Om-Migrationsverket/Nyhetsarkiv/Nyhetsarkiv-2016/2016-10-25-Fler-beslut-i-asylarenden-an-nagonsin.html>, 2016-10-25

¹⁸ SVD, <http://www.svd.se/migrationsverket-46000-kan-avvika-narmaste-aren>, 2016-03-05, SvD, <http://www.svd.se/halften-av-alla-asylsokande-som-blir-avvisade-forsviner>, 2016-07-15

THE SWEDISH WELFARE MODEL AND THE ROLE OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY

The large number of refugees engaged large parts of civil society. In Sweden, as in the other Nordic countries, this engagement is usually complementary to publicly funded welfare. The Swedish welfare model could be described as universal, which means that most of the population is covered by public welfare solutions, with a combination of general contributions, social insurance against loss of income and means-tested benefits. Medical and health care, childcare and education are almost exclusively tax-financed. The model is based on the 'work principle', the objective of which is full employment, so that there is a broad tax base for welfare funding for those periods of life when the individual cannot work or is unemployed. The principle was based on an understanding of an active labour-market policy as more important than insurances and benefits as a protection against economic hardship.¹⁹ In this respect, the Swedish model differs from the welfare state system in most other European countries. The UK model is characterised by universal coverage, to ensure a minimum standard of life, but where the individual needs to take out private insurance to supplement the protection. In the German welfare model, social security and welfare services are linked to employers. These are supplemented with means-tested benefits at a low level of guarantee when families are unable to provide for their basic welfare themselves. This means that churches and other faith communities, together with not-for-profit organisations, have traditionally played a greater role in support, charity and welfare.²⁰

The Swedish model emerged during the early 1900s and expanded during the post-war era. Prior to this, as in the rest of Europe, welfare was provided to a large extent through organisations and faith communities. Over time, most of the welfare production became financed through the transition to public operation and financing. This division of responsibility has been described in terms of a social contract, where key players in society share key tasks between themselves.²¹ By the beginning of the 1980s, Sweden had a welfare model that essentially included the entire population and at levels that meant that neither the most vulnerable nor the middle class needed to seek solutions outside the public bodies.²² However, the welfare state is under pressure.

Since the 1990s cuts have been made in the welfare system. Today, Sweden is much more similar to other western societies than before. Sweden is no longer exceptionally homogeneous. Social inequality is increasing, although Sweden still usually scores high in international

19 Lundberg & Åmark 2001

20 Esping Andersen 1990

21 Lundström and Wijkström, 2002, Trägårdh and Berggren 2006, Wijkström 2012, pp. 1-34

22 Esping-Andersen 1990, Sainsbury 1996, Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser 2011

comparisons of living standards, gender equality, and equal income distribution. With increased pressure on welfare services as a result of demographic changes such as an ageing population and many new arrivals, and a reality far from full employment, several reforms for the restructuring of the Swedish welfare model have been implemented.²³ With many people outside the regular labour market and more irregular migrants, the informal sector, which has traditionally been small in Sweden, has grown again. Those who end up outside the labour market or within the informal sector find themselves outside the Swedish social security system, with income-related benefits at a high level, a fact that increases the divisions in society.

With a welfare state that is no longer as comprehensive as before, there is now a clear expectation, both from national decision makers and EU politicians, that the so-called civil society²⁴ should play a greater role as a provider of welfare service.

PREVIOUS STUDIES ON THE CHANGING ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND VOLUNTARY WORK

Many studies show that member organisations in Sweden are currently losing ground and that fewer Swedes are members of an association. Since 1990, membership of the political parties has been reduced by almost a half, and the trade unions and free churches have lost about a fifth of their members. During the same period, the number of members of the Church of Sweden has decreased from 7.8 to 6.1 million, equivalent to a decrease of 22 per cent. Other organisations, such as sports and outdoor leisure organisations, have also experienced falling membership rates. This has been described as a threat to popular movements and hence to an important part of Swedish society. Despite the decline in membership, however, Swedes are still as engaged in civil society as they used to be. New organisations and faith communities have been created through increased immigration, and new forms of engagement are mobilised through networks and the social media.²⁵

Almost half of the population state that they volunteer for an organisation in some form. In 2009, an average of 16 hours per month were spent on voluntary work.²⁶ Contributing to society by being a volunteer can strengthen self-esteem, give satisfaction and create stronger net-

23 Sainsbury 2012, Schierup et al 2006

24 The civil society has since the 1990s started to be used in Sweden too in discussions about member organisations, faith communities, networks and cooperative associations within what the government has called “an arena separate from the state, the market and the individual household, where persons, groups and organisations act in unison for common interests” (Prop 2009/10:55)

25 SOU 1990:44, Harding 2012, Boije and Ottevik 2014, pp. 259-262, MUCF 2014, Göransson 2000, p. 119 ff, Borevi 2002, Vogel, Amnå, Munck and Häll 2003, p. 28 ff and p. 53, Goul Andersen & Hoff 2001, p. 81

26 Harding 2012, p. 17, Svedberg, von Essen and Jegermalm 2010

works.²⁷ The single most important factor behind people's decision to work as volunteers for an organisation is the fact that they have been asked.²⁸

Several studies show that the motivation for volunteering is linked to values, commitment to the cause, but many also state that they work as volunteers to learn something new and to be more content with themselves. The desire to work as volunteers is also positively influenced by parents' activities in different associations during childhood and by the degree of religiosity. It has become more common for those who work as volunteers to do so without being members, and the driving factor is more closely linked to the activity itself than to the overall goals of the organisation. The likelihood that the commitment will last in time increases with the feeling of belonging to the organisation, the satisfaction of the work and the feeling of being useful.²⁹

As the Swedish welfare model has come under pressure, organisations and faith communities have reclaimed their niches as welfare providers. Publicly funded solutions still dominate, however, even though the system has been opened up to welfare sector activities run by private operations. In Sweden, personal choice has been introduced, but instead of civil society organisations, private companies in particular, often in the form of large corporations, have assumed a more important role.³⁰ However, cooperation between public operators and civil society organisations has increased, in the form of a not-for-profit public partnership. Moreover, organisations and faith communities have played a prominent role, in particular in the reception of asylum seekers and new arrivals.³¹ According to the welfare platform that the Church Board adopted in 2013, the role of giving voice to the most vulnerable groups in the society is the most important of the Church of Sweden's mission to be involved in the welfare sector.³² Its other roles are service provider and partner. The development of the diaconal work within the Church of Sweden is also progressing towards rights-based work to empower persons to take action. The role involves trying to give people a voice to enable them to safeguard their human rights.³³

27 See the compilation of previous research in Weng and Lee, pp. 509-524

28 Harding 2012, p. 17, Svedberg, von Essen and Jegermalm 2010, Freeman 1997, pp. 140-166

29 Wøllebæk, Skirstad, and Hanstad 2014, pp. 22-41

30 Sivesind, Bock Seggaard, and Trætteberg 2016:1. Approximately 19 per cent of the work force in the welfare sector in Sweden are employed by private companies, and only 3 per cent by civil society organisations. In Norway and Denmark civil society organisations account for 8 and 14 per cent, respectively, of employees working in the welfare sector

31 Nahnfeldts 2016, Sivesind (ed.) 2016

32 Church of Sweden, the Central Church Office 2013

33 Hjalmarsson 2015

PREVIOUS STUDIES ON 'RELIGIOUS CAPITAL' AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RELIGION AFTER MIGRATION

A structure where different groups and parts of society never meet does not necessarily create a well-knit society. This means that the way in which organisations are structured and the principles based on which they mobilise their members are important. Organisations where many people gather from different parts of society around a common interest have greater potential to unite people than those that gather a narrow group of like-minded persons with a common identity. The former creates a greater degree of 'bridging', which increases trust between different groups and individuals, the latter more 'bonding'. There is a tension here between strengthening the feeling of belonging to a group and working as bridge builders. Churches and faith communities are an important part of civil society. In *American Grace* (2010), political scientists Robert D. Putnam and David E. Cambell draw the conclusion that religious organisations and networks, the 'religious social capital', work particularly well to create tolerance in society. The explanation for this, according to the study, is the strong moral charge in religious ties and the fact that they create a social duty to do good for others.³⁴ These conclusions are, however, brought into question by other studies. Political scientist Dag Wollebæk considers that a positive connection between individual religiosity and trust is only seen within the group, not between groups. According to this study, moderately religious people have more trust in people in general than fundamentalist believers, but less so than non-religious persons.³⁵ Other studies show that voluntary work involving the entire local community significantly reduces prejudices, xenophobia and tensions between different groups.³⁶

Several studies have dealt with the importance of religion in itself for persons in a vulnerable situation who have been forced to leave their homes.

*When I arrived here, I was immediately surrounded, integrated and encouraged by the pastor as if he knew that I could bring something to the church. And I think that for a migrant Christian like me all this was very meaningful.*³⁷

These are the words of a Pentecostal from central Africa who lives in France and who was interviewed in a European study on the role of religion in integration, carried out in 2007 by the *Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe*.

He is not alone in his experience that his religious engagement has been crucial in helping him to find his place in the new society. In his doc-

34 See Putnam and Cambell 2010, pp. 472-480

35 Wollebæk 2013, pp. 125-128

36 Hoffman et al. (2009)

37 Passarelli 2007, pp. 11

toral dissertation, sociologist Daniel Sjödin interviewed both Muslim and Free Church Christian migrants in the Swedish town Helsingborg. His study shows that the experience of finally being able to feel at home and being warmly received in an otherwise cold and bewildering society is a common story from migrants who are religiously active.³⁸ Social anthropologist Kristina Helgesson Kjellin draws the same conclusion in her material from Skärholmen in southern Stockholm, where she interviewed persons active in the Church of Sweden. The church is described as a place where people listen, ‘... a good place where you can open your heart, help people’.³⁹ Religious sociologist Erika Willander’s research overview of the importance of religion after migration shows that religion seems, above all, to be strengthened in migration situations characterised by flight, hardship and difficulties in settling down in the new country. The same strengthening of religious feeling cannot be detected in cases where the purpose of migration is mainly to find new work on better terms.⁴⁰

Many migrants face stigmatisation and discrimination in the new country. Their former social status and professional competence may be completely lost. Everyday activities like shopping or going to a medical centre require a lot of effort. Often, the religious context can strengthen individuals and give them an opportunity to be seen and respected, meet new friends and build social networks.⁴¹ Through their religious context, many people are given practical assistance and social networks that makes it easier for them to settle in the new country. The belief that we all are equal in God’s eyes can be a help in strengthening their self-esteem. The religious texts often contain stories of flight and migration, the blessing of diversity and the ability to cross different borders. In Helgesson Kjellin’s study, the people she meets point to the Holy Communion, and the sharing of bread and wine in the church service as a ritual in which social relations are transformed and become more equal.⁴²

THE CHURCH OF SWEDEN’S ORGANISATION AND EARLIER ENGAGEMENT FOR REFUGEES⁴³

Since long there has been an engagement within the Church of Sweden for the benefit of refugees, above all, perhaps, from individuals, congregation members or employees of the Church of Sweden, who have linked the refugee issues with their Christian faith and the Church’s mission. This has involved practical help and also, for example, peti-

38 Sjödin 2011

39 Helgesson Kjellin, p. 122

40 Willander 2016a

41 Helgesson Kjellin 2016, p. 149

42 Helgesson Kjellin 2016, p. 171

43 A longer version of this section is available in Swedish at <https://internwww.svenskakyrkan.se/supportmigration/det-gor-svenska-kyrkan-for-manniskor-pa-flykt>

tions to the government from the Bishops' Conference.⁴⁴ The engagement in the parishes has often been dependent on enthusiasts and has grown in places where individuals, often deacons, have had contact with people in the asylum process. The call to stand by the side of the vulnerable, to 'love thy neighbour as thyself'⁴⁵ and the deacons' vow to 'defend human rights' are common driving factors.

With its 6.1 million members, the Church of Sweden is by far the largest faith community in Sweden. The Church of Sweden's dominant position is closely associated with its history. Until 1951, it was not permissible to leave the Church of Sweden without joining another faith community approved by the state. Up until 1995 new-born children became members of the Church of Sweden if at least one of the child's parents was a member. Since then, from 1996, only children who are baptised in the Church of Sweden become members. As a consequence of these circumstances, a very high proportion of the country's population belong to the Church of Sweden. Approximately 90 per cent of the country's inhabitants were members as recently as by the end of the 1990s. Until 2000, the Church of Sweden was also closely linked to the Swedish state.

However, a major change occurred that year, when the former statutory relations with the state were practically dissolved. There are provisions in the rules governing the Church of Sweden, the Church Ordinance, that the Church of Sweden should be an Evangelical Lutheran faith community with a nationwide organisation with parishes and 'pastorates' throughout the country. In 2017 there are a total of 1,355 parishes in the Church of Sweden. Many of these cooperate in pastorates, which is the economic entity with overall financial responsibility. In 2017 there are 648 economic entities, that is, pastorates plus parishes with own finances.

The pastorates and parishes with own finances vary widely in size. Malmö is the biggest pastorate with 327,000 inhabitants, approximately 135,000 of whom are members of the Church of Sweden, and the Fardhem pastorate in Gotland is the smallest, with 826 inhabitants and 612 members. The so-called concept of residence, introduced into the Church Ordinance when the Church of Sweden separated from the state, means that the parish has a responsibility 'for the church activities for all who are part of the congregation'⁴⁶ and not just for its members. Since then, this fact has been presented as important grounds for engagement for persons who for various reasons reside within the boundaries of the parish. Work has often been carried out in ecumenical collaboration, not least locally, but also through international coopera-

44 Ryman 1997, p. 55 ff

45 From Matthew 22:39

46 The Church Ordinance Chapter 2 § 1

tion within, for example, the World Council of Churches⁴⁷ and through humanitarian aid to refugees.

Successful ecumenical calls such as the 2005 ‘Easter Call’ and the 2016 ‘Christmas Call’ are obvious examples of how the churches in Sweden have raised their voice together to defend asylum rights and emphasise the importance of humanity in migration policy. Joint policy documents such as ‘That’s What We Want! Churches and Migration Issues’ from 2006 and joint education initiatives have also played a major role.

In 2016 the General Synod decided, in accordance with the proposals of the Church Board, to invest SEK 60 million (equivalent to EUR 6 million) in both national and international work with asylum seekers and refugees in the period 2017–2019.

TERMS USED

The report contains a lot of words and terms that are contested. Who is actually considered a refugee? How long do you remain an immigrant? What is racism? Words and terms are important, because they also help to shape people’s thoughts. However, we do not intend to enter into any detailed discussion of the terms used in this report. Often we use the terminology in the interview material and in the questionnaire’s free-text answers.

We have chosen to describe the work of the parishes with the target group as work with ‘asylum seekers and new arrivals’ because this is a term often used by public organisations in Sweden. The term ‘new arrivals’ in this context means newly settled persons with a residence permit. There are many new arrivals who are not the focus of this study – for example, labour migrants and immigrant family members of persons who do not have a background as asylum seekers. Many parishes also carry out extensive work with vulnerable EU migrants, which is not described in this report either.

The terms ‘refugees’ and ‘persons with refugee backgrounds’ also appear in the report. Not least, it is common for those we interviewed to refer to the work of the parish as, for example, ‘the parish’s refugee work’. The term ‘refugee’ can be understood either in a strictly legal sense (i.e., a person who has been granted a residence permit in accordance with the UN Refugee Convention), or as a collective name for those who have been granted a residence permit on further grounds of protection in addition to the UN Convention (e.g. in statistics on municipal refugee reception), or – not least in everyday speech – as a

47 The World Council of Churches is a Christian association of 348 churches in a total of 110 countries, whose main goals are Christian unity and increased cooperation between Christians throughout the world. For further information, see <http://www.oikoumene.org/en>

general term for persons who are fleeing their country, for whatever reason and whatever their legal status. It is primarily in this latter general sense that the word refugee is used in the parishes of the Church of Sweden and is sometimes found in quotes and references in this report. Sometimes the term ‘migrant’ is also used in the report, as a general term for persons resident in a country other than their country of birth.

Contested terms such as ‘xenophobia’ and ‘racism’ also appear in the report. We have sometimes paired the word ‘racism’ with ‘organised’ to distinguish between general concepts about how we value colour of skin and origin that we all can be influenced by (‘racism’), and the organisations that have a racist agenda for society (‘organised racism’). In general, we have tried to provide clear examples and concrete reasoning instead of focusing on discussions on concepts. We have often used the terminology contained in the interview material and in the free-text responses to the questionnaire. A question was also posed in the questionnaire about work ‘for social cohesion and against xenophobia’. In the interviews, open questions were asked about what reactions to the reception of asylum seekers had been observed in the local community.

Chapter 2

Work with Asylum Seekers and New Arrivals in the Church of Sweden

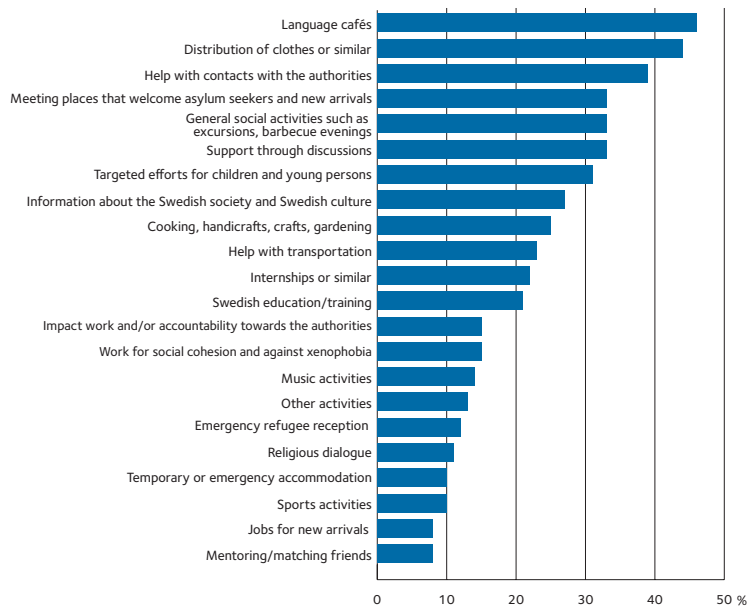
The emergency situation during the late summer and autumn of 2015, when many asylum seekers came to Sweden over a short period of time, prompted a high level of engagement from civil society and from individuals who wanted to help out. The efforts of NGOs have been depicted through media reporting and certain reports but have so far been under-explored. In order to study the extent and content of the activities, the way in which they are conducted and financed within the parishes of the Church of Sweden, and what the activities for and with asylum seekers and new arrivals involve, a questionnaire was sent to vicars in all pastorates and parishes with own finances. In total, 64 per cent of the 688 questionnaires were answered. The non-response analysis shows that the questionnaires answered in the survey generally reflect the Swedish parishes/pastorates in terms of size and reception, which means that the results can be regarded as representative. In this chapter we compare the overall results of the survey, while the method and questions asked are presented in Annexes 1 and 2.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

From the autumn of 2015 until October 2016, when the questionnaires were sent out, 82 per cent of the pastorates and parishes that answered the questionnaire were carrying out activities for and with asylum seekers and new arrivals. The activities are carried out nationwide in locations ranging from big cities and their suburbs to smaller towns, villages and rural areas. Many of the activities have been set up in a short space of time to respond to the needs that arose in the emergency situation during the autumn of 2015. Half of the parishes/pastorates state that they have started an entirely new activity in the last 12 months, while one third have increased the scope of their existing activities. Some individual parishes/pastorates state that they have previously carried out activities, but have reduced them over the year.

Figure 2.1 shows a wide range of activities being developed. Here respondents can state several pre-selected options and give additional details in free-text. The most common activities during this period are language cafés, clothing donations, help with contact with the authorities, creating meeting places and organising social activities. The latter can range from excursions and barbecue evenings to friendship mediation in cooperation with the municipality or by themselves. The parishes also provide community information and orientation in Swedish culture. Many run girls’ or boys’ groups and activities specially aimed at children and youth. As asylum accommodation is in many cases located outside the central areas, transport is provided. Sometimes the work is linked to the asylum accommodation within the parish or pastorate. In cases where parishes provide language tuition in addition to language cafés, they often cooperate with study associations. Some parishes where no or few asylum seekers have arrived, support, or carry out activities together with, neighbouring parishes where more persons have arrived.⁴⁸

FIGURE 2.1 FOCUS ON ACTIVITIES FOR AND WITH ASYLUM SEEKERS AND NEW ARRIVALS IN THE PARISHES OF THE CHURCH OF SWEDEN



Source: Survey aimed at all pastorates and parishes with own finances October 2016. The question read ‘Has the parish/pastorate done any work for and with refugees and asylum seekers in the last 12 months?’, non-response internally 4 out of 440.

⁴⁸ Response (free text, not numbered) to the question ‘Has the parish/pastorate done any work for refugees and asylum seekers in the last 12 months?’

Many asylum seekers have had difficult experiences involving war or persecution and hardship during their flight. Almost one third of the pastorates and parishes state that they have counselling, as part of the ordinary diaconal work, the development of psychosocial support work for children in newly arrived families or image therapy.

Through their access to a religious language, faith communities have the possibility to meet in dialogue with other believers. One out of ten vicars replies that the parish/pastorate has focused in particular on inter-religious dialogue in their work.

The answers not captured within the pre-selected options and where the activity is specific to the Church of Sweden often involve the provision of church services in other languages, study visits to churches in collaboration with schools or on their own, and baptism-related teaching. Several parishes also state that they provide premises for asylum seekers and new arrivals for prayer or celebration of their own church services. In some cases, the parishes state that Christian families who have been exposed to threats in their refugee camps have been offered accommodation.⁴⁹

One in every ten pastorate has provided emergency housing or other emergency assistance, for example at railway stations and airports, assisting new arrivals with clothing, food and transportation. The responses include supplementary details of telephone interviews with the pastorates that reported the largest number of asylum seekers in their activities. In more than half of these, the activities have been significantly reduced or in some cases discontinued as of January 2017, as fewer asylum seekers are arriving in Sweden and the Swedish Migration Agency is closing the directly-procured accommodation.⁵⁰

FINANCING THE WORK

Figure 2.2 shows that, unlike most other organisations, the Church of Sweden's activities for asylum seekers and new arrivals are largely independent of support in the form of public funds. The Church of Sweden consists of autonomous parishes, but both the regional level in the form of dioceses and the national level can assist with targeted support.

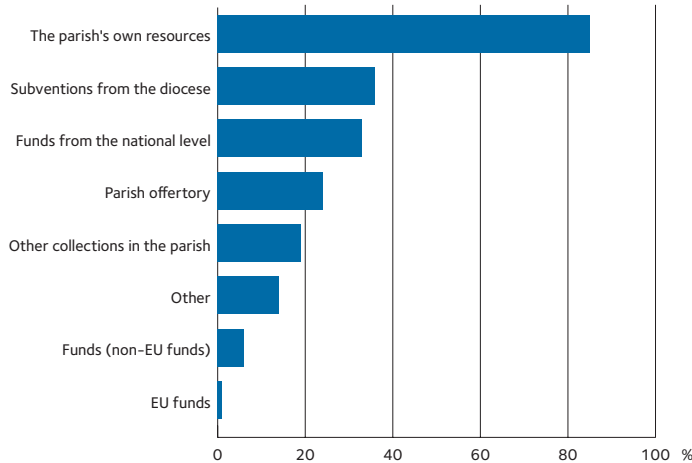
A total of 85 per cent of the parishes/pastorates state that they finance the activities with their own resources, that is, church fees. To a much larger extent than other organisations and faith communities, the Church of Sweden has premises and personnel throughout the country. On average, costs for premises amount to just over a quarter of the

49 Response (free text, not numbered) to the question 'Has the parish/pastorate carried out any activity for and with refugees and asylum seekers in the last 12 months?'

50 The Swedish Migration Agency 29 January 2017

total costs.⁵¹ This means there are large fixed costs and that the budget is set well in advance, but there is also a potential to use under-utilised premises for different activities.

FIGURE 2.2 SOURCES OF FUNDING FOR THE PASTORATES' ACTIVITIES FOR AND WITH ASYLUM SEEKERS AND NEW ARRIVALS



Source: Survey aimed at all pastorates and parishes with own finances October 2016. The question read: 'How is/are the activity/activities with refugees and asylum seekers financed?', 347 answers out of 366 (those who responded that they do carry out activities).

Approximately one third of pastorates and parishes with own finances stated that, in addition to their own funds, they have also received earmarked contributions via the national level and the dioceses. Some of these were in receipt of the Church of Sweden's own funds, which were made available by decision of the Church's highest decision-making body, the General Synod. Part of the grants were government funding, awarded to the Church of Sweden following a government decision in December 2015. Some dioceses also allocated their own funds to the parish work. The national level of the Church of Sweden has also initiated various education initiatives to support the work of the parishes.

A quarter of the parishes/pastorates have also acquired funds through collections and other donations locally in support of their activities. Few of the parishes/pastorates state that they have applied for other funding, such as EU funds and other funds, which may be perceived as difficult and time-consuming. However, cooperation with other organ-

51 Church of Sweden 2015:1

isations and county administrative boards has in some cases resulted in approved applications for EU contributions.

THE ACTIVITIES REACH MANY

The parishes/pastorates that replied to the questionnaire have had in total more than 24,000 asylum seekers and new arrivals in their activities per month. Since not all parishes/pastorates have responded and not all individuals attend all the time, the actual number of people reached by the activities is significantly greater. As an estimate, the activities receive 37,500 visitors per month. The average parish/pastorate has 74 participants in the activities during a regular month. Those who carry out the most extensive activities have attracted between 400 and 1,000 asylum seekers or new arrivals per month, when their activities were at their most extensive. Activities that have reached a large number of asylum seekers and new arrivals are clothing collection, language cafés and international church services.

VOLUNTEERS ARE AN IMPORTANT PREREQUISITE

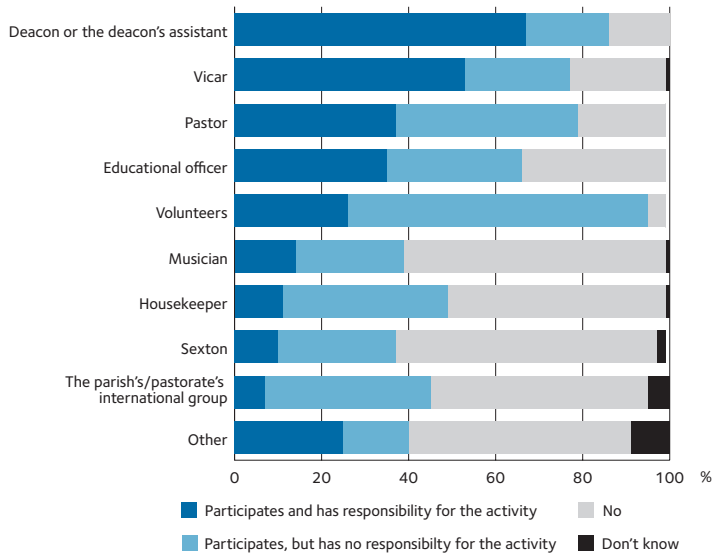
The extensive activities are made possible by a large number of volunteers. Only five per cent of the parishes/pastorates state they have not had any volunteers participating in their activities. In total, the respondent parishes/pastorates have gathered over 5,000 volunteers in their activities. This means that, if those who did not respond to the questionnaire have similar experiences, almost 8,000 persons have been engaged as volunteers working with asylum seekers and new arrivals on behalf of the Church of Sweden. The average number of volunteers is 17, but the number is very unevenly distributed among the parishes/pastorates. A few pastorates have used a very large number of volunteers, in excess of 200. However, it is most common for one to twenty volunteers to be engaged in working with asylum seekers and new arrivals (in 75 per cent of parishes/pastorates).

An explanation of the very large number of volunteers in certain pastorates is that they are or have been responsible for evacuation housing or other types of accommodation for asylum seekers. This activity is of a 24-hour character, which has required large numbers of volunteers.⁵² On request of the municipality, one of these parishes provided evacuation housing in collaboration with other faith communities between August 2015 and February 2016. Other activities involving a large number of volunteers include clothing collection. Earlier surveys and activity statistics show an increase in volunteer work, not only in the reception of asylum seekers and the integration of new arrivals, but also in the provision of support to EU migrants. In 2015, nearly 50,000 volunteers were engaged in diaconal work, confirmation groups or other work with children and youth in the Church of Sweden. In

⁵² Response 108 (free text) to the question: 'What do you consider to be the greatest lesson learned by the parish/pastorate from working with refugees and asylum seekers?'

addition, many were voluntarily engaged in church service work, as workers elected by the parish and as youth leaders.

FIGURE 2.3 PARTICIPATION AND ALLOCATION OF RESPONSIBILITY BETWEEN DIFFERENT GROUPS WITHIN THE PARISHES



Source: Survey aimed at all pastorates and parishes with own finances, October 2016. The question read 'Who is engaged in the work for and with refugees and asylum seekers?', 347 answers out of 366 (those who responded that they carry out activities).

MANY DIFFERENT PROFESSIONS INVOLVED IN THE ACTIVITIES

Figure 2.3 shows that the work for and with asylum seekers and new arrivals involves many different occupational categories and other people working in the pastorates and parishes of the Church of Sweden. Most commonly, there are one or two employees working in this activity, but in large pastorates there may be a lot more.⁵³ In addition to regular personnel involved in the activity, there may be temporary employees, such as project, fee and part-time workers.

Ordinarily, a deacon, a deacon's assistant, a vicar or another priest is responsible for the activity. It should be noted, however, that just over a quarter of the parishes/pastorates state that they have volunteers who are responsible for the activity.

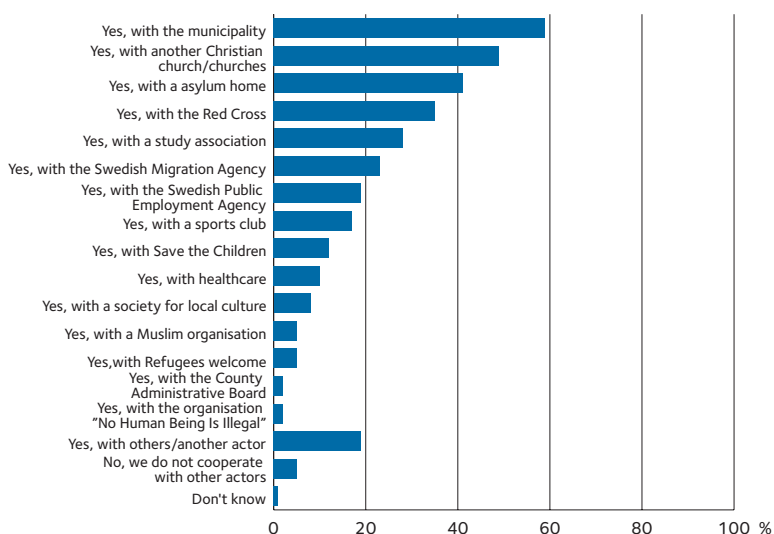
⁵³ The question reads: 'State the approximate number of employees (not volunteers) who worked in this activity in 2015'. Note that the question does not specify full-time equivalents, which means we cannot assume that it concerns 1-2 full-time jobs

MOST COOPERATE WITH AUTHORITIES AND OTHER ORGANISATIONS

The study indicates that the work for and with asylum seekers and new arrivals has gathered many different forces in the local community. Almost 95 per cent of the pastorates and parishes engaged in this kind of work state that they cooperate with other organisations and authorities. Figure 2.4 shows that the most common forms of collaboration are with the municipalities, other Christian denominations, the Red Cross and study associations.

Many also have contacts with government agencies such as the Swedish Migration Agency and the Swedish Public Employment Service, or the county council.

FIGUR 2.4 COLLABORATION WITH AUTHORITIES AND OTHER ORGANISATIONS



Source: Survey aimed at all pastorates and parishes with own finances, October 2016. Question: 'Do you cooperate with any other operators in the work for and with refugees and asylum seekers?', non-response internally 20 out of 366.

Chapter 3

Case Studies: Five Parishes

In addition to the results of the survey presented in Chapter 2, this study is based on interviews with representatives, volunteers and employees in five different parishes. The structure of these five parishes is intended to reflect some of the variation in the different types of parishes within the Church of Sweden. The selection of the five case studies was also determined by the fact that it should be possible to test the question areas covered by this study.

FIVE PARISHES IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF SWEDEN

The five parishes covered by this study are located in different parts of Sweden and operate in local contexts with significant differences (see Figure 3.1). The Parish of Karlskoga is located in a municipality characterised by its industrial history, with a long tradition of immigration and labour migration. About 15 per cent of the municipality's more than 30,000 inhabitants were born abroad. With its location in south-western Värmland, between the bigger towns of Örebro and Karlstad, the Municipality of Karlskoga forms part of a border area. The municipality's population has decreased by around 10,000 since the early 1970s, mainly as a result of structural changes in the industries that previously dominated the local economy.

The Parish of Hammarby developed along completely different lines during the same period. The parish is part of the Municipality of Upplands-Väsby, one of the Stockholm Region's expansive suburban municipalities, strategically located between central Stockholm and the country's biggest airport, Arlanda. Like most other municipalities in the country's metropolitan regions, the municipality, with its almost 43,000 inhabitants, experiences significant refugee immigration and has a multicultural character with a population that has its origins in many different countries.

The Parish of Pajala is located in a distinctly rural area near the border with Finland in the north-eastern corner of the country, around 100 kilometres north of the Arctic Circle. The population of the Municipality of Pajala has been halved since the late 1960s, mainly as a result of unemployment.

At the southern end of the country, 1,700 kilometres south of Pajala, lies the Parish of Teckomatorp. Teckomatorp is located in the Municipality of Svalöv and has approximately 13,700 inhabitants. Many commute to nearby Malmö and Helsingborg. Around 15 per cent of the municipality's inhabitants were born abroad.

Finally, the Parish of St. John's is located in the Municipality of Norrköping in Östergötland. With approximately 138,000 inhabitants, Norrköping is one of the country's major cities and, with its port and industrial development, has a long tradition of immigration and outside influences. Today, around 18 per cent of the inhabitants of the municipality were born abroad, which is just above the average for the country as a whole.

The variation in the local conditions characterising the five parishes has left its mark on the activities of the parishes in the various locations in different ways. In Karlskoga, the employees describe the Church of Sweden as an obvious and prominent part of a generally rich social and cultural life. There is also a long-standing collaboration and an exchange of information with the municipality; as the vicar states, 'one expects the church to get involved in most situations'. A clear majority, approximately 68 per cent of the inhabitants of the parish and municipality, are members of the Church of Sweden. The parish, which has 84 employees, also runs its own pre-school. The parish cooperates with the Public Employment Service and, in addition to its regular personnel, several persons are employed through different types of contributions.

Like many other metropolitan parishes, the Parish of Hammarby in Upplands Väsby, with its 23 employees, saw the number of members of the Church of Sweden decline to 48.5 per cent in 2015. The parish vicar emphasises the need for diaconal work and the fact that a large number of people suffer economic disadvantage and social exclusion. In this respect the Parish of Hammarby resembles the Parish of St. John's in Norrköping.

St. John's parish vicar similarly states that: 'Much of what we do and what is new to us is to ensure that the diaconal work permeates everything'.⁵⁴ In its 2015 parish instructions, the parish describes its areas of focus as 'vulnerability in terms of economy and ethnicity'.⁵⁵ The Parish of St. John's has approximately 26 employees. The cornerstone of the diaconal work is also reflected in the parish personnel structure, with four employed deacons. However, the parish is fairly complex in a socio-economic sense, with both residential areas, rural areas and areas dominated by rental accommodation.

⁵⁴ Interview with the parish vicar

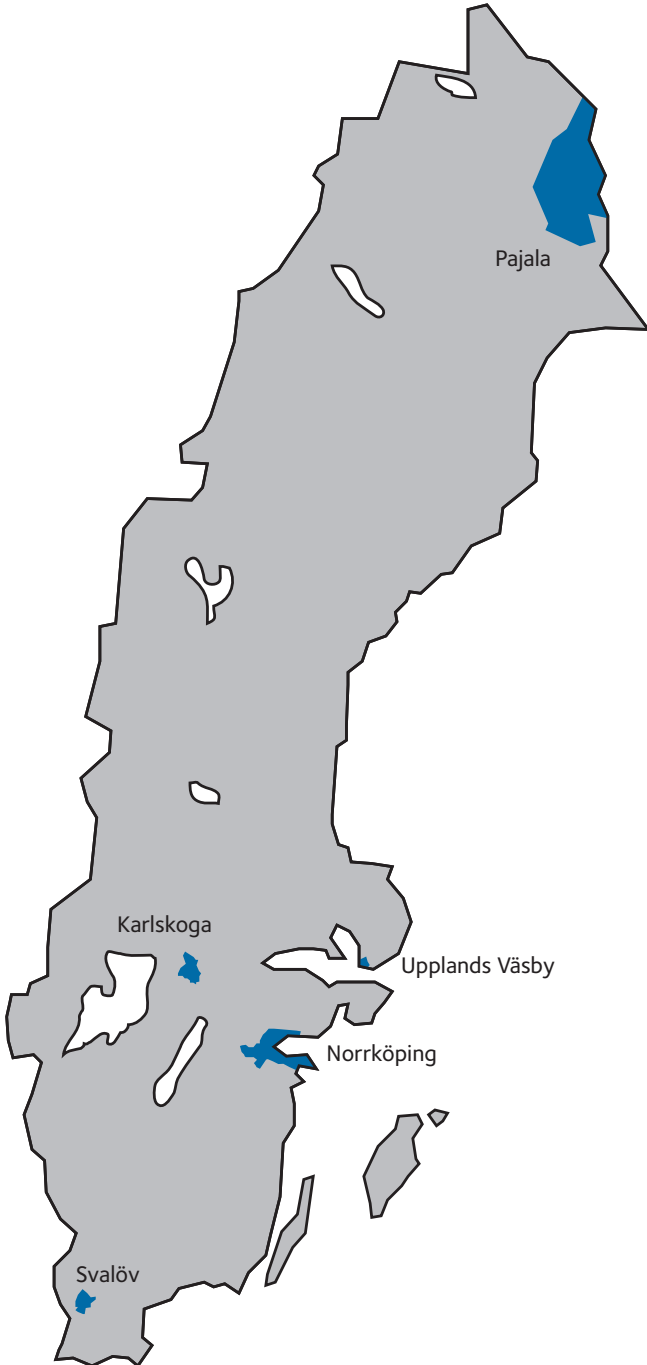
⁵⁵ Parish instructions for the Pastorate of Norrköping, adopted 26 August 2015

Compared with the other parishes in this study, the parishes of Pajala and Teckomatorp are relatively small, with just over 6,000 and 2,500 inhabitants, respectively. Compared with Hammarby and St. John's, however, the proportion of members of the Church of Sweden is high, 74.3 and 64.8 percent, respectively. In Pajala, located in Tornedalen on the border with northern Finland, the legacy of the religious revival preacher, Lars Levi Laestadius, is still alive. The church services of baptism, confirmation, marriage and funeral are of great importance. On the other hand, the diaconal work of the Church of Sweden is not a strong tradition in Pajala. This is partly explained by the fact that the large families of the Laestadian revival movement have their own social protection network. Moreover, the expectations on the Church in Sweden in respect of diaconal work here are not as high as in many other places in Sweden.

The Parish of Teckomatorp is located in an agricultural area of Scania in southern Sweden, where 65 per cent of the inhabitants are members of the Church of Sweden. The parish has three old rural churches and a newer parish centre with a church hall in the centre of Teckomatorp. The old churches are located in a rural area rooted in the agricultural community and with great cultural historical value, while in a built-up area such as Teckomatorp new types of church activities are carried out in more accessible premises, activities that focus to a great extent on the multicultural society and the town's challenges.⁵⁶ This pastorate, of which the parish forms a part, has a total of 26 employees and the work team in the Parish of Teckomatorp basically consists of an educational officer, a musician and a priest.

⁵⁶ Interview with the vicar, the parish council chairman, co-worker 1

FIGURE 3.1 MUNICIPALITIES WHERE THE FIVE CASE STUDY PARISHES ARE LOCATED



REFUGEE RECEPTION IN THE CASE STUDIES

The very sharp increase in the number of asylum seekers who reached Sweden in 2015 meant that most of the municipalities in the country were involved in the work on reception and accommodation for new arrivals. By the end of 2015, there were in total around 182,000 asylum seekers in the Swedish Migration Agency's reception system, out of whom 101,000 lived in some form of social housing, while 48,000 had arranged their own accommodation. In addition, approximately 33,000 lived in other forms of housing, primarily minors placed in family homes. Just over one and a half years later, in September 2017, the number of asylum seekers has decreased to approximately 88,000, out of whom 41,000 live in social housing and 32,000 and 15,500 in their own and other homes, respectively.

Previous experience of refugee reception and other conditions for receiving large groups of asylum seekers in a relatively short period of time varied considerably between the different types of municipalities in the country. A comparison of the conditions in the five municipalities that include the five parishes in this study points to a number of these differences.

Karlskoga has had asylum seekers in the town for many years and has annually received persons granted asylum who intend to settle in Sweden. In 2012 the municipality took the initiative of creating an open network with the social services, the leisure sector and various associations and organisations in order to better contribute to integration. The Church of Sweden has been involved in this from the start. In October 2015, a large asylum home was established in one of the town's hotels, accommodating up to 700 persons. By the end of 2015, there were 851 persons in the Swedish Migration Agency's reception system in the Municipality of Karlskoga, 659 of whom lived in social housing, 121 had their own accommodation and 71 had other accommodation, for example, family homes, community home or hospitals.⁵⁷ The municipality also took in 103 unaccompanied children seeking asylum in 2015.⁵⁸

The interviewees in Karlskoga describe the development of a large asylum reception as positive and as something that has created a great deal of engagement among the residents of the municipality. Many have been keen to contribute and help the new arrivals in the municipality to get a good start. This is also obvious from the daily meetings in town. As a survey participant tells us: *'[...] The immigrants you talk with think conditions here are good. It's a small town and people are*

⁵⁷ Statistics of the Swedish Migration Agency for Persons residing in the Migration Agency's reception system updated 01 January 2016

⁵⁸ Statistics of the Swedish Migration Agency Instructions for municipalities regarding unaccompanied children throughout 2015

kind and friendly and there's not much abuse and such'.⁵⁹ On the other hand, there is criticism and discussion in the social media.⁶⁰

The Municipality of Upplands Väsby has been providing homes to asylum seekers for a long time. The municipality has also received persons who have been granted asylum and intend to settle in Sweden – 166 persons in 2015. The asylum seekers living in the area primarily arrange their own accommodation, that is, they often live with relatives and family. According to the Swedish Migration Agency's statistics, there were 433 persons in the Migration Agency's reception system in the Municipality of Upplands Väsby at the end of 2015/beginning of 2016, out of whom three lived in social housing, 274 had their own accommodation and 156 lived in other accommodation.⁶¹ In 2015, the municipality also received 131 unaccompanied children seeking asylum.⁶² By the end of 2016, the total number of persons in the reception system had slightly increased to 448, out of whom 260 had their own accommodation and 188 had other accommodation.⁶³ Problems of, for example, cramped living conditions and extortionate rents for those residing in their so-called own accommodation are described⁶⁴ but are not given any weight in the interviews. Rather, many of the volunteers are surprised at how good the conditions are for many of the asylum seekers.⁶⁵

In Pajala, the growing number of people seeking asylum in Sweden coincided with a crisis and the subsequent bankruptcy of the Northland Resources mining company. The modular homes installed for migrant mining workers now became asylum homes. The Municipality of Pajala had previously had experience of receiving asylum seekers and new arrivals, albeit on a fairly small scale. The reception of people who moved from Chile in the 1980s is remembered in the village. More recently, Pajala has received a quota of refugees each year, for example, from Burma, and former asylum seekers who have been granted asylum and have been placed in the Municipality of Pajala – a total of 25 persons by 2015.

In total, Pajala received 800 asylum seekers in the municipality in 2015, mainly in the town of Pajala itself, but also in Junosuando, where around 20 persons were received, and in the small village of Erkheikki with around 70 households, where at most 50 persons lived in a disused school.

59 Interview with volunteer 2

60 Ibid

61 The Swedish Migration Agency. Persons living in the Migration Agency's reception system updated 01 January 2016

62 The Swedish Migration Agency. Instructions for municipalities regarding unaccompanied children throughout the year 2015

63 The Swedish Migration Agency. Persons living in the Migration Agency's reception system updated 01 January 2017

64 Interview with the Parish Council Chairman and employee 1

65 Interview with volunteers 2 and 3

According to the Swedish Migration Agency's statistics from the end of 2015/beginning of 2016, there were at that time 609 persons in the Migration Agency's reception system in the Municipality of Pajala, out of whom 559 lived in social housing, seven in their own accommodation and 43 in other accommodation.⁶⁶ In 2015 the municipality received 48 unaccompanied children seeking asylum⁶⁷ and has run community homes both in Pajala and in Korpilombolo.⁶⁸ By the end of 2016, the total number of persons in the reception system had decreased to 386.⁶⁹

There have been mixed responses to the asylum reception. The fact that many of the asylum seekers were single men led to some concern and even actual cultural clashes, e.g. in connection with the use of the municipal swimming pool.⁷⁰ At the same time, the fact that many empty houses were filled and many locals were given jobs as a result of the reception was perceived as something positive.⁷¹ During the autumn of 2016, the Swedish Migration Agency closed down a lot of places in asylum homes in Pajala, and the interviewed persons state that the number of asylum seekers in the municipality is decreasing from day to day. Persons who are granted a residence permit typically do not stay in Pajala but move to bigger cities where they believe they have better chances of finding jobs.

Norrköping has long had asylum seekers living in the municipality. According to the Swedish Migration Agency's statistics, at the end of 2015, there were 2,437 persons in the Swedish Migration Agency's reception system in the Municipality of Norrköping, out of whom 865 were living in social housing, 1,203 in their own homes and 369 in other accommodation.⁷² Up until the end of 2016, the number of social housing places had decreased to 567, and the number of persons with their own accommodation had likewise decreased to 567.⁷³ In 2015 the municipality received 307 unaccompanied children who were seeking asylum.⁷⁴ A majority of the asylum seekers live in their own accommodation, many in Hageby and Navestad, both of which come under the Parish of St. John's. Social housing homes are located within the parish boundaries in the district of Navestad and a short distance outside Norrköping. There are also homes for unaccompanied children

66 The Swedish Migration Agency. Persons living in the Migration Agency's reception system updated 01 January 2016

67 The Swedish Migration Agency. Instructions for municipalities regarding unaccompanied children throughout the year 2015

68 The Municipality of Pajala. Unaccompanied children

69 The Swedish Migration Agency. Persons living in the Migration Agency's reception system updated 01 January 2017

70 Interview with the vicar

71 Interview with employee 1

72 The Swedish Migration Agency. Persons living in the Migration Agency's reception system updated 01 January 2016

73 The Swedish Migration Agency. Persons living in the Migration Agency's reception system updated 01 January 2017

74 Statistics of the Swedish Migration Agency Instructions to municipalities regarding unaccompanied children throughout 2015

seeking asylum in central Norrköping. Norrköping has long been a city characterised by diversity, and the increased number of asylum seekers is not much noticed in the street. *‘People are used to them,’*⁷⁵ according to one survey participant.

The Municipality of Svalöv, in which the Parish of Teckomatorp is located, has been noticed by the reception of asylum seekers, notably from Syria, since 2012. The municipality has also received persons who have been granted asylum and who intend to settle in Sweden – 78 persons in 2015. According to the Swedish Migration Agency’s statistics, there were 598 persons in the Migration Agency’s reception system in the Municipality of Svalöv, out of whom 455 lived in social housing, 30 in their own accommodation and 113 in other accommodation at the end of 2015.⁷⁶ The municipality received 76 unaccompanied children seeking asylum in 2015.⁷⁷ By the end 2016/beginning of 2017, the total number of persons in the reception system had decreased to 308, out of whom 212 lived in social housing and 32 in their own accommodation.⁷⁸ There are mixed reactions to the reception of asylum seekers in the local community. The immigration-critical party, the Swedish Democrats, have strong support in the municipality. As a survey participant puts it: *‘Those who are involved think that the work is extremely important and interesting [...] but there are also people who think that we should not receive any immigrants at all’.*⁷⁹

HOW THE ENGAGEMENT WITH ASYLUM SEEKERS IN THE PARISH BEGAN

The studied parishes became involved in a number of ways: by establishing networks with other operators in the municipality themselves, on the initiative of asylum seekers or former immigrants to the municipality, or as a partner of other civil society actors who had taken the initiative. The Parish of Karlskoga is described by the vicar as a parish that has always had working with asylum seekers on its agenda, although, before 2012, no one was responsible for the matter. A new head of operations for the parish diaconal work and social contacts was recruited in 2012. Opportunities for more structured and extensive work were created out of his experience and interest in working on issues concerning asylum seekers and new arrivals. The municipality initiated a network for refugee issues between some thirty different operators in the municipality, among other things, NGOs and churches at approximately the same time. The Parish of Karlskoga was involved from the beginning.

75 Interview with trainee

76 The Swedish Migration Agency. Persons living in the Migration Agency’s reception system updated 01 January 2016

77 The Swedish Migration Agency. Instructions for municipalities regarding unaccompanied children throughout the year 2015

78 The Swedish Migration Agency. Persons living in the Migration Agency’s reception system updated 01 January 2017

79 Interview with the Parish Council Chairman

In the autumn of 2015, when the number of asylum seekers increased drastically, the municipality got in touch and asked the Church of Sweden to coordinate voluntary efforts, including the organisation of a clothing collection. The operations manager said yes immediately, and the municipality contributed SEK 250,000 (equivalent to EUR 25,000) to the work of the parish, which helped to expand the work.

When the Parish of Hammarby's engagement for asylum seekers began in the summer of 2015 it was, unlike the Parish of Karlskoga, relatively inexperienced in this type of work.

However, there was a network and an amount of trust to build on. About two years earlier, a deacon in the parish had begun inviting various actors such as the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, the police, the social services and various voluntary organisations to networking breakfasts in order to put in place further cooperation on social and diaconal issues. This network became a good base for the new deacon who started to work in the parish in August 2015 and wanted to initiate work on refugee issues. The parish had no activity at the time but soon decided to start a language café. A lot of the work involved using the already existing space and energy and channelling them.

In Pajala, in the spring of 2014, the parish's deacon convened the integration group, created at the initiative of the municipality. Two months later, the number of asylum seekers in the municipality grew radically with hundreds of new persons within a short period of time. A bed was allocated to more or less everyone. However, different initiatives soon started, especially when the locals saw how badly dressed many people were. A Facebook group was started with the name 'Pajala's helping hands', and clothing and shoes were collected and distributed. The Church of Sweden was involved but did not need to be the core of the work, as new actors were emerging. Among other things, a person in the local LGBT movement (Pajala Pride) was running the activity, and already from the start the work was organised with the help of the asylum seekers themselves.⁸⁰ The joint integration group linked to the Municipality of Pajala began discussing different types of activities. It is hard to remember after the event who took the initiative for what, especially as everything is interconnected within a smaller community.

Quite soon Christian asylum seekers started to appear at church services in Pajala. Some wanted to know more about the Church of Sweden's liturgy, and the deacon started a small group called 'Prayers in Swedish', where prayers were translated to English and the importance of the liturgy in the worship service was discussed.⁸¹ The deacon also visited asylum homes and other meeting places and was available

⁸⁰ Interview with employee 1

⁸¹ Interview with employee 1 (follow-up telephone contact)

for counselling. However, the parish felt the need for greater and more structured work and in the autumn of 2015 decided to apply for funds from the Church Board's special funds for a one-year integration co-ordination service. The integration coordinator started work in March 2016.

Of the five parishes included in this study, it is only the Parish of Teckomatorp for which a specific date can be given for when the activity for and with asylum seekers started, namely 28 August 2012. During this year, the Swedish Migration Agency started to rent private homes in the community for accommodating asylum-seekers, and one day in August the parish personnel had their first contact with asylum seekers from Syria:

They came one day and rang the doorbell and said 'Hello, we're here' and then we said 'Welcome'. [...] And there were three families standing outside our door. Yes, they knew that this was a house of the church, they knew that it was a church and they had come to the village and were completely confused, they had arrived the day before. They arrived on 27 August, I remember the exact day and on 28 August they were knocking on our door here.⁸²

The parish had not prepared any special activities for the asylum seekers who moved in and did not know what the Swedish Migration Agency's plans were for an asylum home in the town. The asylum seekers initially participated in an activity called 'Open House for the Whole Family' and in an open café for parents. Only then did the employees, together with some of the new parishioners, begin to think about how the activity could develop. Later a language café was set up, where the localities were always open for spontaneous visits. As more families arrived, initiatives were taken to more actively invite new asylum seekers. Many of the asylum seekers also turned to the parish for help in contacting the Swedish Migration Agency and the Social Insurance Agency, not least for assistance in reading and clarifying the contents of letters from these authorities.

The parish educational officer is the employee who is most involved in the work with asylum seekers and new arrivals, and she is also the one who initiated the work. The parish priest and the musicians are also engaged, as well as a number of volunteers, especially those involved with the language café. Of the six to seven volunteers involved in the activities, most are recruited by the parish educational officer, both within the parish and in the neighbouring parishes. She has also built networks dealing with refugee issues throughout the municipality. When the asylum seekers started to arrive in Teckomatorp, she contacted the municipality's refugee coordinator, who was not aware of the

⁸² Interview with employee 1

situation at all, which initially created confusion.



Family day in the Parish hall on the UN Day, Parish of Teckomatorp.
Photo: Lena Johansson Ohlström

When the larger asylum homes opened in other parts of the municipality in autumn 2014, the parish educational officer noticed this in that she received a cancellation for a planned camp, as the localities would be used as asylum home. She then contacted the municipality's refugee coordinator again and together they formed a network with, inter alia, the social services, the Church of Sweden, the rescue services and the asylum homes.⁸³

Individuals have also taken important initiatives. The 'Marhaba' association was set up by a real enthusiast in the municipality who himself is of migrant origin, in order to facilitate contacts between asylum seekers, new arrivals and native locals. The initiative started in 2015 and has engaged more and more people, which resulted in various types of activities for creating contacts, such as Christmas celebrations, Ramadan festivities, cultivation and arrangement of trainee jobs. The Church of Sweden is represented by the parish educational officer and other dedicated people in the parish.⁸⁴

The Parish of St. John's has for a long time worked with the Municipality of Norrköping and various organisations on issues concerning asylum seekers and new arrivals. The parish also collaborates in the network 'The Future Lives With Us' – a network of parishes within the Church of Sweden in some of Sweden's metropolitan areas, often with a low number of members and great diaconal needs. The parish hall and St. John's Church are located near the Hageby district,

⁸³ Interview with employee 1

⁸⁴ Ibid

where many of the town's new arrivals live. It has, among other things, influenced the worship services of the church. The parish has also for a long time participated in various forms of cooperation for the development of the Hageby district, including the municipality and the Hyresbostäder housing agency. The cooperation of the last few years has taken the form of employment support activities in Hageby under the name Portalen ('The Portal').

In August 2015, the parish was asked if they could provide logistics for a major fundraising for refugees in Greece. The fundraising received a huge response from the citizens of Norrköping and represented an important interface between the parish and the surrounding community.⁸⁵ In order to take care of all the engagement, the parish restructured a job position in October to fully focus on developing the work with asylum seekers and new arrivals.

HOW THE PARISHES' ACTIVITIES DEVELOPED

Overall, the work with and for the asylum seekers has developed into a relatively broad and multifaceted activity in the five parishes. This is especially true of the Parish of Karlskoga, where extensive and variegated activities for asylum seekers and new arrivals have been established and, to a large extent, seem to have grown organically. Because the large asylum accommodation is centrally located and one of the parish churches, the Söderkyrkan, is situated near the homes of a large number of asylum seekers (in their own accommodation) or other people with a refugee background, it has been easy to reach out.

The operations manager describes the work as being based on five pillars. The first is education. The parish provides a wide range of language cafés and special language support, both for those who need to study further and for illiterate persons. About 100 persons attend every week, and around twenty volunteers are involved in language activities.

The second pillar is individual counselling and psychosocial support. The parish employs a psychologist, and two additional psychologists and retired nurses work as volunteers and receive people every day. The parish also provides legal advice.

The third pillar is social coaching, with study visits and excursions. For example, the police may come and talk about the need for young persons to wear a helmet when riding a bicycle.⁸⁶ Here too, much of what they do is about building relationships and creating linkages to a context.

The fourth pillar is active leisure time and may involve anything from

⁸⁵ Interview with employee 2

⁸⁶ Ibid

cultural activities and festivities to fishing and cycling. Many operators in the local community are involved, for example, in the Christmas party that the church held together with the Pentecostal Church at Christmas 2015.

The fifth pillar is spiritual care, which deals with religious issues, Bible studies in, among other things, Arabic, spiritual welfare, and also taking care of converts. *'We have a lot of conversation with refugees about the Christian faith. We also talk a lot with the Muslims.'*⁸⁷

The previously mentioned clothing collection, which was held in the parish, is largely finished by now, even though some clothes still come in. There is also some engagement for persons who have been given decisions on deportation, in some cases also help with subsistence.⁸⁸

The open pre-school that the parish operates has become an important meeting place where many of the asylum seekers, both mothers and fathers, come with their children. The parish also has a men's group of 20-25 persons, as well as women's groups and a girls' group.

In the Parish of Hammarby in Upplands Väsby, the activities are mainly centred on the language café that the parish has operated since the spring of 2016. The language café is open two days a week, five hours at a time. Many emphasise that it is more than a language café – it is a meeting place. Families and single persons, women and men of different ages meet and practise their Swedish, play games, paint, do puzzles and have coffee together. There are around 50 persons here at any given time. People participate in the activity in order to practise their Swedish, and they may also need help with other things, such as filling in forms, calling authorities and having letters translated. For many people, the language café has become much more than a way of practising their Swedish; it has become a place of stability in an otherwise uncertain life.⁸⁹ Both Christians and Muslims attend, and many countries are represented.

Around 25 volunteers are attached to the activity, many of whom have recently retired. Some volunteer meetings have been held to strengthen the shared responsibility for the activity, but everyone agrees that the language café relies on the employees and, above all, on the deacon responsible.

In Pajala, the Integration Coordinator initiated 'Having Fun Together' in the parish quite shortly after the first asylum seekers started coming to the municipality's meeting point. Sometimes these evenings gathered 60-70 persons, both adults and children. It was easy to get asylum

⁸⁷ Interview with the Operations Manager

⁸⁸ Ibid

⁸⁹ Interview with employee 1

seekers to find their way there and many had asked precisely for the opportunity to practise Swedish.

However, it has been difficult to recruit volunteers to the language café, despite ads in free newspapers and active recruitment attempts through study associations and pensioners' associations. In the surrounding villages, the engagement of volunteers for the asylum seekers has been more apparent.⁹⁰

The parish has also started a language circle twice a week. Festivities are a recurring method of creating meeting places. The parish has hosted an Eritrean evening, a Syrian evening and an Afghan evening, where asylum seekers from each country have been able to cook typical food from their respective countries in the kitchen of the parish hall.

In autumn 2016, the municipality, together with the Parish of Pajala and other operators, such as various study associations, applied for money to create a social meeting point at the bus station in Pajala. However, several co-workers believe that the integration arenas that work best in Pajala are those that do not have integration as their main goal.⁹¹ Pajala IF, for example, does a great job, where sport is the uniting factor. Everyone can join, because it is cheap and equipment can be borrowed by those who need. Anyone who is interested in finding a bargain among second-hand clothes can meet at the Red Cross Kupan store. The church choir has become an integration arena in the parish, thanks to a dedicated church musician who has actively welcomed asylum seekers to the choir.⁹²

Much of the activity in St. John's church in Norrköping aimed at asylum seekers and new arrivals, is about creating meeting places and supporting the participants in learning Swedish. A language café is run three times a week, chiefly by volunteers. The number of volunteers varies from time to time, but is usually between seven and ten. The majority of volunteers in language cafés are pensioners. In addition to language cafés, the parish also gives downright language classes four times a week. The parish has a total of fourteen trainees in its activities, who, among other things, are responsible for the tuition in Swedish.

⁹⁰ Interview with employee 1, volunteer 1

⁹¹ Interview with employee 1 and employee 2

⁹² Interview with employee 1 and employee 2



Artistic expression in n the Parish of St. John's.
Photo: Elisabeth Larnemark

For several years, the parish has run a special educational programme for children in the asylum process and children who have recently been granted residence permits in Sweden. As the number of participants in the language cafés increased in 2015, many participants felt that the children who came with their parents disturbed their activities. After some time and after getting to know the parents a little better, they started the special programme for these children. The deacon in charge of the activity then started a conversation group for the children's parents. In the district of Navestad, where the parish also has localities, a language café is run once a week, as well as a night café for young persons, and women's gymnastics.

In Teckomatorp, the open activity with both asylum seekers, new arrivals and other parishioners has been supplemented with a language café four days a week. In addition, the children of asylum seekers take part in the parish children's choir and children's groups for all ages. One of the parish staff also meets many asylum seekers who are getting along very well in Teckomatorp and would like to settle there if possible. She also sees the activities that have been built up in the parish so far as a step forward for future work rather than a temporary parenthesis: 'Because some people will settle here and nothing is as it has been before, but it's about looking forward, I think'.⁹³

93 Ibid

Chapter 4

Important Conditions

Half of the parishes/pastorates of the Church of Sweden started new activities for and with asylum seekers and new arrivals within a short period of time. Many expanded their existing activities. The interview material and the questionnaires identify some important conditions that have enabled and helped the parishes to build up their work with and for asylum seekers and new arrivals. None of the parishes we have studied specifically started from scratch. Many had noticed the increase in the number of asylum seekers for several years. Certain conditions were already in place before the major asylum reception began locally and were important for making a prompt start and for carrying out the work. In this chapter the conditions identified by the interview participants are presented as important prerequisites for the ability to quickly adapt to meet new needs, in this case a large reception of asylum seekers.

LOCAL NETWORKS BASED ON PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND TRUST

Practically all the interview participants highlight the importance of local networks and building personal relationships in order for the parish to play a role in the reception of asylum seekers. Trust is often stated as having been built up over many years through, for example, well-reputed child and youth work, sustainable diaconal services and visible and competent employees. Most of the parishes in the case studies are reported to have existing structures for co-operation and networks actually dealing with asylum reception and integration issues, where the parish has been involved from the start and has sometimes initiated the work.

In some interviews, emphasis was placed on the importance for the parish to have an outward attitude, to see itself as part of the local community, and to recognise its mission as being more than its own activities. Several employees talk about the importance of building up their networks through direct contact with people.⁹⁴ It is not enough to sit in the parish hall, sending emails and updating the website. One needs to be visible in the community in order to build trustworthy relationships.

⁹⁴ Interviews 10, 17, 24, 28

Several people stress that it is important to actively invite people and tell them about the activities. An interview participant makes this point when commenting on what happens when this is not done: *‘It’s interesting that some people say, “we do something and no one comes”. But what did you do? Who did you talk to, were you out there, making yourselves seen?’*⁹⁵ Establishing good relationships with people in other organisations also helps you to inform others about your activities.

The target group’s trust in the Church is stated as crucial to the work. All the parishes specifically studied state that they have informed the target group about their various activities, by going out into the community and talking to people and also by putting up posters in different languages at asylum homes, libraries, food stores, the Migration Agency, the Public Employment Service and other strategic locations. The experience of the interview participants is that posters are good – especially when writing in languages that asylum seekers understand, but that the ‘mouth-to-mouth’ method and an open attitude work best in building networks and disseminating information.

Generally speaking, it is said, it is easier to reach those living in asylum homes and harder to reach those residing in their own accommodation, but no one has found it difficult to contact the target group. It is also important to build networks with migrant-led religious communities that are in contact with many asylum seekers. This is particularly obvious in Norrköping, where the Parish of St John’s has spent a long time establishing inter-religious work involving close and personal relationships with representatives of, for example, the Syrian Orthodox churches and the Muslim congregations. Another employee reflects on the reasons why good relationships have been developed:

*As a church we have provided [for the Orthodox]. [...] When IS began to wage war, mainly against Christians in Iraq and Syria and all the other places, then we had a very large attendance or a demonstration, you could say, one Saturday in Norrköping where the Church of Sweden was active [...]. And the Orthodox have borrowed churches for many years [...].*⁹⁶

Because of the personal relationships and trust that have been built up, the Syrian congregation also takes a positive view of many Syrian Orthodox asylum seekers attending the Church of Sweden’s church services.⁹⁷

Trust in the Church has also been a condition for recruiting volunteers, as described in more detail in Chapter 6. The local business community

⁹⁵ Interview 10, 17, 24, 28

⁹⁶ Interview with the Parish Council Chairman in Norrköping

⁹⁷ Interview with employee 3 in Norrköping

has also been engaged and contributed frequently, thanks to good personal contacts. They have donated Christmas presents⁹⁸, sweets⁹⁹, and outdoor clothes for pregnant women¹⁰⁰. In one parish, local pubs and restaurants provided food and serving staff for a big Christmas party.¹⁰¹

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION

The geographic location is not irrelevant for the work with asylum seekers and new arrivals. It helps if the parish has premises that are easy for the target group to find and access. This fact has been made very clear in Karlskoga. The parish hall is centrally located and in close proximity to the large asylum home operated at a hotel. One of the parish churches, the Söderkyrkan, is located in an area where many asylum seekers live in their own homes.¹⁰²

In Teckomatorp the parish hall, with its adherent church hall, is located in the centre of the village, with its entrance doors on the ground floor. The geographical situation contributed to the fact that asylum-seeking families could easily find their way there and were able to knock on the door and seek contact.¹⁰³ In Svalöv, the parish hall is also centrally located, but on the second floor of a disused school. It is not as easy to just look in. Neither has spontaneous contact been established with asylum seekers who live in or attend school in Svalöv.¹⁰⁴ There is also a desire to run a language café in another parish of the pastorate, but there are no asylum seekers living within reasonable distance from the parish hall, so this wish cannot be put into practice.¹⁰⁵

In Pajala town centre, the church and parish halls are central and visible, and most asylum seekers have lived within walking distance. Asylum seekers can easily find both the church and the parish hall.¹⁰⁶

In the Parish of Hammarby in Upplands Väsby, the church and parish hall are located in the centre of Väsby and are well visible to all who come there. However, the Parish of Hammarby has chosen to run a language café in 'The House of Opportunities', premises which are not as central but close to a residential area where many asylum seekers live. Although the 'House of Opportunities' is a little remote, it has worked well, but it has required more active work on the part of the parish to enable people to find it.¹⁰⁷

98 Interview 4

99 Interview 27

100 Interview 21

101 Interview 4

102 Interview with the Operations Manager in Karlskoga

103 Interview with employee 1 in Teckomatorp

104 Interview with the vicar in Svalövsbygden

105 Interview with employee 1 in Teckomatorp

106 Interview with the vicar in Pajala

107 Interview with employee 1 in Hammarby

In the Parish of St. John's in Norrköping, the St. John's Church and parish hall are in a visible location close to the residential area of Hageby, where many asylum seekers and new arrivals live. The parish also has a smaller church and offices in Navestad, which is a similar area. However, the geography of the parish makes it difficult to create meeting places between richer and poorer areas within the parish, as the E22 motorway forms a kind of physical and mental barrier between the areas.¹⁰⁸



Swedish courses in the Parish of Råneå.
Photo: Satu Brännström

SPACE IN THE PARISH'S PREMISES AND IN EMPLOYEES' WORKING HOURS

It is interesting to note that the majority of the parishes in the case studies had partially empty premises when many asylum seekers arrived. Several of the parishes also had personnel who could readily devote a relatively high number of working hours.

In St. John's, the parish hall has recently been re-opened after extensive renovation. Parts of the premises were previously rented out, but the contracts were terminated. Activities needed to be found for the new premises: first a café, then a language café and other activities. The language café expanded, and in autumn 2015 the premises were also used for the large clothing collection organised by the parish. As regards the staffing situation, St. John's is a big parish in a very extensive pastorate. This has made it possible to quickly re-prioritise the employments. The Church Secretary who worked with the parish management team was given a new role as an activity developer in October 2015 in order to focus entirely on work relating to the large reception of asylum seekers.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Interview with the parish vicar of St John's

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

In Teckomatorp, the parish hall had just been expanded and there was room for more activities. Employees state that it was more a matter of *'filling the premises'* than preparing space.¹¹⁰ The parish educational officer, who had worked for several years in the parish, also had a yearning to carry out this kind of activity and felt there was need for new impulses.¹¹¹ She did so, as far as she was able to re-prioritise in her work. However, the vicar states that the formation of the pastorate has taken some energy and it has taken time to get the right staff in place. For the first time there is now a deacon employed in the pastorate. With another situation in 2015, the pastorate might have been able to do more.¹¹²

In Hammarby, the appointment of a new deacon happily coincided with the large asylum reception in 2015. There was room for the new diaconal work and there was also physical space in the new premises. It was natural to invest in refugee and integration work. *'We had the house, we had the premises and we had some personnel, so it was really only a matter of adapting the work a little'*.¹¹³

In Karlskoga there were really no empty premises, and it has been difficult to accommodate all activities, not least because the big church has also undergone a major renovation and has been closed.¹¹⁴ There was, however, an operations manager who had room to work on refugee and integration issues and an opportunity to partly collaborate with others to resolve the local issue.

In Pajala, there was a large parish hall that was not used to the full. However, the staffing situation did not allow them to carry out any major work from the outset. In addition, several positions were vacant after the merging of parishes. The deacon could partially re-prioritise his services, but it was only when a special integration coordinator was hired with project money that the work could really gain momentum. This was 1.5 years after the first large groups of asylum seekers started to arrive in the autumn of 2014.¹¹⁵

KEY INDIVIDUALS WITH MANDATE TO ACT AND COLLEAGUES TO COOPERATE WITH

in several cases the employees' professionalism and experience are highlighted as a key requirement for the work.¹¹⁶ There is often an employee who is especially important for the activity, not least in a start-up phase. This is a person who is often called 'the driving force'

110 Interview with employee 1 in Teckomatorp

111 Ibid

112 Interview with the vicar in Svalövsbygden

113 Interview with the vicar in Hammarby

114 Interview with the vicar in Karlskoga

115 Interview with the vicar in Pajala

116 Interviews 17, 21, 24, 35

and who not only goes the extra mile for the cause but also has the right skills and ability to enthusiastically involve others. A person who likes to take the initiative and who is undaunted. One of them who has been pointed out as this kind of key individual says: *'I usually do new things that I haven't done before, it's fun'*.¹¹⁷ In particular, the retainers in many parishes who are engaged in many different areas of the work are marked out as important. *'We have some long-standing key individuals who are involved in all kinds of activities and support the work, and without them we would not be so strong'*.¹¹⁸

Many witness that a driving force is not enough. This person must also have room in his or her work schedule, support from other employees and the authority and mandate to develop the work. Where this mandate exists, the parish can become an actor that can quickly adapt when the situation suddenly changes. This was crucial in many places, so that work related to the major asylum reception in 2014 and 2015 could get under way quickly. Some of the vicars identify themselves as managers who supply locations and mandates to the key individuals. There is also the feeling that this is a culture within the parish that is not represented by the manager alone. What is required is not just giving a mandate but also building collaboration between colleagues who can support each other, instead of leaving a key individual alone with the burden. Sometimes you can perceive a feeling of disappointment among the most committed, both with their managers and their colleagues. It is found that a culture of mutual support in the workplace is sometimes missing.

The interview material mentions that some employees may find it difficult to adapt, do new things and step out of their comfort zone and their main area of competence.¹¹⁹ It is emphasised that it is important to build work teams where everyone sees their part in a whole that is being built together.

Some highlight the opportunity of working with volunteers as being of particular importance when support from colleagues fails. It is a great benefit when there are, for example, youth groups or volunteers who can be a little more involved when needed.

EXISTING LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL SKILLS

Mutual understanding can be a challenge in encounters with asylum seekers. The large reception of people from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan in recent years means that the knowledge of languages such as Arabic and Dari is becoming more important. The interview material shows that there are often people with a refugee background living in the parish who play a key role in building bridges to the new arrivals. In

¹¹⁷ Interview 24

¹¹⁸ Interview 14

¹¹⁹ For example, interviews 8, 10, 11, 17, 24

some parishes, for example, Arabic-speaking personnel are available, not usually among ordained ministry, but perhaps as housekeepers or caretakers and, more commonly, as trainees, paid employees or volunteers. One employee considers that it is absolutely crucial for the work with asylum seekers to have employees, in this case paid through church fees, who are multilingual. One of the parishes describes a person who arrived relatively recently as an asylum seeker from Syria and whose current role in the community is essential for their work. He knows how to run the parish's activities and he has the confidence of the Syrian group, speaks several languages and is generally good at building relationships.

Own experiences of migration or vulnerability do not just provide linguistic or cultural skills. One employee expresses it: 'I have migrated myself and therefore I understand people when they come here and want to have some connection, and maybe I understand better than others because I have my own experience'.¹²⁰

THE RIGHT TIMING

there are often great needs in our society and in the Church's diaconal work, but this is not so often reported in the mass media. There have been asylum seekers in vulnerable life situations earlier in many of the parishes of the Church of Sweden. In the autumn of 2015, the media often highlighted the major needs of asylum seekers and the local parishes as a platform for engagement. A momentum emerged, which many parishes responded to. In the autumn of 2015, the Swedish asylum reception reached record levels. Sweden also experienced a tangible and medially visible wave of humanity and engagement in relation to people fleeing their countries of origin. To what extent this has been crucial to recruit volunteers and to engage the parishes is an open question, but many volunteers have flocked to get involved. In a way, the autumn of 2015 can be described as a kind of window of opportunity that opened when it was unusually easy to recruit volunteers and receive support from other actors locally. One survey participant describes the humanity as taking them by surprise. The same participant explains that the volunteers involved in the parish's language café are to a large extent persons with whom the parish has not previously been in contact and that the media interest has been crucial for recruiting them. Another participant tells that the engagement came before the parish's request for volunteers, and that it was more a matter of channelling an engagement than creating one.

120 Interview 29

FINANCIAL RESOURCES AND SUPPORT FROM ELECTED PARISH REPRESENTATIVES

Four of the parishes in this case studies say themselves that they have good finances, although they have some concerns about how their finances will develop in the future. Having good finances is a favourable condition that many, but not all, parishes and pastorates of the Church of Sweden can be pleased about.

The Parochial Church Council Chairman has been interviewed in all of the five parishes we have visited. Other employees have also been asked about the Parochial Church Council's view on the work with asylum seekers and new arrivals. It gives us a unanimous picture of the fact that these Parochial Church Councils are largely seen as positive and contribute resources when needed.

Different parishes and pastorates in the Church of Sweden have very different conditions regarding financial resources. Some of the largest pastorates have up to 250 employees, while there are parishes with own finances that have only ten employees. The conditions for finding funds in your own budget, being able to redistribute tasks between different job positions and seeking money externally are shifting

At the same time, we can see that there were good opportunities to compensate for inadequate resources during the large asylum reception of recent years. Through simple application procedures, it has been possible to receive financial support from the national level of the Church of Sweden and, in many cases, from the diocese. The state and municipalities have also had additional funds to allocate. Many survey participants believe that in the places where there were many asylum seekers, combined with the will of the parish's managers and employees to act, there were opportunities to obtain financial resources for various projects and extra commitments.¹²¹ For example, the Parish of Karlskoga received a contribution from the municipality to coordinate volunteers and a clothing collection in the autumn of 2015. Pajala, Hammarby, Karlskoga and Teckomatorp are also in receipt of the Church Board's special contributions for work with asylum seekers and new arrivals. The funds have contributed to greater economic flexibility than what the parishes' own budget processes would allow. One vicar highlights the *'good relationships with the diocese and the national level of the Church of Sweden, which promptly provided structural support and project money'*¹²² as an important condition for the work. Another writes that the prompt methods of applying for money from the diocese and the national level *'without complicated application procedures'* has made things easier.¹²³

121 Validation Seminar Uppsala, 24 January 2017

122 Response 149

123 Responses 214, 241

Chapter 5

Challenges to Organisation and Management

The national survey shows a wide range of activities for and with asylum seekers and new arrivals. In order to initiate new activities on a large scale in a short time, resources need to be mobilised and possibly re-prioritised. Already existing ones may need to be expanded. New tasks must be performed and new employees must be taken care of, as necessary. In this chapter, we look at the aspects of organisation and management that have emerged from the interview material and, to a certain extent, in the free-text responses in the questionnaire. What has been important in the organisation? Which role do the management and leadership play in the creation of conditions for a good job? Which aspects have been particularly challenging, difficult or important?

NOT MAKING IT MORE DIFFICULT THAN NECESSARY

There are some tensions in the material about how difficult or easy the work with asylum seekers and new arrivals is. Many stress, particularly in the questionnaires, that the work is complex and difficult. At the same time, both the interviews and the questionnaires emphasise the importance of not making the work more complicated than it is. Simple solutions are often good solutions. The feeling that this is 'complex' must not stand in the way of doing what you can, trying ideas out in practice: *'People often think "No, I'm won't do anything because I want to do it well" and then nothing gets done. Maybe it's better to do something badly than not do it at all.'*¹²⁴

A vicar writes in the survey: *'Meeting places are the best. It's that simple. Without hassle.'*¹²⁵ Another writes: *"People are people". I cannot see a big difference between these new arrivals and the socially vulnerable Swedish natives. They have similar concerns, types of personality, pleasures and problems'*.¹²⁶ The difference, as according to the vicar, is primarily in visibility and scope: *'With this wave of so many*

¹²⁴ Interview 26

¹²⁵ Response 179

¹²⁶ Response 216

asylum seekers, the problems are concentrated and clearly linked to the group of “immigrated””¹²⁷ But this does not mean that the parish lacks the tools to be a relevant operator.

WELL THOUGHT-THROUGH ORGANISATION

Several of those we interviewed reflect on the need to invest in good organisation and administrative support structures regarding such work, especially as it involves many volunteers and the needs are often boundless.

Many parishes have been overwhelmed by the huge response from both asylum seekers and locals in terms of wanting to participate in the activities. One of the vicars responding to the survey summarises lessons learned as follows: *‘It helps to have a good organisation, because the work may involve drastic changes. It’s space-intensive. Many helping hands are needed’*.¹²⁸

One lesson is that it is important that someone in the work team has the coordinating responsibility, especially when many volunteers are involved. That there is someone who holds everything together and coordinates the volunteers and other contacts. The importance of using *‘competent staff to give structure to the voluntary work’* was marked out as an important lesson by a vicar who responded to the questionnaire.¹²⁹

Four of the five parishes have worked in varying degrees on receiving trainees and paid employees to facilitate their entry into the labour market. Their experiences vary, and it is obvious that this is easier for some parishes than for others. There are different methods of supervising trainees. It is also easier to find meaningful tasks for the trainees in a bigger parish.

The greatest dilemma that several people describe is what happens when the internship or paid employment ends. There are seldom opportunities in the parish to move on to regular employment. There is need for thinking and planning how internships and paid positions are phased out and how the relationships can still remain.

The organisation of the work has also been influenced by the amalgamations of parishes and the formations of pastorates that have taken place in the parishes of the Church of Sweden in recent years. Parishes have been merged and larger pastorates have been formed with the aim of creating conditions for a more professional organisation and sustainable economy.

127 Response 216

128 Response 212

129 Response 189

The processes of amalgamation and pastorate formation have required a lot of time and energy. A survey participant compares the differences between the parishes that have formed pastorates with his experience of working in the Church of Sweden Abroad with the Norwegian Seamen's Church. *'It's something like when you worked in Dubai with the Norwegians, you think it's the Norwegian Church, we are neighbours after all, but there are often essential differences'*.¹³⁰ It may be stated that, in spite of major organisational changes in several of the specifically studied parishes, it has in many respects been possible to act as a relevant operator in relation to the large reception of asylum seekers in Sweden in recent years.



International Women's Café in Hagsätra Church, Parish of Vantör.
Photo: Johanna Linder

FUNCTIONING LEADERSHIP

Several survey participants talk about the importance of a clear leader who is able to prioritise, staff missions and make demands on employees along the way.¹³¹ It is, to a great extent, about creating security and giving people a common direction and focus.

Leadership is important, because the work with asylum seekers and new arrivals requires the readiness to reschedule activities and set new priorities. Several survey participants would like to see more discussions about the priorities of target groups and staffing for assignments

¹³⁰ Response 189

¹³¹ Interviews 10, 24

thereafter.¹³² One survey participant says she was flexible, had no small children at home and could work overtime when a large number of asylum seekers suddenly arrived all at once, but she lacked clear priorities and a staffing plan from her boss.

A vicar reflects that a decision should have been made earlier on focus and priorities, and that this should have been communicated internally. Another vicar comments in a similar vein that the staffing at their language café could have been strengthened at an earlier stage and that preparedness for a large number of participants could have been better.

Even after priorities have been set, there may still be difficulties in getting *‘the entire personnel on board’*¹³³, so that everyone really addresses the priorities that have been decided. Many parishes have been able to finance additional employments for the work, but this needs to be combined with the fact that others in the work team are assigned the task of supporting and cooperating, and that the project personnel are not left alone. Many survey participants state that it has been difficult to secure support from colleagues and that they have met some resistance in the personnel group – not against the work with asylum seekers and new arrivals, but having to reorganise their own working hours.

Some of those we interviewed believe that the resistance can have its origin in uncertainty. As one employee tells us:

*[---] I think there may be interest, but if you have no experience and if you only read what is said by others in the newspapers or the media, you might be afraid too, I think. Yes, I sometimes feel alone, it's me who takes it on.*¹³⁴

One survey participant considers that the skilled employees who built up the work with asylum seekers and new arrivals both inspire and scare them a little because the standard is so high. *‘It can be a case of “that’s how you do it” and “can I manage it or not?”’*¹³⁵ A survey participant who experienced great frustration in being left alone to do the work with asylum seekers and new arrivals reflects at the same time that, as a person, she may not have communicated her need for support.

It appears to be important for a manager, to assign clear tasks, inspire courage and self-confidence in insecure staff, so that they understand that they can and should have a role to play in the activity, as well as to ask experienced employees who are passionate about the work for help in introducing and guiding insecure colleagues.

¹³² Interviews 10, 24, 28

¹³³ Interview 26

¹³⁴ Interview 10

¹³⁵ Interview 16

FLEXIBILITY

Rapid changes and the need for flexibility are recurring themes, not least in the questionnaires. These themes are highlighted both as challenges and as something that has stimulated and made its way into the everyday life of the parish in a positive way. According to one survey participant:

Yes, it's funny that a lot of things happen that you can't always work out in advance, but maybe that's what the hardest thing is, the fact that we don't have a clear road ahead of us. So it's not easy to predict where we are heading.¹³⁶

Another survey participant reflects that this is a completely new way of working, which involves, to a greater extent than before, managing your own time and seeing what is needed and what the role of the parish is in the present context:

This experience has taught us that we have to adapt. We can't go on saying, 'yes, we've always run sewing clubs, we have to continue running them'. [...] What is diaconal work of today? What is it we have to do for both children and youth [with regard to] diaconal efforts? What are we going to support families with? So I hope we are better prepared to adapt our work according to needs and what people want.¹³⁷

Some vicars reflect in the survey that they have realised that their own parish was not prepared and describe the lesson as '*the insight that we in the parish were not ready to receive so many asylum seekers and refugees in a short space of time*'.¹³⁸ Another writes: '*We are not prepared and are unaccustomed to dealing with unusual situations, events and times*'.¹³⁹ One vicar sees the lack of preparedness as symptomatic of the entire Church of Sweden.

The Swedish society's rules regarding asylum seekers may be difficult to penetrate and, in parts, unpredictable. Many interviews highlight the difficulties in the fact that many asylum seekers are moved around different types of accommodation in different places at short notice, which makes it difficult for the parish to plan for the work and time and again breaks the sense of belonging that has been created.¹⁴⁰

The uncertainty surrounding the housing situation and – after changes in the legislation – the increasing uncertainty surrounding the possibility of settling in Sweden also affects the conditions for the parish work. A vicar writes in the questionnaire:

136 Interview 31
 137 Interview 4
 138 Response 122
 139 Response 229
 140 Interviews 3, 6, 8, 22

It is difficult to find good types of activity that involve and interest the asylum seekers seriously, when rules are changed and the requirements for whether or not you can stay are stricter. The resignation and hopelessness appears to be greater than a year ago, and matters are complicated despite good incentives for dialogue and attempts to answer questions about what needs there are.¹⁴¹

Flexibility is also about not always being rigid with internal rules but also being able to take the person and the individual circumstances into account.



Ski trip with the Parish of St. John's. Photo: Axel Arkstål

UTILISING PEOPLE'S SKILLS AND ABILITIES

Several survey respondents state that the parish has been successful in building on what people can and want to contribute. One employee emphasises that *'it is very important to build on different parish residents who are passionate about different things'*.¹⁴² Some parishes have been able to recruit experienced individuals who can give their professional skills as volunteers and have been able to build activities based on these.

Building on people's skills also applies to persons who have arrived as asylum seekers. The interviews show examples of how the parishes make use of professional experiences from other countries. A survey participant tells about their large clothing collection:

¹⁴¹ Response 73

¹⁴² Interview 16

A lot of it is about logistics. One of the employees worked in Syria as a manager [...] He was Logistics Manager for the Middle East's largest woodworking company. So we assigned him the task of organising things on our computer systems.¹⁴³

Several participants talk about the importance of involving the asylum seekers themselves before starting a new activity. 'Is there a need? What is this need?'¹⁴⁴ One of those we interviewed expressed it as follows:

I think you have to dare to think bigger and actually open up and ask. These are people who come from another country and culture, and who have tremendous capabilities. So, ask them 'What would you like, what do you need? What could we do together?' Not only for you, but together with you, and this is what I try to convey to my colleagues, sometimes at least.¹⁴⁵

One parish tells us that they have been inspired by a local integration centre, which is characterised by the fact that even if a person only knows five words of Swedish, that person can teach these words to another person.

FOCUS ON WHAT IS GROWING AND CLOSE DOWN WHAT IS NOT WORKING

It is obvious from the interview material that the acknowledgment of doing a good job is that it attracts new persons. If asylum seekers feel that they are welcomed in a parish and that relevant and meaningful activities are offered, they tell their friends and acquaintances, and more people join in.

Sometimes there is also the feeling of 'this is where it happens', it becomes a general social meeting place where more and more persons want to join in. A survey participant tells how their open pre-school has grown:

First a few mothers came who thought they could sit and relax for a while over a coffee while others took care of their children. No, we are here [taking care of the kids], but by all means bring the men along too. In the end [...] perhaps it may be that the men [wonder] 'What are our wives doing?' [...] And this has had a very good effect. So there are between 50 and 70 persons, both men and women, with their children on Fridays, and the room gets packed. It gets really packed. There are people everywhere, so it's great fun.¹⁴⁶

143 Interview 17
 144 Interview 24
 145 Interview 10
 146 Interview 8

A well-functioning activity also makes more people get involved. A volunteer tells us: *'The more you participate and the more you get involved, the greater your commitment is to help or do other things'*.¹⁴⁷ It will easily have positive chain effects and the activity can grow organically and associatively, especially if it is based on good relationships and healthy openness.¹⁴⁸ *'You need to be on a roll, you need to think big all the time, that's how you create dynamics.'*¹⁴⁹

Many employees also reflect on the fact that it is important not to hesitate to put an end to activities that have no growth potential, and which *'become a safe corner for a few persons'*.¹⁵⁰ Stopping activities can, however, involve difficult and painful processes, and it takes clarity and courage to make changes.

CREATING AN INTEGRATED ACTIVITY

Many parishes have a vision of creating an integrated activity where asylum seekers and new arrivals are in the same groups as established Swedes and parishioners. Some questionnaires indicate that the parish has found its role primarily as a bridge builder between the asylum seekers and the locals. Both to channel the engagement of those who want to help and to deal with prejudices. A vicar writes in the questionnaire that *'we can make a difference in working with attitudes and building on people's willingness to work for inclusion and to combat xenophobia'*.¹⁵¹

It is clear from the interview material that it is not always easy to create an integrated activity. Sometimes it is a matter of cultural differences, but it can also be about geography – people living in different parts of the city, sometimes with a clear barrier, such as a motorway, separating them. Sometimes it is a matter of time. Asylum seekers have all the time in the world, while established Swedes, especially families with young children, are extremely busy. One employee talks about the parish children's choir, attended mainly by native Swedish middle-class children. *'They come with their bags packed, as they are going to play handball, or to ballet or figure skating or something, immediately afterwards, a typically full schedule.'*¹⁵²

The survey shows that church musicians are involved in the work with asylum seekers and new arrivals to a relatively small extent. Some survey participants reflect that most church musicians expect basic knowledge of note reading and Swedish hymns when recruiting to adult choirs. One employee in a parish states that choir members of Middle Eastern origin are now starting to join their church choir, but that it is

147 Interview 2

148 Interview 10

149 Interview 26

150 Ibid

151 Response 56

152 Interview 35

not all that easy. *'Obviously, they don't have the correct intonation and it's a challenge for the musicians to use other scales and so on [...]. Yes. It must be quite a struggle, I would think'.*¹⁵³

There may also be other barriers to creating cross-border meeting places or reaching certain groups. There are different reflections about this in the interview material and the survey, and there is no uniform picture that emerges of, for example, which gender or groups are difficult to reach. In one parish, it is maintained that it is difficult to arrange activities that attract men, both asylum seekers and native men, except for church services.¹⁵⁴ A vicar responding to the survey writes: *'It's difficult to run activities for women. They cannot participate because of their spouses'.*¹⁵⁵

One survey participant feels that it is difficult for women with young children to take part in language cafés and language courses and to really focus on language learning. She believes the parish is at fault for not providing a crèche.¹⁵⁶ Having parallel groups for children and parents to allow mothers to focus on language learning is a strategy used by some parishes to deal with this particular problem.

For many minorities, it may also be important to maintain some limits so they do not drown in the majority community. The parishes have experiences of meeting groups that emphasise particular interests and protect their own meeting places, in preference to integration.¹⁵⁷

Finding good strategies for meeting across borders and creating an integrated activity is an important issue that is not simple. What seems to be working are common festivities, such as midsummer or ones featuring around food from different cultures. Some refer to the fact that sporting activities work well, but none of the parishes in this case studies works with these to any great extent. Music is highlighted as an opportunity that could be used more. Joint excursions are another activity that can work well across borders. Sometimes there are obstacles caused by a lack of buses or other common means of transport. Making bikes available for lending is one way of facilitating excursions that someone has experience of.¹⁵⁸ A few times in the interviews, children are presented as an example and guide: *'Yes, probably the most fascinating thing are the children, wherever they are, they are absolutely wonderful and play here and learn Swedish quickly. Yes, the kids are doing very well here, I think'.*¹⁵⁹

153 Interview 31

154 Interview 6

155 Response 55

156 Interview 3

157 For example, interviews 8, 14, 17

158 Interview 7

159 Interview 13



Cinnamon buns baking at a language café in the parish hall, Parish of Teckomatorp. Photo: Lena Johansson Ohlström

ENDURANCE

The work with asylum seekers and new arrivals easily becomes borderless. There are great needs, many people come under pressure owing to regulations and vulnerable living situations. Then it becomes a challenge to find ways to cope in the long term, not least for those employees who have the main responsibility for the Church's diaconal work.

Volunteers can also experience the same frustration: *'You wish you could be some kind of amoeba that could simply – well, take care of everyone, but you can't'*.¹⁶⁰

Coping in the long term is the big problem. *'[The lesson is] that it takes a lot of efforts and although it's very rewarding work, it is difficult for volunteers in the long term. A lot of people can't cope with the commitment. It's hard to see a long-term result.'*¹⁶¹ A vicar writes in the questionnaire that *'it's easy to engage people to begin with, but then it becomes harder'*.¹⁶² Finding limitations and structures that make people remain engaged over time is one of the suggestions for a sustainable activity. The possibility to give employees a break is also important.

¹⁶⁰ Interview 2

¹⁶¹ Response 39

¹⁶² Response 129

A parish states that they have given personnel the opportunity of job rotation in their work with asylum-seeking families with children:

So, someone says, 'I don't feel like working today', because it's going to be noisy and they don't follow the same rules and so on. 'Switch', then we change. [---] She, the activity manager, is the head of all activities, so she can easily pick the staff and you can actually get away and have a day off if you want to. So, I think it has worked out very well.¹⁶³

Another way of coping in the long run is to ensure good, functional networks and contacts, and to know what other operators are doing and can contribute.

Some also highlight the importance of networks in the diocese or national and international contacts for inspiration and gaining new perspectives.¹⁶⁴ Many vicars who responded to the survey also emphasise the importance of cooperation – that the Church does not need to do everything itself. Refreshing one's skills is described as important for the staying power of both personnel and volunteers. When both employees and volunteers are given the opportunity to learn more and to develop their skills, better conditions are created for endurance and long-term work.

¹⁶³ Interview 4

¹⁶⁴ Interviews 10, 21, 28

Chapter 6

The Volunteers' Engagement

The vast majority of parishes engaged in any activity for and with asylum seekers and new arrivals have also engaged volunteers in this work. The compilation of the survey shows that the parishes/pastorates had an average of 17 volunteers engaged in the work with asylum seekers and new arrivals in 2015. The engagement and influx of volunteers has varied quite a lot between different parishes and pastorates. However, a few have indicated that they have no volunteers at all in their work, less than five per cent of those who work with new arrivals and asylum seekers. In this chapter we describe the experience of working with volunteers, the driving factors that the people we interviewed indicate as reasons for their engagement and how the interaction works.

'VOLUNTEERS ARE THERE WHEN THERE IS A PRESSING NEED'

Both the interviews and the questionnaires reveal that there is a huge commitment and that it is easy to recruit volunteers when the purpose and timing is right – and the refugee situation in the autumn of 2015 was perceived to be such an occasion.¹⁶⁵

During the course of one night there are 500 new arrivals who need care, clothes, planning and management and that makes it easy to join in [---]. She put herself forward as a volunteer and I would like to do that too. [---] Instead of a Catch 22, it becomes a positive spiral because you know that the others have managed it.¹⁶⁶

Many got in touch with the visited parishes after they had seen an advertisement or read an article in the local newspaper that aroused their interest. Several survey participants also report that there were soon streams of people volunteering to do the work – partly new groups of both younger and older people who had previously not been active in the parish.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ For example, questionnaires 28, 142, 182 and 149 (free text) on the question: 'What is your perception of the parish/pastorate's greatest lesson for working with refugees and asylum seekers?'

¹⁶⁶ Interview 8

¹⁶⁷ Interview 4 and telephone interviews 2017-01-12

The vicars' answers to the questionnaires also reflect the fact that it has been easy to recruit volunteers in many places, just because the work was so urgent. One vicar describes that the greatest lesson is '*Volunteers show up when there is a pressing need*'.¹⁶⁸

The parishes that have organised major clothing collections describe this as an important area of contact with locals, also generating new volunteers.

METHODS OF RECRUITMENT

The parishes in this survey used different strategies for finding volunteers. For example, they advertised in the local press or the parish magazine, or put posters up in the library. The social media, especially Facebook, have been an important channel for mobilising engagement in most of the specially studied parishes. One of the employees described that the parish convened a meeting where those who attended were given the opportunity to subscribe to an interest list.

As described above, many volunteers have 'recruited themselves'. They have got in touch with the parish and wanted to help out. In some examples, the municipality has given a special assignment to the Church of Sweden to organise voluntary work with asylum seekers.

Often, however, an invitation, a push in a certain direction, or a question from the parish, is needed for people to become involved. It is not enough that the door is open. People often need to be welcomed over the threshold, to be asked a question: 'Do you want to?', 'Can you?'. The most common method of recruiting is simply asking people to help. It is described as important for a parish employee to be the one who invites you and asks and encourages. As one employee says: '*I'm not a leader, but I am this engine who still asks people: "Would you like to get involved? Do you want to join and contribute?" And people would want to, because you ask them in this way.*'¹⁶⁹

The experience of many survey participants is that it is not enough to say that 'everyone is welcome' but that it works better if there is also a specific task. A priest tells us that he invited both Armenians and Syrians to participate in the liturgy in the church service and conduct different moments.

Some of those recruited have a previously established contact with the Church of Sweden. It may be a choir singer, an elected representative of the parish or an active worshipper who has been asked to participate in volunteering in a language café or other activities.¹⁷⁰ Others have a

¹⁶⁸ Response 28

¹⁶⁹ Interview 28

¹⁷⁰ Interviews 25, 7, 32, 34

previously weak relationship with the Church of Sweden but have had contact, for example, through their children or grandchildren being involved in parish activities, or by seeing an advertisement or reading an article about the need for volunteers.

Some volunteers have gone along to the parish because the volunteering task simply suited their special interests. One of the volunteers saw an announcement about the need for help with garment sorting, and she was immediately interested, as she had been dreaming of working in a clothing store.¹⁷¹ Another volunteer is an old language teacher and considered the idea of helping out in a language café attractive.¹⁷²



Volunteers in the Parish of Björketorp. Photo: Maria Berggren

NOT ALWAYS EASY TO RECRUIT

Not all parishes or pastorates find it easy to recruit enough volunteers for the work with asylum seekers and new arrivals. The reasons for this vary in the descriptions of the survey participants. It could be that the parish tradition regarding volunteers is quite weak. This may be due to the fact that many, especially occupationally active people, are already fully occupied with other things in their spare time.

The engagement might also have taken other expressions and may have been channelled by forming new associations, networks or spontaneous actions.¹⁷³ Not least in smaller towns, there may be a tradition of

¹⁷¹ Interview 23

¹⁷² Interview 25

¹⁷³ Interview 10

local volunteering among local persons who do not need an institution or organisation such as the Church of Sweden.

VOLUNTEERS' DRIVING FACTORS

The typical volunteer is described by one survey participant as a *'new pensioner who has had an academic job, a teacher or [similar] who wants to do something important when they retire.'*¹⁷⁴ The main driving factor in persons of other age groups too is often a desire to help out with something important. One volunteer says: *'Yes, I wanted to do something different, I wanted to do something for others and I saw this as a great opportunity.'*¹⁷⁵

Many of the volunteers we have interviewed tell that the major asylum reception in the autumn of 2015 affected them and that they wanted to be involved. One volunteer has doubts about how Sweden will be able to handle the large reception of asylum seekers, but stresses the importance of participating if we want the integration to work. Otherwise it may be difficult for people to end up on their feet:

*If they are not given any information about how things work and how we do things here in Sweden, they do not have the same opportunity to do the right thing either.*¹⁷⁶

In addition, many volunteers describe their values and their commitment as something that in one way or another forms part of a family tradition. Sharing and the acceptance of diversity and differences that often exist from the beginning are a matter of course.

My father, he [...] has never made any distinction between people, but has always shown respect for each individual. He always said that no matter how poor you are, you can always offer a piece of bread and a cup of coffee and that lesson has stayed with me [...]

Several people also have stories showing that specific life experiences have given them a different level of sensitivity to people in vulnerable life situations. It may be fatigue depression, a cancer diagnosis, a refugee or immigrant story in their own family, or the experience of having a child with a disability.

We would be extremely happy if we had a larger network around us. My parents were dead when [our disabled son] was born and [my husband's] parents died shortly afterwards, so we have not had that

174 Interview 26

175 Interview 33

176 Interview 13

*network around us, and so I think it's easier to feel for others maybe, I believe so anyway. That's probably how it is.*¹⁷⁷

A great interest in people, different cultures and countries is often part of the volunteers' driving factors. Many have travelled a lot and enjoy sitting down and talking to someone from Syria or Afghanistan and learning more about that country or telling them about their own travel memories.

*Since I've travelled a lot, I've always been interested in other cultures, religions and other food. [...] I think it's because my relatives far back went to sea, and I had this curiosity, so I think I got that gene, haha.*¹⁷⁸

WHY INVOLVEMENT WITHIN THE CHURCH OF SWEDEN?

There may be various reasons why people have become involved specifically with the work of the Church of Sweden. Several of those we interviewed describe an existing, though sometimes weak, bond to the Church of Sweden that made it feel right. They were confirmed and married in the Church of Sweden. Their children were involved in children's activities within the parish. Or they know someone who works in the Church. *'It started, as I said, when I saw ads in the magazine and then I thought, "Yes, some in my family are involved here".'*¹⁷⁹ Many have a positive association with the Church. *'I think the Church gives you peace. It is a tranquil place that makes you feel good and when you go abroad you go to churches too.'*¹⁸⁰ Another volunteer describes that in various places in the country he noted that the Church has staying power and thus is credible in its commitment to vulnerable groups.

Volunteers feel it is easy to become involved in the Church of Sweden. There is no risk of being elected as treasurer at the next annual meeting. One volunteer says: *'Yes, it's good to be able to come here, I get on with my work here and then I go home'*.¹⁸¹ A co-worker describes this as a clear advantage in contact with potential volunteers. Another reason is the fact that this parish has actively welcomed them and asked whether they want to get involved.

There are also those who have had a strong relationship with the Church of Sweden for a long time, but not to the local parish they have moved to. A volunteer tells us that she was looking for a way to become involved and the language café provided such an opportunity: *'I had been missing the church, I had not found an obvious place where I could be involved with the church, and then an opportunity appeared, so I feel I have come home again, in a way'*.¹⁸²

177 Interview 20

178 Interview 32

179 Interview 23

180 Interview 33

181 Interview 2

182 Interview 2

Sometimes there is also the hope of eventually finding employment in the parish. *'As soon as there is a vacancy in the church of any kind, like a housekeeper or something, I apply for it.'*¹⁸³ Some employees who themselves have come to Sweden as asylum seekers or immigrants describe the desire to work in the Church as an important source of motivation for their engagement. This is expressed in the joy of serving the Church and working in an environment that is close to God.¹⁸⁴

VOLUNTEERING EFFORTS CAN MEAN SO MUCH

Based on the interviews and questionnaires, it is clear that volunteering in the work with and for asylum seekers and new arrivals can be very varied. It can be anything from short one-off actions to devoting almost all of one's free time to helping out in regular activities. The needs and contributions also vary depending on whether there is an emergency situation, when a lot of people are moved to a new location for a short period of time, or if there is a permanent activity going on for several years.

The interviews show that language cafés in various forms, as well as the collection, sorting and distribution of clothing, are examples of activities that require a lot of and regularly allocated time.¹⁸⁵ In some places it may take a few hours of work several days a week for a group of volunteers. Other more regular meetings may involve managing a men's group, girls' groups, or hold the localities open for those who want to come and use a sewing machine or knit.¹⁸⁶

Many activities that volunteers in the parishes participate in are actions that occur more rarely or on occasion. They can be themed festivities involving cooking, music, dance and excursions. They can also be fun activities for families in connection with the main holidays when the schools are closed. It is apparent from the interviews that those involved in the regular voluntary work are also often involved in and contribute to this type of activity. Several survey participants talk about being able to help asylum seekers to break their boredom while waiting for news and work, or the pleasure of gaining new knowledge and influences.¹⁸⁷

Transport is something many need help with, especially as asylum homes may be located outside urban areas. It could be transport to facilitate visits to the authorities, but also to get to know the area they have come to or just to take a break from their current situation. However, this is something that might pose difficulties for voluntary efforts as a passenger car does not carry more than four persons, mak-

¹⁸³ Interview 2

¹⁸⁴ Interviews 3, 29

¹⁸⁵ For example, interviews 13, 21, 14

¹⁸⁶ Interviews 32, 3, 25, 23

¹⁸⁷ Interviews 29, 6, 21, 27

ing excursions very resource-intensive.¹⁸⁸ Sometimes volunteers are also engaged in supplying bicycles for asylum seekers. A parish responding to the survey describes how volunteers have collected bicycles for unaccompanied young asylum seekers, including bicycles in poor condition, which were then repaired by asylum seekers and Swedish youths together at a 'bike centre'.¹⁸⁹

The activities create contact areas and also lead to voluntary work outside the organised activity. It may be to help with doctors' visits or contacts with authorities such as the Swedish Migration Agency, and help with appeals.¹⁹⁰

Many of the volunteers have helped to move furniture and obtain crockery and other things for a first home. The engagement may also involve the provision of used prams and furniture or anything else that the asylum seekers are in need of, or to offer accommodation to someone who is homeless.¹⁹¹

*[...] it was the last resort, it was a matter of inviting her to stay with us at our place, where we have room [...] She's a person you just can't help liking, she is simply a lovely person, so yes, there was nothing hard about asking, so now she's living at our place while we help her to get a flat, and we think she'll get one.*¹⁹²

The meetings create friendship and warmth, but it can be difficult to set limits when the needs are great.¹⁹³

Another volunteer says that it can also be difficult not to become too involved in one's eagerness to help: *'[...] because they too need to be given a chance to do things on their own, but it's not that easy.'*¹⁹⁴

188 Interview 13
 189 Telephone interview 12 January 2017
 190 Interviews 13, 20, 8, 3
 191 Interviews 10, 13, 8
 192 Interview 20
 193 Interview 13
 194 Interview 20



Parish of Backa. Photo: Kikki Mårtensson.

INTERACTION BETWEEN VOLUNTEERS AND EMPLOYEES

The interaction between volunteers and employees often seems to work well in the activities we have specifically studied. One survey participant explains that they find it relatively easy to recruit and retain volunteers in the activities for asylum seekers and integration, because there are no given templates, established cultures or employees who are used to doing everything themselves.

Sometimes there are clashes between employees and volunteers, and also between new and old volunteers.¹⁹⁵ A spontaneous desire to participate and help out is not always without its problems. There are a number of kitchen rules and there are hazards for children. Those who were previously given a task, such as distributing hymn books at the church service, may not always want help with the task, or other members of the congregation may get offended.¹⁹⁶

The employee's management can be important in planning activities and clarifying the goals of the activities. By inviting volunteers to meetings, or keeping the dialogue alive by other means, the volunteers have opportunities to see what works well or not so well.¹⁹⁷

ORGANISING THE VOLUNTEERING

Activities centred on asylum seekers and new arrivals may come about on the basis of identified needs, or some persons might offer to run a certain activity. In both cases, preparations by the employees may be necessary, to investigate the need, what the target group wants, wheth-

¹⁹⁵ Validation Seminar in Uppsala, 24 January 2017

¹⁹⁶ Interview 7

¹⁹⁷ Interview 24

er there is any other actor already doing it, and whether the number of volunteers is suitable for the task.¹⁹⁸

In practice, the organisation of voluntary work may involve completing a form with a number of questions and contact information, and an agreement on who will do what on which day, how many hours and what activity.¹⁹⁹ One parish states that, in order to become a volunteer, you need to submit excerpts from the police criminal register.²⁰⁰ So that the volunteers do not feel pressured into coming every time, some parishes have chosen an open approach; whoever wants to come may do so without committing themselves. This open form has the disadvantage, however, that it may lead to situations where you have a huge number of asylum seekers at the same time and only a few volunteers.

Some interviews point to some frustration with there being too few volunteers in place at language cafés, either for participants who want to be able to practise their Swedish as much as possible, or for those volunteers who have come and feel there are insufficient numbers.²⁰¹ The language cafés work in several different ways, but they are generally described as a relatively unstructured forum for discussion. The volunteers who find it easy to make contact or who have established more of a routine may feel confident that they have understood the topics in the conversation or the daily newspaper. However, some volunteers have found it a little difficult to participate when there is no clear structure. Those volunteers who do not naturally find their place in a new social situation may feel insecure and would appreciate clearer organisation about who is doing what. Moreover, both the target group and those who engage in volunteering work have different pictures and expectations about what a language café should be. This sometimes creates frustration. At the same time, everyone is aware that language cafés also have many other functions. Although not everyone learns Swedish as fast as others, it is a social meeting place that gets many people through a difficult time. The question of a clearer organisation remains, however, as an opportunity.

LONG-TERM ENGAGEMENT?

One of the persons interviewed summarises both the pros and cons of volunteers becoming involved when people are in an emergency situation. Parishes have been able to mobilise forces quickly in the local community to meet the needs that have arisen, but how long do the volunteers find the strength to keep working?

198 For example, interviews 24, 4, 8

199 Interviews 17, 20

200 Interview 24

201 For example, interviews 3, 24, 32

*How would [the municipality] have solved it if we had not? [...] Perhaps it's a little easier for us to find solutions quickly. They may not be lasting solutions in every case, because they are often the work of volunteers, but we have them to start with.*²⁰²

Parishes that also responded to the questionnaire testify that it may be difficult to guarantee a long-term perspective in the work if the activities are carried out by voluntary forces: *'A basic input is needed for volunteers if the work is to go on for a long time'*.²⁰³

It can be difficult to maintain volunteers' engagement if the work is experienced as too difficult and mandatory. The lesson is that many volunteers want to help, but with some tasks or at certain times of the day it is harder to get volunteers to take part, which means that the personnel may still have a heavy work load.²⁰⁴

It is also a challenge to retain volunteers when the number of asylum seekers decreases, or those who have come are rejected or sent to new locations. Several of the parishes that have had hundreds of volunteers are no longer in contact with them, as fewer asylum seekers are arriving and asylum homes are being closed down. It can also be difficult to cope with circumstances that change from emergency aid situations to situations where the people with whom the volunteers have become acquainted and on friendly terms are affected by difficult or even critical news that arouses strong emotions. This can be difficult to bear also for those close to them.

*[...] the women who were very depressed last summer, someone moved away, they had such a close relationship and so on. And then I said I should try thinking 'yes, I got to participate and do my bit'.*²⁰⁵

*It felt a little strange when I was driving the moving van [...] and when we were driving away in the evening, he was standing there all alone in a completely new city.*²⁰⁶

In the event of rejection, it is appropriate to ask questions about how people who have received a negative answer to their asylum application may be supported. It raises difficult questions, which everyone in the parishes may encounter and should be prepared for.²⁰⁷ Not least, it can be difficult for volunteers who have a close relationship with them. Several dioceses and parishes of the Church of Sweden have the policy of not providing accommodation for those who want to hide on the

²⁰² Interview 8

²⁰³ Response 156

²⁰⁴ Response 108

²⁰⁵ Interview 10

²⁰⁶ Interview 13

²⁰⁷ Interviews 17, 31, 26, 32

parish premises to avoid expulsion, but for some of the people who have been engaged, the answer may be more difficult. One employee says:

*[...] you meet a lot of people without papers and we've only had the question come up a little bit, but it is a challenge, really. Yes, as a church we have said that we do not hide refugees. Some individuals can do that, of course, but it's extremely hard.*²⁰⁸

Here, the parishes of the Church of Sweden have responsibility for both volunteers and employees who work for those who have been refused asylum so that they receive support and supervision in their work. The importance of well thought-through approaches to meeting people who have received rejection decisions is also emphasised by Support Migration and in earlier guidance and policy documents for the Church of Sweden.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ Interview 26

²⁰⁹ See, for example, the Church of Sweden. Support Migration, Meeting undocumented immigrants, and older materials in Swedish such as Hellqvist 2012 and the Church of Sweden Parochial Board 1993

Chapter 7

Pleasure and Difficulties in Encounters with People Seeking Asylum

Working with and for persons seeking asylum in Sweden involves meeting people from many different countries, of different ages, and with different languages, education, occupations and backgrounds. What they have in common is that they are waiting in a new country, in many cases they have had difficult experiences in their countries of origin and on the journey here, and that they find themselves in a vulnerable life situation. In this chapter we present some of the accounts and reflections contained in the interview material, which deal with what employees and volunteers – some of whom have refugee backgrounds themselves – consider the pleasures and difficulties of interpersonal encounters.

ENCOUNTERS THAT CREATE MEANING AND GIVE JOY

Both employees and volunteers constantly reiterate the pleasure they get from the work with asylum seekers. Although it is, in parts, an intense and tiring work that also competes with other commitments during their free time, it is, nevertheless, meaningful work. Many meetings touch them deeply. What they perceive as a minor input gives so much back, as it creates moments that really mean something to someone else.²¹⁰

The joy in their eyes, despite all they have been through, I think that's fantastic and we all think so. How can you have so much joy and so much laughter in spite of everything you have been through? [---] They want so much to share what they have, and we don't think we do all that much, we sit here, speaking Swedish and drinking coffee, yet give so much.

One of the interviewed volunteers describes what is positive about being part of an activity where there are no demands for output. They feel

²¹⁰ Interviews 2, 32, 22, 28

that being able to contribute something meaningful for others just by being there gives them energy.

The answers to the questionnaires also portray a picture of work that goes beyond the usual. People who work with asylum seekers are and become involved in the lives of the asylum seekers and get to know them as individuals. As one vicar writes: *'It has been and is very meaningful. We are bringing specific benefits'*.²¹¹ Another says: *'The activity creates strong bonds between people'*.²¹²



Meeting place in Härnösand Cathedral Parish.
Photo: Linda Maria Thompson/Ikon

The interviews reflect the pleasure of getting to know new people. This could involve chatting for a while, getting a glimpse of other people and their everyday life, or just the joy of sharing a moment with each other. According to one survey participant, 'if you are interested in people, you get so much back, because every meeting is something unique, you always learn something'.²¹³

The meetings can also help people to break down preconceived opinions and realise that assumed differences do not exist.²¹⁴ In some cases, they can lead to more long-lasting personal relationships. It can be anything

²¹¹ Response 88 (free text) to the question: 'What do you consider to be the parish's/pastorate's greatest lesson in carrying out activities for and with refugees and asylum seekers?'

²¹² Response 45

²¹³ Interview 33

²¹⁴ Interviews 2, 15, 24, 33, 21

from seeing each other from time to time, being invited to celebrations with the family or following each other on Facebook several years later, to chatting on Instagram for a while and reminding them to go to bed in time for school the next day or accompanying them to give them support during childbirth.²¹⁵ By meeting and talking, all parties get to learn about different countries and cultures. The meetings can also provide a better understanding of the conflicts that asylum seekers have escaped and what is concealed behind what is reported in the news.

Others mention that the work with asylum seekers means a break from the everyday routine and the chance to do something new and develop oneself. It allows you to learn a lot and helps you to discover your own skills, which can also increase your self-confidence.²¹⁶

‘WE NEED EACH OTHER AND ENRICH EACH OTHER’

In almost all interviews there are accounts of new insights into the reciprocity that exists in the encounters between people, even when the one is there to help and the other to be helped.²¹⁷ It is not always easy to tell who is the one who is giving and who is getting something back.

*What I want to emphasise is that there can be such amazing meetings between people. You come here thinking you’re going to help, but you are the one who is helped. I can honestly say there is such incredible communication and such an enormous community and love. It’s actually an amazing thing, and this still surprises me. Yes, it makes you feel very happy.*²¹⁸

Other survey participants describe the resources of those who come to Sweden as an injection into the local cultural life, where smaller towns may find it difficult to offer a wide and varied range of services to the population.

Others point out that the mixture of people in itself is positive and helps to break preconceptions:

*[...] above all, maybe in a small community, you can get into a rut in some way. That’s how we have always done it, that’s how it has always been [--] then I was sitting [and thinking] ‘Good God, send us some refugees!’, and he did.*²¹⁹

Some are surprised that a lot of them are so well educated, and this is a resource we can use.²²⁰ *There are a lot of them, you really feel that they are*

²¹⁵ Interviews 32, 8, 10

²¹⁶ Interview 4

²¹⁷ For example, interviews 4, 8, 10, 12, 15, 18, 20, 24, 32, 33

²¹⁸ Interview 18

²¹⁹ Interview 10

²²⁰ Interview 33

*very determined, and some families who come here have worked abroad in a great many different countries and they can really make their way.*²²¹ At the same time, the same participant is aware that this does not apply to all of them: *'Some are not like this at all, they need more support'*.²²²

COMMUNICATING DESPITE LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Language barriers and attempts to bridge them are a recurring theme in the interviews. The most difficult situations are when there is no common language. Many of the asylum seekers who come speak English, but far from everyone. By using each other and helping out, the language barrier is often overcome, but sometimes the matter that needs to be sorted out is of a more serious or urgent nature.²²³ It may be particularly difficult in the case of persons with diaconal needs or in need of spiritual care.

It is not always possible to get access to professional interpreting support, and even when this happens, interpreting is very costly in the long term.²²⁴ However, language barriers can still be overcome in most situations. If a person fails to convey what he or she wants to say, there is often someone else who can speak the language. This may be someone in the group of asylum seekers, employees or volunteers, or friends and acquaintances are asked to assist.²²⁵ Having language skills among employees or among active members of the parish is often a condition for initiating work with asylum seekers, as is also highlighted in Chapter 4.

Others try to find solutions by using dictionaries or translations via mobile apps and websites so that they can communicate. These are not always the correct translations, but people can make themselves understood, even if the results are sometimes a bit absurd.²²⁶

In other cases, language confusion is experienced as something that encourages creativity and leads to a great deal of hilarity. Bridges are built between languages by using improvisation and sign language: *'[...]/ The hardest part is understanding the languages, because not everyone can speak English or any other language. Then you try your hand and sign language – yes, sometimes you do it and you fall about laughing.'*²²⁷ Several emphasise humour as an important resource when language is ineffective.

Different forms of art can also help to bring people together and create meetings and communion even though different languages are spoken.

221 Interview 24

222 Ibid

223 Interview 10

224 Ibid

225 Interviews 29, 2

226 Interviews 25, 15

227 Interview 22

For example, music can work across borders. One of the interviewees relates how uncertainty about how a situation with a tense atmosphere in an asylum home could turn into an unusually festive evening, when the deacon was joined on his way to the home by a man with a violin: *'[...] then they took out the violin and started dancing and everyone danced. She says they danced the night away. There was no tense atmosphere then [...]*²²⁸

DIFFICULT TO FACE INGRATITUDE AND TO ACCOMMODATE CONFLICTING FEELINGS

People who join an activity with a desire to do good and help out expect to be met with gratitude. It can be frustrating when this does not happen, when the one who is expected to receive help makes it clear that he or she does not want it or is dissatisfied. It may also be difficult to have to set boundaries in the situation when the purpose is to provide help, and the boundary between what is right and wrong is not always clear.

A survey participant expresses some sadness about feeling curious and open to trying new dishes and customs that belong to cultures that asylum seekers bring from their countries of origin, as she did not feel that the asylum seekers responded reciprocally with the same curiosity and willingness to get to know the Swedish culture.

It may be considerably more difficult to deal with individuals who participate in the activities and abuse your trust. One of the answers in the survey reports that the Church suffered a theft, but no one wanted to help to address the problem. *'Everyone kept silent instead of helping us to inform the refugees. We wonder how good integration can be when nobody wants to help refugees to be aware of and follow Swedish customs and practices?'*²²⁹ The same questionnaire mentions the importance of immediately giving asylum seekers good social information and explaining the rules and traditions that apply in the country.²³⁰ Some of the interviewees similarly emphasise the importance of explaining which written or unwritten rules apply.²³¹

CULTURAL CLASHES AND CONFLICTS

In the work with and for asylum seekers and new arrivals, there is often the need to handle cultural clashes and resolve conflicts. These can be clashes between immigrants and natives or between different groups of immigrants, or between persons of different religions, classes or political beliefs. Much of the friction that arises deals with who must adapt. There may be minor disputes regarding food or major conflicts concerning politics or theology.

228 Interview 4

229 Response 217

230 Ibid

231 Interviews 6, 31

Not eating the food provided on the grounds of religious rules can come across as strange and a little awkward. Few within the Church of Sweden observe the Easter fast or fast to get closer to God. It is commonplace in some other Christian churches, however, but Swedes are not always prepared for it.

Even different traditions for how to greet each other may cause problems. Questions asked are whether everyone should greet others by shaking hands or whether the customs of the country of origin should be taken into account.

Explaining Swedish laws and views on road safety, for example, can be another difficulty. The attitude to timing and keeping appointments can also create friction. At the same time, there is an understanding that the asylum process itself can make it difficult to adapt to more in-depth schedules and punctuality. The authorities may invite people to meetings at short notice, which means that other activities or appointments may have to be postponed. One volunteer states that he too noticed that asylum seekers sometimes do not come to the language café at the agreed times, because they are invited to various meetings by the authorities at short notice.

Differences in views on gender equality and who has the right to decide the choice of partners are areas where Swedish legislation and norms differ significantly from the situation in the countries where most asylum seekers come from. There are several examples that issues of gender equality and equal rights irrespective of gender are actively raised in the work. But the differences in views can sometimes be so big that it becomes difficult for both sides to reach each other:

Most are issues of social knowledge, when people sometimes ask why they do this or that in Sweden, and although I explain the roles of men and women and so on in a perfectly comprehensible way, they find it very hard to understand because it is not something they can understand theoretically at all.²³²

One survey participant feels that the values about gender roles are changing and that the younger generation is more open to taking in what is happening in the new society they encounter. *[...] these younger guys I have talked to, they say – well, we are in Sweden now.²³³*

²³² Interview 21

²³³ Interview 32

Chapter 8

Strategies for Responding to Hostility, Prejudices and Racism

The reception of asylum seekers can elicit different reactions in the local population. All the specifically studied parishes have experience of encountering a great commitment and willingness to help, but also fear, hostility and, to some extent, organised racism. The questionnaires show that 15 per cent of the parishes/pastorates that responded to the survey state that they work for social cohesion and against xenophobia. At the same time, what is meant by this is a matter of interpretation. A language café (which almost half of the respondent parishes/pastorates say they operate) can in many respects be said to be an activity for promoting social cohesion and combating xenophobia, although this is not a stated goal. None of our five parishes have any activities where issues on how to respond to prejudice and racism are in focus, although it is obvious that they are still part of the work. In this chapter we take a closer look at how parishes and committed individuals deal with hostility, prejudices and racism, mainly in others, but also, to some extent, in themselves.

ALLOWING PEOPLE TO GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER AND HELP EACH OTHER

In the questionnaire, a vicar writes: *'In small towns you encounter a great deal of openness as well as fear of people from other cultures'*.²³⁴ The strategy that most participants believe in and work for is to let people get to know each other and to make this a way of giving the community an injection against xenophobia and racism. Then people will no longer be strangers or groups but individuals with names and life stories. One of the participants describes this as by becoming engaged and getting to know each other, you discern the individuals behind the concept *'refugees who come here'*.²³⁵

²³⁴ Response 156 (free text) to the question: 'What do you consider to be the parish's/pastorate's greatest lesson in carrying out activities for and with refugees and asylum seekers?'

²³⁵ Interviews 14, 4

*Suddenly they get names and become real people telling about their travels across the Mediterranean, which makes you choke and don't believe it's true, for example. And children and – yes, it's for real, and we really want to do everything we can for them.*²³⁶

In some cases, the participants reflect on how they have had to deal with their own prejudices by being part of the work with asylum seekers, and through this have overcome their fears. *'Yes, I don't think I feel so afraid if I meet a large group of people. Those who are not Swedes. [---] I feel more interested.'*²³⁷

Many survey participants have identified the mere offer of the opportunity to help as a good strategy. Many local inhabitants believe that donating their old clothes and toys is something meaningful. A volunteer tells us her friends say, *'Oh, how nice, now we can [give them away] and [we don't need] to take them to the dump, we'll choose what's good and clean and nice.'*²³⁸ One colleague says that the locals have shown their concern for the asylum seekers by telling them about traffic safety.

However, prejudices and hostility are not only found between native Swedes and immigrants. Those participating in the activities as employees or volunteers also need to deal with and respond to this kind of expression between different asylum seekers of different ethnic origin or political convictions. One of the interviewees highlights the importance for the language café to become an activity where people from different walks of life meet, and not a meeting place for certain groups of asylum seekers only.²³⁹

*Yes, it's certainly true and I think there have also, periodically, been people who don't want to sit next to each other, for example, and there have been awkward moments. But I don't know, somehow we have tried to make sure that everyone is welcome here. We don't take a stand in your conflicts and so on, here we can socialise, men and women together, no problem, and I think we have sort of been able to let go of some ideas.*²⁴⁰

Many participants point out the power of setting a good example. One employee says her mantra is: *'We need more good stories.'*²⁴¹ The role of the Church is to take the lead and show the way, provide examples, for instance, of good relationships between the sexes, between people of different backgrounds and different beliefs.

²³⁶ Interview 4

²³⁷ Interview 23

²³⁸ Interview 23

²³⁹ Interview 25

²⁴⁰ Interview 10

²⁴¹ Interview 28

HIGHLIGHTING THE FACT THAT PEOPLE OF REFUGEE BACKGROUND ENRICH THE AREA AND SWEDEN

Many survey participants emphasise that the community and the country have been enriched by asylum seekers and immigrants. They use this as an argument in meetings with those who are worried and sceptical. One volunteer says:

In rural areas and in smaller places, asylum seekers can be a matter of survival for the village's school and grocery store. The football team gets new players. There is more life. The world is expanded.

I think the fact that the world has come here in some way has enriched the village and all people living here in every way. You can't say it was a tiny speck, but, in some way [the village] has also been put on the map, [...] now we're somehow included on the map of the world, and I have told others this at some point, imagine how amazing it is, these are people who used to live there and have come here as refugees and have lived here, and then they move to [a big city] and their greatest desire is to move back [here]. Just imagine, that's what I say. Then they might smile a little and [say] yes, that's cool.²⁴²

A vicar responding to the survey believes that, for the rural areas, immigration also involves coping with the shortage in the labour force in the coming years. *'In a rural area, we have so much to gain from the fact that the asylum seekers/those who have been granted a residence permit, like it here and want to live and work right here – with no less can we handle the shortage of labour in the coming years!²⁴³*

SPEAKING UP CLEARLY AGAINST PREJUDICE AND RACISM

Many survey participants mention challenging situations that sometimes have their roots in an unwillingness to change, sometimes in real problems and sometimes in prejudice and racism. Speaking up against prejudicial and racist comments or disrespectful attitudes is perceived as important.

Antagonisms may also arise out of religious or politically opposed ideas between different groups of asylum seekers. One employee describes a situation where a Christian asylum-seeking woman told about a group of asylum-seeking men who came to church activities and always said *'Christians are bad and Muslims are good'*.

Several have experience of having to speak out against Islamophobia. One employee relates: *'There is a man from Syria who was a Christian and who made very disparaging comments about Muslims in general and I told him we do not accept the way in which he was speak-*

²⁴² Interview 10

²⁴³ Response 114

ing'.²⁴⁴ Another employee says: *'Some may be bothered by the fact that Muslims pray five times a day. Then I say, but as Christians we can pray five times a day too, that would be great'*.²⁴⁵

Many people talk about cultural clashes and conflicts that exaggerate a negative opinion or concern, and that could be avoided with better information and clarity from the outset. One survey participant tells us about disturbing incidents in the local swimming pool, when young male asylum seekers did not treat women in swimsuits in a respectful way, and there had also been an attempted rape. *'But we have an excellent swimming instructor, a great educator. He put them in place and it was needed.'*²⁴⁶

Other survey participants talk about the importance of clarity, for example, letting people know they are taking up too much space in a language café, or deciding that a woman should sit at the front of the bus today instead of a man *'because it's her turn'*.²⁴⁷

It is also important to equip people to understand their rights in Sweden and that they should not accept oppression from their natives or family members but should notify the police when necessary.

Many derive local xenophobic sympathies from fear and concern based on ignorance. This can be expressed as a fear of those with a different colour of skin, language and religion. Some survey participants believe that the fear of Muslims is particularly great, not least because of the Islamic terrorism that is widely reported in the media and that many are unable to distinguish between militant Islamism and ordinary Muslims. Responding to prejudices and providing the correct information is an important part of creating a more positive climate.

244 Interview 2.4

245 Interview 2.8

246 Interview 6

247 Interview 2.1



Meeting across borders in the Parish of Nordmaling.

Photo: Satu Brännström

NOT SETTING VULNERABLE GROUPS AGAINST EACH OTHER

Many survey participants believe that it is not uncommon for own disappointments to pave the way for hostility and dissatisfaction with asylum seekers. *‘It is so easy to think that when you haven’t got a job these “rascals” come here and take your job from you and they take your place at the kindergarten.’*²⁴⁸

The needs of Swedish youths and pensioners are not infrequently set against the needs of the new arrivals. *‘They say that our [young people] have problems too, “why don’t you help us?”, and so on.’*²⁴⁹ One employee emphasises the importance of seeing everyone in need, to avoid exacerbating a sense of ‘us’ and ‘them’. To jointly fight against injustice and for a good life for all. Otherwise, there is a risk that some feel pushed aside.²⁵⁰

As mentioned earlier, several employees believe that clearly stated principles for the Church’s diaconal work are a support in dealing with enviousness.²⁵¹ Principles that ensure that groups of people are not set against each other but take account of the needs of the individual on the basis of general priorities that can easily be explained and defended – for example, prioritising families with children.

248 Interview 13

249 Interview 22

250 Interviews 8, 19

251 Interviews 11, 35

ORGANISED RACISM REQUIRES ORGANISED COUNTER MOVEMENTS

All parishes have experiences of negative comments from local residents about asylum seekers coming to the town and the parish becoming involved. However, it is not all that common for the parishes to describe experiences of meeting organised racism. In a free answer in the questionnaire, a vicar writes that a lesson they learned was that *'there is a racist threat in society that is very nasty – the “Sons of Odin” and “Nordic Front” are spreading propaganda and agitating against refugees'*.²⁵² Another writes that their engagement *'[is] partly work against the wind in relation to other xenophobic forces in society, but it has not defeated us'*.²⁵³

The interview material also contains an example of an actual threat to a parish's work with asylum seekers. For example, a person who wanted to invite asylum seekers to a parish sports activity received threatening letters.²⁵⁴ There are also instances of local asylum homes being attacked.²⁵⁵

However, there are also descriptions of positive engagement and organised counter movements, which are often initiated due to growing organised xenophobia.²⁵⁶

252 Response 201

253 Response 73

254 Ibid

255 Interviews 16, 24

256 Response 201, interview 24

Chapter 9

Collaboration with Public Actors

It is obvious from the interview material that the work with asylum seekers and new arrivals strengthens the local parish's local networks, both with the civil society operators and with public actors. Local cooperation on activities for and with asylum seekers and new arrivals is extensive. The survey shows that the parishes of the Church of Sweden have many contact areas with public actors, in addition to other civil society partners. In this chapter we look at how the cooperation with the public actors, such as the municipality and the relevant authorities, is experienced by the parishes studied. We have not interviewed representatives of the public actors; what is presented is the parish's image of how the cooperation works.

COOPERATION WITH THE MUNICIPALITY

As a general observation, it is relatively easy to cooperate with the municipality. Relationships with the municipality's officials are often already in place. Local politicians are sometimes also elected representatives of parishes of the Church of Sweden. A lot of municipalities have appointed a person with special responsibility for integration and establishment, who often sees the civil society as an important partner. Knowledge of the role of the Church of Sweden is often relatively good in the specifically studied parishes, especially in smaller towns. In the bigger cities, however, it does not always seem to be quite so easy.²⁵⁷

257 Validation Seminar in Uppsala on 24 January 2017



Provision of collected clothes, Parish of Karlskoga.
Photo: Alex&Martin /Ikon

Several interviews include reflections about the fact that the Church does not want to take on tasks that fall within the scope of public actors. Drawing boundaries is not always simple. Should a parish host the municipality's housing search function?²⁵⁸ Should a parish provide sessions with psychologists?²⁵⁹ Should a parish act as translator of the Migration Agency's letters?²⁶⁰ What should the Church's role be?

A vicar responding to the survey says it is *'better to support the municipalities and the state with staff and voluntary resources, joint leisure activities and help with homework than carry out your own work'*.²⁶¹ Another states that it is *'better to support engaged actors than to take the primary responsibility'*.²⁶² A longer questionnaire reflects the same conclusions, and it highlights the need to be clear about the distribution of roles in respect of the public actors:

The important lesson we have learned is not to see ourselves as the only operator in the matter, not to end up in a situation where we believe we are the only solution. It is important to make a clear situational assessment and think in the long term. To be clear about the roles, so that we do not go in and take responsibility for what the municipality, county council or Migration Agency is responsible for.

²⁵⁸ Interview 24

²⁵⁹ Interview 32

²⁶⁰ Interview 10

²⁶¹ Response 136

²⁶² Response 193

*To make a reasonable assessment of what the parish can do and do it. This means: Analyse, delimit.*²⁶³

There are also people seeking help who have expectations that the Church should help out in a matter and the deacon has to tell them that in Sweden this is the duty of the municipality.

The same survey participant observes, however, that this drawing of boundaries is becoming increasingly difficult, as regulations for asylum seekers and new arrivals have become tougher.²⁶⁴ Cooperation is also made more difficult when asylum policy is tightened. If there was cooperation, not least in the autumn of 2015 and the spring of 2016, in welcoming asylum seekers, today the task looks quite different. Many officials from the Swedish Migration Agency and the police are responsible for making sure that the people who have been refused their asylum application leave the country. This is a work task where the parishes of the Church of Sweden do not have an equally clear role and in many cases do not share the opinion of the authorities. Many parishes are facing ethical and moral dilemmas.²⁶⁵

NO FEEDBACK ABOUT THE WORK ON EMERGENCY HOUSING

The large reception of asylum seekers in the autumn of 2015 meant that the boundaries for who had formal responsibility for what were no longer relevant. Everyone needed to help out. In particular, there was a great need for temporary accommodation, and one of the parishes carried out an inventory of their premises and identified three possible locations where they could provide shelter. They were referred by the municipality to the Migration Agency, which at first wanted to come straight away. But then everything came to nothing. The participant states that all working hours invested in this were wasted. Nor has there been any feedback from the municipality or the Swedish Migration Agency as to what happened.

At the same time, the Church of Sweden received several requests at both diocese and the national level to provide emergency accommodation.²⁶⁶ This resulted in major processes in many dioceses. For example, in the diocese of Lund, a comprehensive and rapid inventory was carried out involving all the parishes. Approximately two weeks later the diocese was able to supply 400 places to the Swedish Migration Agency. The diocese deacon who worked on the inventory had a lot of contact with the Migration Agency during the process, and the Agency emphasised the urgent situation and the fact that they were

²⁶³ Response 184

²⁶⁴ Ibid

²⁶⁵ Validation Seminar in Uppsala on 24 January 2017

²⁶⁶ Among other things, through telephone calls to the Diocese of Uppsala 06 November 2015, emails to several NGOs 09 November 2015

very interested. But in the end hardly any places were used.²⁶⁷ The same thing happened in other places in the country. A total of approximately 3,000 places were presented to the Swedish Migration Agency, but only a very small number were put to use.²⁶⁸ The feedback from the Swedish Migration Agency was found to be inadequate or non-existent.

Asylum reception is not always a smooth process and may be difficult to predict. It is also influenced by global events and political decisions. The autumn of 2015 was special. The Migration Agency's requests for emergency accommodation were followed one week later by government decisions on border controls and the tightening of regulatory frameworks. The number of new asylum seekers decreased. There is an understanding that the municipalities and the Migration Agency would not have been able to predict this development, but it is important to draw common lessons from collaborative projects that are put on hold, and this has all too infrequently been the case.

RAPID RELOCATIONS AND INADEQUATE INFORMATION FROM THE SWEDISH MIGRATION AGENCY

All the parishes visited have been affected by the Migration Agency's rapid relocations of asylum seekers. Asylum homes are opened and closed, and information to the local community as well as the residents to be moved is often found to be insufficient. It is hard on the individual, it complicates the municipality's planning of school activities, for example and also makes it difficult for the parishes of the Church of Sweden and other civil society operators to take the right actions.

It is often a surprise when a new home opens, not least because procurements are secret and previously there was no requirement to inform the municipality if you were participating in a procurement to run an asylum home. Sometimes information is also lacking when the Swedish Migration Agency has been able to rent accommodation.

It is also difficult, especially on an emotional level, when a home is closed or places are reduced and many asylum seekers are moved to another place. It creates anxiety for the individual and takes energy from the parishes and the local community who have built up relationships and activities. One participant relates: *'They have recently become friends, and then the Migration Agency says "all 52 of you [...] have to leave on Monday"'. "Where?" Well, we don't know'*.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁷ Telephone conversation with the diocese deacon in Lund 30 November 2016

²⁶⁸ Email correspondence with the Church of Sweden's crisis organisation 30 November 2016

²⁶⁹ Interview 6

RIGID BUREAUCRACY AND BY-THE-BOOK EMPLOYEES

One of the vicars responding to the survey writes that a lesson they have learnt is that *‘there is a lot of bureaucracy associated with activities for and with refugees and asylum seekers’*.²⁷⁰ The examples often quoted in interviews are regulations concerning opportunities for asylum seekers to practise or work. Sometimes there are good reasons for regulations and bureaucracy – fire protection rules and employers’ responsibilities are important. However, many participants consider that there are rules and systems that could be simplified.

Sometimes it is the application of regulations that is defective rather than the regulations themselves. Several employees report that they often have to ensure that asylum seekers, also those without papers, receive the care and support they are entitled to by law. Many social workers working at maintenance support units have only recently qualified. The deacon of the Church of Sweden is the one who stands for continuity and deeper knowledge.

There is also criticism against the sharp dividing lines many people encounter between different public actors. There are several examples in the interview material that the employees of the Church of Sweden try to figure out how different decisions by authorities are linked and how they affect each other. The deacon’s role in particular can be to get to the bottom of decisions where people end up in tricky situations and find out what has happened and see what can be done about it.

LACK OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

There is a feeling among many participants that the knowledge of public actors about the Church of Sweden has decreased. It is no longer a matter of course to know what a deacon’s duties are or to understand that the Church’s diaconal work is not aimed at recruiting new members to the Church of Sweden. One deacon has experience of staff at the homes of unaccompanied children wondering what she was doing there. Another survey participant tells us that many officials and politicians are well acquainted with the Church of Sweden, while *‘some officials and some police officers and others seem to [have the attitude] “what are you doing here?”’*²⁷¹ Generally speaking, ignorance and suspicion vis-à-vis the Church of Sweden seem to be more widespread in the cities than in smaller towns.²⁷²

At the same time, the developments of recent years have contributed to a better understanding of the different actors in more vulnerable areas of the cities.

²⁷⁰ Response 38

²⁷¹ Interview 11

²⁷² Validation Seminar in Uppsala on 24 January 2017

If knowledge about the Church of Sweden is variable, it is even more lacking as far as other religious denominations than the Church of Sweden are concerned. It cannot be taken for granted that the police are able to distinguish between the Syrian Orthodox Church and the Muslim congregation, or that they think of migrant-led communities in terms of resources for preventative work or crisis management.²⁷³ When there are established inter-religious collaborations, as in Norrköping, the Church of Sweden can often play the role of bridge builder between the public actors and the migrant-led religious communities.

²⁷³ Interview 28

Chapter 10

Why do Asylum Seekers Come to the Church of Sweden?

For many people, religion and belief play an important role in everyday life. Several different beliefs are represented among asylum seekers and new arrivals. Previous research shows that there are several reasons why people fleeing their country of origin seek contact with religious communities, an account of which is given in Chapter 1. In this chapter we will highlight in particular the factors identified in our interviews as reasons why asylum seekers and new arrivals come to the parishes of the Church in Sweden. Asylum seekers have not been interviewed specifically, but the analysis is based on what employees, parish elected representatives and volunteers have fed back from their meetings with the target group. The opinions of asylum seekers or former asylum seekers are conveyed through the interviewed employees or volunteers, who have come to Sweden as asylum seekers themselves. Thus, we primarily present the opinions of those who have chosen to become engaged in the parish work.

FOR HELP AND SUPPORT

The most common reason why asylum seekers come to the Church of Sweden is that they find good activities which are a support for anyone who is new to Sweden. These include language cafés and other social contact areas, but also the opportunity to talk about their problems with someone who is listening, to get help with contacts with the authorities and with practical problems. Many are in a tough situation and live with an uncertain waiting and in close proximity to other persons they have not themselves chosen to share accommodation with, and with whom they may have major differences of opinion. Many have difficult memories of war and violence and live separated from their families.

Many asylum seekers live in cramped housing conditions, are unemployed and long for something to break the boredom. *‘They have nothing to do and then they come here. There may be seven, eight of them to*

a room, so this must be a breathing hole.²⁷⁴ For those with children, the ability to share large playgrounds in parish halls and see the children having fun and developing is invaluable.²⁷⁵ The pedagogical activities for children in the Parish of St. John's, as well as open pre-schools and other childcare activities in the other parishes, mean a lot. As one employee tells us:

Then we had singing sessions with lots of motion, because children need to do something that they feel good about, that makes them happy. I had met so many children here who had stony faces, two to three-year-olds with no facial expression, but when we started singing week in and week out, something happened.²⁷⁶

Settling in a new country is not easy and it is not always easy to make contact with the Swedes. The Church of Sweden can be a place where this contact can be established.

The individual talks that mainly priests and deacons have with the asylum seekers can deal with many different things. It can be anything from legal assistance to concerns for children, or inactivity, loneliness and resignation.

Just talking about one's problems with someone who listens and cares is sometimes as important as actual help.

Both Christians and Muslims attend the activities organised in the parishes we have specifically studied. For Christians, the fact that it is the Church's activities often reinforces the reason to attend. According to two survey participants, it is important for Muslims that the activity is good, not who is managing it.²⁷⁷ Others say that many Muslims especially appreciate the fact that it is the Church that runs the activity, because it is a context where faith in God is natural.²⁷⁸

One participant points out that the relationships built in the Church are informal and more equal, unlike the many contacts with authorities that asylum seekers need to deal with.²⁷⁹ There may also be a greater acceptance of cultural and individual differences in the Church.

Questions about work and housing are central to many new arrivals, not least for those who are granted asylum in Sweden. Some have been able to secure an internship or temporary employment in the parish, which provides language training, networking and work experience.

274 Interview 32

275 Interview 3

276 Interview 10

277 Interviews 2, 6

278 Interview 9

279 Interview 9

Sometimes the parishes have helped by matching workplaces in the local community, for example, through identifying asylum seekers' skills, mentoring or by communicating knowledge about occupations with future labour shortages.²⁸⁰

Often, housing shortages and high rents mean that many have difficulties in solving their housing situation. Two out of five of the parishes we have specifically studied say they sometimes match private individuals who can rent out a home or room to asylum seekers or new arrivals in need of accommodation at a good rate.

Some tell that Muslims are pleasantly surprised that they are welcome to the Church's activities. In some cases, it is also natural for Muslims to turn to the Church. The Teckomatorp parish educational officer tells us that asylum seeking Muslim families from Syria, who have lived with Christians before, knocked at the Church of Sweden's door on their first day in town.



Lighting candles, Parish of Leksand. Photo: Ingrid Del Castillo

PRACTISING ONE'S FAITH AND ATTENDING CHURCH SERVICES

One volunteer with experience of the asylum process says going to church gives her a lot of strength. One employee tells us that belief in God is crucial to many of the asylum seekers he meets. *'If you have gone through difficult times and are still going through difficult times,*

²⁸⁰ Interviews 10, 17, 21, 26

*belief in God is much more valuable than when you're doing well.*²⁸¹ Another employee talks about a woman from Eritrea who often attends the church service.

*Then my sister asked, 'did you understand anything that was said?' 'No, not so much, but it doesn't matter, it's so nice to be in the church.' Because a lot of it is a spiritual experience, which strengthens you and doesn't have much to do with words and languages.*²⁸²

There may be different reasons for attending the Church of Sweden instead of the church you have previously belonged to. It may often be for purely practical reasons, for example, the Church of Sweden is the closest – in smaller places, there is often no Catholic or Orthodox church at all – or the belief that belonging to a certain denomination is not so important. *'It makes no difference. The Church is the Church.'*²⁸³

In some survey participants there is an awareness that moving between different Christian churches is not always without complications. One employee tells us that she urges Catholics and Orthodox people to talk with her priest about whether it is possible, according to their church, to receive communion in the Church of Sweden.²⁸⁴ There are also those who have chosen to become members of the Church of Sweden.²⁸⁵

All five parishes have experience of meeting Muslims who come to the Church of Sweden with ideas of converting to the Christian faith. Some believe that this may be because they hope that, in doing so, they will be granted asylum in Sweden,²⁸⁶ but there are also those who truly wish to become Christians. One deacon tells us how this desire can be expressed:

*It is a longing for God and it is the Christian God they long for and the identity they feel. And some just say: 'Christians have been good to me' and [...] when I was a refugee, the Christians took care of me and befriended me on a journey that has been quite awful.*²⁸⁷

The parishes emphasise that it is a matter of more haste, less speed when they encounter Muslims who want to convert, especially young persons. *'Some come [and say] "I want to be baptised now", they want to be baptised at once and then I tell them we always provide education first so you know what it means.'*²⁸⁸ Several tell us they consult their bishop and others in the diocese regarding Muslims who want to convert. However, all parishes have one or several persons who have con-

281 Interview 6

282 Interview 21

283 Interview 3

284 Interview 21

285 Interviews 17, 32

286 Interviews 6, 10

287 Interview 21

288 Interview 21

verted or have started such a process, for example, by attending baptismal education. Several also highlight the importance of being clear that it is not certain you will be granted asylum in Sweden just because you become a Christian. A vicar responding to the survey writes: *'We have also learned to be extremely clear in communicating with those we get close to, sometimes they may think that a letter from a priest will change the Migration Agency's decision, etc.'*²⁸⁹

Muslims' participation in church services and rites in the Church of Sweden does not always reflect a longing to become Christian, but the space itself is important, holiness is important and so is finding a place where prayer and religion are natural. An employee tells of an older Muslim woman who regularly went to worship. After the woman's death, her sons expressed their gratitude to the parish for receiving their mother: *'The nearest house of God is the church here, so we are very grateful for having been able to come every Sunday and celebrate your worship even though we are Muslims'*.²⁹⁰

Muslims may also feel confident that those they have got to know through the Church are able to understand and respect their faith more than society in general.

TO ENTER SWEDISH SOCIETY

'Those in the Church' is not infrequently synonymous with 'Swedes' because that is where Swedes have first been encountered. Positive renown spreads from person to person. A good experience leads to a chain reaction, and more people attend. A man who has been in Sweden for one and a half years tells us that he chose to come to the Church of Sweden because he thought it was the place where he could most easily get to know Swedish people and learn about Sweden. He states that there are many reasons to come to the Church of Sweden – to make contact with Swedes because the Church is close to where he lives – but what made him decide to come back was the genuine welcome and an invitation to become part of a community.

He says that it has been a real support for him while he was settling in Sweden.

*It's not that easy to move here from another culture, another background. And when you come here and you're new to the place, it's really important to meet people who want to help you and encourage you to move on, and I think that's why I have a relationship with the Church.*²⁹¹

289 Response 58

290 Interview 16

291 Ibid

One employee reflects that the structure of the worship in the Church of Sweden can also be a way to better understand Swedish society's values of empowerment and participation. The fact that both women and men may be priests in the Church of Sweden also provides a kind of key to how Swedish society works. Muslims too sometimes attend the church service of the Church of Sweden to learn about Swedish society.

The Church of Sweden is active on its historical home ground and is dominated by a 'Swedish majority'. In part, Swedish culture has been formed by Lutheran Christianity. It is not surprising, therefore, that those who want to settle in Sweden see the Church of Sweden as an arena for integration.

Chapter 11

Pros and Cons of Being a Church Working with Asylum Seekers and New Arrivals

There is sometimes a certain concern in the Swedish social debate around admitting religious entities onto social arenas. There is sometimes a perception that the confessional is not neutral or open to all. For refugees who have come to a new country, religion can create a sense of recognition and build bridges to the majority community. In other cases, different beliefs can create boundaries and obstacles. In this chapter we present what the interview material has found to be the pros and cons of being a confessional actor, a church, working with asylum seekers and new arrivals.

A VALUE BASE AND A BELIEF THAT BEARS

Throughout the interviews, people say that it was easy to justify the parish's work with asylum seekers and new arrivals and that much was self-evident. There is a value base that facilitates both the initiation of the work and its longer-term continuation. *'We just do it, and there has never been anyone who has thought it strange that we should do it, they all just said 'yes yes' and you just get on with it.'*²⁹² Sometimes the action seems to have come first and the theology has been a second nature or has grown later in reflections over practice.

We can essentially distinguish two main motives for the parish's commitment, based on how individual employees and elected representatives express it in the interviews.²⁹³ It is about the work being done partly 'for the sake of fellow human beings' and partly 'for the sake of the world and society'.

What would Jesus have done? So who is it you meet? Who is standing in front of you and how should you treat your fellow human

²⁹² Interview 4

²⁹³ The interviewed volunteers have expressed themselves to a lesser extent about the motive for the parish's work

when he's standing there without [any warm] clothes? They come wearing 'foppas' (a kind of cheap plastic shoe). No, not even foppas, but these flip-flops, with temperatures of minus ten degrees outside. They have nothing else with them. What do you do? Naturally, we help. I think it goes without saying.²⁹⁴

Someone also refers to Jesus constantly tearing down boundaries and going outside his own group. *'That's what Jesus does all the time. He extends and tears down boundaries and goes beyond them.'*²⁹⁵ It does not matter if your fellow human beings are Christians or Muslims or atheists. *'The Church helps you because you are a human being.'*²⁹⁶

Some strands of creation theology are also found among the answers. *'We are all God's creatures. We are equal in God's eyes. We will all be Jesus for each other somewhere, Christ for his brother and sister, and we can't put people into separate categories.'*²⁹⁷ Many stress that it is a matter of not differentiating between people. A fellow human being in need is a fellow human being in need, no matter where they are born or what language they speak. *'What is actually different, apart from the fact that they come from another country?'*²⁹⁸

Another obvious theme in the material is that the work is carried out because the world needs it; our society needs it. *'We want to participate and make the world a better place, it's our task, it's our mission, and this is how we'll do it.'*²⁹⁹ This can also be expressed in very specific terms, as many asylum seekers and new arrivals need a lot of support and help, and if no one gives them this, society stops working properly: *'Our responsibility or purpose is to help them to move on, go further in society and we do it for their sake and for Sweden's sake too, [...] it's a "win-win" situation.'*³⁰⁰

While it is relatively easy for all survey participants to find a link between the Christian faith, the parish's mission and the work with asylum seekers and new arrivals, it is quite rare for theological discussions to be held jointly in the parish or to be formulated and written down. Many parishes are unaccustomed to common theological reflection on diaconal issues, such as responsibility for people in vulnerable life situations.³⁰¹ Some participants point out that the strength of having a clear value base and common theology is not fully utilised.³⁰²

294 Interview 4

295 Interview 18

296 Interview 34

297 Interview 31

298 Interview 16

299 Interview 26

300 Interview 9

301 Validation Seminar in Uppsala on 24 January 2017

302 Interviews 10, 24, 28

Many of those we have interviewed describe how their belief in God and their relationship with God helps them and provides security when they have difficult conversations or face unpredictable situations. It is about having the confidence that you will be given the strength you need and there is another dimension beyond all that is difficult. *'I won't say that all the people who come here are down at heels, in other words refugees, but many have been involved in a great many horrors. [--] And in those meetings [...], I think that's how I am strengthened in my faith.'*³⁰³ One survey participant calls it *'a spiritual musculature'*.³⁰⁴

The long tradition of the Church of Sweden can sometimes be perceived as sluggish, but in the interviews this long tradition is also highlighted as something that allows for flexibility and the ability to improvise.

THE TARGET GROUP'S CONFIDENCE IN RELIGIOUS ACTORS

Many of those we interviewed say that it is precisely the religious identity of the Church of Sweden that makes it easier to gain the confidence of asylum seekers and new arrivals. It is often a matter of experience from their country of origin or from their journey here. Some participants believe that oriental Christians often have positive expectations of the Church of Sweden as a church.³⁰⁵ Previously, they belonged to a Christian minority in a non-democratic state, which often diminishes their confidence in society's institutions. *'A key is that in this tradition you trust another believer more than the state. Many people have such a background.'*³⁰⁶

Asylum seekers who are not Christians also see something homely and familiar in the Church of Sweden. Many have seen Muslims gladly come to the Church of Sweden activities just because it is a 'house of God', especially when there is no Muslim congregation to turn to.

Some are of the opinion that *'there may also be a recognition effect between Islam and Christianity, because many of our values regarding family, what we feel to be right and wrong, these are actually common ideas.'*³⁰⁷

It can also be about good relationships built up locally through inter-religious and ecumenical cooperation or an appreciated and welcoming activity.

303 Interviews 10, 24, 28

304 Interview 35

305 Interviews 27, 28, 31

306 Interview 28

307 Interview 12



Theme evening on Syria, Parish of Tanum.
Photo: Sara Wetterlind

THE CHURCH IS A PLACE FOR THE DIFFERENT STAGES OF LIFE

While the Church of Sweden welcomes people of other faiths to its activities, there is also room for those who are not very strong believers. These may be asylum seekers and new arrivals who do not practise religion. They may be volunteers who want to work with asylum seekers and new arrivals but who are not believers personally. One volunteer says: *'No, I'm not particularly a church-goer, that's the person I am, and the attitude here has been very good, there have been no demands or expectations or anything like that, rather, it feels like an open house'*.³⁰⁸

Nor is it the aim of the Church of Sweden's diaconal work that people should convert to Christianity. Rather, it is about inspiration and Christ's clear call to help your neighbour, whatever his or her faith, and to cooperate with all people of good will. This enables many people to feel at home. One employee states: *'People may come, and we'll just love them, love them, love them and do what we can for them'*.³⁰⁹

There are many descriptions of festivities and community events in the interview material, for example, Christmas and Midsummer celebrations. The festivities can be both of a general cultural or a Christian character in a way that enables many to join. There is a lot of coffee drinking in the Church, which an employee also symbolically interprets: *'It is also a symbol for saying, "welcome among us"'. This is like the large living room to which you also have access.'*³¹⁰

³⁰⁸ Interview 15

³⁰⁹ Interview 21

³¹⁰ Interview 10

Many describe the benefits of the Church's being a natural place for life's various stages – for celebration and joy but also sorrow and longing. It is a place to feel good as well as to cry or take things slowly.³¹¹ There are opportunities for many different activities – music, drama, coffee-making, Bible study, language learning.³¹²

Most of the asylum seekers' contacts with the Swedish society are with officials from the authorities, whose duties are to check and assess, for example, their grounds for asylum, their ability to work, or their housing needs. It can be liberating, therefore, to meet an old Swedish institution that is not an authority.

There is something in its long tradition and the continuity of local presence that creates good conditions for being an important actor in society, sometimes better conditions than authorities and public operators have. Many parishes and the Church of Sweden as a whole still have relatively good finances. Activities are run without profit interests with the parishes' own resources, and one participant considers that this also makes a difference for the target group.

IS A CHRISTIAN ACTIVITY OPEN TO ALL?

When we asked our survey participants about the disadvantages of the Church's being involved in this work, it is precisely the confessional aspect that is reflected on. The fact that most of those who are not Christians themselves but, for example, Muslims are comfortable in attending the Church of Sweden activities, but that there are also those who are not. Many participants find that most people who wonder why the Church of Sweden welcomes Muslims to its activities are reassured when they are given an explanation of diaconal principles and can see in practice that the work is truly open to all.

At the same time, one participant considers that people often need time to see the benefits of participating in the parish's activities: One of the volunteers also thinks that this obstacle can be overcome, if you just make people feel welcome.

It is obvious that there are differences between various Muslim groups in terms of how easy they think it is to participate in activities of the Church of Sweden. Among Muslims from countries where people have lived close to Christian groups, it seems relatively straightforward and rather a plus factor than a negative one that the activity is run by a church. For Muslims from countries without major Christian minorities, it may be more complex, perhaps as they have no experience of living close to Christians in their countries of origin.³¹³ Sometimes it

311 Interviews 2, 24

312 Interview 9

313 Interviews 9, 10, 35

is above all the social control in their own group that gets in the way and they do not want to get into trouble with their own compatriots.³¹⁴

Some employees tell us that they have chosen to use other premises (not a church)³¹⁵, another entrance (not through the church gate)³¹⁶ or a neutral name (which does not include the word ‘church’)³¹⁷ for the activity, in order to facilitate the participation of Muslims. Such adaptation may at times be complicated, but in the examples we have received from the case studies, it has worked well.

Several have also experienced that when they want to inform people, for example, about language cafés, they first need to explain to the managers of community homes or employees in the municipality that the purpose of the Church of Sweden’s diaconal activities is not to convert Muslims to Christianity.

314 Interviews 9, 34, 35

315 Interview 35

316 Interview 31

317 Interview 29

Chapter 12

Have the Parishes Been Affected?

Both in the interview material and in the questionnaire, there are countless reflections on how the parishes have been affected by the work with asylum seekers and new arrivals. This concerns a new activity that starts and grows, many new people who fill the parish's premises, new dynamics in the parish's everyday life and church services. But it is also about a new power and confidence in the parish's ability to be a relevant social operator that makes a difference locally. In this chapter we present thoughts and experiences of what happens to the parish in the meetings.

A REVITALISED LIFE IN THE PARISH

In many responses there are reflections on how parish life has been revitalised by the work with asylum seekers and new arrivals. Survey participants state that *'the number of worshippers has increased, the choirs are lively, the various women's and children's groups are very active, etc.'*³¹⁸ In another questionnaire, a vicar believes that meeting people from other cultures has enriched the parish.³¹⁹ The same idea is also apparent from the interview material. The premises are being filled, new people are attending in large numbers. This makes demands, in its turn, for the premises to be utilised more efficiently over the course of the day.

The work with volunteers has been discussed specifically in earlier chapters. Not least the power in the fact that many new groups have found their way to the church thanks to their wanting to do something for the asylum seekers. Many describe it as creating a new space that also generates new initiatives that do not just involve the work with asylum seekers and new arrivals. One participant tells of a young woman who has started a 'walk-and-talk' group for young people who want to come to church and talk about life issues. Another participant believes that the work with asylum seekers creates a new space that is

³¹⁸ Response 121

³¹⁹ Response 145

not ruled by the personnel and the old, established way of doing things. This makes it easier for new ideas and new initiatives to take root and to develop.³²⁰

One participant states that the work with asylum seekers and new arrivals is important not only in view of the responsibility for fellow human beings, but also for the Church of Sweden to survive and continue to be called a folk church. The work can involve both natives and immigrants and revitalise the church.

NEW POWER BY SEEING ITS MISSION AND COMPETENCE AS A CHURCH

The testimonials of how the parish has been influenced by the work with asylum seekers and new arrivals are often about the joy of having rediscovered its vocation as a church and the fact that the life of the parish has been enriched by the diaconal work's being moved to its centre.

One participant puts it as follows: *'We understand why we are a church. It's something we've struggled with over the years'*.³²¹ In the national survey material, there are similar reflections about people having *discovered the power of the parish in a diaconal approach*³²², or having *broadened their views of their mission and function in society*.³²³ One vicar stated that the parish's identity and mission has become clearer.

It has sometimes also led to new priorities. Another vicar writes in the survey that the work with asylum seekers has helped the parish to see what is really important. Not infrequently, they can also see their own skills as a participant more clearly. It is evident in many questionnaires where the vicars reflect on the lessons they have learned from their work, for example, *'that there is knowledge in the parishes and skills, and that the church is perceived as an obvious actor in civil society'*.³²⁴ One vicar states that he has learned that it is possible to quickly adapt and be open to people who need temporary accommodation and food. An understanding that civil society works and the parish is needed.³²⁵ Other answers point in the same direction and indicate that the parishes can channel the will to help and support many people in need of specific help. The impression is that the work has led to new self-esteem and regained pride in the work of the parish.

NEW INSIGHTS AND KNOWLEDGE

Many also reflect, both in interviews and in questionnaire responses, that the parish has gained new knowledge and insight through the work

320 Interview 8
 321 Interview 31
 322 Response 220
 323 Response 105
 324 Response 93
 325 Response 102

with asylum seekers and new arrivals. Several persons write about the pleasure of getting to know other cultures and religious traditions,³²⁶ that the world has become both bigger and closer.

But the new insights are also about learning more about Sweden. That the parish has gained knowledge of how society and integration policies work in relation to the vulnerable position of individual asylum seekers.

Several answers in the questionnaire discuss the idea that *'getting to know people and their culture does something to our view on human dignity'*. *'We have developed a culture in which refugees have helped us to look at vulnerable people with greater care.'*³²⁷ These new insights can be expressed in several practical ways. Several parishes not only support people in the asylum process or those who have been granted a residence permit, but also those who have been refused asylum and do not want to or cannot leave the country.

Re-discovering how one's own social fabric is impregnated by Christian ideas is another lesson that some say they have learned thanks to their meetings with asylum seekers and new arrivals.

MORE NATURAL TO TALK ABOUT YOUR BELIEF IN GOD

Many, especially in the interview material, also testify that there are new opportunities for talking about their belief in God thanks to those who have arrived from other countries. What was previously a little embarrassing to talk about has become more natural. One participant says that the new parish members are much more comfortable with their beliefs and that they identify themselves on the basis on their religious affiliation.

One of the vicars responding to the survey points out that *'our young people have become more curious about their Christian faith by meeting other youth of other faiths'*.³²⁸

Many asylum seekers, both Christians and Muslims, are also interested in the Church of Sweden's faith and way of reasoning on theological issues. One survey participant considers that many Christians from the Middle East have not reflected so much about their beliefs in the past, that it has just been a matter of course. In encounters with, for example, the Church of Sweden's adult education (catechumenate), they may be doing this for the first time.³²⁹ Muslims ask a lot of questions, too, such as what the baptism means. The questions open the door to

326 For example responses 175, 203, 225

327 Response 48

328 Response 172

329 Interview 26

conversations on faith and life, and enrich the parish and also empower the volunteers to share their faith in God and to represent the Church.



Picnic excursion, Parish of Backa.

Photo: Kikki Mårtensson

MORE ACTIVE CHURCH SERVICES

Many express their joy that the church services in the parish have been vitalised thanks to the new parishioners. Not least, there have been more people attending the church services in many places.

The increase in church services attendance is visible in the church service statistics of the five visited parishes with an upward curve, to varying degrees, over the last one to two years. This is mainly true of other worship services than the principle services, and the increase represents a slight turn in an otherwise downward curve.³³⁰ The vicars we asked to explain the increase say it is due mainly to an increased presence of asylum seekers and other people of immigrant background.³³¹

The parishes also try to prepare space in the church service for the new groups in different ways, especially by using multiple languages. The impression we have got from our specially-studied parishes is that it is less common for the music in the church service to be affected – the focus is often on language understanding. Agendas are drawn up in different languages. The gospel is read in different languages. However, the extent to which this happens varies, and it depends on whether there is anyone who is willing to read. Sometimes churches

³³⁰ The Church of Sweden's Statistical Database

³³¹ Interview with the vicar of Pajala, the vicar of Norrköping, the vicar of Hammarby, the vicar of Karlskoga

recruit church wardens of refugee backgrounds. One vicar writes in the questionnaire about the importance ‘of providing space in the church service for refugees as they in some cases constitute half of the worshippers’.³³² These changes can also create opposition and conflicts.

OTHER CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS AFFECT THE CHURCH SERVICES

Most Christians who have arrived in Sweden as asylum seekers have backgrounds in Oriental churches, usually Orthodox and sometimes also Catholic. In many respects, this affects the church service in a specific manner, which is not always completely unproblematic for the local parish. Many Oriental Christians are used to being able to move freely around in the church hall during the church service, pray in front of an icon, and light candles. Sitting down when the church service begins is not as important.

Many are unaccustomed to sing along in the hymns. One participant states that it can be ‘perfectly quiet during the hymns because in the Orthodox Church there is a choir singing’.³³³

Celebrating mass is important and constitutes the very core of the religious service for many of the Oriental Christians. The liturgy of the mass also creates a recognition beyond language and cultural clashes. But not all parishes of the Church of Sweden are used to celebrating the Holy Communion every Sunday.

THEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES MUST BE ACCOMMODATED

Christian immigrants with roots in other confessions, countries and cultures do not always share the theology of the Church of Sweden concerning, for example, female priests, the place of LBHQ persons in the Church, or religious dialogue. According to one survey participant, this is not always mentioned in the joy of receiving new worshippers and a revitalised parish: ‘We don’t really share the same theology with all these new friends who attend the church service with us, but we don’t really talk about it’.³³⁴

New theological decisions in the Church of Sweden can also quickly affect participation in the local worship. One parish tells us that the decision of the Church of Sweden to marry same-sex couples in 2009 resulted in a Catholic group from the Middle East leaving the congregation. Although they invited the diocese bishop to explain and open up a dialogue, it did not help. However, it has not affected the participation in the church services of the parish in a longer perspective. New Oriental Christians have joined.

³³² Response 101

³³³ Interview 26

³³⁴ Interview 31

The differences can also concern the way in which priests are treated. There is great respect for their office. At the same time, according to the same participant, there is also a possibility in the great respect for the priesthood. This is more important than the unfamiliarity of seeing women as priests.³³⁵

There may also be other theological differences. For example, many people of Orthodox or Catholic backgrounds are used to praying to Jesus' mother Mary. One participant reflects on the theological diversity he meets in the work with Christians from other countries and faith traditions – questions that the parish has often not faced earlier.

It is obvious that being an Evangelical Lutheran church in a context where a large number of the worshippers are of Oriental Orthodox or Catholic backgrounds is a special situation. It leads to many small and major conflicts about how church services and rites can be structured in a welcoming manner without breaking with the faith and the teaching of the Church of Sweden. One participant considers that he sees an opportunity in *'the constant reformation, the constant adaptation that is still found in the Lutheran Church as well'*,³³⁶ while emphasising that the Church of Sweden needs to take care to maintain the achievements gained, for example, in terms of gender equality.

CONFLICTS, CLASHES AND AMBIVALENCE

Any kind of change arouses a certain amount of resistance and concern. What is happening and what consequences will it have? One participant says: *'There are always those who think it was better before or that it was more organised. So when you're in your niche and are safe, everything feels very good'*.³³⁷ He notes at the same time that those niches are not all that old, that a lot of things we have 'always' done in the Church of Sweden are only a few decades old.³³⁸ Another employee similarly states: *'But people miss the way things were done before, you can say that. There may be bitter comments that we're just focusing on this now and have forgotten other things.'*³³⁹

There may be concern that Muslims are attending church, that the church services have become messier, that a lot of work is necessary to deal with trainees, that the deacon does not have as much time to visit the elderly in the parish. Instead of integrating, different target groups are often set against each other in discussions about what the parish should prioritise. These discussions are relatively common in the specifically-studied parishes, despite a common understanding that the work with asylum seekers and new arrivals is important.

335 Interview 31

336 Interview 31

337 Ibid

338 Ibid

339 Ibid

Working with the parishioners' attitudes is highlighted as important both in the questionnaires and in interviews. There are examples of the local reception of asylum seekers and the parish's engagement causing concern and sometimes hostility. Many mention challenging situations that sometimes have their origin in ignorance or lack of familiarisation, sometimes in real problems and sometimes in stereotypes and racism. One vicar responding to the survey stated that the views of the people active in the parish and of the parish employees are in many respects in line with the opinions of the rest of society: *'Some people think it is a natural and good thing that we are doing the work, and others do not like the fact that Sweden as a country has received so many refugees'*.³⁴⁰

Sometimes there are different cultural expectations depending on what one is used to. One employee tells us that the parish's Sunday school is often too messy, as many of the asylum-seeking parents do not take their children to Sunday school, but the children come on their own.³⁴¹

There are also parishioners who dislike seeing Muslims coming to church. One employee tells of a Muslim man who wanted to help out in the church service, which one of the church wardens strongly opposed. But the employees have made it clear that the Church is open to all.

The general picture we have received from the parishes we have specifically studied is that – although not everyone is enthusiastic – there is in any case a great understanding that the work with asylum seekers and new arrivals is part of the Church's mission. Other things are more upsetting, like the media report in the summer of 2016, that the Church employees made expensive trips.

THE PARISHES GET NEW MEMBERS

All the specifically studied parishes have gained new members of refugee background. These may be partly Christians who have chosen to become members of the Church of Sweden, partly Muslims who have converted to the Christian faith in the Church of Sweden.

One parish employee tells us that those who become members are often not asylum seekers but have lived for some time in Sweden and have been part of the parish community for a while. In these cases, the parish encourages membership and also has introductory evenings for new members *'where people are told a little what they can do and be involved in, and what the Church of Sweden stands for'*.³⁴² A volunteer in the same parish states that some have become members of the Church of Sweden.

340 Response 140

341 Interview 28

342 Interview 26

Now I've got – and it's not just me – but I've got some people to join the Church of Sweden, some Syrians who have their children here. And I've said that as long as you don't have work or anything, it costs nothing to be part of the Church of Sweden,³⁴³ it's just a security, and I think it's great that they have done so.³⁴⁴

All of the specifically studied parishes have experience of meeting people who want to convert from Islam to Christianity, often during the asylum process. Many emphasise the importance of having a well thought-through approach to this issue. One employee tells how they deal with those who want to convert during the asylum process and that they talk a lot about the fact that the process takes time and that converting in itself cannot help them to get a residence permit.

The link between baptism, faith and membership is not obviously positive to all. In one parish, some employees state that they would like to see new forms of membership in the Church of Sweden, where you could also be a supportive member to show that you want to support the work, even if you are part of another denominational or religious orientation.³⁴⁵



Excursion with ice skating. Danmark-Funbo Parish.
Photo: Magnus Aronson

³⁴³ The membership fee of the Church of Sweden is based on a person's municipal taxable income. For further information see <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/kyrkoavgiften>

³⁴⁴ Interview 3 2

³⁴⁵ Interview 4

CREATING A POSITIVE IMAGE IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Several participants reflect that, thanks to its engagement, the parish has become more visible in the local community. A wide target group has gained knowledge of the Church's diaconal work through new contact areas, new volunteers and positive media attention. We have '*shown in the village that we can become engaged*',³⁴⁶ writes a vicar in the questionnaire. Another writes that '*our parishioners have caught sight of their parish and the work carried out in the parish*'.³⁴⁷

One interviewed employee sees the work in a missionary perspective, as an opportunity to change a negative image and show that the idea you might have had of the Church is not true.³⁴⁸ A volunteer who has not had any previous close relationship with the Church of Sweden thinks it is good that the Church '*consolidates its position here in society through its work, being compassionate, and recognising and helping these vulnerable people*'. She further states that the Church of Sweden had previously been bad at telling about its diaconal work. '*Then you need to go out a bit more and talk about what you really do, your incredible achievements in society. The Church of Sweden is for many just, well – a church here and there and church services and not much else*'.³⁴⁹

346 Response 117

347 Response 172

348 Interview 21

349 Interview 33

Chapter 13

Where Are We Heading? Thoughts About the Future

The work with asylum seekers and new arrivals has been going on for many years in the Church of Sweden. However, the engagement has varied widely between different parishes. Nearly half of the parishes and pastorates that indicated in the survey that they were working for asylum seekers and new arrivals in 2016 stated that they had started this type of activity in the last year. For others, it was a type of activity that had been carried out for a long time but whose extent and intensity increased as a result of the growing number of asylum seekers in 2015. Only one of the five parishes we have specifically studied did not begin their refugee work until the autumn of 2015. Nevertheless, much of the work for and with asylum seekers and new arrivals currently carried out by parishes and pastorates is relatively new and its extent is linked to large and rapidly changing local circumstances. This chapter deals with what the interviewed people see as future needs for developing more integration support activities in the parishes and for accommodating the encounter with many people whose application for asylum has been rejected, and also how they view the role of the Church of Sweden in society in a broader sense.

DEVELOPMENT OF INTEGRATION SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

A recurring theme in several interviews is that efforts will be needed to support the continued integration of the new arrivals into Swedish society in the coming years. Many of the asylum seekers who have participated in language cafés and other activities carried out by the local parishes have been or will be notified whether they may or may not stay in Sweden. Those who are granted a residence permit will start SFI (Swedish for immigrants) and will not have as much time or interest in language cafés.³⁵⁰ Other needs will instead become more apparent. They need to find accommodation and enter the Swedish labour market. Many of those who came to Sweden after 24 November 2015 will, in view of the ‘temporary asylum law’, receive temporary residence permits for 13 months, which will affect their situation. A large group

350 Interviews 8, 26

is young and needs to focus on education. Many will also have their application for asylum rejected, and later in this chapter we will discuss how this fact influences the parishes' future plans.

Several survey participants speak in general terms about the housing and employment needs and building a more integrated society, but not always about the role that the parish can play in this respect.

As mentioned earlier, several of the specifically-studied parishes have examples of having been able to match private individuals who can rent out a home or room at a good price to asylum seekers or new arrivals who need accommodation.³⁵¹ One participant believes it would be important to further develop this work.³⁵²

Other specific examples contained in the interview material often concern finding a place for trainees and various forms of employment in the Church of Sweden, and contributing to working life contacts through a number of internships and study visits to various workplaces.

In some cases, the interviewees also highlight the importance of new arrivals learning to understand the norms, customs and traditions of Swedish society. One participant, for example, emphasises the importance of accepting customs relating to how women dress.

Several also hope that the local parish can serve as a meeting place where people, natives and immigrants alike, can meet and develop new social networks that can contribute to integration in the labour and housing market.

Developing new contact areas and social networks is also highlighted as something desirable in itself, whether it facilitates the new arrivals' entry onto the labour market or not. In an increasingly segregated society, the Church of Sweden can be one of the few places where people meet across different borders. One participant describes an important role for the parish as a meeting place beyond cultural borders, and also religious boundaries, which school and other social institutions do not always manage to achieve.

The hope for the future development is that those who are currently participating in the Church of Sweden's activities for asylum seekers and new arrivals will find a more permanent place in the parish in the long run and that the sense of belonging will deepen.

There is not so much reasoning in the interviews about the need to deepen the work on the majority population's attitudes and viewpoints

³⁵¹ Interviews 10, 14, 21, 24
³⁵² Interview 27

in order to facilitate integration from two directions. One participant, however, stresses that the Church must stand for a clear value base, not least because of the xenophobic trends which can be seen in society.

WHO WILL REMAIN IN THE RURAL AREAS?

In many places, in nearly half of the country's pastorates and parishes with own finances, the activities of asylum seekers were started as a result of the record number of asylum seekers in 2015. Hence, the work is directly linked to the fact that there are asylum seekers within the boundaries of the parish or in its vicinity. Therefore, the question of how this work will develop over the next few years is also a question of how the number of asylum seekers will change.

In many places in the country, especially in smaller towns in rural areas, the Swedish Migration Agency is now closing down asylum homes, as the need for places is reduced. Several of the interviewees express hopes that those who are granted residence permits in Sweden choose to stay in the parish or municipality and that the activities that have been pursued so far can develop as the needs change. In a rural parish like Pajala, there is greater uncertainty than in the other four specifically-studied parishes, as to what will happen in the longer term when many people move to other places in Sweden.

With the limited labour market and opportunities for education located in a small town like Pajala, it is not as easy to plan a development of the parish's activities for new arrivals as elsewhere. Many express both great uncertainty, but also some hopes, that the new parishioners will, after all, see the benefits of residing in a small place, where it is easy to connect and therefore will choose to try to settle there.

Similar reflections are found in many rural parishes that have previously received a large number of asylum seekers but now see their reception being phased out.³⁵³ The asylum seekers have on many occasions provided hope and new opportunities for the schools and shops in the rural areas fighting against closures.³⁵⁴ The question is what opportunities there are that at least some of those who get a residence permit want to stay in a rural area where the demographic challenges of an ageing population are the greatest.

353 Validation Seminar Uppsala on 24 January 2017

354 See, for example, interview 10 response 114 (free text) to the question: 'What is your perception of the parish/pastorate's greatest lesson for working with refugees and asylum seekers?'

STRATEGIES TO MEET AN INCREASING NUMBER OF UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS

The Swedish asylum policy, which was made stricter in November 2015 and resulted in a ‘temporary asylum law’, has not had any great influence on asylum decisions at the time of the Interview Study. It has been noted above anything else that the number of new asylum seekers has decreased, but not to the same extent in the decisions themselves. This is due to the fact that many of those who arrived during the large reception in the autumn of 2015 have not yet received a decision in their asylum cases, as the processing times of the Swedish Migration Agency have been very long. The children and families with children who applied for asylum in Sweden before 24 November are not affected by the ‘temporary asylum law’ either. It is therefore only in 2017 that the parishes will really see the consequences of the new legislation in the asylum decisions. There are also other decisions the consequences of which will affect the parishes. One such decision, is the new return agreement with Afghanistan, which Sweden signed in October 2016, and which could facilitate expulsions to Afghanistan.

The experience of many participants is that those who are refused a permit often do not want to or cannot return to their country of origin.³⁵⁵ There may be many reasons for this. Fear of what would happen on their return, hopelessness because returning would mean unemployment and misery, a feeling that all their hardships during the journey have been in vain, a debt to smugglers which creates desperation and, not least, a strong connection to Sweden – especially for those who have attended school here and found friends and leisure activities. Many cannot leave the country for practical reasons, for example because their travel documents have not been issued.

Before 20 June 2016, persons with a decision on expulsion or rejection that has entered into force have often been able to reside in asylum homes and receive a daily allowance from the Migration Agency, in accordance with the Act on the Reception of Asylum Seekers. In the new regulations, this support has been removed for adults without children. More than before, we expect people to seek support in the Church of Sweden, especially those who already have an established relationship. Even today these situations already pose difficult choices. According to Support Migration: ‘It is not a Christian act to turn away the person reaching out to the congregation for help. [...] Working for people in vulnerable situations is part of the Church’s diaconal mission and cannot be waived.’³⁵⁶ At the same time, with the current legislation, it is not obvious how to best support those who have received a final rejection. There is a risk that those who remain in Sweden without papers end up outside society permanently. Some might be worse off here than

³⁵⁵ Interviews 10, 17, 24, 26, 31

³⁵⁶ Church of Sweden. Support Migration, Meeting undocumented immigrants

they would be if they returned to their former home country. For others it is the other way around.³⁵⁷ There are reflections on these difficulties in the interview material, but no answers.



Parents with baby, Parish of Leksand.
Photo: Ingrid Del Castillo

NEW PARISHIONERS ENTAIL THE NEED FOR DEVELOPMENT AND RENEWAL OF THE PARISH WORK

A number of survey participants, especially in the larger or medium-sized cities, also talk about the coming years as a time when the activities primarily aimed at asylum seekers and newcomers are replaced or developed to become an integral part of the ordinary, more permanent activities of the parish and become part of the everyday life of the parish.

Several participants describe succeeding in this kind of integration in the long-term work as a challenge. This is something that can be compared to a new love and now needs to become part of everyday life. Underlying theological conflicts and cultural conflicts may surface.³⁵⁸ The parish needs to develop skills in conflict management and diversity work.³⁵⁹

One common trend in the interviews is that it is primarily the church diaconal work that will develop and change. One participant believes that it is partly a question of new content and partly of new forms of organisation and the staffing of the work.

³⁵⁷ The Church of Sweden, Support Migration states: 'The Church of Sweden sees itself as part of society, respects the political decisions taken democratically and wishes to cooperate with the authorities and other public actors. There are practical and psychosocial ways to support people in vulnerable situations without acting outside the system. We work in parallel to influence the policy in a human direction that safeguards dignity and human value. At the same time, we understand that people whose asylum applications have been rejected may end up in a situation where the option to hide is perceived to be the only way out. If individual Christians or a parish wish to support this decision, their choice must be respected.'

³⁵⁸ Interview 31

³⁵⁹ Validation Seminar Uppsala on 24 January 2017

In many places, the church service has already been influenced by people of foreign origin and other church traditions joining the Church of Sweden. In other places, this is something relatively new and seen as an opportunity to be embraced and something that will characterise the structure of the church service for a long time. Here a participant mentions previous experiences from the Finnish immigration wave in the 1950s that still characterise the parish's activities with, for example, church services in Finnish.

Some of the specifically studied parishes have seen a development in their parish or pastorate where one of the churches has been characterised by diversity in the church service, while the church service in other churches has remained largely unchanged. This is also highlighted as an opportunity to accommodate differences and both accept and welcome new people, but at the same time take things slowly as regards changes in worship.³⁶⁰

GREATER DIACONAL NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS ON THE CHURCH OF SWEDEN AS A WELFARE PROVIDER

According to the interviews with those in charge of refugee work, the Church finances have hitherto not been a direct obstacle to the development of new activities and the expansion of existing ones associated with the work with asylum seekers and newcomers. On the other hand, several people express uncertainty as to how resources will suffice in the future with fewer members and shrinking finances, while the Church's diaconal needs will increase.

Some also express concern that too much responsibility is placed on the Church of Sweden and the local parishes, responsibility for what is currently provided by the public society, alongside the Church of Sweden. *'The Church can't do everything'*,³⁶¹ someone states, especially in a future with shrinking finances that will require a less resource-intensive organisation while the work is growing.

In the future scenarios depicted in the interviews, there are several reflections about changes in society for better and for worse. It is no longer a matter of course that the public authorities can finance the welfare that is needed. More actors will need to take responsibility.

Several participants believe that these changes will also create new expectations for the Church of Sweden to step in and take responsibility.

³⁶⁰ Interviews 5, 31

³⁶¹ Interview 24

Chapter 14

Summary Conclusions

In the autumn of 2015, organisations, religious communities and spontaneously established networks were of great importance in solving the practical problems engendered by the large reception of asylum seekers, and the Church of Sweden was one of them. Eight out of ten pastorates and parishes with own finances spread throughout the country carried out activities for and with asylum seekers and new arrivals during the autumn of 2015 until the autumn of 2016. Half of the parishes/pastorates started a new activity. One third expanded their existing activities. As an estimate, the parishes' total activities for asylum seekers and new arrivals had 37,000 visitors an average month.

NATION-WIDE INFRASTRUCTURE MAKES IT EASY TO MOBILISE

The Church of Sweden is a big organisation with the advantage of having personnel and premises throughout the country, both in cities and rural areas. As a consequence, it has had the infrastructure to build on. Employed personnel are able to maintain networks and have broad skills as well as expertise. The great and often urgent needs that arose when a large number of asylum seekers arrived could not, however, be dealt with at the same time within the existing framework. Here, the possibility of project employments, subsidised employment and the mobilisation of volunteers has been crucial.

The activities for asylum seekers and new arrivals constitute a wide range of language cafés, clothing distribution and help with contacts with the authorities as examples of common activities. Unlike other operators in civil society, individual counselling with a priest or deacon is also an important part of the support offered by the parishes.

The study, like other studies of civil society, shows that many parishes have found it easy to mobilise volunteers for this activity. Only five per cent of the interviewed parishes/pastorates have not had volunteers in the activities. Many people wished to be involved and contribute to the images encountered in the media of all those who have needed to leave their homes and undergo hardships in the Mediterranean and on their way through Europe. This has meant that new groups of volunteers

have wanted to participate in the activities. However, it appears that there are different local traditions for engaging in voluntary work and the extent to which they are channelled through organisations or the initiatives of individuals. It may also be difficult to harmonise the goals of individual volunteers with the goals of the organisation. This may be the case regardless of whether the volunteers have had an earlier relationship with the Church of Sweden. Fewer of those who work as volunteers are members or otherwise involved in the organisation they channel their engagement through, a challenge that the Church of Sweden shares with many other member organisations.

EMPLOYED PERSONNEL PROVIDE THE CONDITIONS FOR LONG-TERM WORK

There is also a challenge to transition from mobilisation in an emergency situation to long-term operations. The parishes' activities have primarily been carried out with their own resources, but they have also been able to apply for earmarked funds from the diocese and at national level for the work with asylum seekers and new arrivals. Sometimes the parishes have also received public contributions. This has created a certain degree of flexibility without the parishes having to down-prioritise other activities to any large extent. New needs have been met by expanding existing activities, better utilising the premises, engaging volunteers and having temporary employees.

However, long-term activities and sustainability in the future imply priorities. Some types of labour-intensive efforts are difficult to cope with primarily voluntary forces. A functioning activity often requires employed personnel to manage and coordinate the work. This in turn requires a functioning organisation to be in place and clear leadership, when important decisions need to be taken on priorities and how to staff the activities. In the future, the Church of Sweden will also experience difficulties in maintaining extensive activities with its own resources. Increasing numbers of parishes will have too many calls on their finances while the Church's diaconal needs increase, for example in parishes with a large older population and where a high number of paying members are leaving, as well as in cities with vulnerable areas, and where a smaller percentage of the population are members of the Church of Sweden.

The importance of working long-term and having an in-built staying power in the work with asylum seekers and new arrivals is emphasised by many survey participants. The conditions for long-term work are in some respects particularly good in an organisation such as the Church of Sweden with its resources in the form of employed personnel and premises throughout the country. But for the activity to continue over time, it needs to be increasingly seen as an integral part of the regular parish work. For some of the specifically studied parishes, the work has

meant not being ‘two parishes in one’, where part of the work team is primarily engaged in more traditional parish activities, while another part of the work team, together with new volunteers, trainees and contributors, develops new forms of activities based on the needs they meet and the skills and talents people bring with them.

THE WORK IS DONE IN COLLABORATION WITH BOTH PUBLIC AND CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS

In 95 per cent of the pastorates/parishes of the Church of Sweden, the activities with and for asylum seekers and new arrivals are carried out in collaboration with other actors. Other Christian religious communities, the Red Cross, study associations, Save the Children and sports associations are regular collaboration partners. Hence, there is a lot of variation, and the survey shows a multifaceted and varied cooperation that can include everything from local asylum groups to chess clubs. In the five parishes in the case studies it is obvious that the local community has a well-developed network of personal relationships and mutual trust that could be mobilised to meet the large number of asylum seekers in Sweden in 2015 and 2016.

The survey shows that the most common partner is the municipalities – 59 per cent of the pastorates and parishes working with asylum seekers and new arrivals state that they cooperate with the municipality. The case studies shows that it was relatively easy to cooperate locally with the municipality, something that earlier studies of civil society have pointed out. Many parishes/pastorates also cooperate with the authorities, 22 per cent cooperate with the Swedish Migration Agency, and 18 per cent with the Swedish Public Employment Service.

In this respect, the Church of Sweden differs from with other civil society organisations. A study conducted by the Youth and Civil Society Issues Agency (MUCF) on the role of the civil society in the asylum reception of 2015 shows that cooperation with the municipalities and government authorities among the voluntary organisations covered by the survey is not as common as it is in the Church of Sweden.³⁶² The Swedish National Defence College writes in its study ‘Voluntary Resources in Refugee Situations’ that good contacts between public actors and volunteers ‘can be relegated to individual officials who have a broad network of contacts in the voluntary sector’.³⁶³ In the parishes in the case studies, it is often thanks to a dedicated employee in the Church of Sweden that the cooperation and networks have come into being.

³⁶² MUCF 2016a

³⁶³ Asp 2017 p. 41

The salient cooperation with the public actors is probably due to the fact that until 2000 the Church of Sweden had a state church form and was part of public Sweden. But the fact that the parishes of the Church of Sweden, unlike many other local operators in civil society, have employed personnel to a great extent facilitates contacts with the authorities. Not least the role of the deacons is important in this respect.

THE DILEMMA OF BEING BOTH A PARTNER AND A VOICE

This study shows that the parishes' activities for asylum seekers and new arrivals are primarily funded with their own resources. A third of the pastorates and parishes have also been supported by dioceses and the Church of Sweden at national level. This gives them relative financial independence from the municipalities and other public financing agencies. While many other civil society actors are largely dependent on organisational support from the municipality for example, the Church of Sweden has its own resources. A large part of them consist of the Church fees paid by the members.

In the introductory chapter we described the ongoing discussion around possible roles for the civil society. It can mean empowering and giving a voice to vulnerable people, i.e. forming opinions and protecting people's interests. It may be as a provider and service producer as an alternative or complement to publicly owned and profit-oriented service providers in the welfare sector. It can also mean being a partner in a more general sense.

Supporting asylum seekers in their contacts with the authorities and monitoring the rights of vulnerable groups are presented in the survey as well as in the interview material as a common role. The interview material describes the Church of Sweden as a bridge builder ensuring that people do not end up in trouble in the application of regulations or because of a lack of communication between different authorities and public actors.

With a more restrictive asylum legislation, it may be even more difficult in the coming years to give a voice to the target group, to support those in vulnerable life situations, while being a cooperating partner. When civil society is increasingly faced with people whose asylum application has been rejected, conflicts of interest may arise that may render the cooperation with the public authorities more complicated and the needs of the target group even greater.

A "RELIGIOUS CAPITAL" IS AN ASSET

An advantage of the Church of Sweden and other churches and religious organisations in their work with and for asylum seekers and new arrivals is that religion is a integrated part of life in most of the countries the refugees come from. Earlier studies show that religion becomes more important for those who have been forced to leave their country and have experienced severe hardships during their journey.

Security and recognition are created through the possibility of practising their religion, which can facilitate their integration. Bridges and social capital can also be built through the encounter with the religious representatives of mainstream society, to achieve increased integration. The parishes of the Church of Sweden have the advantage of a 'religious capital', professional diaconal work and, in some cases, networks and competences linked to inter-religious dialogue. This study shows that both Christian and Muslim asylum seekers find their way to the Church of Sweden. The situations may be different, depending on where the asylum seekers come from and the local tradition they carry.

The Christian has also been important for the decision to reach out to and welcome asylum seekers. In the interview material, many see the involvement of the parish in the work with asylum seekers and new arrivals as an obvious act in meeting with people in a vulnerable situation. It is about seeing your neighbour and his/her needs. The interviewees emphasise that the work is done partly 'for the sake of fellow human beings' and partly 'for the sake of the world and society'. A common value basis of this type is a strength of an organisation and facilitates the rapid start of new activities and then continuing to pursue long-term work.

In some respects, however, in Sweden being a Christian church in this work can be perceived as a disadvantage. There may be uncertainty among Swedish authorities whether or not it is appropriate to cooperate with a religious community. Muslims and other groups may also doubt whether participating in activities on Christian premises is compatible with their own beliefs. This study does not show how these groups view the activities of the Church of Sweden, but many of the interviewees highlight the importance of activities open to all without differentiating between people based on their beliefs, and in some cases finding ways to adapt the activity to enable people of different religion and nationality to participate.

THE ENCOUNTER WITH ASYLUM SEEKERS AND NEW ARRIVALS BRINGS NEW ENERGY

For the parishes, the work with asylum seekers and new arrivals has meant a clear revitalisation of the parish life and church services. Asylum seekers and new arrivals have come in large numbers and in some cases they have taken the initiative to approach the Church of Sweden themselves. Many thousands of new volunteers have joined in. This provides a basis for volunteering activities for society in general and for the parishes of the Church of Sweden specifically. The interview material shows that the work with asylum seekers and new arrivals has opened up a new space in the parishes which have taken up the mission. Through a more visible diversity and new dynamism, other new groups have made themselves at home in the parish and felt welcome.

Those involved in the work with asylum seekers and new arrivals in the parishes testify that the work is very rewarding – it is meaningful to contribute, and the meetings with people create friendships and provide new insights and new knowledge. There are many accounts of reciprocity in the activities in the interview material and it is not always evident ‘who helps whom’. At the same time, the activity is aimed primarily at helping and supporting asylum seekers and new arrivals so they can orient themselves in a new country, a new local context and a new language. When collected winter clothes are given to those who do not have any, or the Swedish language is taught to those who do not have Swedish as their mother tongue, it is inevitable that one party is more likely to feel that it is helping and the other party to feel to a greater extent that it is being helped. This can create an asymmetry in the relationships that can be difficult to relate to for both parties.

The material also makes it clear that it is not always easy to be a fellow human being or communicate beyond language and cultural boundaries. Encounters with people who is under severe pressure, waiting in uncertainty or who has been refused asylum can be challenging. In order to continue a long-term commitment, professionalism and a well-functioning organisation that support the work are necessary.

There are many testimonies that the new locals have come to mean a lot for the local community, both for the town and for the parish. Not least in the rural areas, a new dynamic has been created, where the immigration has helped to improve the basis for local schools and where football teams have been reinforced. The reception has also been a burden on the local community and its public services, but in many places there are hopes that at least some of those who have come will be able to and will choose to stay. In the current situation when the Swedish Migration Agency is closing down many asylum homes because fewer asylum seekers are coming to Sweden and when many of those who are here are expected to have their applications for asylum rejected, many believe that these hopes will not be realised. Should we then think like a survey participant who says that ‘*at least I was part of it for a while*’,³⁶⁴ or will it lead to major disappointments and complicate future engagements?

BRIDGE BUILDER IN A SEGREGATED SOCIETY

Even though there are more refugees in the world than ever, the Swedish Migration Agency estimates that significantly fewer persons will seek asylum in Sweden in 2017 than in 2015.³⁶⁵ However, future developments are uncertain and dependent on what is happening in the world around us. Many of those who applied for asylum in the autumn of 2015 have now received a decision in their asylum case.

³⁶⁴ Interview 10

³⁶⁵ Swedish Migration Agency 7 February 2017

Those who are granted a residence permit are to take up residence in municipalities and start settling down. Many will only get a 13-month residence permit, with continued uncertainty as a consequence. Others will be deported or hide, where the first could mean death and the latter a vulnerable and difficult life as undocumented.

One way forward is to develop a more integrated parish life where people of different backgrounds also meet in different situations than those specifically targeted at asylum seekers and new arrivals. As the interview material shows, it requires openness to changes in the established parish activities.

Increasing segregation, with housing allocated along ethnic and socio-economic dividing lines, is characteristic of many Swedish cities today. This is a development that the local parishes that work in these environments can hardly influence. There is also much indicating that the relatively high immigration figures in recent years, combined with housing shortages, present ever greater challenges of this kind. The Church of Sweden has the potential to build bridges between the different parts of the segregated city. The results of both the interviews and the questionnaires show that the meetings between people of different religions and ethnicity in the work reduce prejudice and xenophobia. The Church of Sweden can also help to establish contacts between the Swedish society and migrant-led religious communities, where both parties may have poor knowledge of each other's role and potential. The contact established in the work for asylum seekers and new arrivals between Swedish-born and immigrants may be the bond that is needed for society to handle a high asylum reception and good integration between people of different backgrounds. Other possible roles for the parishes of the Church of Sweden involve more systematic work to help people to enter the labour and housing market. In the interviews, several people emphasize the importance of the parish being regarded as part of the local community and seeing its mission as larger than its own activity.

The Church of Sweden is also affected by segregation. There is a risk that the activities in parishes in different parts of the country and in different districts of the bigger towns will rather reflect the lack of integration in society in general than help to improve it. But at the same time, many parishes have a geographical coverage that encompasses accommodation from different social classes and varying ethnic backgrounds. Here is an opportunity to break the segregation to some extent. The challenge for the Church and its parishes is to conduct activities that are open to an increasingly heterogeneous population, and which, to a certain extent, can overcome the mental and physical boundaries that exist in the segregated city and in the country as a whole. The work that this study describes largely concerns crossing of boundaries. The

continued development of this work can be an important contribution to a more cohesive Sweden.

Thank you!

In conclusion, we would like to express our thanks. We would like to extend a warm thank-you to our five parishes and all those who have been interviewed and have generously shared their time and their thoughts with us. Without you, this report would not have been possible! We would also like to warmly thank everyone who responded to the national survey, thereby giving us an overall picture of the work with asylum seekers and new arrivals in the parishes of the Church of Sweden – both in figures and in reflections given in the free-text answers. We also thank those who have shared photos free of charge, which has enabled the report to reflect activities from all over the country as well. We also wish to thank those who read and commented on the texts during the work and the people who attended the Validation Seminar on 24 January 2017 and contributed constructive comments and reflections. A special thank-you to Pernilla Jonsson and Marie Schött in the analysis unit, who have assisted with the report in many ways.

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Annex 1

The method of investigation

This study is based primarily on the results of a survey aimed at all of the Church of Sweden's pastorates and parishes with own finances, as well as case studies in five parishes. This material has been supplemented with telephone interviews in order to validate data submitted in the questionnaire responses and to obtain information about the Church of Sweden's previous work with asylum seekers and new arrivals. Statistics and facts have also been taken from the Church of Sweden's Statistical Database, the Swedish Migration Agency,³⁶⁶ the Swedish Election Authority,³⁶⁷ the respective municipality websites and the National Encyclopaedia.

SURVEY STUDY

The survey was sent on 6 October 2016 to all the 688 units. A reminder was sent out after a month. The questions were included as the first section of a larger annual survey sent from the Analysis Unit at the Church of Sweden's Central Office in Uppsala. 440 questionnaires have been answered in total, corresponding to 64 per cent. The answers include parishes from 224 of Sweden's 290 represented municipalities. The response frequency is somewhat lower in metropolitan areas and rural areas, but the differences are relatively small, and therefore not indicative of a systematic lack of response. Nor is there any indication that the units that did not respond have a smaller number of asylum seekers and new arrivals in the municipality they belong to.³⁶⁸

The survey asked questions about the activities over the last 12 months as of October 2016, when the survey was sent. We would point out that we have used the term 'work with refugees and asylum seekers' in the survey, while in the study we have chosen to use the term 'work with asylum seekers and new arrivals'. (See the concept discussion in Chapter 1.) In this national survey, there are both pre-selected alternatives and, in some cases, the possibility to give free-text answers. Most free-text answers are linked to question 10 where there are no pre-selected options. The survey questions are listed in Annex 2.

³⁶⁶ The Swedish Migration Agency, statistics, applications for asylum, settled cases, people received in a municipality, <https://www.migrationsverket.se/Om-Migrationsverket/Statistik.html>; Migrationsverket, 25 October 2016; 'Incoming asylum applications' and 'People residing in the Migration Agency's reception system'; <http://www.migrationsverket.se/Om-Migrationsverket/Statistik/Aktuell-statistik.html>, 2016-05-01

³⁶⁷ The Swedish Election Authority, elections to the City Council 2014, <http://www.val.se/val/val2014/slutresultat/K/rike/index.html>; elections to the Riksdag 2014, <http://www.val.se/val/val2014/slutresultat/R/rike/index.html>

³⁶⁸ Municipal reception per 1,000 inhabitants in the municipality of the respondents was Q1 5.0, the median 7.6 Q3 10.5 and the average 8.8. In those that did not answer, the municipal reception was Q1 5.0, the median 7 Q3 10.0 and the average 8.3. For all municipalities Q1 was 5.1, the median 7.6 Q3 10.8 and the average 9.0.

When free-text answers are used in the report, they have been anonymised and the many free-text answers to question 10 have also been given a serial number reproduced in the footnote (for example, 'Response 166'). We carried out follow-up telephone interviews to validate the information received about the number of asylum seekers the activities have reached and the number of volunteers in the activities. Telephone interviews were conducted in January 2017 with the 10 units that reported the highest number of asylum seekers and new arrivals in the activity, 400–1,000³⁶⁹ per month, and most volunteers respectively, 70–1,100 in total.

CASE STUDIES

The survey was supplemented by five case studies. The principle for selecting the parishes was the requirement that they should reflect variations in different types of parishes and that we should be able to test all the areas covered by the study. To get a variety of conditions we selected parishes in different types of municipalities (according to the SKL's earlier classification): big city, metropolitan suburbs, medium-sized city, small urban and rural areas. There are great differences in population, age structure, migration and reception of asylum seekers. In order to be included in the selection, the municipality within each group should have received a large number of asylum seekers in 2015, but otherwise the municipality should have a population, labour market or other parameters that do not deviate significantly from the average within the group (see the table in Annex 1.1 and 1.2).

³⁶⁹ Prior to correction, the highest number of reported asylum seekers in the activity was 840 per month.

TABLE ANNEX 1.1 AVERAGE DEMOGRAPHIC CONDITIONS, LABOR MARKET AND MEMBERS IN THE CHURCH OF SWEDEN PER TYPE OF MUNICIPALITY 2015

Type of municipality	Average population	Average age	Net migration/population	Openly unemployed	Percentage of members of the Church of Sweden	Asylum seekers Total per 1,000 inhabitants	Proportion in OAC
Rural municipalities with a visitor industry	9 837	46.2	0.007	4.5	73.7	43.1	7.6
Rural municipalities	12 350	45.8	0.005	7.3	75.5	49.2	9.3
Commuting municipalities near medium-sized towns	17 593	44.5	0.009	7	71.4	37.5	18.8
Small towns	43 809	43.3	0.009	6.3	71	21	20.7
Commuting municipalities near big cities	41 893	40	0.01	3.8	63.7	7.3	40.2
Commuting municipalities near medium-sized towns	15 803	42.7	0.009	5.6	71.9	20.5	19.3
Commuting municipalities near small towns	11 300	44.8	0.01	6.8	71.9	44.7	15.7
Big cities	598 093	38.8	0.006	7.1	47.7	11.5	70.1
Medium-sized towns	110 389	40.5	0.006	6.8	62.9	12.3	44.1
Total	33 969	43.3	0.008	6.1	70.2	29.4	22.2

Source: Statistics Sweden and the Swedish Migration Agency

Moreover, the five parishes have been chosen as they are located in different parts of the country and also reflect the variation in the proportion of asylum seekers in their own accommodation (OAC) and asylum homes. The parishes chosen for the case studies are the Parish of St. John's in Norrköping (medium sized towns), the Parish of Hammarby in Upplands Väsby (commuting municipalities near big cities), the Parish of Karlskoga (small towns), the Parish of Teckomatorp in Svalöv (commuting municipalities near medium-sized towns) and the Parish of Pajala (rural municipalities). The intention of this selection of parishes in the different municipalities is that they reflect, to some extent, how the local conditions for the work with asylum seekers and new arrivals can vary within the Church of Sweden.

TABLE ANNEX 1.2 AVERAGE DEMOGRAPHIC CONDITIONS, LABOUR MARKET AND MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH OF SWEDEN PER MUNICIPALITY IN WHICH THE CASE STUDY PARISHES ARE LOCATED 2015

Municipalities in which the case study parish is located	Population	Average age	Net migrants/population	Openly unemployed	Percentage of members of the Church of Sweden	Asylum applicants total per 1,000 inhabitants	Proportion in OAC	Type of municipality
Karlskoga	30 283	43.9	0.01	7.7	70.2	27.8	16.4	Small towns
Norrköping	137 035	40.5	0.009	9.6	61.4	18.1	49.3	Medium-sized towns
Pajala	6 193	48.7	-0.01	8.1	76.8	95.3	1.9	Rural municipalities
Svalöv	13 655	40.7	0.014	5.9	69.7	42.5	5.5	Commuting municipalities near medium-sized towns
Upplands Väsby	42 661	39.4	0.014	4.8	55.5	5.4	61.5	Commuting municipalities near big cities

Source: Statistics Sweden and the Swedish Migration Agency

The case studies are based on interviews and examinations of policy documents (parish instructions) in the parishes selected. Both employees and elected parish representatives as well as people involved in volunteer work have been interviewed. Among the employees, the vicar and the person in charge of the activity have been interviewed in each parish. The elected parish representatives are represented by the chairman of the Parish Council and, in one parish, also by the chairman of the Parish Board. The target group of the activity, the asylum seekers, is not included in this study. This limitation has been made in view of the group's vulnerable position, as they can be placed in a position of dependence in relation to the Church of Sweden if they participate in the Church's activities. However, people of refugee background are included in the study as employees, trainees or volunteers in the activity.

In total, 35 semi-structured interviews have been conducted with a total of six elected representatives, five vicars, 13 employees and 11 volunteers. The interviews were conducted in a single room in the respective parish and lasted between one and three hours. The interviews in the Parish of Karlskoga were held on 1–2 June 2016, in the Pastorate of Norrköping and the Parish of St. John's on 3–4 October, 25 October and 2 December 2016, in the Pastorate of Svalöv and the Parish of Teckomatorp on 6–7 October, in the Parish of Hammarby on 24 and 26 October and in the Parish of Pajala on 1–2 November 2016. The Parish of Karlskoga was initially selected for a pilot study, in which the interview template was tested. After that only marginal changes were made to questions in the interview template prior to visits to the other parishes. The results from

the interviews in Karlskoga are therefore included in the context of this study.

The interviews were conducted by Andreas Sandberg (all interviews) and Kristina Hellqvist (all interviews in Pajala, St. John's and Teckomatorp and four interviews in Hammarby) or Marie Schött (all interviews in Karlskoga and two interviews in Hammarby). The interviews were recorded and then transcribed in full. All interviewees have been able to read the transcripts and correct any misunderstandings. The interviews were coded with numbers between 1 and 35. In most cases, these completely anonymous numbers are used when the interview is cited in the report. In parish-specific contexts, however, a role description (e.g. 'employee 1 Pajala') is used instead. All of the persons we have cited have been given the opportunity to approve how the excerpts are used in the report.

Based on the interview material, a qualitative text analysis has been made, where the content is structured on the basis of themes raised and recurring in the interviews. These are influenced by the questions raised by the interviewees in the interview template (see Annex 3), but also by other areas and interpretations that have emerged in the interviews.

The quote is reproduced in the text as close to the conversation as possible, but breaks and fill sounds are not reproduced. In some cases, the interviewed persons have read the excerpts themselves and corrected the word order and sentence structure.

Preliminary results were presented at a validation seminar in Uppsala on 24 January 2017. Representatives from the specifically studied parishes and from several dioceses participated together with invited researchers, and the discussion at this time has guided the continued process.

Annex 2

Survey questions

Work with asylum seekers and refugees is not new to the Church of Sweden, but with the increasing number of asylum seekers in the autumn of 2015, this work has become highly topical.

It is especially important, therefore, to form an idea of the extent, orientation and forms of cooperation. The following questions do not concern activities specifically directed to vulnerable EU migrants, but we are aware that the groups can share the same activities.

1. Does or has the parish/pastorate carry/carried out any activities for and with refugees and asylum seekers during the last 12 months?

You may select several of the options.

- No
- Yes, emergency refugee reception (for example, at railway stations, airports, assisting new arrivals with clothes, food, transport)
- Yes, Swedish education/training
- Yes, language cafés
- Yes, information about the Swedish society and Swedish culture
- Yes, cooking, handicrafts, crafts, gardening
- Yes, distribution of clothes or similar
- Yes, temporary or emergency accommodation for new arrivals or asylum seekers at the parish's/pastorate's initiative
- Yes, help with contacts with the authorities
- Yes, targeted efforts for children and young persons
- Yes, meeting places that welcome asylum seekers and new arrivals
- Yes, support through discussions
- Yes, music activities
- Yes, sports activities

- Yes, religious dialogue
- Yes, general social activities such as excursions, barbecue evenings (for families or adults)
- Yes, help with transportation
- Yes, jobs for new arrivals (for example, start-up jobs or jobs for entry to the labour market for new arrivals)
- Yes, internships or similar
- Yes, impact work and/or accountability towards the authorities
- Yes, work for social cohesion and against xenophobia
- Yes, mentoring/matching friends
- Yes, other activities, namely: _____
- Don't know

2. Please state how many asylum seekers and refugees have participated in the activity/activities during an average month.

3. Enter the approximate number of employees (not volunteers) who worked as part of this activity in 2015:

State the supplied work corresponding to the number of full-time positions, not the number of employed persons. For example, a full-time employee and a part-time worker working half the number of hours are reported as a total of 1.5. Employees on an hourly rate are counted by dividing the number of hours worked with a template of 2,000 hours a year. For example, an employee on an hourly rate who worked 150 hours ($150/2000$) corresponds to 0.075 full time employment.

Round to whole numbers. _____

4. State the number of volunteers involved in this activity in 2015
(number of individuals):

5. How do you finance the activity/activities with refugees and
asylum seekers?

You may select several of the options.

- The parish's own resources
- Funds from the national level
- EU funds
- Funds (non-EU funds)
- Parish offertory
- Other collections in the parish
- Subventions from the diocese
- Other, namely: _____
- Don't know

6. What people are involved in the work for and with refugees and asylum seekers?

	Yes, and has responsibility in the activity	Yes, but has no responsibility in the activity.	No	Don't know
The parish's/pastorate's international group	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Volunteers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Deacon or the deacon's assistant	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vicar	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Priest	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parish educational officer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Musician	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sexton	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Housekeeper	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other, namely:

7. Has the parish/pastorate previously worked with asylum seekers and refugees?

- No
- Yes, but the activity has been expanded over the last 12 months
- Yes, roughly to the same extent as the last 12 months
- Yes, but earlier the activity was more extensive
- Don't know

8. Do you cooperate with other actors in the work with refugees and asylum seekers?

You may select several of the options.

- No, we do not cooperate with other actors in the work with refugees, asylum seekers or people without papers
- Yes, with the Swedish Migration Agency
- Yes, with the municipality
- Yes, with the Swedish Public Employment Agency
- Yes, with the medical care authorities
- Yes, with the County Administrative Board
- Yes, with the Red Cross
- Yes, with Save the Children
- Yes, with a sports club
- Yes, with a society for local culture
- Yes, with another Christian church/churches
- Yes, with a Muslim organisation
- Yes, with a study association
- Yes, with a asylum home
- Yes, with Refugees Welcome
- Yes, with No Human Being Is Illegal
- Yes, with others/another actor, namely: _____
- Don't know

9. Has the parish/pastorate collected money (via collections or other means) for the work with asylum seekers and refugees?

You may select several of the options.

- No, we do not raise funds for refugee work
- Yes, to the work of the parish/pastorate for the target group locally here in Sweden
- Yes, for the Church of Sweden for refugee work in Sweden (not the parish's/pastorate's own efforts)
- Yes, for the Church of Sweden's international work for refugees outside Sweden
- Yes, for an organisation other than the Church of Sweden for refugee activities in Sweden
- Yes, for a fundraising organisation other than the Church of Sweden for refugee activities outside Sweden
- Don't know

10. What do you believe is the greatest lesson the congregation/pastorate has learned from working with refugees and asylum seekers?

Annex 3

Interview guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE – VICAR, PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL CHAIRMAN – THE PERSON IN CHARGE OF THE ACTIVITIES

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PARISH/PASTORATE

To be answered primarily by the vicar and Parochial Church Council chairman, but other interviewees are also asked to tell how they view the parish.

Can you describe your parish?

Can you describe how the parish has evolved in recent years?

About the work with refugees and asylum seekers

Can you tell how the work with refugees and asylum seekers started?

Can you describe the work?

Where are the activities of the parish carried out?

Are the activities and church services carried out in languages other than Swedish? Are there personnel who speak relevant languages?

Is there any other form of language support in the work?

Who participates in the activity

Can you tell who participates in the work?

Can you describe the development over time since you started the activities?

How have you informed /invited people to the activities/church services?

About the impact on parish life

In what way has the parish life been affected by the work with refugees and asylum seekers? Can you give examples?

About external cooperation

Can you describe how the parish cooperates with other organisations, communities, the municipality, authorities?

Have you agreed on a division of responsibilities between the different actors?

What does the division of responsibilities look like?

Is it coordinated with other activities within the parish's borders/ the municipality? Is each person responsible for a certain part?

How do you experience the cooperation?

About the practical matters

Can you describe how you have solved the practical matters of financing/use of premises/personnel resources?

About the future – long-term, resource-based planning

How do you think the work involving refugees/asylum seekers will develop in the next few years?

Will the parish work with refugees beyond the asylum period, i.e. with people who have been granted a residence permit and remain in the location?

Community – context

How has the community reacted to/talked about the reception of refugees/asylum seekers and the parish's work with them?

Conclusion – Summarising questions

If you were to start the work today – would you do anything differently? In terms of activity orientation, planning, organisation, etc? Key lessons?

Is there anything you want to add – anything important that we have missed in our questions?

INTERVIEW GUIDE – OTHER EMPLOYEES**QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PARISH/PASTORATE**

How would you describe the parish?

About the work with refugees and asylum seekers

Can you tell how the parish's work with refugees and asylum seekers started?

Can you describe the activity you are involved in?

Where does the activity you are involved in take place?

Are there personnel who speak relevant languages? Is there any other form of language support in the activity?

Who participates in the work?

Can you tell who participate in the work?

Can you describe the development over time since you started the work?

Can you tell how the parish has informed/invited people to the activities/church services?

About the impact on parish life

In what way has the parish life been affected by the work with refugees and asylum seekers? Can you give examples?

About external cooperation

Can you tell whether the parish collaborates with other organisations, faith communities (also migrant-led ones), municipalities and authorities in the work you are involved in?
How do you experience the cooperation?

About the practical matters

Can you describe how you have solved the practical issues of space in premises, transport?
How do you think it works?

About the future – long-term, resource-based planning

How do you think that the work involving refugees/asylum seekers will develop in the parish in the next few years?
Do you think the parish will continue with this type of work in the next few years?

Community – context

How has the community reacted to/talked about the reception of refugees/asylum seekers and the parish's work with them?

Conclusion – Summarising questions

If you were to start the work today – would you do anything differently? In terms of activity structure, planning, organisation, etc?
Key lessons?
Is there anything you want to add – anything important that we have missed in our questions?

INTERVIEW GUIDE – VOLUNTEERS**Questions about the parish/pastorate**

Can you describe the parish?

About the work with refugees and asylum seekers

Can you tell what it was that made you get involved in the parish's work with refugees and asylum seekers?
How long have you been involved in the congregation?
Can you describe the work you are involved in?
What does a regular day look like? What is easy? What is difficult?
Where does the activity you are involved in take place?

Who participate in the activity?

Can you tell who is involved in the activity you are involved in?
Thoughts about those who participate/do not participate?
Can you describe the development over time since you started to get involved in the activity?
Can you tell how the parish informs/invites people to the activity?

About external cooperation

Can you tell whether there are other organisations, faith communities (also migrant-led ones), municipalities, authorities involved in the activity you are involved in?

Do you know who took the initiative to the cooperation?

How do you experience the cooperation?

Community – context

How has the community reacted to/talked about the reception of refugees/asylum seekers and your and the parish's work with them?

The future – conclusion

How much time do you spend per week doing volunteering work?

Is there anything you want to add – anything important that we have missed in our questions?

A Time of Encounters

In October and November 2015, almost 10,000 new asylum seekers reached Sweden's border every week. Encounters with refugees became part of the everyday lives of many Swedes. Many volunteers engaged in different organisations and networks in order to meet the urgent needs. The parishes of the Church of Sweden expanded their existing activities and mobilised employees and volunteers for new efforts, in rural areas as well as in larger towns. "A time of encounters" highlights the extent of the work of the Church of Sweden with asylum seekers and new arrivals in 2015 and 2016. The study draws the image of an intense time with major challenges, but also great joy, especially in the encounter between people. "A time of encounters" is based on a survey and case studies conducted in five parishes with different conditions.

This study is aimed at people who are interested in the work with asylum seekers and new arrivals in the parishes of the Church of Sweden. The study provides a comprehensive description of how the activities are organised and the challenges and satisfaction associated with the work. The study is also aimed at readers who have a general interest in the efforts of civil society in a critical situation. It also provides a description of the scope and focus of the work and how resources can be mobilised in the local community.